

The SCRIPTURE STANDARD

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

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THE GREAT DIVIDE

Hardly a day goes by without some new outrage of death and destruction in Palestine, committed almost equally, it seems, by Jew and Arab. According to a report in this morning's paper, present hostilities could well blossom into open warfare over the activities of Dr. Irving Maskowitz, a Jewish millionaire from the USA, who is buying up houses from the Arabs and giving them over to Jewish occupants. It seems incredible that the innate animosity between the Jews and the Arabs, which goes back almost to Abraham's day, could be actively sustained over all those centuries, but here we are in 1997 with the conflict as fresh as ever. *The issue* between the parties has, of course, remained basically the same over all those many years: LAND and boundaries, and who should occupy Jerusalem. When we come to think about it, I suppose we might well come to the conclusion that *nearly all* conflicts between nations, and even amongst individuals, are due to one making an encroachment upon the property of another: and especially with regard to land. Hitler's original excuse for the invasion of adjacent countries was to restore to the Fatherland, territory "lost" after the First World War. In more recent times we have had countless wars over land and boundaries, many not yet fully resolved, as in places like Korea, India, Africa, Bosnia, and, nearer to home, Ireland.

Quite apart from disputes amongst *nations* over demarcation lines, we have, on a smaller scale, similar struggles amongst *individuals*. Indeed, in the "Reader's Page" of a well-known daily newspaper, where readers are invited to send questions to the editor on legal matters, it seems, judging by the nature of the bulk of the questions, that most readers have problems with *neighbours*. Most questions relate to *boundary lines* between properties; e.g. branches of neighbour's trees overshadowing one's garden: roots of neighbour's trees impoverishing one's soil: parking of neighbour's car partly on one's driveway: neighbour's proposed extension darkening one's outlook: liability of neighbour for upkeep of mutual fence: etc. etc.

This is not surprising, is it, when we are surrounded by fences and walls in every direction, and when the first thing we do, upon acquiring some property, is to scrutinise the Title Deeds, and to peg out the boundary. Basically, the human animal (like some of the lower order of animals) is extremely territorial.

BARRIERS AND BOUNDARIES

Barriers are not to be confused with boundaries. We all like to know where we stand in all aspects of life (even small children like to know what the domestic ground-rules are) and so man is constantly marking out boundaries: not always on land. There are moral and legal boundaries as well as the territorial, and these boundaries create restrictions and are described variously: e.g. Rules; Laws; Agreements; Contracts;

Compacts, Covenants; etc., Lawyers spend a lot of time, and make a great deal of money, in establishing and defending men's boundary lines, and the Courts and Prisons are full of men and women who have over-stepped the social, marital and legal demarcation lines of society.

Boundary lines are not only important but often historically sacrosanct and many inhabitants of British towns and villages make an annual trek around the parish boundaries to re-establish them and emphasise their exact location. In England "Beating the Bounds" is still kept up in many towns when the residents, clergy and Town Hall Officials traverse the boundaries and little boys place willow wands here and there on the actual line and are "whipped" at intervals to make them remember these boundaries. In Scotland there is similar pageantry especially in the border country with "The Riding of the Marches" when huge numbers go round the "Marches" (boundaries) on horseback (because the distances are so considerable) and it is claimed that these events produce the largest number of simultaneously mounted horsemen in the whole of Europe - (it should be said, of course, that the "boundaries" are not the only attraction of that day to bring out such crowds).

God was the first to make boundaries. The Genesis tells us that it was the violation of these boundaries which led to man's downfall, and his expulsion from Eden. Stepping over God's boundaries is to "*trespass*" and can likewise be described as "*sin*" (missing God's mark). Obviously without distinct boundary lines (or laws) there can be no trespass. Without law there can be no offence. The line, or law, is impassive and merely informative. The writer to the Hebrews says that even Moses' law could not excuse: it could only accuse. Also in Rom. 7, he says that without law sin dies, but our enlightenment revives it. Indeed it is only the restraints of law which highlight our sinful natures. "**What shall I say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay I had not known sin but by law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet.**" So then rules, laws and boundaries are, in themselves, neutral, impartial and merely informative. God's laws are as neutral as a looking glass, and if we do not like what we see, do we accuse the mirror? God's laws bring knowledge and that knowledge bring accountability. In any case, law is only a terror to those who break it, but docile and mute to those who keep it. God's laws and boundaries are for our present good and future blessing. He takes them seriously and so should we. By contract, **the Devil sets no boundaries.** Few can claim never to have strayed across God's boundaries and all we, like sheep have gone astray, but John reminds us that "**if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.**" (I John 1:19).

Thus, man's barriers must be distinguished from God's boundaries.

THE GREAT DIVIDE

Jesus came into the world to demolish barriers: to bring peace and freedom to all mankind. However, the peace that Jesus gives is not exemption from hardships and persecutions, but peace with God and with men of goodwill. The "freedom" Jesus gives is not freedom from tyranny or even menial servitude, but freedom from bondage to sin and Satan. Indeed Paul advised slaves, who had just become Christians, to accept freedom when given but, meanwhile, to be content to remain as slaves with their masters; because even as slaves they were Christ's free-men (just as their masters, if converted, would become Christ's slaves): (I Cor. 7:22). Many masters, on becoming Christians, liberated their slaves immediately, but some slaves elected to remain: half the population at that time being in slavery. Alexander Campbell, in his one visit to Britain, was hounded by banner-carriers and lampooned as a "man-stealer" by hostile mobs, especially in Edinburgh, and as a result of such persecution was jailed for over a week in Bridewell Prison in Glasgow: when, in fact, Campbell was fully opposed to

slavery and had long previously released the slaves he had fallen heir to.

The greatest human divide of all time was that between Jew and Gentile. The open conflict and smouldering animosity, which had festered and broken out over many centuries, certainly appeared to be completely irreconcilable, yet Jesus removed this great barrier at a stroke. The Law (Mosaic) which was the very embodiment of the division, was nailed to Christ's cross and Jesus took it out of the way when He died. Paul says, **"For He is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us. Having abolished in His flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make Himself of twain, one new man, so making peace."** (Eph 2:14). And thus the vast gulf which separated both Jew and Gentile, the very magnitude of which makes the Great Wall of China look a trifle, was bridged instantaneously by Jesus. The best that men could have done would have been to have set up Councils and Committees with endless wrangling amongst delegates but Jesus, in His Death, reconciled the seemingly irreconcilable and bridged the unbridgeable. Predictably there were Jews subsequent to the time of Christ's death who were insisting that Gentile Christians be circumcised but Jesus had short-circuited all that by abrogating all previous forms of national and religious identity, and starting from scratch with entirely new rules and fresh religious concepts: all applicable to Jews and Gentiles alike. Those coming to Christ and finding themselves at the foot of the cross would find that everyone else was there: and that would be the kind of "oneness" that would exist. We are reminded that Christ's peace comes not from a pact; nor a programme; nor a promise; nor even a profession, but from a PERSON and that if we are all reconciled to Christ, we shall, at the same time, be reconciled to one another. We notice from Paul's words (quoted above) that it was Christ "who has made both one, and it was Christ "who broke down the middle wall of partition;" all outwith and beyond man's own agency.

IT'S UP TO US - "PEOPLE POWER"

A few years ago, we all stood amazed to watch the demolition of the Berlin Wall, and the re-unification of Germany, all brought about by the sheer determination of people - "People Power ". And were we not inspired by such a sight, and convinced that if a wall of this magnitude could be brought down, then other similar walls might also be brought down? However, it is also sadly true that some of the barriers in this world, and especially those in the spiritual world, are far more complex and complicated than even those of the political divide, having for centuries been fermenting in a climate of suspicion, perceived injustice, bloodshed and mutual incompatibility. The Jew and the Arab are, as previously mentioned, obvious examples of this, but there are others such as Roman Catholicism and the Islamic extremists, living, it seems, in open hostility against the entire world. As we watch the daily outworkings of these deeply ingrained and long established animosities, punctuated by bombings and maimings at the various flashpoints throughout the world, we cannot be surprised that the cynic would laugh at any talk of reconciliation. The only hope for a troubled world is in Christ, of course, and it is only when men and women come to Christ that there will be any hope of true unity. Jew and Gentile were reconciled in Christ some 2,000 years ago, as stated previously, but they don't seem to know it, or don't seem to believe it.

Having just said that only in Christ can a divided world be reconciled and unified, is it not truly ironical that Christendom is so sadly divided? Christ came to remove the barriers and yet Christ's own followers have, just as quickly, put many of the barriers back up again. Jesus intended that His followers would be **"all one in Christ"** but He had hardly left this earth before the divisive spirit was manifested, and leaders in His church were **"speaking perverse things and drawing disciples away after themselves"** not sparing the flock. Today, after centuries of Roman Catholicism, and a

Reformation, and a Restoration, we can see, now that the dust has settled, that "nothing changes here" and that not only are there many hues amongst the various denominations, but there are also many brands amongst the "Churches of Christ."

In a world where religious division is rife and rampant we can but hope and certainly pray that eventually the "Cold War" amongst Christians might thaw and that "peace might break out." Surely, when Jesus prayed for unity amongst believers He did not conceive it the impossibility that perhaps we do. At Christ's crucifixion the veil in the Temple was rent in twain, from the top to the bottom, (signifying that God had ripped it, not man) and this indicated that the portals of heaven are now accessible to anyone, and to everyone. Hopefully we shall yet see the tearing down of many other veils amongst the churches, and the blinkers from our eyes. Although the Jews would never have admitted it, and perhaps were never really aware of it, they read their scriptures with a veil over their eyes. Paul said that he used great plainness of speech, **"And not as Moses, which put a veil over his face, that the children of Israel could not steadfastly look to the end of that which is abolished: But their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same veil untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which veil is done away in Christ. But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the veil is upon their heart."** (2 Cor. 3:13,14). And so there were many kinds of veils "done away in Christ" but obviously many remain and it is a great mistake, I think, for the churches to think that they don't have any, or for us to dismiss the possibility that we, too, can read the scriptures with a veil before our eyes. Veils are no respecters of persons and come in many forms: ranging from the veil of smug complacency (which is perhaps commonest); to the veils of misunderstanding, ignorance, bigotry, misconception, self-righteousness, prejudice, partiality, unfairness and preconception, etc., etc.

Jesus came to demolish all veils, barriers and barricades, yet men in every sphere have been quick to "put the shutters up", and certainly in the religious realm, men have re-erected many of the barriers that Jesus destroyed. In the denominations and elsewhere the bulk of the ordinary members are under the control of a handful of clergy, or "leaders," and generally whole congregations are held in religious thralldom by a few men. In *the political context* we have seen what "People-power" can do and how changes can be wrought when the will is present. Is it "pie in the sky" to think that some of the religious barriers could disappear in the next decade if only "People-power" could be motivated? Many of us never thought we would live to see the demise of the "Iron Curtain", and yet it has gone. Let us then work and pray for the demolition of all *religious* barriers, whether in other churches or in our own, and for the removal of all veils, whether before our eyes or the eyes of others. Such initiatives must begin with ourselves, of course, for "People-power," after all, is made up of **individuals**.

EDITOR.

ETERNITY IN HEAVEN

Many people in our generation live in hopelessness and despair. Without a firm faith in God and in His promises, there is not much assurance for the future. Many would echo the words of H.G. Wells, "Man, who began in a cave behind a windbreak, will end in the disease-soaked ruins of a slum", or the despair of Bertrand Russell, "Brief and powerless is man's life; on him and all his race the slow, sure doom falls pitiless and dark." Still others reflect the vain search of the German philosopher Nietzsche: **"Where is - my home? For it do I ask and seek, and have sought, but have not found it. O eternal everywhere, O eternal nowhere, O eternal - in-vain!"**

In contrast, God's people have a home and a hope! Abraham **"looked forward to**

the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Hebrews 11:10). He and others desired "a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city" (Hebrew 11:16). This home and this hope became ever clearer in the work of Jesus, who "brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (II Timothy 1:10), as He paid the price of redemption and broke through the barrier of death.

ALIENS AND EXILES

The despair of those who put their hope in this world is understandable. All those things we see around us are transient (II Corinthians 4:18) and will some day pass away (Matthew 24:35). The only treasures which will last are those laid up in heaven (Matthew 6:20).

This earth is not the true home of the children of God. Here we are "aliens and exiles" (I Peter 2:11), for "here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city which is to come" (Hebrews 13:14). As the apostle Paul put it, "our commonwealth is in heaven, and from it we await a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Philippians 3:20). Reflecting Moffat's translation of this verse "we are a colony of heaven", Merrill C. Tenney has written: "While abiding here, we are like a colony in a distant land, whose privileges and protection are assured by the country to which they belong. Although we may be non-residents, our citizenship is in the homeland, and we expect to return there in due time. The believer's true home is the City of God; he is only a sojourner in this world"; ("The Glorious Destiny of the Believer", p.20).

When we are born again, of the water and the Spirit, our names are entered in the "Lamb's book of life" (Revelation 21:27), the citizenship register of that eternal city. This gives us the privilege of entry into that city, unless we have soiled the robes once washed white in the blood of the Lamb and had our citizenship rights revoked (Revelation 7:14; 3:4.5). We have a home - our Father's house, the City of God!

OUR FORERUNNER

It is proper to speak of the Father's house as "heaven" (Matthew 6:9). Jesus both came from heaven and returned there (John 6:41; Mark 16:19). He is our merciful and faithful high priest, "seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven"; (Hebrew 8:1). More than that: He is our forerunner, making it possible for us to come into the very presence of God by the new and living way (Hebrews 6:20, 10:19,20). He is the pioneer (going ahead of us, leading the way) and perfecter (completer, finisher) of our faith (Hebrew 12:2). Jesus saw the goal, endured the pain of the cross, and crossed the finishing line into heaven, where He now sits at the Father's right hand. Following His lead, we too can finish the race and gain the victorious presence of the Father in heaven.

ONE HOPE

Some people would have us believe that Christians are divided into two groups, with some having a heavenly hope and others an earthly one. But the New Testament pictures but one hope, just as there is but one body, one Spirit, and one Lord (Ephesians 4:4,5). Our future does not lie here, with those things that are transient, but our hope is laid up in heaven (Colossians 1:5). Our inheritance is "imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven" (I Peter 1:3,4).

The hope of the apostles lay in the return of Jesus and in going with Him to the Father's house to enjoy His presence (John 14:2,3). That is also the hope of every Christian! "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel's call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first; then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so we shall always be with the Lord". (I Thessalonians 4:16,17). Underline those last

words: "so we shall always be with the Lord"! That is our hope - eternity in heaven!

WHAT IS IN STORE

What will eternity in heaven be like? What will it mean to be in the presence of the Father in the ultimate sense? We have been given only the briefest glimpse of the eternal destiny of God's people, but it is enough!

Basically, eternity in heaven will mean for us "glory and honour and peace" (Romans 2:10). But God has gone further in His description, struggling with human language to convey to our finite minds the eternal glory and honour and peace involved in dwelling with Him. Consider the picture given in Revelation 7:15-17: "Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night within His temple; and He who sits upon the throne will shelter them with His presence. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their Shepherd, and He will guide them to springs of living water; and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

Without doubt the most thrilling picture of the eternal home of the believer is that found in Revelation chapters 21 and 22. We recognise that this is obviously a poetic and highly symbolic presentation. We do not expect to see literal gates of pearl, streets of gold, nor walls and foundations of precious jewels; any more than we can imagine a city that is a perfect cube, as high as it is long and wide. But we do gain from this description the truth that the City of God, the New Jerusalem, our eternal home, has a preciousness far surpassing anything we have experienced here on earth. Here is perfect security and abundant life, combined with the absence of fear and filth of any type. "Behold the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them; He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away" (Revelation 21:3,4).

ETERNAL LIFE BEGINS NOW

Eternity in heaven is not for everyone, for one has no part in the City of God unless washed clean by the blood of Jesus (Revelation 7:14; 22:14) and duly entered as a citizen in the Lamb's Book of Life (Revelation 21:27). Eternal life begins here and now as we grasp Jesus Christ, the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and the only way to the Father (I John 5:11, 12; John 14:6). Eternity in heaven is the culmination of a process begun here on earth, when we received in Jesus forgiveness of sins and were delivered from the domination of darkness and made citizens of the kingdom of God's beloved Son (Col. 1:13,14). Turning from the sins of the past and putting our lives in the hands of Jesus we are buried with Him in the waters of baptism. This puts us on the pathway which leads to eternity in heaven.

Do you have a home and a hope? YOU CAN!, for there is a city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

W. HART.

THE DANGER OF LEGALISM

Seemingly, the temptation to label and classify is so strong that most of us cannot resist it. On every hand, in so many phases of our lives we find this to be true. Sadly, it is no less true in the Church. Such pejoratives as "anti," "progressive," "legalist," and "liberal" are thrown around far too loosely. Rarely do we find that one is attempting to build another's reputation or image when he uses such words, in common usage such terms are hazily defined, if indeed they are defined at all.

Liberalism is a real danger to the cause of Christ. So is legalism! Yet the vast majority of those who are labelled as liberals are really not liberals at all. Likewise, many are labelled by their detractors as legalists when they are not legalists in any sense of the true meaning of that term.

Legalism as it is used in this study refers to one who seeks to justify himself before God by law or rule keeping. One is not a legalist because he seeks to obey every command of God. Nor is one a legalist because he believes in the validity of law, Jesus said, **"If ye love me, keep my commandments."** Surely, no one would seek to prohibit that which is described by Jesus as a necessary result of loving him. An individual can stand firmly for God's will, even strictly interpret the word, do all in his power to be always obedient to the commands of our Lord and still not be a legalist. It is when he falls into the trap of thinking that his rule keeping will result in his salvation that he begins to think as a legalist. It is when one forgets or rejects the fact that **"by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast"** that he becomes a legalist.

This is the danger being spoken of when it is affirmed here that legalism is a grave danger to the church today, even as it was in the first century.

In the first generation of Christianity, legalism made a concentrated effort to take over the faith, in the Roman province of Galatia legalists had told the Gentile Christians that one could not be a Christian unless he kept the ceremonial law exemplified in circumcision. Paul warned these people, **"Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage."**

LEGALISM OF O.T.

The allure of legalism is the temptation to believe that one can simplify the problems of living, it leads one to think he can accept an external standard or a set of rules made by someone else and avoid the responsibility for making decisions.

Legalistic thinking is dangerous because it does not put priority on the good of man. Every rule God has ever made for man was designed for his good. Sometimes changing circumstances have changed the conditions the original instruction had been given to correct. The legalist seems never to be able to realize this. The law of the Old Testament had served its day and purpose well, but Christ had come in fulfilment of that law. The teachers who would have brought the Galatians again under bondage could not grasp that fact.

Christ had problems with the Pharisees over this very weakness in their thinking. Legalism was by no means the only problem Christ had with the Pharisees, but it was one that caused much conflict between the Lord and this religious party. The Pharisees put a great deal of emphasis on the Sabbath and had developed many meticulous interpretations of the laws regarding its observance, Jesus knew and taught that the Sabbath law has been made to guarantee man and beast a day of rest against the oppression of his master. He said **"The sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath,"** Christ realized the purpose of the sabbath, knowing that it was not an end within itself, but was intended for the good of man. The Pharisees were so literal in their zeal for the law, they put the letter of the law above the good of man. That is the danger of legalism.

As good as it was, the Old Testament law was pre-Christian. It was designed to prepare its followers for the freedom and responsibility that were to come with faith. Paul had preached freedom and liberty to those to whom he carried the gospel. Since the beginning there have been those who just cannot abide freedom. As soon as one set of rules has been cast off some are tempted to make new sets of rules for people to obey. Christianity is not a set of rules. It is a mature faith that does not need rules

because it is governed by love. Legalism is sub-Christian because it focuses on laws and ignores the person for whom Christ died.

NOT ALWAYS SPECIFIC

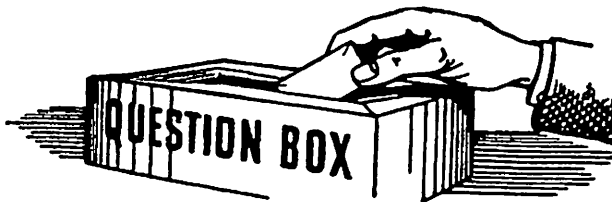
A third danger of legalism is its tendency to make the gospel a new law. The gospel is the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ. Let it be clear that Christianity has the highest ethical standard of any system ever developed. It is not a question of whether we are to obey the will of God. Certainly, the Christian will live at the highest level of which he is capable. But it is not response to a system of law. Rather it is in response to a system of faith.

Many have wondered why the New Testament has not been more specific about a lot of matters. The fact that it has not means that every age can be trusted to deal with the problems of its own day rather than being hampered by regulations drawn for an earlier day that no longer are adequate. Man, especially the one who tends to legalistic thinking, would have done it differently. God knew better, as always. Legalism offers a comfortable way for people to coerce unity for a while. But then it breaks apart because people have consciences and the ability to think for themselves. This is the reason creeds have never worked. Surely, we who have always disdained creeds should understand this principle.

Letting tradition, which is not of itself bad, become legalism is always a danger, in religion, the past has always been important. From the past we have our traditions, whether it be oral or written, which point us to the way God or his people have operated in the past. By these traditions we are called to faithfulness and obedience to God. However, there is always a subtle temptation to allow our traditions to become laws. It is when tradition becomes a man-made law, unrecognized as such, that tradition becomes legalism and a danger to the very cause of Christ.

Care should be taken not to conclude that everyone who fails to agree with some new idea we have is a legalist. As in other areas, it is not our province to judge who is or is not a legalist. Let God take care of that! In our own thinking and judgement, however, let us not fall into the trap of legalism. It is a lethal danger!

D. COOK.



Conducted by
Frank Worgan

*"Paul talks of a time when "that which is perfect" would come.
To what does he refer?" (1 Cor. 13:10)*

This quotation, as you will have recognised, comes from that beautiful and familiar exposition of the superiority of Love. But whilst 1 Cor. 13 is a chapter powerful and important enough to stand alone, it should really be studied in context with chapters 12 and 14. Misunderstandings arise when the 13th chapter is read out of context and studied in isolation.

If we always bear in mind that when the books of the Bible were written they were not divided into chapters and verses, we shall be spared a great many of the problems which arise from a device which was intended to be a help to us.

1. Turning, first, to chapter 12, we find that Paul is continuing to respond to the series of questions sent to him by members of the Church in Corinth. He has now reached an issue which appears to be a major preoccupation with the Corinthian

brethren; a question concerning the relative importance of the various miraculous gifts, bestowed by the Holy Spirit Himself (v.11).

Those who possessed such gifts as other tongues, the interpretation of tongues, healing and prophecy, believed that their gifts were the most important of the nine 'charismata' ('grace gifts') which Paul lists in this section of his letter. These were the gifts which attracted most attention and which enjoyed a profile higher than the less dramatic and less ostentatious gifts, such as those of miraculous knowledge or wisdom.

The apostle's first concern, therefore, is to make the brethren recognise that whatever gift a person possesses, it has been bestowed on him, not for his personal elevation, but for the edification of the entire Body of Christ, the Church.

Indeed, this is the illustration he uses. He presents an analogy which portrays the church as a body comprised of many members, each of which has its distinctive function and which occupies its own special place (vv. 12-27).

Incidentally, we should notice that in vv. 29-30 how effectively he dismisses the view, still held today by many of the so-called 'Charismatic' groups, which says that anyone who does not possess a spiritual gift has not received 'the second blessing' and may well be regarded as a kind of 'second-class' Christian.

2. Then, in ch. 13, Paul urges the brethren to desire the 'better gifts' = '*kreittona*', or the 'greater gifts' = '*meizona*'; that is, gifts which are 'better' or 'greater' than the things about which they are so concerned. These better, more desirable possessions are Faith, Hope and Love, of which the greatest is Love (v.13).

3. The conclusion which remains to be drawn is that the Corinthians were taught, by Paul, that one could be a true Christian without possessing any miraculous gift, but there is one spiritual endowment - one Christ-like virtue - which is indispensable, because it is a virtue which 'abide'. The word '*meno*' literally means 'to remain when other things have ceased'.

Here we come to the nub of the matter, because in verses 8 to 11 Paul assured his Corinthian brethren that whatever miraculous gifts of the Spirit they possess, those gifts are transient and they *will* inevitably pass away.

'Prophecies', in the plural and referring to a range of abilities which included both *forth-telling* and *fore-telling*, would be 'abolished, end, be caused to cease'. The A.V. states that prophecies 'shall fail', which is an unfortunate rendering, liable to give the wrong impression, because Spirit-inspired prophecy never 'failed'. For prophecy to 'cease' is an entirely different matter.

The gift of tongues, also was destined to 'cease', as was miraculous knowledge, because Paul assigns all of them to the Church's infancy and declares that, like the playthings of childhood, they will one day be 'put away'.

And when would this 'cessation' occur? The question has drawn our attention to that time, 'when that which is perfect is come' (A.V.).

4. The 'end of the age'? The Coming of Christ?

This phrase has sometimes been taken to refer to the end of the age, when Christ returns, and if this were a correct interpretation it would be a strong argument for the continuance of spiritual gifts.

But it is *not* correct, because Christ cannot be described as a 'thing' - as '*that* which is perfect'. The word 'perfect', in this form, '*teleion*', is neuter and would never be used to describe a mature person. It is a form which was used to refer to a baby, or a child.

For example, in Luke 1:35, the A.V. reads, 'that holy *thing* which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God'. Strange as it may sound in our ears, in those days all children were described in the neuter gender until they reached the age of puberty, from which time they would be referred to in masculine or feminine forms, as the case required.

Therefore, the word 'perfect' used here in 1 Cor. 13:10, cannot possibly refer to Christ and His return.

Furthermore, if the Holy Spirit had intended us to understand this as a reference to Christ, it would have been easy for Him to have said, 'when He who is perfect', or even, 'when Christ comes again'.

5. The Perfection of Heaven? This is another explanation which has been suggested. We are asked to believe that the phrase refers to the future life in Heaven and to the state of perfection to which the believer looks forward.

But it is difficult to fit this view into these three chapters, dealing, as they do entirely with the way in which the Church should behave here, on earth! And, in any case, this word, 'perfect', common though it is in the New Testament, is not once used with reference to heaven's state of perfection.

6. What, then, does the phrase mean? Well, the word, '*teleios*', from '*telos*', meaning 'an end', has to do with reaching maturity and the attaining of a purpose or goal. Therefore the contrast is between something that is incomplete, in part, and therefore transient (see v.9 again), and something that is complete and abiding.

Paul has pointed out to his Corinthian brethren that they know 'in part'. They are living in a time when God's will and purpose is in process of being revealed 'through His holy apostles and prophets' (Eph. 4:4-6). Bear in mind that the apostles had been promised that the Holy Spirit would guide them into all truth, teach them all things, and bring to their remembrance the things they had been taught by the Lord (John 15:26; 16:13).

As we look back from our position today we see that during that period, the gift of the Spirit were bestowed in order to support and strengthen the infant Church (Rom. 1:11). Indeed, it might be said that the spiritual gift were the things that belonged to the Church's infancy, which would be one day laid aside.

That time came when the apostolic age ended as the last apostle completed his work.

We have, today, in the New Testament Scriptures, in the inspired writing of the apostles, all that the Holy Spirit desires us to possess and know. We have the full and final revelation of God's will for His people. The complete; the 'mature'; the 'perfect' has come. the miraculous gifts, which the Holy Spirit clearly indicated as of limited duration have passed away, and today, as James tells us, we look into 'the perfect law, the law of liberty' (Jas. 1:25).

(All questions please, to: Frank Worgan, 5 Gryfbank Way, Houston, Renfrewshire, PA6 7NZ, Scotland.)

ANOINTING WITH OIL

"Is any of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise. Is anyone of you sick? He should call the elders of the Church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of The Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; The Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again the prayers, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops." (James 5:13-18 N.I.V.)

A PASSAGE OF SOME CONTROVERSY

James 5:13-18 is a passage of some controversy because it raises so many questions. Why anoint with oil? Is this a spiritual sickness or physical sickness (in vs.

14)? Should we call on the elders today to anoint the sick with oil? What was the purpose of the oil? Is this an iron-clad guaranteed method of healing today? Let's consider some of these questions prayerfully and scripturally.

Is the writer speaking of physical or spiritual illness? It would appear that both are involved. Verse 14 asks if anyone of you is sick. Verse 15 suggests that the sick (ill) person would be made well. The passage also suggests spiritual illness. In verse 14, the ill person is calling for the elders and verse 15 states that the sick man's sins would be forgiven. Possibly then, in this passage, we find a physically ill man who also is suffering spiritually.

What is the theme of the passage? That God answers prayer? Prayer is the theme! Notice how often the word 'Pray' is used. Verse 13 ". . . one should pray". Verse 14, ". . . the elders will pray over him". Verse 15, " And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well . . ." Verse 16, ". . . pray for each other . . ." Verse 17, Elijah prayed earnestly. Verse 18, "And he prayed. . ." Obviously God was drawing our attention to the effectiveness of prayer. Sick people may be made better through prayer. Our sins can be forgiven through prayer (repentance).

WHY OIL? ONLY MEDICINAL?

Some have said that oil was used for medicinal purposes only. Possibly oil could be administered medicinally for a skin rash or helping to heal wounds. I'm sure that we would all agree, though, that oil would not be used if the illness were throat infection, broken leg or gall stones! No, . . . scriptures reveal to us the use of oil.

James is writing to the Jews - they understood oil. (James 1:1). "To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations". James was definitely writing to the Jews, and oil was certainly part of their everyday way of life. Oil was more than a custom to the Jew - it was part of their daily toiletry. Part of our daily toiletry would be to get up, shower, brush teeth, comb hair and dress for the day. The Jew would get up, possibly wash, comb hair, anoint self with oil, and then dress for the day. Because of the dust, heat of the sun and physical labour, the use of oil was essential to keep the skin in good condition.

Let's go even one step further. If we went into a gentleman's home and saw him unshaven, unkempt and dressed in pyjamas, we would naturally assume that there was some type of problem. He may be ill or too upset to go to work because of possibly a personal problem. In the same manner, if we were to see a Jew (at the time of the book of James) who had not yet anointed himself with oil, we would assume that he was either ill or in mourning or grieved by some problem. It would not be natural for one not to anoint oneself with oil at the beginning of the day.

BIBLE EXAMPLES

Obviously we need more scripture to clarify the Jewish custom of using oil.

2 Samuel 12:15-20. We recall that the union of Bathsheba and David was sinful. When Bathsheba bore David's child, the Lord did not allow the child to live. As the child lay dying, scripture declares that David did not go about his natural daily way of living. He did not wash, eat, sleep or anoint himself with oil because he was grieved and praying. However, when the child died, David assumed his daily pattern of living because there was nothing more he could do for the child. Verse 20 says that David washed, anointed himself with oil, ate and carried out his daily routine.

Daniel 10:1-3. Apparently Daniel saw a vision that displeased him greatly. He was so upset by the vision that he mourned for three weeks. During Daniel's time of mourning, he ate little or nothing at all, drank no wine, and did not anoint himself with oil. After his mourning period, he returned to his normal way of living; eating, drinking and anointing himself with oil.

Matthew 6:16-18. Jesus was appalled at the hypocritical nature of some of the

Jews. Some would fast and not anoint themselves with oil just so that men could see that they were not going about their daily routine. They were drawing attention rather than meditating spiritually or praying. Jesus told his disciples that fasting was between oneself and God; therefore, they should go about their daily routine normally. They should wash and anoint with oil even if fasting.

Mark 6:12,13. The sick came to the apostle for healing. Those that were ill had, of course, not anointed themselves with oil. Obviously, the apostles did not need oil to heal. (They never used oil to heal. God healed through them by miraculous means) Notice verse 13. The apostles were so sure that the sick would be healed that they anointed the ill with oil even before the healing took place. Obviously, it was an action of faith by the apostles that the ill person would be made well and able to go about his normal activities of the day.

WHY OIL IN JAMES 5?

Remember that the theme of James 5 is the effectiveness of prayer. It was an act of faith on the elders' part. They believed that the ill man would be cured of his illness. They were so assured of it that they anointed him with oil so that he would be able to go about his daily tasks normally, as soon as he was made well.

It would be similar today to the elders going to a sick man's home; praying for him to soon be made well; then, taking the sick man's suit and dry cleaning it, washing his shirt, ironing his tie and shining his shoes because they are expecting to see him at worship service on Sunday morning.

The elders believed that God would hear and answer their prayers concerning the ill man in James 5. Obviously, then, the anointing of oil has nothing to do with the physical recovery of the sick man. elders need not use oil today. It is God answering our earnest prayers that really counts. "Ask and it shall be given unto you, seek . . . knock . . ." (Matthew 7:7).

Let's consider one last point. **Is healing guaranteed as an answer to the prayer of the elders?** Surely we realize that God desires our prayers; ". . . do not cease to pray . . ." (Colossians 1:9), ". . . pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17), ". . . pray always" (2 Thessalonians 1:11), "Is anyone of you in trouble? Let him pray" (James 5:13). Consider I John 5:14,15: "This is the assurance we have in approaching God; that if we ask anything, **according to His will**, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us - whatever we ask - we know that we have what we asked of Him."

God says to pray for **all** reasons and He will and does answer according to His will. We do our part and He'll do His. Sometimes we wish that God would answer our prayers the way we would answer them! No! We just need to pray and God will answer as He sees fit. The elders are to offer prayers for the sick and the Lord does the answering "*according to his will*" (I John 5:14).

D. SMITH.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Dec. 7	Ezra 9	1 Cor. 7:1-24
Dec. 14	Proverbs 18	1 Cor. 7:25-40
Dec. 21	Jeremiah 10:1-16	1 Cor. 8
Dec. 28	Deut. 24:10 to 25:4	1 Cor. 9

MARRIAGE

I think the key to chapter seven is

found in the words: ". . . **the present distress**" (v.26). There were special circumstances here for Paul to write the way he did on the subject of virginity and marriage. I like what Adam Clarke has written: "In such times, when the people of God had no certain dwelling place, when they were lying at the mercy of their enemies without any protection from the state - the state itself often among the persecutors - he who

had a family to care for, would find himself in very embarrassed circumstances, as it would be much more easy to provide for his personal safety than to have the care of a wife and children. On this account it was much better for unmarried persons to continue for the present in their celibacy".

Paul wrote: "**For I would that all men were even as I myself**" (7:7). Some commentators have suggested that Paul by this time was a widower or that he was separated from a wife, who had deserted him, possibly at the time of his conversion. Personally, I have always understood these words to mean that he was an unmarried man. "The language of 1 Cor. 7 would be satisfied by any one of these three conditions; in the absence of more positive evidence we cannot say which corresponds to the actual situation" (Bruce).

There can be difficulties in being married to an unbeliever. Paul was fully aware of them in his day. However, he did not encourage divorce in this situation (7:12-17). The teachings of Christianity are not about breaking up society or dissolving the bonds of social life; rather they are about helping to cement and sanctify the ties which connect us with those around us.

The word "virgin" in verses 36 and 37 I believe is an incorrect translation. (I see that in the margin the R.V. even speaks of a "virgin daughter".) The translation should be "virginity". The words have to do with a man's own virginity. Does this not make the passage clearer?

We read "**The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband lives; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will: only in the Lord. But she is happier if she so abide, after my judgement: and I think that I have the Spirit of God**" (7:39-40). I remember reading many years ago an article on these verses in a *Millennial Harbinger* of Alexander Campbell dated 1831. The writer dis-

puted certain aspects of the translation. Let me quote him: "But the truth is that the whole chapter is written not about the person to whom the Corinthians were to be married, but about marrying itself; and as the apostle wished them to be without 'anxious care', he told both the unmarried men and widows that it was good for them to remain like him, unmarried; and therefore I rather conclude the whole passage ought to read thus: 'If her husband be dead she is at liberty to be married to whom she pleases. Only in the Lord is she indeed happier if she so abides according to my opinion'. That is my opinion expressed in the former part of the chapter, viz. that widows would be happier if they remained single like me". Campbell, in the end, tended to agree with the writer's comments on these important verses.

FOOD SACRIFICED TO IDOLS

The early Christians were surrounded by pagans. The pagans had their own forms of worship in their various temples dedicated to false gods. The meat of sacrificed animals very often ended up in the market place from the heathen temples. Could a Christian purchase and eat such a product? In addition, in first-century Corinth it was customary on sociable occasions to gather for a meal in a pagan temple. Might Christians go? There were "hot" questions and Paul dealt with them most effectively. We could do with more Pauls today. Paul in this chapter speaks of the responsibilities towards the saints with a weak conscience. You might think it is all right to eat such meat, even in the temple of the false god, but your action could lead to the weak brother perishing (8:11). Knowledge is not everything. "**Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies**" (8:1). Christian love should be sympathetic and considerate towards fellow believers at all times. Yes, we are free in Christ, but this freedom must never become a stumbling block to them who are weak (8:9). Paul is clear: "**Therefore, if what I eat**

causes my brother to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause him to fall" (8:13, N.I.V.). In other words, an indulgence which may be the ruin of someone else is not a pleasure, but a sin.

THE RIGHTS OF AN APOSTLE

The apostles of Jesus were unique. They were all specially chosen for their great work on earth. Paul was no exception, although, of course, he appeared later on the scene to be primarily "a preacher, and an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles" (2 Timothy 1:11).

Paul's writings reveal a man with authority, and that authority was, of course delegated to him by Jesus Himself. The great thing about Paul is that he never abused this Christ-given authority. He was never one to throw his weight around, but was always humble with it. Personally, I think he is one of the greatest men who ever lived and one of the most understanding, patient, hard-working, conscientious, God-fearing individuals in the Bible. (And to think he once persecuted the early saints to death!)

The life of the apostle Paul has changed many lives. I know of people who began to study him as sceptics and ended up as believers. His life, his character, his convictions won them over in the end. I like what W. J. Dawson once wrote of Paul: "For it was his genius, his intensely idealistic and yet practical spirit, his magnificent moral enthusiasm and self-sacrifice that were to do more than any other agencies to secure the dominion and justify the ideals of Christianity". Where would Christianity be today without the apostle Paul?

1 Corinthians 9 reveals a lot about the great man. Here are some points I have noted: he had the right of support (7-14); he did not insist on his rights (12,15); the preaching of the gospel of Christ was everything to him (16-18); he made sacrifices to win Jew and Gentile

for Christ (19-23); he practised the sternest self-discipline (24-27).

Paul liked the picture of the athlete. The Christian has to be like the athlete - self-disciplined, dedicated, focused, determined, resolute. Winning is what it is all about. "Know you not that they who run in a race run all, but one receives the prize? So run, that you may obtain" (9:24). The athlete's prize was a crown of laurel leaves; the Christian's prize is a crown of righteousness (2 Timothy 4:8). Paul also wrote "But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway" (9:27). Kenneth S. Wuest has written: "If Greek runners broke training, they would be disqualified, forbidden to race. The Greek word translated 'castaway' is the word 'disqualified', disapproved after having failed to meet the requirements. Paul served his Lord with an intense earnestness lest he be disqualified, forbidden to exercise his ministry".

IAN S. DAVIDSON,
Motherwell.

TEST YOUR BIBLICAL KNOWLEDGE

1. How did Achan and his family die?
2. At what age did Manasseh become king?
3. What was cursed because of Adam's sin?
4. What was Zerubbabel's position?
5. How many years of peace did the Israelites enjoy under Ehud?
6. Og was the king of which nation?
7. Name the two sisters of Lazarus.
8. What did Peter use to cut off the ear of the high priest?
9. For whom was Paul pleading in his letter to Philemon?
10. What is the mark of the beast?

APPEAL FOR P.N.G.

I wish to thank all of the congregations and individual Christians who sent money to the Church of Christ relief fund for the Warie Valley.

Unfortunately, I had to return home because I had suffered a fractured vertebrae and two collapsed vertebrae. As there was no improvement, I decided to come home.

Two days ago I received a letter from Tobey Huff informing me of the state of things in the Waria Valley. There has been little or no rain for several months. The people have planted new gardens four times to watch them all wither and die in the hot sun. According to Tobey 75% of Papua New Guinea has been without rain for some time. The situation in the Waria Valley is critical and the money is running out. I know that you have given liberally in the past but I must plead with you to send any help which you can to alleviate the suffering of our brethren there.

In spite of all of their trials, the Church continues to grow spiritually and numerically. There were fifteen baptisms during the months of May and June. People who had rejected the gospel and the teachings of the Church are now seeking to be taught. This has been very encouraging to the brethren, but their witness and willingness to share their food with others in need, has opened peoples hearts to hear the good news of Jesus Christ.

If you are able to send a donation to this fund please make your cheques out to Church of Christ Relief Fund and send to Tobey Huff, P.O. Box 409, Lae, Morobe Province, Papua New Guinea. Thank you!

RUTH B. COLES.

GHANA REPORT

By the time readers read this report, Brothers Graeme Pearson and John

Kneller will be in Ghana. Their visit, I believe is a follow-up to see progress on the Churches you brethren up there have been helping to build in Ghana. A hearty "AKWAABA" (a word in the local dialect meaning welcome) awaits them. Indeed they will see progress in many areas of the work of the Churches here. Growth in memberships, new congregations, improvement on the infrastructural work (Church building), etc., are there to testify that your investment or labour in the Lord's work in Ghana has not been in vain. However, beside these encouraging works are still areas of heartfelt concern and need for which they would yearn to do something. Yes, these will be the basis for the next phase of our development programmes they will present to you when back home in the U.K.

The Church in Ghana is still young, much work is still ahead and much support from caring brethren is still necessary to sustain and develop it.

We pray our loving heavenly Father to grant them safe arrival, stay and return home.

WISDOM KPEHOR,
Accra, Ghana.

GHANA APPEAL

In the past 2 months we received an overwhelming response to aid Ghana and I would like to thank everyone involved. Since August we have with your generous help sent 300kg (over a quarter of a ton) of medical aid, Bibles, hymn books, glasses etc to Ghana. We have not lost a parcel yet but it has been known for parcels to take up to a year to arrive by "economy surface". We contacted DHL and opened an account with them and sent 249kg in 3 separate shipments, the first two shipments were received within 10 days and the third should arrive before this Scripture Standard is printed. DHL have given us

exceptionally good service and low rates. They have removed a frustrating aspect of this work.

We have received news that John Mensah Bonsuh has started another Church on 21st Sept. This one is at Bodwesango which is 63 miles from Kumasi. The first four baptized were Kwabena Aboagye, Jaw Mensah, Kwabena Oppong and Akwa Donkor. They requested Hymn Books and these are on their way. This month I would like to appeal for teaching materials for the children. In the past we have helped the children in Accra and Nkwanta. I know that Dorbiso patiently await aid for their children. I am not particularly asking for money, and second hand materials will be appreciated. Alternatively please make cheques payable to Graeme Pearson (Ghana Appeal), and send to G. Pearson, 13 Fairways, Dunfermline, Fife, KY12 0DU, Scotland.

Thank you IMB for £100 received 7/10/97 receipt No. 902. Also received on 20/10/97 £500 C&G cheque dated 16/10/97 receipt No 906. Both will be converted into Travellers' cheques and personally distributed in remote villages in November.

GRAEME PEARSON.

COMING EVENTS

KIRKCALDY

200th Anniversary Celebration
(God Willing)

Principal Speaker: Albert Winstanley
SATURDAY, 14th NOVEMBER, 1998
at 2.00pm and
SUNDAY, 15th NOVEMBER, 1998
at 3.00pm (Anniversary Day)

NEW SUBSCRIPTION RATE

Would subscribers please note the revised U.K. rate applying to 1998 is £9.00.

Overseas rates are unchanged and continue as for this year.

- 1. Stoned to death (Joshua 7:25).
- 2. Twelve (2 Chronicles 33:1).
- 3. The ground (Genesis 3:17).
- 4. Governor (Haggai 1:1).
- 5. Eighty (Judges 3:30).
- 6. Bashan (Deuteronomy 1:4).
- 7. Martha and Mary (John 11:1).
- 8. Sword (John 18:10).
- 9. Onesimus (Philemon 10).
- 10. 666 (Revelation 13:18).

ANSWERS

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