

The **SCRIPTURE STANDARD**

*Pleading for a complete return to Christianity
as it was in the beginning*

Vol. 65 No. 8

AUGUST, 1998

THREE ITEMS FROM A TRACT

According to this morning's newspapers, another batch of illegal immigrants have been arrested. The police, acting on a "tip-off", stopped a large truck on the motorway yesterday and found fourteen illegal immigrants hiding in a secret compartment in the vehicle. This is happening all the time, of course, and some countries, like USA and Canada have a much bigger problem with illicit immigration than does Britain. It is difficult, sometimes, not to feel a certain sympathy for those who, by some accident of fate, have been born on the wrong side of a border, or who are being victimised, for whatever reason, and are trying to flee to a better environment. Most of us here in the UK have no idea whatsoever as to how wretched and dangerous life can be in other parts of the world. The "Boat People", for instance, in their overloaded, leaky, insanitary and unseaworthy death-traps would rather drown at sea than return to the shores they left behind. However, chaos would reign if there were no immigration controls, and therefore entry into another country must be within legal constraints and in accordance with the law. Truly there are thousands who seek a better country.

Paul (in Heb. 11) describes great worthies of the O.T. and says that they too sought a better country - viz. "But now they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly, wherefore God is not shamed to be called their God; for He hath prepared for them a city." Those who would seek this heavenly country must do so *lawfully*. The principle of legality obtains just as much in entering the Kingdom of Heaven as it does in entering lowly Britain. Jesus said, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber." Jesus was, of course, declaring Himself to be the door into the Kingdom, and added "I am the door, by Me if any man entereth in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture." (John 10:1,9). There will always be those who wish to enter on their own terms, or "climb up some other way" (and some would even try to take the Kingdom by force: Matt. 11:12), but entry must be in the God-given manner, through Christ and His Holy Word.

ALL AUTHORITY

There are, of course, those who might not like the mention of words like "law" and "legality" in connection with entrance to the Kingdom of Heaven, and would quote Jesus' words, "For the law was given by Moses but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" (John 1:17).

This is, of course, quite true but any kingdom has a king and any king has power to make laws to govern his subjects, and there is a law outlined in the N.T. which is certainly not of Moses. James, who has a fair bit to say about law says, "There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and destroy" and that lawgiver, obviously, is Christ.

But it is not merely a question of law; it is a question of authority. John says that **"God hath given Him (Christ) authority to execute judgement also, because He is the Son of Man."** (John 5:27). Jesus has, in fact, been given ALL authority and said, just prior to His ascension to God's right hand, **"All power (authority: RV) is given unto Me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you, and lo I am with you always even unto the end of the world."**

Clearly Jesus had been given total authority (in heaven as well as in earth) and, based upon that authority, Jesus commissioned His apostles to go into ALL the world (to Jews, Samaritans and Gentiles) and preach the gospel to EVERY NATION, baptising them and thereafter teaching them to observe ALL THINGS "whatsoever I have commanded you." Thus God has entrusted all authority to Jesus and any failure in us to acquiesce to that authority would be a rejection of God's lawmaker. As James says, there is One Lawmaker, who able to save and to destroy. Some of that authority was, of course, delegated to the apostles when they were given their great commission and Jesus could say of the apostles, **"He that heareth you heareth Me, and he that despiseth you despiseth Me, and he that despiseth Me despiseth Him that sent Me."** (Luke 10:16). Who would dare to challenge the authority of Christ, we wonder?

THREE ITEMS FROM A TRACT

Who would dare to challenge the authority of Christ, we ask? And the plain answer is that it is done every day, and most often by those claiming to be Christians. Just this week I received a 6-page tract entitled *"Baptism In Water"* by a Robert McCracken, and although lack of space restricts the opportunity to comment on it, one or two points deserve notice. For instance, the tract (1) creates a difference between *the terms of entry* into the Lord's Body as between Jews and Gentiles: i.e. the Jews (the circumcision) required to repent and be baptised, but (2) the Gentiles receive remission of sins "as the immediate result of faith" and (3) baptism "has no efficacy towards eternal salvation."

Wherein do these three items of Mr. McCracken's doctrine challenge Christ's authority? (I have written to the tract-writer, by the way, and await a response).

(1)

First of all, the tract, in drawing a distinction between Jew and Gentile *in terms of entry* into the Lord's body, flouts the authority of Jesus. It was our Lord's **emphatic and stated intention** that His same gospel should be preached in all nations and to every creature. Certainly at the beginning of Christ's ministry the gospel of the kingdom was taken exclusively to "the lost sheep of the House of Israel", but after they rejected the opportunity to repent and set their house in order, and crucified their Messias, God withdrew any special consideration of His chosen race and extended His gospel to the Gentiles. As Paul says, **"the gospel is the power of God unto salvation, to the Jew first and also to the Greek"**. However, after the Lord's resurrection, and just prior to His ascension, He commissioned His apostle thus, **"Go ye into ALL the world and preach the gospel to EVERY CREATURE"** (Mark 16:15) and **"Teach ALL THE NATIONS"** (Matt. 28:19). Indeed, on receiving the commission the apostles **"Went forth and preached EVERYWHERE"** (Mark 16:20). Thus whether the commission was fully understood at that time by Peter or not, the gospel was certainly to be the same for all ("all the nations: every creature") and so were *the terms of entry* into the Lord's body. In short, Jesus commanded His apostles to preach one, and the same, gospel to everyone (Jew and Gentile) and to offer them entry into the K. of H. *on exactly similar terms*: i.e. their faith in Christ; their repentance and their immersion for the remission of their sins. To teach otherwise is clearly a subversion of Christ's intentions, wittingly or unwittingly, and a challenge to His authority.

(2)

That "*Gentiles receive remission of sins as an immediate result of faith*" is again a statement which contradicts God's word. Obviously one must have **faith** in Christ to receive remission of sins (Acts 10:48) and remission of sins comes to us only by virtue of **the shed blood of Christ** (Matt. 26:28 & Heb. 9:22) but God's word is also quite emphatic that **baptism** must come prior to remission of sins being granted (Acts 2:38). The apostle Peter, inspired of the Holy Spirit, preaching the gospel at Pentecost, instructed earnest enquirers to "**Repent and be BAPTISED every one of you in the name of (or by the authority of) Jesus Christ FOR the remission of sins.**" And so Peter says that repentance and baptism must **precede** remission of sins. Mr. McCracken says that "remission of sins comes as the immediate result of faith." Thus the latter contradicts the former and challenges the word of the Holy Spirit.

Baptism being necessary *prior* to remission of sins is surely not a concept difficult for us to grasp. The converts of John the Baptist did not seem to have any difficulty with the principle. John the Baptist preached "**The baptism of repentance for the remission of sins**" (Mark 1:4). His converts came in their thousands, on the understanding that if they repented their sins, and were baptised confessing their sins, they would receive remission of their sins. Would John's converts have received remission of sins if they had refused his baptism? If so, what was the point of John baptising thousands in the Jordan? Was Christ's baptism inferior to John's, and as per the tract, not for the remission of sins? Of course not. Jesus baptised even more converts than John (John 4:1) and that is saying something. Was He wasting His time and energy, and the time of the thousands of converts? No; Jesus was baptising for the remission of sins.

Even in the case of Paul's own conversion, we find that, even after having lengthy conversation with Jesus, in person, on the road to Damascus, Paul's obvious faith and special relationship with Jesus did not give him remission of sins. Indeed, he still had his sins upon him even after three days of prayer and fasting. It was not until God sent Ananias to him that he got rid of his sins (remission of sins), for Ananias said, "**What are you waiting for, get up and be baptised and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.**" (Acts 22:16). And so Paul's sins were *washed away* (not prayed away) *in baptism*.

(3)

The tract's third assertion that "*Baptism has no efficacy towards eternal salvation*" is another clear assault upon the sovereignty of Jesus. Jesus, in giving the great commission to the apostles (already mentioned) said, "**He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned**" (Mark 16:15). Undeniably, there are in the Bible, some difficult passages, but I suggest that this is not one of them. Indeed one could read that statement to an infant class at school and they would all understand that "salvation" will follow upon "belief and baptism" and that condemnation follows upon disbelief. And surely Jesus knew what He was saying. Do we imagine that Jesus got the sequence of His words mixed up? And so from this passage alone, we understand Jesus to say that faith followed by baptism will bring about salvation. None of the apostles appear to have tried to correct Jesus and point out that He had got it wrong. However, had Mr. McCracken been in Christ's presence on that occasion, he could have said, "Not so, Lord, don't you know that baptism has no efficacy towards eternal salvation." What would Jesus have said to Mr. McCracken, we wonder? Peter obviously understood the sequence of our Lord's words for, a short time later, at Pentecost, when he preached the gospel, and was asked by enquiring penitents, what they must do, he said, "**Repent and be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ FOR the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.**" This

was not an opportunity confined to "the circumcision" for Peter went on to say, **"For the promise is unto you and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call"** (Acts 2:38,39).

A FORM OF REASONING?

Consider the "logic" of the following:-

(1) Yes, baptism is mentioned about 80 times in the N.T. and was administered by John and Jesus but "baptism has no efficacy towards eternal salvation."

(2) Yes, the last command of Jesus was **"Go, teach and baptise"** all the nations, but nevertheless baptism has nothing to do with our salvation.

(3) Yes, the first command given to enquiring sinners was **"Repent and be baptised"** (Acts 2:38) but that does not mean that baptism plays any part in salvation.

(4) Yes, no less than 3,000 souls obeyed Peter on Pentecost and were baptised, but that seemed unnecessary for baptism has nothing to do with salvation.

(5) Yes, every case of conversion in the Acts involved faith, repentance and baptism, but that does not mean that baptism has any efficacy towards eternal salvation, does it?

(6) Yes, John's and Christ's baptism was for **"the remission of sins"** but remission of sins has nothing to do with eternal salvation.

(7) Yes, Rom. 6 says that we rise in baptism from the watery grave to **"Walk in newness of life"** but "newness of life" has nothing to do with our eternal salvation.

(8) Yes, we must be **"born again"** (born of water and the Spirit) and we must participate in the **"washing of regeneration"** (Titus 3:5) but baptism plays no part in this.

(9) Yes, the Jews **"rejected the counsel of God against themselves"** by refusing to be baptised, (Luke 7:29,30) but surely baptism is not as important as all that.

(10) Yes, Baptism was sent down to earth by God **from heaven** (Matt. 21:25) but that does not mean to say that baptism has anything to do with eternal salvation.

(11) Yes, Jesus walked 70 miles to be baptised and *insisted* on being baptised "For" He said, **"Thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness"** (Matt. 3:13) but "fulfilling all righteousness" has nothing to do with salvation.

(12) Yes, Baptism is for **"putting on Christ"** (Gal. 3:27) but putting on Christ has nothing to do with our salvation, has it?

(13) Yes, Paul was told to arise and to be baptised **"to wash away his sins"** but "washing our sins away" has nothing to do with salvation, has it?

(14) Yes, Jesus said, **"He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved"** but did He get the sequence of His words correctly, for we know that baptism is not necessary to a person's salvation.

(15) Yes, Peter said that **"baptism doth also now save us"** but surely Peter could not mean that, for we know ourselves that baptism does not save us?

When we reflect upon all the facts concerning baptism in the 15 items above (and there are many more) it must surely strike us strangely bizarre that any serious student of God's word (and indeed a tract-writer) should just dismiss these facts as of little consequence and of no relevance to one's soul's salvation.

Justification for this attitude is usually based upon texts like Acts 16:30,31 - as follows.

FAITH THE FIRST STEP

Acts 16:30,31 records Paul's reply to the jailer's question, **"Sirs, what must I do to be saved."** Paul answered, **"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."** Many refuse to be moved away from this one verse, and they say, "See, it never mentions baptism." Yes, it never mentions baptism but it never mentions repentance either, does it? Belief, in fact, is just the first step but more must follow.

After all, the demons firmly believe in Jesus but it won't save them: and they tremble (James 2:19). And John tells us that **"among the Chief Rulers many believed on Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue"** (John 12:42). Here were eminent and intelligent Jews who genuinely believed in Jesus Christ, but thought it wise to keep quiet about it: thus they would not confess Him. And so here, straightaway, we see that **more than faith** is required: a confession of Christ is required as well. Thus we cannot isolate and cling to one verse as far as salvation is concerned: we must enlarge our knowledge and take on board every other verse which deals with the subject.

Incidentally, in the conversion of the jailer (mentioned above) Paul was dealing with a Roman (a heathen man) who probably had never heard of Christ, and so the jailer had to take the first step: belief. Accordingly, the record goes on to describe how Paul preached **"the word of the Lord"** to the jailer and his household, and how that Paul baptised them all straightaway thereafter; (the **"very same hour of the night"**). And so it seems that Paul (unlike Mr. McCracken) regarded baptism as vitally important in the **"efficacy of eternal salvation"** and something *so important* that it could not be put off until the morning.

ENTRY IN THE AUTHORISED MANNER

Yes, of course, we are saved by **faith** (Acts 16:31). But we are not saved by faith alone (James 2:24). Why are we not saved by faith only? Simply because we are saved by many other things as well. For instance, we are saved by **grace** (Eph.2:8); we are saved, as we have seen, by **confessing Christ** (Rom.10:10); and by **the gospel** (Acts 11:14); and by **the Holy Scriptures** (2 Tim. 3:16); and we are saved by **calling on His name** (Rom. 10:13); and by **hope** (Rom. 8:24); and by **Christ's life and death** (Rom 5:10); and by **our obedience** (Acts 2:40); and by **Christ's name** (Acts 4:12); and by **our good deeds** (James 2:24); and by **baptism** (1Peter 3:21); and by **our endurance to the end** (Matt. 10:22). There are other elements involved in our salvation, of course, but those few listed above should be enough to illustrate to any reasonable person that we are saved by a whole combination of factors, all equal in importance and all plainly revealed in God's word. Baptism is included as much as any of the others and although it is not more important than others, neither is it any less important than the others. As stated previously, any tract-writer who teaches that **"baptism has no efficacy towards eternal salvation"** is subverting the truth of scripture and challenging the authority of Christ and His apostles, by teaching something they never taught or sanctioned. Such misinformation will deceive the unwary and be ever likely to lead some away from the truth. We have not been left in ignorance and there is a **prescribed way** of entering the Kingdom. We must not add to God's word nor must we subtract from it, even if any such measure would increase convert numbers. We must enter the Kingdom by the door, for there will be those, said Jesus, who will try to climb up some other way. Jesus anticipates that at the Great Assize not a few **"illegal immigrants"** for heaven will turn up and claim entry saying, **"Lord, Lord have we not prophesied in Thy Name? and in Thy Name cast out demons, and in Thy Name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you, Depart from Me, ye that work iniquity"** (Matt. 7:22). It's a sobering thought.