

The SCRIPTURE STANDARD

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

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TRACTS, AND FACTS IN ACTS

Those who take upon themselves the task of writing and publishing religious tracts, and other gospel literature, shoulder a great responsibility. One might even say, an awesome responsibility. And yet when we read the many tracts which come our way it is staggering to see that the vast majority of them not only give misinformation, but would confuse and lead the seeker-after-truth astray. Some months ago I referred, in an article, to a tract I had received which purported to prove that Christians can never be lost or fall from grace, and I tried, in these columns, to show how erroneous that doctrine is. I now have before me another tract which claims to inform people "How To Be Saved" and is one of many tracts published by a Mr. T. L. Osborn. The strong theme (indeed the only theme) of this tract is to show us that all that is required of us is that we should believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and we shall be saved. Mr. Osborn is not, of course, saying anything new but is simply following a long tradition of tract writers whose theme is "only believe."

For the benefit of some of our younger readers, or readers otherwise new to this widespread doctrine, I offer the following comments and if anything unfair or inaccurate is said by me I hope I will be challenged. I will certainly print any ensuing correspondence. In trying to be charitable we imagine that some of these tract writers don't know any better and are doing their best with the knowledge that they have, but invariably we are forced to the conclusion that they certainly know better and *studiously avoid* all passages of scripture which may interfere with their chosen subject.

Although there are slight variations to the theme of "only believe", the basic core of the dogma is that people can be saved instantaneously (even sitting beside their radio sets or driving their cars) by suddenly "believing" in Jesus. Those who preach this particular belief and accept it (and there are vast numbers) would advise enquirers that they have nothing to DO in regard to their salvation (for Christ did it all on the cross) and they need simply believe. Obviously we must all BELIEVE on the Lord Jesus Christ to be saved, and certainly Christ accomplished our salvation on the cross, but as we shall clearly see from the N.T. there are also things that we must DO in our acceptance of salvation. We do not have to rely on the interpretation of one or two verses of scriptures on this subject for, in the Acts of the Apostles, we have several clear examples of conversion, and what can be better than *real examples* of how men, and women, from all walks of life, were saved in N.T. times? From these examples we can judge for ourselves as to whether the apostle Peter believed in the "only believe" teaching, or Philip, or Ananias or Paul. In short, *how* did the apostles carry out Christ's instructions to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature? What did *they* understand by this and *how did they* convert enquirers?



REAL EXAMPLES OF TRUE CONVERSIONS

The Book of Acts takes up where the Gospels leave off. The Gospels close with the account of the ascension of Jesus to God's right hand in heaven, after giving His final instructions to His apostles. These instructions, according to Mark, were **"Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned."** (16:15). Even at the outset, these instructions of Christ seem to be in conflict with Mr. Osborn, in that, according to Jesus Himself, salvation *was to be preceded* not only by belief but repentance and baptism. We shall see if this view is borne out by how the apostles interpreted Christ's instructions. Subsequent to Christ's instructions, the first recorded instance of the preaching of the gospel is by the apostle Peter, on the Day of Pentecost, and is in consequence of the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the assembled apostles (Acts 2).

THE SAVING OF THE 3000 AT PENTECOST (Acts 2)

Moved, supernaturally, by the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles, Peter preached to a massive Jewish audience so effectively that he convicted them of having killed the Messiah, the Son of God. Stricken in conscience they called out **"Men and brethren, what shall we do?"** In Peter's reply we shall notice that he did not tell them to BELIEVE on the Lord Jesus Christ, for evidently they already believed in Him, but he directed them in *the next steps* of their conversion. He said, **"Repent and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."** (2:37). Here is a passage of which Mr. Osborn must be completely unaware for it does not mention "belief" but does mention repentance and baptism. And baptism is for the remission of sins. And surely "remission of sins" must be *a very important ingredient* in a person's salvation. In response to Peter's preaching 3,000 souls **"gladly received his word and were baptised"** that same day (v.41). Baptism didn't seem "unnecessary" to those 3,000.

PHILIP AND THE SAMARITANS (Acts 8)

The next conversions in the Acts refer to the preaching of Philip the evangelist to the Samaritans. This was during the persecution of the Churches in Jerusalem orchestrated by Saul (later Paul). Many of the citizens of Samaria had hitherto been under the spell of Simon the Sorcerer, who had **"For a long time bewitched them with sorceries. But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the Kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptised, both men and women. Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptised he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done."** (v.12). Here we are informed that the large numbers of Samaritans who believed were also baptised (including Simon the Sorcerer).

PHILIP AND THE EUNUCH (Acts 8)

The next conversion mentioned in Acts involves the Ethiopian Eunuch, Chancellor of The Exchequer to Queen Candace. The eunuch is returning home in his chariot from Jerusalem and is not only reading Isaiah Chap. 53 but is debating within himself as to whom it refers. The Holy Spirit brings Philip to the chariot, and Philip at the eunuch's request, boards the chariot and enters into a conversation on the predictions of Isaiah. **"Then Philip opened his mouth and began at the same scripture and preached unto him Jesus. And as they went on their way came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water, what doth hinder me to be baptised."** Before we look at what happened next we should, I think, wonder how the eunuch knew to mention baptism. It seems clear that Philip was not preaching an "only believe" doctrine: but baptism was an important element of his gospel message. Philip had preached unto him "Jesus" and obviously this included the element of baptism. We notice, too, that the eunuch did not say, "Who is going to force me to be baptised" but rather "What can stop me from being baptised." Clearly the eunuch had the attitude that God

requires. **“And Philip said, if thou believest with all thy heart thou mayest . . . And he commanded the chariot to stand still and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch and he baptised him.”** (v.38). Thus according to Philip, only those who believe in Christ totally (with all their heart) are fit subjects for baptism. Can any sane person contemplate Philip telling the eunuch about baptism, stopping the chariot, going down into a pool of water waist-high and immersing the eunuch if the whole business was quite unnecessary? Can we imagine it? And yet many tract writers either manage to avoid the mention of baptism, or completely dismiss it as “unnecessary to salvation.” Perhaps they have overlooked Acts 8.

PAUL’S OWN CONVERSION (Acts 9)

Paul was an unlikely candidate for God’s selection to service. It was while Paul (then Saul) was **“Yet breathing out threatening and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord”** (and was in fact, on his way to Damascus to wreak havoc on the Christians there) that he was struck down and blinded by the Lord Jesus Christ. Horrified to learn that he had, in fact, been persecuting Christ, he **“trembling and astonished, asked the Lord, What will thou have me to do?”** This, of course, was a golden opportunity for Jesus to say, **“Do? You have nothing to do: Only believe.”** But the Lord said no such thing. **“Jesus said, Arise and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou MUST DO.”** Struck temporarily blind, Paul was led by the hand into Damascus and was in such a state of mental turmoil that **“He was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink.”** After three days God sent a reluctant Ananias to Saul to restore his sight and tell him what he must do. **“Immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales, and he received his sight forthwith, and arose and was baptised.”** Luke (who wrote the Acts) merely mentions that Paul **“arose and was baptised.”** However, years later, when Paul was recounting the circumstances of his own conversion, he gave us a little more detail. He says that after Ananias had restored his sight, Ananias informed him that he (Paul) had been chosen by God to know God’s will and **“to see the Just One, and to hear word from His mouth. For thou shalt be a witness to all men of what thou hast seen and heard. And now, why tarriest thou, Arise, and be baptised and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord”** (Acts 22:15). One would have imagined that if Paul was specially chosen by God to do God’s will, and to actually see Christ, and actually hear Christ’s words, that baptism could have been dispensed with. I’m sure Mr. Osborn would think so. Yet Paul’s conversion is similar to all the rest: God is no respecter of persons in this. Paul had spent the last three days in remorse, fasting and prayers, but these prayers had not erased his sins; otherwise Ananias, at the end of the three would not have said, **“Arise, and be baptised and wash away thy sins . . .”** Again, we cannot imagine a man being “saved” if, three days later, he is still “in his sins.” Thus Paul was not “saved” at his conversion with Christ, but was saved only after the three days when he had “obeyed the gospel” in baptism, and had “washed away” (not “prayed away”) his sins. Thus Ananias confirms the words of Peter (in Act 2:37) that *baptism is for the remission of sins*: and “remission of sins” is a very important consideration in a person being “saved.” How can tract writers ignore such things?

CORNELIUS AND HIS HOUSEHOLD (Acts 10)

After Paul’s conversion in Chap. 9 we have the conversion of the first Gentiles in Chap. 10. We see from the record that the apostle Peter had to be convinced by a vision from God that the Gentiles should receive the gospel. However reluctant Peter may have been, he duly arrives at the house of Cornelius, a Roman soldier, and preaches to a very enthusiastic group of Gentiles. Peter concludes his gospel address with these words: **To Him (Christ) give all the prophets witness that, through His name, whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins. While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Spirit fell on all them which heard the word. And they of**

the circumcision which believed (the Jews) were astonished (as many as came with Peter) because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the Holy Spirit." (There are only two recorded instances in the N.T. of baptism in the Holy Spirit: this one and that of the apostles, in Acts 2). Most of our tract-writing friends would tell us that men baptised in the Holy Spirit were highly honoured and certainly saved instantaneously. Yet Peter, after he recovered from his astonishment that the Gentiles had been baptised in the Holy Spirit, said, "**Can any man forbid water that these should not be baptised (which have received the Holy Spirit as well as we). And he commanded them to be baptised in the name of the Lord**" (v.47). To Peter, baptism in water was not some unnecessary humbug, or optional appendage to salvation, but was vital and something he *commanded to be done*, even with those who had just, in his presence, been baptised by God, in the Holy Spirit.

CONVERSION OF LYDIA Acts 16

Paul and Silas describe how, on their second missionary journey, they came to Philippi and stayed there several days. "**And on the sabbath we went out of the city by the riverside, where prayer was wont to be made: and we sat down and spoke to the women that resorted thither. And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended to the things which were spoken by Paul. And when she was baptised and her household, she besought us saying. If ye have judged me faithful to the Lord, come into my house and abide there.**" Again, all those who heard the gospel and believed it, were baptised.

CONVERSION OF THE JAILER (Acts 16)

While in the same city of Philippi, Paul and Silas later encountered much persecution and ended up in jail. God intervened, and by means of an earthquake sundered open the prison doors. Thinking that the prisoners had escaped, the jailer prepared to kill himself but Paul restrained him and said, "**Do thyself no harm, for we are all here.**" Although the jailer was a heathen man, he was astute enough to realise that he had angered the God of Paul and Silas, and, in fear and trembling, said, "**Sirs, what must I do to be saved?**" Paul replied, "**Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.**" Plainly the jailer knew nothing about Christ and so "**Paul spoke unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in the house.**" The outcome is recorded in the next verse. "**And he, (the jailer) took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes, and WAS BAPTISED he and all his straightway.**" The jailer and his household were baptised *immediately*.

THE CORINTHIANS (Acts 18)

Paul, still on his second missionary journey, came from Athens to Corinth, and preached the gospel to everyone: Jews and Gentiles. When many Jews rejected his message and blasphemed, Paul concentrated his efforts on the Gentiles. "**And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house, and many of the Corinthians hearing, believed and were baptised**" (v.8). And so the pattern is maintained: those in Corinth who heard and believed, were immersed.

THE EPHESIANS (Acts 19)

The last relevant mention of baptism in Acts relates to what Paul found at Ephesus. When he asked certain brethren if they had received the Holy Spirit since they believed they replied, in surprise, that they had never even heard of the Holy Spirit. This, in turn, surprised Paul, and he asked, "**Unto what, then, were ye baptised? And they said, Unto John's baptism.**" Paul then explained to them that whereas John's baptism had been previously relevant, it had now been superseded and overtaken by Christ's baptism. "**And when they heard this, they were baptised in the name of the Lord.**" Thus we have here an example of *Godly men*, who having already been baptised with John's baptism, had to be baptised again, with Christ's baptism. This incident is of

great interest and shows us *the importance* that Paul attached to baptism: Christ's baptism.

THE THIEF ON THE CROSS

"But", someone says, "The thief on the cross was 'saved' without being baptised. I want to be saved like the thief on the cross."

Prior to Pentecost, and while Jesus trod the earth, being all powerful, He could at will, retain sins or forgive sins on *whatever terms He pleased*, or indeed, *upon no terms whatsoever*. This was during His ministry and prior to His burial. After His death however, the will of Christ as Testator assumed its full force and, since Christ had ascended into heaven, He was in any case, no longer here to forgive people personally. Thus from the time of the ascension Christ's terms for salvation were committed into the hands of His earthly representatives (the apostles) and they were sent into all the world to make these terms known. As we have already seen, Christ's parting instructions to His apostles were, "**Go ye unto all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved.**" Consequently people today cannot be 'saved' like the thief on the cross, who was, after all, the *only person* to whom Jesus ever said "**Today thou will be with Me in paradise,**" (whatever that meant). Similarly Jesus said to various people, "Thy sins be forgiven thee" and to the woman taken in adultery, He said, "neither do I condemn thee, go and sin no more," But no one expects that to happen today. Those who asked to be saved like the thief on the cross are very selective and, predictably don't want to be saved on the terms given to the rich young ruler: "**go and sell all thou hast and give it to the poor.**" We can't ask to be saved in a preferred manner. Salvation is non-negotiable. Even Paul (a chosen vessel) as we have seen, was not "saved like the thief on the cross" but was instructed by Christ personally, to go into the city and wait until he was told the things he must do. The *terms of entry* into the Kingdom of God, and for the remission of sins, were enunciated at Pentecost and have never changed.

CONCLUSION

Many years ago, the late brother David Dougal, an evangelist for whom I had great respect and admiration, assured me that once we had a solid grasp of the Acts of the Apostles we could go anywhere. His words are so true and a study of the Acts is one of the most profitable pursuits of the Bible student. It certainly sheds much light on the question of conversion: and how men can be saved.

Fortunately, in this article, it has been possible to squeeze in **all** the conversions in the Acts, and surely the record speaks for itself. Every conversion there (without any exception) has clearly shown us that, in N.T. times, all believers were called upon to renounce sin (repent) and to be baptised (immersed) that their past sins might be washed away and that they might rise from the watery grave to walk in newness of life (Rom 6). Mr. Osborn and the many others, will doubtless continue to write their tracts and maintain that we need "only believe", but from this very brief look at the Acts we have seen that Peter did not subscribe to the doctrine and neither did Philip, Ananias or Paul. This is hardly surprising when we remember that Jesus, in His commission, said, "He that believeth and is baptised will be saved." Jesus, in His purpose, placed baptism between belief and salvation, and as I say, a great responsibility rests with those who would alter the sequence of Christ's words and would make Him say, "He that believeth is saved, and may be baptised if he feels the need." Truly an awesome responsibility rests on those who write tracts. Tracts should reflect the facts in Acts.

(I regret this article is even longer than usual but I wanted to include all the conversions in Acts.)

GLEANINGS

"Let her glean even among the sheaves." (Ruth 2:15)

"AND THE LIFE"

"I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father; but by me" John 14:6.

WE QUOTE – R. W. DALE THE ATONEMENT

"That same night, after the institution of the Supper, He said to His disciples, **"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you."** John 15:13. Three months before, He had claimed to be the Good Shepherd, and in illustration of His claim He emphasised in the most remarkable manner His readiness and His *intention* to die for His flock. He does not say that He will lead His sheep to the greenest and most abundant pastures, and to streams which are not dried up by the summer's heat or swollen by the rains of winter into dangerous torrents; but He declares again and again that He will die for them. **"I am the good Shepherd: the Good Shepherd giveth his life for the sheep."** **"As the Father knoweth Me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down My life for the sheep."** (John 10:11,15). Up to this point, however, it remains uncertain whether He was to die for the flock of God in any other sense than many faithful shepherds have died for it.

"I LAY DOWN MY LIFE"

Jewish prophets, Christian apostles, many reformers and missionaries, and many outrageous ministers of the gospel in evil times, have died rather than betray their trust. Had our Lord said nothing more, it might have been possible to interpret His words as meaning that He was to die as they have died. The shepherd may lose his own life while he is struggling with the wolf; the wolf may be killed, or, even if not, the struggle may give the sheep time to escape, though the shepherd perishes. To prevent any mis-conception, He breaks up His illustration. The shepherd that dies defending his flock does not die voluntarily; he dies because the wolf is too strong for him; but our Lord declares that it is not to be so with Him; **"I lay down My life . . . No man taketh it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again"** (John 10:17,18).

"NO MAN TAKETH IT FROM (HIM)"

His devotion to men is as great as that of the shepherd who imperils and actually loses his life in protecting his flock against the wolf; He too, dies for the sheep; but He lays down His life deliberately and of set purpose: **"no man taketh it from (Him)."** Our Lord's death is unique. The parallel fails. He died for men in some other sense than those who have shrunk from no dangers in the service of the Church and of God. Words of our Lord, which we have already considered, suggest a partial explanation of the peculiarity of His death: His blood was shed **"for the remission of sins."**

"FOR THE SHEEP"

There are other words of His which contribute additional illustration to the sense in which He laid down His life **"for the sheep."** On His way to Jerusalem, and a very short time before His death, He had spoken to Peter and the other Apostles about the greatness of their future position in the kingdom of heaven: **"Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of His glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.** (Matthew 19:28).

"AND THE LIFE"

WE QUOTE — JOHN SPENCER

All the good things that can be reckoned up here have only a finite and limited goodness. Some can clothe but cannot feed; others can nourish but cannot secure; others adorn but cannot advance; all do serve but none do satisfy. They are like a beggar's coat made up of many pieces, not all enough either to beautify or defend. But Christ is full and sufficient for all His people: righteousness to cover all their sins, plenty enough to supply all their wants, grace enough to subdue all their lusts, wisdom enough to vanquish all their enemies, virtue enough to cure all their diseases, fulness enough to save them to the utmost. He is bread, wine, milk, living waters, to feed them; He is a garment of righteousness to cover and adorn them; a Physician to heal them; a Counsellor to advise them; a Captain to defend them; a Prince to rule; a Prophet to teach; a Priest to make atonement for them; a Husband to protect them; a Father to provide; a Brother to relieve; a Foundation to support; a Root to quicken; a Head to guide; a Treasure to enrich; a Sun to enlighten; and a Fountain to cleanse: so that as one ocean hath more water than all the rivers of the world, and one sun more light than all the luminaries in heaven, so one Christ is more to a poor soul than if it had all the world a thousand times over."

WE QUOTE — RICHARD SIBBES

"We see in burning-glasses, where the beams of the sun meet in one, how forcible they are, because there is a union of the beams in a little point. Let it be our labour that all the beams of our love may meet in Christ, that He may be our Beloved. As all streams meet in the great ocean, so let all our loves meet in Christ. We cannot bestow our love and our affections better than upon Christ. It is happiness that we have such affections as joy, delight, and love, planted in us by God; and what a happiness is it that we should have such an excellent Object to fill those affections, yea, to transcend, and more than satisfy them!"

"BUT BY ME"**WE QUOTE — SAMUEL RUTHERFORD**

"O blessed conquest, to lose all things and to gain Christ! If I should tell you what I have found in Christ, ye or others could hardly believe me. Make Him your only, your best-beloved. Look into those depths of loveliness, sweetness, beauty, excellency, that are in Christ, and then ye shall cry down the whole world, and all the glory of it even when it is come to the summer-bloom."

"This soul of ours hath love, and cannot but love some fair one; and O what a fair One, what an only one, what an excellent, lovely ravishing One, is Jesus! O come all, and drink at this living well. Come, drink, and live for evermore. Come drink, and welcome; welcome saith our fairest Bridegroom. No man getteth Christ with ill-will; no man cometh and is not welcome: no man cometh and rueth his voyage. All men speak well of Christ who have been with Him."

Selected by Leonard Morgan.

CHURCH GOVERNMENT

The Papal structure of the Roman Church evolved because the leaders slowly took more responsibility unto themselves. Brother Marsden's "Question Box" in September's 1994 issue of the *Scripture Standard* suggested we shouldn't keep peering over the Elders' and Deacons' shoulders to see how they administrate. This article seeks to initiate a discussion on this statement and to determine what the scriptural rôle of Church leaders today should be, and to establish how much the Church leaders should be able to act on their own.

The King of Judah and Jerusalem, Manasseh, did much evil in the sight of the Lord and because the people were seduced by him the Lord said **“Behold, I am bringing such a calamity on Jerusalem and Judah that whosoever hears of it, both ears shall tingle”** (2 Kings 21:1-15). In a similar vein the King of Israel, Jeroboam, sinned and made the people of Israel to sin, for which the Lord struck Israel **“as a reed is shaken by water”** (1 Kings 12:25-14:16). It is apparent then that God regarded the rulers as agents of the people, and the people were responsible for their leader’s actions. Jesus said (Matthew 15:15) **“that if the blind lead the blind both will fall into the ditch”**; clearly the led are not able to abdicate their responsibility for their leader’s actions.

“We have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God” (Hebrews 12:22), our citizenship is in heaven (Phil. 3:20) and we are fellow citizens with the saints (Eph. 2:19), and our lifestyle has to be worthy of that of a citizen (Phil. 1:27). The Holy Spirit in choosing the word ‘citizen’ in a Greek world where the duties of a citizen were clearly understood is very pertinent to this discussion. The scholar Aristotle said in his ‘The Politics’ some 300 years before Christ was born, “As soon as a man becomes entitled to participate in office, deliberative or judicial, we deem him to be a citizen of that state” (III.(i)). The Greeks had frequent referenda on all key decisions that were made by the city, and citizens were fined heavily if they did not exercise their vote. Paul claiming Roman citizenship (Acts 21:39) was able to appeal directly to Caesar (Acts 22:11) showing the equality, under law, that all Roman citizens had at that time. Against this background we can look at how the early Church made their decisions.

INVOLVEMENT OF THE CHURCH

After Christ’s ascension into heaven, Peter told the disciples (Acts 1:15) that a replacement Apostle for Judas was required. It is very significant that the choice of the successor was not chosen by Peter or by the remaining 11 Apostles, but was put in the hands of the 120 (names) who as a whole put forward two men; the selection of Matthias being then made by drawing lots (Acts 1:15-26). The first decision then of the Church following the ascension of Jesus, of the very critical issue of making an Apostle was made by the whole Church. The guidelines for the selection process, however, were dictated by Peter. The same pattern was followed when the Apostles decided that additional help was required to serve tables (Acts 6v2), they set the number of helpers required (v3) and their qualifications, obtained approval of the whole congregation (v5), and then let them do the choosing. The formal appointment being confirmed by the Apostles (v6). When the question of circumcision arose, it is interesting to note the same routine is followed.

Following a great dissension (Acts 15v2) it was determined to send not only Paul and Barnabas but also **‘certain others’** (note that Paul and Barnabas didn’t go off on their own or at their own behest) to see the apostles and elders in Jerusalem (v2). When they arrived at Jerusalem they were met by **the Church** and the Apostles and the elders (v4). The Apostles and elders then considered the matter (v6) whilst the multitude kept silent (v12). James summarised the outcome of the debate (v13). The decision was then ratified by the Apostles, elders and the whole Church (v22).

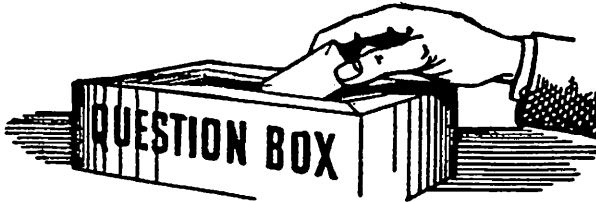
These three examples seem to show that the leaders of the Church set the rules but carried the whole congregation with them by allowing them full access to the decision making process, and also in its implementation and ratification. The leaders’ aim was to get all to be of one mind (Acts 15v25). They gave no hint of lording over their flock (1 Peter 5:1-3).

In setting the method of resolving differences between brothers Jesus requires (Matt. 18:15-17) it first be attempted between the two parties, then with one or two witnesses and, then before the Church. The final decision then rests with the Church. This is the same pattern as we have seen applied in the early Church.

THE DANGER

All Christians are required to be subject to their rulers (Tit. 3:1), to the elders (1 Peter 5:5) and to those who labour in the work (1 Cor. 16:16), but it is everyone's duty to submit to one another (Eph. 5:21; 1 Peter 5:5). It is however all Christians duty to stimulate one another to good works and admonish one another (Col. 3:16) including elders (1 Tim. 5:19,20). Jesus chided His disciples in wishing to lord it over others (Matt. 20:24-26); this charge being relayed to Church elders by Peter (1 Peter 5:3). The early Church fathers fought to keep this humility in the flock. Clement of Rome at the end of the first century said "Let each man be subject to his neighbour (Epistle to Corinthians para 38). Around 110 AD Polycarp and his fellow elders sent a letter to the Philippians (at their request) and whilst encouraging them to submit to the elders and deacons (para 5) then said "Be ye all subject to one another" (Para10). A contemporary of Polycarp, Ignatius, however was taking a very different stance maintaining that there is "one flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ, and one cup unto union in His blood: also there is one altar, as there is one bishop." (Epistle to Philadelphians para 4), a little later, in his epistle to the Smyrnaens he had moved on to claim "It is not lawful apart from the bishop either to baptise or hold a love feast" (para 8). His earlier demands for submission to the bishop (epistle to the Ephesians para 9) and demands not to resist the bishop (epistle to the Ehesians para 5) and again moved on to say "he that doeth aught without the knowledge of the bishop rendereth service to the devil" (epistle to the Smyrnaens para 9). History then shows that within a hundred years, the responsibilities moved away from the Church as a whole, guided by the elders, to a single Bishop. If the march to Rome took place so quickly, with so many in the Church having first hand contact with the first generation of Christians, how much more do we need to be on our guard against innovations to the New Testament pattern, which has to be our sole guide.

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Conducted by
Alf Marsden

"I have heard various brethren say, "the Church is getting too liberal." I am not quite sure in which way they mean this. Could you please explain?"

Liberal ideas came to the forefront in the 18th century and were initially applied to such things as politics, economics, and social affairs. It wasn't long before such ideas began to be applied to theology also, and there develop what has become known as the 'Liberal Theology.' This was resisted quite strongly in the 18th and 19th centuries but seems to have gained ground again in the 20th century. It started in Protestantism, but Catholicism was not immune from it. I suppose one could say that Atheistic Humanism and the Charismatic groups could be by-products of a more liberal approach to Christianity. So what does this mean to us, and what are the effects of it?

WHAT DOES LIBERALISM MEAN ?

To be liberal means to be 'open-minded, unprejudiced, free from pedantry. I think I should explain that a 'pedant' is someone who is said to "overrate book learning, who is intent on technicalities, and one who insists on strict adherence to formal rules"; he is also one who could be said to be 'doctrinaire', i.e., make no allowance for circumstances.

There is nothing wrong in being open-minded; it simply means that one is prepared to weigh the evidence as it is given. What is wrong is that when the evidence has been weighed, and the 'scales' of the mind indicate that the evidence points in a certain direction, that the liberal would say, "Well, it doesn't really matter." When it is **Biblical** evidence that we are talking about, the issue for the Christian can become quite serious: let me give you an example. The Biblical evidence for the existence of God and His hand in Creation is quite compelling, and as far as I know, has never been refuted successfully by any human authority. Yet the liberalising Humanist would say, "No; you don't have to believe in God, and the Creation story is just a myth; just rely on evolutionary processes, and man will be able to arrive at the pinnacle of his own achievement." The Christian will know that the chilling answer of the Bible to that liberal view is "**O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps**" (Jer. 10:23).

Furthermore, take the example of the liberalising element in the Anglican Communion. There is not the slightest evidence in the Bible for the ordination of woman priests, yet the liberalising faction in that Communion have pushed ahead and have disregarded the Bible, thereby splitting the Anglican Church. Those, on the other hand, who hold tenaciously to the truth of the Bible, are said to be 'doctrinaire'; they are not responding to the 'changed circumstances', i.e., the emancipation of women. We in the Church of Christ would be classed as doctrinaire, but I don't mind, do you? Let **God** be true. Catholicism, as I have said, is not immune to liberalisation. Many of the teachings and practices are self-evidently liberal, and it would be tedious of me to go on re-stating them here.

WHAT ARE HUMAN AFFAIRS ?

To the Bible-based Christian this is a very serious question. Liberal philosophy holds that all authority, real or alleged, which is brought into human affairs, should be open to critical enquiry. Implied in this 'alleged' authority would be God and the Bible. It is at this point that true Christian theology has to part company with liberal philosophy; at least it **should** do. The tragedy is, of course, that many churchmen – who should know better – have invented a 'liberal theology' which, as we have said, may satisfy liberalising humanists, but which openly contravenes the Divine Theology as revealed in the Bible (I feel I must make that clear to the questioner, who I know is a young Christian, that the word 'theology' simply means the science of the treatment of God; His nature and attributes).

Christian Theology, although it has a direct and necessary impact on human affairs, is not of itself human in origin. There are two things, apart from God and His Christ, which should be supremely important to the true Christian: the Bible and the Holy Spirit. These are crucial to the Christian as he conducts his life in the sphere of humanity, yet these are **not** of the human nature, and the authority which flows from them cannot be arrived at by human assessment. Let us examine them.

The Bible is the revelation of God to man. The words are 'inspired', and that means they are God-breathed; holy men of God spake as they were **moved** to speak. Quite simply, they were moved to speak the words that God **wanted** them to speak. It is preposterous that the words of the Divine Creator – Who Himself called humanity into existence – should be critically examined at the bar of **human** enquiry; that's like saying that the Creator of humnaity has to be examined for **suitability** by the human nature He created, which nature sinned and fell from His grace. It is true to say that the **reverse** is rather the case; human nature should stand before **God** to be critically examined to see if it can even stand before Him. It is only by His grace that it can. Therefore, the Bible, which is the revealer of God as Creator, cannot and should not be seen as a human work. It is Divine in origin, and therefore should not be subject to critical enquiry by a human 'court' for authenticity and authority; everyone and

everything should be measured against it. This seems to be too much for some people, and probably this why the 'liberal theology' has developed. The idea seems to be, "bring God down to our level." This will not do, and should be resisted.

Every Christian who has been obedient to the Gospel as revealed in the Bible, is the recipient of the Holy Spirit. He lives within us, and leads, guides, and directs us through God's Word, the Bible. The Holy Spirit is a Person of the Godhead, along with God and His Son, Jesus, therefore we cannot confine Him to human limits, nor can we express His work in human terms except for that which we see in the lives of Christians. His specific work is to confirm our relationship with God through the testimony contained in the Bible, and to help in the restoration of the image of God, the image which commenced with our acceptance of the Gospel. Human standards do not apply to the Divine.

Many of the charismatics have sought to do this by 'speaking in tongues'. There is no doubt that the Apostles were 'Spirit-possessed' on the day of Pentecost, but they **did not** articulate meaningless gabble. Acts 2:7,8, reads, "Behold, are not all these which speak Galilaeans? And how hear we every man in **our own tongue** wherein we were born?" The wonderful works of God were spoken in WORDS, and in languages which the people present could **understand**. Yes it was miraculous, but the miracle was in the message of the Gospel and not in the Apostles themselves.

Many of the liberalists see it in reverse. I once talked with a young woman who saw 'speaking in tongues' as the summit of Christian experience. "Do you speak in tongues", she asked? "No", I replied, "But I do have the Holy Spirit." "Well", she went on, "you can't be a Christian if you don't speak in tongues." That was final, and nothing I said would dissuade her. She was making the cardinal mistake of elevating **herself** rather than giving glory to the saving grace of God. How sad!

Well, dear questioner, there is much more that could be said but I would like to leave you with this thought. We should always keep before our eyes the love of God our Father, the sacrifices of His dear Son, the resurrection, the Gospel message wherein is salvation, the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit, and the teaching of God's Word which encourages us to respond to the 'upward call' of God in Christ, so that we shall ultimately conform to the image in which He created us. And **never** forget: Satan is the great iconoclast.

Finally, let me say that modern-day technological aids in preaching and teaching do not, in my opinion, constitute liberalism in the Church; nor do different ways of presentation. The real test should be, 'can I do it without contravening Scripture and offending God and my brethren.' If there are 'grey' areas – and there are – where no clear directive seems to be given, then we should take the attitude of Paul, "**If that offends my brother, I will not do it as long as I live.**"

(All questions, please, to Alf Marsden,
20 Costessy Way, Winstanley, Wigan. WN3 6ES).

THE WISE MEN FROM THE EAST

At this time of the year we are sure to hear about the Wise Men from the East following the star. Legend has transformed them into three kings of different nations and even suggested names for them, while at the same time implying that it was very easy for them to find the right house in Bethlehem because a star of enormous size appeared to be just over the roof top. In reality, of course, it must have been more difficult, for which of us would try to find any particular building by help of the stars?

In the Book of Daniel especially, we see several references to these eastern astrologers. We know that astrology is always vague and mostly wrong, but in Babylon apparently there were careful astronomers who accurately recorded all changes observed in the clear night sky in those desert regions for several hundred years, to provide facts for the astrologers to work on. They understood the movements of the

planets against the constellations, and could predict eclipses. Also it may be after the miracles worked by the Lord in the case of Daniel and his companions, some knowledge of the true God was still in existence there. Babylon being to the east of Judaea, it is quite a likely place for them to have come from.

At any rate, on this occasion, God permitted certain Wise Men to see and correctly interpret a sign from Himself. This would be in accordance with prophecies such as "there shall come a star out of Jacob" (Numbers 24:17) and "the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising" (Isiah 60:3). They observed a new star rising in the east, and understood that it related to a new king of overwhelming importance to be born in the obscure little country of Judaea.

Their excitement over this discovery was such that they felt impelled to make a journey and bring gifts to this new king. The account does not necessarily imply that they followed a star all the way to Judaea, as some hymnwriters state; in that case they could have gone straight to Bethlehem. Rather, having ascertained the country, they went first to king Herod in Jerusalem to ask for further directions. Probably to their surprise Herod knew nothing about any new king and "he was troubled and all Jerusalem with him." This visit seems to have been foreordained so that the great men of Jerusalem should have the fact of the birth of the Redeemer forcibly brought to their attention, for as yet only humble folk knew about it. The prediction pointed to someone so great that Herod set his Bible scholars to search for some information as to where the Messiah was to be born. They indicated that it was the town of Bethlehem.

Herod in turn was anxious to know, for his own reasons, when the star had first appeared. Some people have suggested that it was a comet or a conjunction of planets, but this question seems to indicate that it was not a surpassingly bright object, or everyone in Judaea would have noticed its appearance. The answer he was given persuaded him that it had been visible for about two years, for Herod later acted on the assumption that the baby in question had been born within that timescale. This again makes it unlikely that it was anything as transient as a comet.

The Wise Men then set out for Bethlehem, which was about five and a half miles distant in a south-westerly direction, travelling after dark so that the stars were visible. At this point the star confirmed the direction they were taking, to their great joy. In Matt. 2:9 it is recorded that the star which they saw in the east "went" before them and then "came" and "stood". A heavenly body which both moved and stood still while they were on a two hour journey did not act like any star, planet or comet known to us.

Now these Wise Men were not simpletons where the night sky was concerned, and knew as well as we do that a star could appear over any building, depending on the angle from which it was viewed, the time of night the season of the year. This makes the identification of the exact house in Bethlehem in which Mary and Joseph were lodging all the more wonderful. Rather than imagining them riding along on camels with an amazingly bright star in front of them, perhaps we should think of them poring over charts of the heavens, and closely observing a star which was moving erratically compared to other heavenly bodies. They would have to make careful calculations to ensure that they were viewing it from the right place and at the right hour of the night, as they approached the huddle of houses on a hill which was Bethlehem, and having picked out a particular house, then enter the town and find the entrance to it unlit and probably narrow streets. They had faith in their own methods, for when they arrived at the house, they were not put off finding it was only the home of an ordinary carpenter, but fell down and worshipped the baby.

Thus was fulfilled the prophecy, and the Wise Men faded out of the story together with their mysterious star. After God had warned them in a dream to avoid the cunning

king Herod, who knows but that they returned home and told their strange story, and it prepared the ground for some who came after in their country to believe in the gospel. We do not know what became of the rich gifts they brought, but possibly they provided timely assistance for Joseph and Mary on their forced journey into Egypt very soon afterwards.

(Miss) Rose M. Payne.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Jan 1	Proverbs 2:	Acts 18:19-28
Jan 8	Deut. 18:1-13	Acts 19:1-22
Jan 15	Habakkuk 2:	Acts 19:23-41
Jan 22	1 Kings 17:7-24	Acts 20:1-16
Jan 29	Ezekiel 33:1-20	Acts 20:17-38

JOHN'S BAPTISM

We read in this section of Scripture of those who only knew John's baptism. His immersion differed from that instituted by Jesus in the four following respects:

1. He baptised in the name or by the authority of God and not in the name or authority of the Lord.
2. He baptised into no name. He could not have baptised subjects into the name of the Messiah because he did not know the Messiah when he began his ministry (John 1:32-34). Again, he could not have baptised anyone into the name of the Holy Spirit because the Spirit had not yet been given. The Spirit was sent when the Son of God was glorified.
3. He did not baptise into the Christian faith. Alexander Campbell has written: "To believe that Jesus is Lord of all, that He died as a sin-offering and that He arose from the dead, was impossible to any of John's contemporaries. For Jesus was not made Lord, as Peter imparted on Pentecost, until He ascended into heaven . . . It is useless to show that the disciples of John had not the faith which Christians after Pentecost had; consequently could not be baptised into a faith which they did not possess."

4. John's baptism brought no man into the kingdom of heaven. The reason is obvious: no person could come into the kingdom which was not set up. John had declared this kingdom was near at hand, but, of course, he did not live to see its commencement.

I quote the great Mr. Campbell again: "The state in which John's immersion left his disciples, was a state of preparation for the kingdom of heaven, which at first must be gradually developed and progressively exhibited to the world. But the state in which Christian immersion leaves the disciples of Jesus is the kingdom of heaven – a state of righteousness, peace, joy, and possessed of the Holy Spirit of adoption into the family of God. They are pardoned, justified, glorified, with the title, rank and spirit of sons and daughters of the Lord God Almighty."

THE WAY

The early disciples were known as *the people of the Way*. We read: "**But some of them became obstinate; they refused to believe and publicly maligned the Way**" (19:9, N.I.V.). "**About that time there arose a great disturbance about the Way**" (19:23, N.I.V.). There are other passages too. "**Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem**" (Acts 9:1,2, N.I.V.). "**I persecuted the followers of this Way to their death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison . . .**" (Acts 22:4, N.I.V.). "**However, I admit that I worship the**

God of our fathers as a follower of the Way, which they call a sect” (Acts 24:14, N.I.V.). “Then Felix, who was well acquainted with the Way, adjourned the proceedings” (Acts 24:22, N.I.V.).

I think the translators of the New International Version got it right when they capitalised the word way because the Way is a person, who is Christ Jesus. He, Himself, said during His ministry: **“I am the Way, the Truth and the Life: no man comes unto the Father but by me” (John 14:6).**

Jesus also spoke of two ways: one that leads to life and the other that leads to destruction (Matthew 7:13,14). He said of the former: **“ . . . and few there be that find it,”** and of the latter: **“ . . . and many there be which go in thereat.”** His words could not be any plainer or simpler.

EPHESUS

Paul visited Ephesus: in his day the most populous city of the Roman province of Asia. Ephesus actually dated to the 12th century B.C. and had a chequered history to 133 B.C. when it formed part of the kingdom of Pergamum. In Paul’s day the city was described as “The Treasure House of Asia” and “The Vanity Fair of Asia Minor” because of her importance as a trading and commercial centre. She was also an Assize Town where the Roman governor came on occasions to try important cases. Here too the Pan-Ionian Games were held regularly, which attracted many visitors. Sadly, the citizens of Ephesus were well known for their fickle, superstitious and immoral behaviour.

Ephesus was a centre of idolatry. One of the seven wonders of the ancient world was sited here – the temple of Artemis or Diana. It was 425 feet long, 220 feet wide and 60 feet high. It had 127 pillars, each the gift of a king, and 36 were overlaid with gold and jewels. The temple was an asylum for criminals; was associated with weird, ecstatic and hysterical worship; and was maintained by hordes of slaves. Virtually nothing remains of this great pagan edifice.

Tourists to Turkey flock in their thousands to the site of ancient Ephesus. They are surprised to find that, although she was once a seaport, she is now seven miles inland because of the silt carried down by the river Cayster. The theatre, where thousands of screaming Ephesians gathered to against protest Paul’s ministry, is still there. It was excavated by an Austrian team of archaeologists.

It should be remembered that Paul later wrote an epistle to the saints at Ephesus, which has been described as “The Queen of the Epistles.” Ephesus also features as one of seven Churches of the province of Asia in the Book of Revelation (2:1-7). It is the Church that is mentioned first (1:11), which is probably an indication of the primary importance of Ephesus in the region.

FAREWELL TO THE EPHESIAN ELDERS

It was an emotional meeting between Paul and the Ephesian elders at Miletus (20:17-38). He said to them: **“And now, behold, I know that you all . . . shall see my face no more” (20:25).** No wonder **“they all wept sore and fell on Paul’s neck and kissed him . . .” (20:37).** However, Paul had given a warning to these men before his departure: **“Take heed therefore unto yourselves and to all the flock, over which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to feed the Church of God, which He has purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn everyone night and day with tears” (20:28-31).**

Many thoughts come to mind in reading this passage, the qualifications of an elder detailed by Paul under the inspiration of the Spirit (1 Timothy 3:1-7, Titus 1:5-9); the task of an elder, which is to feed spiritually the flock of God; the future apostasy foreseen by Paul that would originate from the

eldership itself; Paul's deep love of the Church and his zealotness unto tears.

I believe that the rise of the papacy can be traced back to the corruption of the office of an elder. First, there was a multiplicity of elders in one church; then there was an elder or bishop over a multiplicity of churches. Soon there arose arch-bishops to govern bishops and then patriarchs to supervise the arch-bishops.

The word patriarch means "the rule of a father" and by the 6th century A.D. there was in place a universal father to control the patriarchs. The universal father, of course, became better known as the Pope. To many, this is the "man of sin" of 2 Thessalonians 2:3. The reasons for his appearance are worthy of our most careful analysis in the light of Paul's words.

Ian S. Davidson,
Motherwell.

TEST YOUR

BIBLICAL KNOWLEDGE

1. Who was the first king of Israel?
2. The Book of Nahum is about the destruction of what great city?
3. Who were the 2 sons of Samuel?
4. According to the apostle Paul, Hagar stands for what mountain in Arabia?
5. In which book of the New Testament do we read of the king Aretas?
6. What was the occupation of Demetrius?
7. How long did Abimelech rule over Israel?
8. How old was Isaac when he died?
9. Name the year when all the Israelites returned to their own property.
10. Which prophet revealed that Solomon would build the temple?

NEWS FROM THE CHURCHES

Dennyloanhead: The Church here are overjoyed to announce that on Tuesday, 1st November, 1994, a young man, Graeme Scobbie, confessed his faith in

Jesus Christ, as his Saviour, and was baptised into Christ for the remission of sins.

Graeme is the son of Sister Jenny Scobbie and the late Bro. Andrew Scobbie. We thank God for this wonderful increase and our prayer and desire is that our young brother will be richly blessed in God's service and will grow in grace and in the knowledge of his Lord and Saviour. To God be the glory.

Joe Malcolm (Sec).

THANKS

Sister Frances Wilson of Inverness would like to thank family, Church members and all friends for the many "Get Well" cards, flowers and 'phone calls received during her stay in hospital. These were much appreciated and she was greatly uplifted by them all.

Grace Sneddon

GHANA APPEAL

Recently the National Bible Society of Scotland sent an appeal to those on their mailing list for help to print Bibles in TWI (Ashanti region language) for distribution in Ghana. I wrote and asked if I could purchase these and send them to Ghana myself. They agreed and let me purchase Bibles at half price, £4.24 per Bible which has maps and cross references.

We purchased 10 and sent these yesterday to the Ashanti region. I have asked for a feedback on how accurate a translation these Bibles are and how many are required in each congregation. If the comments are favourable we will endeavour to supply everyone who does not have a Bible, with one.

The Angu church building is completed and shortly they intend to have a Gospel campaign. A brother has written a tract for distribution around Angu. We have used some of the Appeal

funds (lowest tender was accepted) to have these printed in Glenrothes on coloured paper and these will be in transit to Africa as you read this article. We thank all who are helping in this work once again for your love and concern for our brothers and sisters in Christ in Ghana. Those wishing to help in this work, please contact:- Graeme Pearson, 13 Fairways, Dunfermline. Fife. KY12 0DU. Tel 0383 728624.

P.S. received with thanks £50 from IMB on the 9th Nov. (receipt number 578).

1. Saul (1 Samuel 10:24)
2. Nineveh (Nahum 1:1)
3. Joel and Abijah (1 Samuel 8:2)
4. Mount Sinai (Galatians 4:25)
5. 2 Corinthians (11:32)
6. Silversmith (Acts 19:24)
7. Three years (Judges 9:22)
8. 180 (Genesis 35:28)
9. Year of Jubilee (Leviticus 25:13)
10. Nathan (2 Samuel 7:4)

ANSWERS

THE “DANGER” OF FORGIVENESS

There is a myth floating around about “forgiveness.” In fact, it has been among us for a long time. This illusion asserts that “there is an inherent danger built into forgiveness. If one realises he has been freely forgiven for his evil deed, he will be encouraged to . . . do it again!”

As a result of this imagined peril, there has been a tendency to muffle . . . or at least minimize the message of grace as it relates to man. We hide this threatening truth under piles of religious jargon designed to confuse the would-be recipient so that he will never fully realise what he has. (It’s not that we won’t want him to be completely forgiven – saved; we just don’t want him to be completely conscious of it . . . lest he be tempted to exploit it.) It has even been known among us to try and convince such a fellow that “he earned it at great effort” . . . so that he will appreciate it more.” (After all, we value anything more if we have to work for it! Don’t we?) But the object of all these theological gyrations is the same . . . to keep this “dangerous forgiveness” under-cover.

Forgiveness, however, is not dangerous to any real Christian. He will never be made worse for having come to realise the immensity of his debt. Only better!! Forgiveness becomes the impetus that provides him with power. The motive which grows into desire . . . to be . . . to become . . . to do for Christ, his forgiver.

The disciple of Christ will only be improved by a clear knowledge of grace. The hypocrite will be exposed.

One more thing: if we decide to “hold back” the message of forgiveness from all people . . . then we really have NO MESSAGE AT ALL!!

J. WRIGHT.

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