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AFTER THIS MANNER ... PRAY YE

(A Study of the Lord's Prayer)

This is the first of a series of articles in which attention will be focussed on that small section of Holy Scripture commonly known as the Lord's Prayer, and in view of the importance of this part of the Word of God, plus the fact that it is sadly misunderstood, a careful examination is called for.

The subject matter of Matthew Chapter 6, verses 9 to 13, is nothing less than the Great Head of the Church instructing His members on THE MANNER in which they are to pray and commune with their God.

Because of the teaching prevailing amongst Dispensationalists it is necessary, at the outset, to clarify certain points. Such teach that the Sermon on the Mount, which includes the Beatitudes and the Lord's Prayer, is not for the people of God in this age. Many who hold this theory dismiss the whole of Matthew's gospel as being Jewish, having relevance to a future earthly Messiah, and that the prayer which is before us pertains to such a period. These teachers tell us that they have learned to rightly divide the Word of Truth. They have certainly learnt how to divide it, but as to the RIGHT of it, that is another matter, for much of the fragmentation, together with that which is read into certain parts of Holy Writ, defies spiritual intelligence.

Two of the inspired writers, Matthew and Luke, record this prayer, but neither drop a hint to suggest that our Lord said, or implied, that it was only for the Jews, or that it must never be used until some far distant period in time. If it was NOT for His people, would not Christ have said so? And if it was WRONG for the New Testament Church, surely the Church epistles would have given warning on such an important issue.' In coming months, one will endeavour to show that the recorded prayers and doxologies, as seen in the New Testament epistles are, AFTER THIS MANNER, as set out by the Great Head.

Those teachings which so divide the Holy Scriptures, are dangerous and pernicious; they destroy the UNITY OF THE FAITH, and are God dis-honouring.

Coming to these five verses we immediately observe two things - The introduction to the Prayer, and The Prayer itself. The prayer commences with the words: "Our Father which art in heaven;" but it is essential that we first carefully consider the introduction: "AFTER THIS MANNER THEREFORE PRAY YE." Bearing in mind the golden rule of Biblical interpretation is to keep a given passage within its context, the introduction is vital in the understanding of that which follows.

In the previous section of His sermon, Christ had been dealing with the Law, setting it in true perspective; restoring it to its original meaning, and explaining its deep spirituality. Just as He had so expounded His Law and set it forth as our guideline and spiritual rule of life, so now He gives us guidance and ruling in prayer.

God has ALWAYS done this. Did He not write within the heart of early man a TRUE form of worship which Abel obeyed and Cain disobeyed? When the Almighty was about to destroy the earth because of its vile sin and iniquity, He did not vaguely tell Noah to build an ark to provide some kind of shelter. No.' Noah was given complete instructions and a full specification as to design, measurements, and construction.

When the order of worship for the people of God under the Old Covenant, was laid down, it was set out in fine detail: "And look that thou make them after their pattern which was showed thee in the mount." (Ex. 25:40). The obedience of the Old Testament Israel to all that was laid down by God at Sinai was but to illustrate and serve as AN EXAMPLE of what was required of His New Covenant people - the Church of the Redeemed: "Who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith He, that thou make all things according to the pattern showed thee in the Mount." (Heb.8:5).

God in His wisdom and His understanding of our lack of spiritual intelligence, has gone to great lengths to provide us with examples, illustrations, types, and patterns. Here in Matthew Chapter 6 He is helping us in prayer. This is a PATTERN. He is saying: "I will give you an example; I will illustrate just how you should pray." As with all those other matters, His people are to do according to the pattern. Thus it is in prayer. It is to be "AFTER THIS MANNER", says Christ. What we are to understand is, that we are to frame our prayers according to this rule, and model them upon this example.

As the Commandments were written by God Himself, (with His own finger, we are told) hence, the Psalmist says: "The law of the Lord is perfect." (Ps. 19:7). So did this prayer come from the lips of God the Son. Therefore, we have a prayer in perfection. Thomas Watson, the Puritan, said: "Never was prayer so admirably and curiously composed as this."

"The words of the Lord are pure words; as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times." (Ps.12:6). Every word our blessed Lord spoke was pure, but in these five verses of Matthew chapter 6 we surely have words of the type spoken of by the Psalmist: "Tried in a furnace." There is nothing superfluous; no idle words; no flowery jargon. "Purified seven times" - the number of PERFECTION. Such is the example of prayer which the Great Head has given to us; a perfect framework upon which our prayers are to be moulded.

It has been well said that: "Clearness is the grace of speech." Could this prayer be surpassed for clarity? Only sixty-six words, including the "Amen," yet, in these sixty-six words is perfect direction. It is a prayer without any defect and is complete in all its necessary requisites - petition, confession, and adoration. If we are to pray aright, then it must be after this pattern.

If a Christian is to WALK well-pleasing to God, then, that Christian must walk in the way of His commandments, for therein lies the perfect rule of life for the believer. If we are to WORSHIP God in an acceptable manner, then it has to be in accordance with the mandate; a form of DIVINE

ordering and not of MAN. It is to be in SPIRIT and in TRUTH. It is to be in the BEAUTY of HOLINESS.

This is equally true with regard to PRAYER. If our prayers are to gain the ear of the Eternal God, then, they must be framed according to the WILL of God; in keeping with the EXAMPLE given.

In no way does this imply that prayer is a highly technical exercise, or a difficult practice, for this is not so.

"Prayer is. the simplest form of speech
That infant lips can try:
Prayer the sublimest strains that reach
The majesty on high." (Montgomery).

Nevertheless, there is an order; a Divine formula; a certain pattern to follow. Christ says, in effect, I give you an example - then, pray "AFTER THIS MANNER,"

The prayer falls into three parts:

1. The Preface.
2. The Petitions
3. The Conclusion, or Doxology.

THE PREFACE is that which "leads into" the prayer, and is in two parts: (a) "Our Father" (b) "Which art in heaven."

"OUR FATHER". These two words need to be looked at carefully, and immediately it is observed that to style the prayer as the "LORD'S prayer," is strictly, not correct, for Christ addressed His Father as MY Father, or, just, Father. We must also remember that He and His Father are one. In that sense He stood alone - SUPREME; None are, or can be, linked with Him in that sense.

God is the Father of the Son eternally; by essence, one; whereas, we are His children by virtue of adoption, through grace. In John Chapter 20 verse 17, Christ speaks of MY father; that is by essence: and YOUR father; that is by grace. This alone is evidence that it is not the LORD'S

prayer. As aforesaid, the introduction to a subject is vital to that which follows, and in this instance it is the MANNER in which HIS PEOPLE are to pray. Hence, the word OUR, for He is the God and Father of ALL His people. "This God is our God for ever and ever." (Ps.^-8;14-). "He that is our God is the God of salvation." (Ps.68:20). "Thou...hast made us unto our God kings and priests." (Rev.5:10). We are to pray in this way, claiming the true and living God as OUK5 through grace, for by virtue of the salvation which is in Christ Jesus, we have been made priests unto Him. That is, we have right of access and a liberty to draw near to God. "Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus." (Heb. 10:19).

As we exercise our priestly function and privilege, we should note in the pattern given to us, that we do not come in great fear and trembling, addressing the high and lofty One as being remote and unapproachable. Whilst reverence and Godly fear ever become us as other Scriptures plainly show, (and in this we must never be lacking) yet, in this pattern which our Lord is setting for us, He is saying: "When you pray, above all else, always be conscious of the intimacy of your relationship with God through grace." He is not to you, austere or far-removed. Whilst you acknowledge His sovereignty and proclaim His majesty, yet never forget He is your Father. The reason for this must surely be to engender openness and freedom, not licence or familiarity, but a liberty which is spiritual and holy.

Because of a widespread belief of the UNIVERSAL FATHERHOOD of God, some detail must be gone into at this point in order to make clear the sense in which God is Father.

"Have we not all one father? hath not one God created us?" (Mal.2:10). "For we are also His offspring. Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God..." (Acts 17:28-29). It is such verses as these which are quoted in proof (so-called) of universal fatherhood. But such verses must not be held in isolation. To the Scribes and Pharisees, Christ said: "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do." (John 8:44). It is not In the light of, or, by virtue of, CREATION that Christ has taught us

to pray to God as our Father, rather is it by virtue of the ELECTION OF GRACE. "According as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love.' Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will." (Eph.1:4-5). Those that are thus predestined will in their respective generations be BORN OF GOD by the invincible power of the Holy Spirit. "For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He did predestinate, them He also called: and whom He called, them He also justified: and whom He justified, them He also glorified." (Rom.8:29-30).

This is all accomplished through the merits of Christ in His work of atonement. "When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father." (Gal. 4:4-6). "ABBA" was an Aramaic word commonly used in Palestine at the time, and children would address their father in this way. It denoted close affinity, endearment, and affection.

Christ having made full satisfaction to God, the Holy Spirit effectually calls and invincibly brings the sinner into the good of atonement. "The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye might know what is the hope of His calling, and what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints." (Eph.1:18).

Imparted to us is faith enabling us, not only to see the Truth, but to believe it. Hence, Paul's words: "Ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus." (Gal.3:26). It is ONLY through the grace of God in salvation that any can truly address the Eternal Being as Father. It is a SPIRITUAL relationship. He is not fallen man's father by virtue of natural birth. God becomes father only through the new birth - being born from above.

This is the most wonderful thing that mortal man can ever know, for to be born of the Spirit brings us into the family of God. He, the eternal Supreme Being, becomes OUR FATHER.

In Matthew's gospel Chapter 5 verse 48, we have a most beautiful statement: "Your Father which is in heaven is perfect." It means, complete; without defect; unqualified. What a thought this is as we come to Him in prayer. "The only wise God." (1 Tim.1:17). Our Father is the God of infinite wisdom. Earthly fathers advise their children, endeavouring to inform and counsel them aright and do what is best for them, but how inadequate is their advice oftentimes; how fallible their judgment. How different it is with our heavenly Father! With unerring wisdom, He gives, and He withholds, He comforts, He chastiseth, He leads into "green pastures," He leads also into dark valleys. Yes! but it is HE who leads all the time, and in wisdom which is without defect. Our Father who is PERFECT makes ALL things work together for good to His children» the Father of Wisdom indeed!

Moreover, our Father is a God of love to His children, "Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love." (Jer.31:3). "In His love and in His pity He redeemed them." (Isa.63:9). "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him." (1 John 4:9). "For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Rom.8:38-39). Such is the love of OUR FATHER. It is everlasting, mighty, tender, and true. When ye pray let this fill your mind, "you are communing with your Father," says Christ. He who loves you with an eternal love, states that you can never be separated from that love, neither can any power on earth or in hell disrupt it.

Think too of His riches: "For every beast of the field is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. I know all the fowls of the mountains: and the wild beasts of the field

are mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell thee: for the world is mine, and the fulness thereof." (Ps. 50:10). In times of greatest human extremity OUR FATHER has abundance. This is why later in this prayer we are bidden to seek our daily bread from Him.

In a time of severe famine Elijah was provided for: he looked to his Father in heaven, and God sent all the food he needed by ravens. Our God's resources are limitless. He can always in a mysterious providence, provide.

"The birds without barn
Or storehouse are fed:
From them let us learn
To trust for our bread:
His saints what is fitting
Shall ne'er be denied,
So long as tis written
The Lord will provide."

(John Newton)

Not only riches in providence, but spiritual riches. "The exceeding riches of His grace," says Paul. Let us never forget the limitless riches which reside in the eternal God, and He knoweth how to give good gifts unto His children, (cf. Matt.7:11).

"He giveth more grace when the burdens grow greater,
He sendeth more strength when the labours increase;
To added affliction He addeth His mercy,
To multiplied trials, His multiplied peace.

When we have exhausted our store of endurance
When our strength has failed ere the day is half done
When we reach the end of our hoarded resources,
Our Father's full giving is only begun.

His love has no limit, His grace has no measure,
His power has no boundary known unto men;
For out of His infinite riches in Jesus
He giveth and giveth, and giveth again."

(Annie Johnson Flint)

THIS IS OUR FATHER.

One concluding thought: our Father "only hath immortality." (1 Tim.6:16). Earthly fathers grow old, they slow down, their sharp and agile minds, their quick and shrewd counsel which at one time was so valuable, loses something of its keenness; but not so with our heavenly Father» "Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? There is no searching of His understanding." (Isa.40:28).

Earthly fathers die. When a good father is removed from the family circle, my.' what a miss. The head is gone, the great controller, the one who ordered all the affairs. The whole family feels adrift; their guide and helper is gone.

This can NEVER happen in the family of God. "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty." (Rev.1:8). HE ONLY HATH IMMORTALITY - DEATHLESS.

In this opening article we see how the prayer commences "Our Father." In the months which lie ahead we shall see, D.V., how it ends - "forever."

"OUR FATHER ... FOREVER." Blessed be His Holy Name.

W. H. Molland.

(To be continued)

"As God prescribed Moses a pattern of the Tabernacle (Ex.25:9), so Christ has here prescribed us a pattern of prayer ... not that we are tied to the words of the Lord's prayer. Christ says not, 'After these words, pray ye;' but 'after this manner»' that is, let all your petitions agree and symbolize with the things contained in the Lord's prayer."

Thomas Watson (1620-1686)

"We ought to examine our prayers by this rule."

John Calvin (1500-1564)

ALCOHOL AND THE CHRISTIAN

Great Britain is on the brink of moral collapse. Social evils abound. The Biblical sanctity of marriage has well-nigh been abandoned. Divorce proceedings are now almost as common as marriage vows. Chastity nowadays has little meanings indeed the sexual behaviour of much of today's society has sunk lower than the animal creation. Those that degrade humanity in this way will be given up by God. (cf. Romans Chapter 1). Any person with spiritual discernment must recognize Divine judgment upon such sins in the scourge of Aids.

Drug abuse, with all its ghastly consequences, has ruined the lives of very many young people, with all the accompanying heartache brought upon parents and families. Tobacco also, has sent many to an early grave, to say nothing of the billions of pounds literally gone up in smoke, and which could have been put to far better use in the home. Then there is the curse of alcohol - major indeed!

There can be no doubt but that the Government has shown some concern in all these areas, yet, their methods of dealing with the problems are pathetically weak. Having departed from the mandate of Holy Scripture and eroded the sanctity of marriage by introducing a permissive society, with easy divorce etc., an ever-increasing number of unmarried couples and single parent families have become the responsibility of the State.

As the disease Aids spreads, millions of pounds are being spent educating people on how to live promiscuously (which is GROSS SIN), yet try and fight the contamination. Gigantic national campaigns have been launched in an effort to check drug abuse, yet, the supremely lucrative business of drug trafficking thrives and drug users are provided with free needles by the authorities. Antismoking propaganda has also been embarked upon with some degree of success. Nevertheless, many die a premature death each year from lung cancer which is directly linked with tobacco smoking. In addition, the authorities have tightened up on drinking and driving offences, and one is thankful for this.

However, all these matters are of a moral nature, and whilst the powers that he - which God has ordained - have a solemn responsibility, the moral and spiritual truth is the charge of the Church. This has been the burden of recent articles in this magazine, and the question must be asked with great emphasis* WHY THE SILENCE IN THE PULPITS UPON THESE PLAGUES IN SOCIETY? True; divorce, loose living, promiscuity, drugs, tobacco, may get occasional passing reference, but alcohol seldom, if ever. Why? For is it not the most prevalent?

During the last century and into the early part of the 20th, temperance was a very important subject with many Non-conformist bodies, particularly the Methodists and Salvation Army. One has only to read such works as "IN DARKEST ENGLAND AND THE WAY OUT" by Wm. Booth, and, "DOWN IN WATER STREET" by Samuel Hadley, to discover the awful sin and frightful misery caused by drink. Evangeline Booth the daughter of the founder of the Salvation Army said* "Intoxicating liquor"- it drained more blood, hung more crepe, sold more homes, snapped more wedding rings, defiled more innocents, blinded more eyes, twisted more limbs, dethroned more reasons, wrecked more manhood, dishonoured more womanhood, broke more hearts, drove more to suicide than any other scourge that ever swept across this world."

Would any Christian say that these, and many other men and women were wrong, or ill-advised in their stand for total abstinence?

Many will accept that a century or more ago, when the Salvation Army was established, alcohol was a serious problem in Great Britain, but hold that today things are different, and a rigid position with regard to intoxicating liquor is irrelevant. Those who think this way are either ignorant of the facts or not prepared to face them.

The problem of alcohol was described in a recent report of the Royal College of Psychiatrists in Britain as "An endemic disorder of frightening magnitude."

In the United Kingdom, in the past twenty years, the consumption of beer has increased by 50%, spirits 300%, and wine nearly 400%. It is estimated that 90% of the population in the United Kingdom take alcohol in varying degrees. Figures produced in 1977 revealed that Britain spent £450,000,000 more on alcoholic drink, tobacco and gambling than the total expenditure on bread, cereals, meat, bacon, sugar, preserves, confectionery and dairy products. There is nothing to indicate that this trend has changed in the last ten years.

The Helping Hand Organization - in a report on Alcoholism and Grime - states: "About half the population of Britain's prisons is there because of drink."

In a film made by the Medical Council on Alcoholism is a comment that: "One way in which Venereal Disease spreads rapidly is by young people losing control of their powers of decision while under the influence of alcohol."

It is estimated that more days are lost through alcohol than through strikes. The cost to industry in lost production because of drink ranges from £100 - £350 million per year.

"8 - 14 million days a year are lost at work because of heavy drinking." (Government Economic Service Working Paper No.37 by S.Holtermann and A*Burchell DHSS. 1981)*

Company directors have a 22 times higher mortality rate from alcohol excess than the national average.

"66% of suicide attempts and deaths involve alcohol." (Alcohol and Suicide by B.Ritson).

"38% of drownings in the 25-29 age group are associated with alcohol." (Royal Life Saving Society of U.K. 1983).

"In 1983 approximately 45% of offences of wounding or assault were committed by people thought by their victims to have been drinking." (Hansard 13th Jan.1986. Col.457).

"Drinking plays a part in up to 50% of murders." (Journal of Psychiatry Vol.128 - 1976).

"One in four emergency, general medical admissions could be attributed to alcohol consumption" (Journal of Royal Society of Medicine Vol.79« March 1986).

"One in three drivers killed on the road has been drinking over the legal limit." (Blennerhassett Report - Dept. of the Environment 1976).

"In 1984, 75% of car passengers killed or injured in drink-drive accidents, travelled in a car driven by a drunken driver." (Road Accidents in Great Britain 1984. Dept. of Transport 1985).

In bygone days, drinking was mainly associated with men: today, however, this is not the case.

"A recent survey showed that 92% of women have a drink from time to time, with the vast majority drinking moderately." (Women and Drinking - An enquiry carried out on behalf of the DHSS - OPGS - HMSO 1985).

Attitudes to women drinking have changed over the years.

It is no longer socially unacceptable for a woman to be seen drinking in a bar or public house; and buying alcohol in an off-licence or supermarket, is for many a part of daily life. Drink in the home is now looked upon as essential to the "good life."

The result of home drinking by both parents, plus the glamorizing of the "glass" on the television screen has had the tragic effect of children being contaminated with this sore evil from birth; in fact, many before birth as a result of women drinking while they are pregnant. Statistics for this are sad in the extreme.

Children become familiar with intoxicating liquor at an early age, indeed, most are brought up with it, that by the time they are in their teens drinking is a regular part of life for them. Whilst warnings have been given to young people concerning the evil and dangers of drugs - and parents are terrified lest their children should become ensnared by these - yet this most potent and potentially addictive drug of alcohol they encourage in the very home into which their children are born. No

parent would be so foolish as to encourage an intake of heroin, provided it was in MODERATION. Yet this is the very attitude to intoxicating liquor. Almost all children say that their parents or relatives gave them their first drink.

"Over 60% of 15-16 year olds say their parents or relatives gave them their first taste of alcohol." (Teenagers and Alcohol - HMSO - 1972).

"A national survey of schoolchildren found that at eleven years old 50% of boys and 30% of girls drank alcohol at least once a week." (Education and Health Vol.3 - No2 - March 1985).

"Only 2% of fifteen and sixteen year olds in a Scottish survey reported never having tasted alcohol." (Alcohol Drugs and School Leavers - Tavistock Publications 1985).

"Average ages of first drinking are between 10 and 14 years." (Ten to Fourteen year olds and Alcohol - HMSO 1972).

According to a very recent survey, New Society report: "Only 16% of teenagers rate alcohol as a dangerous drug." ('The Thatcher Generation' in New Society 21st Feb. 1986).

An eminent psychiatrist who is a world authority on alcohol and drug addiction has said that: "If alcohol were a newly developed substance today, the Committee on Safety of Medicines would almost certainly not allow it to be administered to human beings!"

Whilst statistics can be boring and leave people cold, surely Christians, called upon by God to witness by WORD and LIFE, dare not shut their eyes to this appalling state of affairs which is blighting the society in which we live.

The writer is well aware of the arguments which are brought forward by many Christians, that total abstinence from intoxicating liquor can never be substantiated from the Scriptures. There may be some truth in this, but there are other considerations. Not always is there a clear-cut "do" or "don't" in the Word of God. Nevertheless definite

PRINCIPLES are set out. One of the most important to a believer is that of EXAMPLE.

"For none of us liveth to himself." (Rom.14:7). Although we may not be aware of it, our lives do influence others, be it for good or ill.

Whilst many may take alcohol in moderation claiming that they can control themselves, many cannot. None when they first started to take strong drink ever thought they would end up an alcoholic, but it has been so for countless thousands. Our nation today has an untold number of young people living in squalor and crimes many are in prisons, hostels, and psychiatric institutions, and not one of them ever intended to be there, but why?

How did it come about? DRINK! Woe, unto that man or woman who gave that young person their first drink. The Word of God says it were better that a millstone were hanged around his neck and he be drowned in the depth of the sea than cause a little one to offend, (cf.Matt.18:6).

Let none feel confident in their ability to control alcohol, for it is "A DEMON." The strongest of men have been overpowered by it. Could a more faithful man be found than Noah? What a testimony he bore over a tremendous span of time! What faith! What exploits for God! Yet, alcohol got the better of him, and the latter part of his life was ruined. It is a fact of today's society that, in the main, it is not weak-willed or inadequate people who are overcome by drink. Top ranking business executives have the highest incidence of alcoholism in Britain.

To partake of liquor is to play with fire - a thing which Christians SHOULD NOT DO.

Countless numbers of believers have besmirched their testimony, many making absolute shipwreck of their lives through alcohol, and by so doing have been stumbling-blocks to many. "It is good neither to eat flesh nor drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak." (Rom. 14:21). "Take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours becomes a stumbling block in them that are weak." (1 Cor.8:9).

Should not Christians have in mind the tremendous pressures upon the young in this area today? Also of those alcoholics who have in mercy been delivered from their craving, yet, for them, just ONE DRINK could throw them back again into the abyss of misery. If the people of God are not to be ensamples, then who are? "We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak and not to please ourselves." (Rom.15:1).

There are those who will readily quote the apostle Paul who suggested that Timothy take a little wine for his stomach's sake, but let such remember that in all probability other remedies for such a disorder were not known. A supposedly strong case is made out from John chapter 2 verses 1 to 11 - the account of the marriage in Cana of Galilee - but there is as much ground to believe that this was unfermented wine as otherwise.

The Bible speaks of "THE FRUIT OF THE VINE" as well as "STRONG DRINK", and the latter is always associated with warning and judgment.

Of John the Baptist it is said: "He shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink." (Luke 1:15). And of this man who was a TOTAL ABSTAINER, Christ said: "Among those that are born of woman there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist." (Luke 7:28).

Alcohol is NOT a stimulant which many think it to be, rather does it upset the whole metabolism of the body and act upon the brain by depressing and slowing down the brain cells. The cells first affected are those dealing with judgment, thought, inhibition, and controlling behaviour. It can give false courage, yet reducing the ability to protect from danger, removing restraints which can cause people to act in a way in which they would normally be ashamed, even to anti-social or criminal behaviour. Was not this the case with Noah? (cf. Gen.9:20-23) and Lot (cf. Gen.19:33-36)? Dare a Christian run such a risk?

Further still, why does a Christian NEED alcohol? What is the point? He hasn't got to take the wretched stuff.

The notion that it will cheer a person up, is false, for as has already been stated, alcohol is a depressant. The so-called cheer which it brings is short lived.

Surely a man or woman of true faith, who has a vital relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, and is an heir of heaven, doesn't need any artificial stimulant to joy and cheer!

In the journey through life we all have burdens and sorrows, pressures and anxieties, but even so no Christian is justified in doping his brain with alcohol for an hour or two in order to forget them; rather is he to bring his troubles to His wise, loving, and all powerful heavenly Father, for only in Him will he find true solace and comfort.

Then there are those who will insist that a drink is absolutely essential in the business world - it is convivial and sets the right atmosphere for goodwill - it is a convention which must be adhered to.

No business or professional man worth his salt needs conventions of this nature in order to be successful. If his ability and personality is so inadequate that he must have a drink to prop him up, and give confidence, then he might as well quit his calling.

During the course of his business life, the writer has had to attend many business functions, meeting with high business executives from this, and other countries, and on such occasions drink has flowed freely, but never has he been embarrassed, or his business inhibited» Neither has one's abstention been viewed other than with respect.

One concluding point. In the history of true Holy Spirit revivals, when God has moved in mighty power amongst His people, and souls in their hundreds have been born from above to the extent that whole areas have been completely changed, why is it that public houses and liquor shops have been the first to close down? What has moved publicans, who, having been so wrought upon by the Spirit of God that having cried to Him for mercy and been assured of the forgiveness of their sins, have rolled their

barrels out into the streets and publicly poured the liquor down the drains? Why have drunkards, rescued from the gutters of sin, through the grace and mercy of God, never again touched a drop of drink? Let tippling Christians explain this.

When all the defences have been put up, the so-called proofs brought forward, and the matter approached from any angle, the conclusion must be, that alcohol is NOT FOR THE CHRISTIAN.

W.H.Molland

One acknowledges with gratitude, help given by "The Salvation Army" and "Alcohol Concern" for providing information and statistics.

"Tobacco, heroin, glue sniffing, you don't hear responsible people say, 'We want to promote the idea of moderate addiction,' of course not. We all know, don't we? You can't play around with Heroin or Solvents. The only answer is to stay away from them, and most people do. However, the drug ALCOHOL is responsible for more heartache and horror than all the other drugs put together ... The road to alcoholism and chronic drink problems is strewn with the carnage of broken human beings. Each father or mother or son or daughter all followed the signpost MODERATION. That is why the Band of Hope's message Is 'Stay Smart don't start'."

(The Band of Hope News - Spring 1986)

... YOUR BODY IS THE TEMPLE OF THE HOLY GHOST ...

YE ARE NOT YOUR OWN ... YE ARE BOUGHT WITH A PRICE:

THEREFORE GLORIFY GOD IN YOUR BODY. (1 Cor.6:19-20)

A CRY FROM THE HEART

A letter in the November edition of the Monthly Record of the Free Church of Scotland should not go unheard or unnoticed. It asks that an article might be written in the Record "asking that at the Saturday evening prayer meeting throughout the Church the families cursed with alcoholism should be specially prayed for, that the drunkards themselves will seek the Lord and be saved from this plague." The curse of drink is one which we have mentioned often enough on the pages of the Wicket Gate, and at this time would lend our hearty support and sympathy to the lady who wrote the above words. It is high time that the churches in Scotland, and in the Highlands especially, stopped their pussy-footing around, with regards to the poison of drink. The above-letter concludes - "An entire generation is in danger, and the Church does not seem to care." May we suggest that there is only one real way in which the Church can show that it does care, and that is the advocating and practising of total abstinence; beginning with the pulpit, through the church officers, and by every professed Christian who has Christ in their heart. We know that the old cry goes up, "but you can't really prove that position from the Bible!" One thing that can be proved is that professing Christians are to "abstain from every appearance of evil;" and if there is one evil that is rampant in our day it is the evil of drunkenness. We are under the injunction not to cause those who are weaker to stumble; if any one boasts that they themselves can be "moderate" in drink, let them be moderate to the point of doing without it rather than providing a lead for those who cannot be moderate. The drink industry has proved the power of advertising; that's why it spends millions on Television commercials and such like. There is no better "commercial" for the drink industry than when those who ought to be "examples to the flock" raise their glasses high and potentially invite the young and the weak to follow suit. May we all take up the call for prayer concerning the plague that grows all around us.

J. Seaton
Minister - Reformed Baptist Church,
Inverness.

BLESS THIS POISON. A classic example of the sickening incongruity of nominal religion was witnessed a short time ago here in Inverness. The occasion was the Annual Conference of the Scottish Licensed Trade Association - that is, the filthy "drink" industry. The conference lasted for four days, and commenced on the afternoon of the first day with an interdenominational church service held in St. Andrew's Episcopal Cathedral. We shudder to think what the theme of the prayers or praise would have consisted of. Time was when it was looked upon as a mark of revival when the newly-converted publicans and bar owners used to smash their kegs of beer and wine and allow it to flow down into the sewers where they belonged. Drink-related problems and diseases is now one of the major scourges in this country, especially among young people, and it's a strange version of the Christian church that can open its doors to convene a blessing on the scourge.

Reprinted from 'THE WICKET GATE' by kind permission.

THE PUBLIC-HOUSE BAR

"A BAR to Heaven, a door to Hell,
Whoever named it named it well,
A BAR to manliness and wealth,
A door to want and broken health.
A BAR to honour, pride, and fame,
A door to sin and grief and shame.
A BAR to hope, a bar to prayer,
A door to darkness and despair.
A BAR to honoured useful life,
A door to brawling senseless strife.
A BAR to all that's true and brave,
A door to every drunkard's grave.
A BAR to joy that home imparts,
A door to tears and broken hearts.
A BAR to Heaven, a door to Hell,
Whoever named it, named it well."

EDITORIAL

The pages of Holy Scripture carry the records of a great army of faithful men who, seeing the pressing issues of their day, spoke fearlessly and authoritatively.

Jeremiah was instructed by God to go and CRY in the ears of Jerusalem (cf. Jer.2:2). Joel was to BLOW THE TRUMPET in Zion, and SOUND AN ALARM in God's holy mountain (cf. Joel 2:1). Peter and John preached with BOLDNESS (cf. Acts 4:13 & 29). The apostle Paul spoke PLAINLY and wrote BOLDLY (cf. 2 Cor.3:12 and Rom.15:15). What names could be listed, who, down through the centuries have followed in their train.

The same responsibilities are ours today. As we, His ministers, see the avalanche of wickedness engulfing society, sore evils besetting the church, and apostasy sweeping in like a flood; with our pens we must write BOLDLY, and with our voices CRY ALOUD sparing not, lifting up our voices like a TRUMPET showing the people their transgressions and sin (cf. Isa.58:1).

"He is not only a traitor to the Truth who openly for the Truth teaches a lie; but he also who does not pronounce and show the Truth that he knoweth." CHYRSOSTOM

ANNOUNCEMENTS and INFORMATION

ANNUAL BIBLE CONVENTION

Saturday 18th July 1987

SPEAKER: Mr. John Roberts (Morden, Surrey).
Afternoon 3.30 pm - Tea 5 pm - Evening 6 pm.

THE "DRIVE-IN" CHURCH - Services commence on 12th July and conclude on the 6th September, and will be held each Sunday evening at the River Bank car park, at 6.30 pm.

THE LINK is published every quarter and is available free of charge to any one on request.