

The **SCRIPTURE STANDARD**

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

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TAKING THE INITIATIVE

A tired but triumphant Ted Heath has just arrived back from his negotiations with Iraq's Saddam Hussein. Mr. Heath is all smiles because he has managed to bring back with him no less than thirty-two elderly and ailing hostages. Wasn't it heart-warming to see the tearful reunion between hostages and loved-ones at the airport? Being an ex-Prime Minister and eminent statesman, Mr Heath's initiative has not been without its critics and much controversy has inevitably ensued. Whether or not his precipitate action will have hindered future negotiations for the release of other hostages, will remain to be seen but, like many more, I'm on Ted's side. To me, this rescue of thirty-two unfortunates (some terminally ill) is one of the best things to happen in the Gulf crisis so far, and we can but hope and pray for the release of many more. We can't really imagine what it must be like to languish in captivity in such a hostile and unhappy environment in the hands of Muslim extremists, uncertain of our eventual fate, but the ecstasy and tears of joy on the faces of the captives as they arrived in Britain, went some way to describe it.

Watching the T/V News Bulletins and the happy reunion of hostages and friends, and the congratulations all round, I suppose many of us must have wondered how we would have coped with the situation, either as a hostage or as a close relative. We must have noticed how that, more and more, civilians rather than troops are being manipulated into warfare, and we must also have wondered how the Islamic Ayatollahs can reconcile their professed religious piety with the basic inhumanity of holding civilians hostage, to say nothing of keeping captive the aged, the infirm and the dying.

THE FRUITS OF ISLAM

The Islamic community are quick to refer us to the merits of their religion as the only true religion; recommending that we join them in following their great God Allah and his teachings. There is little doubt of their zeal and Islamic children from infancy are drilled in the contents of their holy book the Koran. It must, therefore, seem a great puzzle to most of us as to how such a religion can allow innocent bystanders to be taken hostage, and in some cases, kept prisoner for years chained to a wall on a concrete floor in a pitch-dark room. Islam can also pass sentence of death upon whom it may (like Salmon Rushdie) and call upon every Muslim to murder such an one should the opportunity arise. The current picture the world has of Islam is one of religious and political intolerance, and as time goes on this intolerance will increase greatly. Any country, with an Islamic element in its population, will find this out, to

its great cost, if it has not already done so. We see on T/V, quite regularly, frenzied Iranians (or whatever) shaking clenched fists at the non-Islamic world, and hurling curses, threats and verbal abuse at all 'the enemies of Allah'. This certainly seems 'par for the course' in countries like Iran where 'death squads' shoot a regular quota of 'enemies', or Iraq, which recently used nerve gas to slaughter hundreds of civilians in Kurdistan, a neighbouring Islamic country. And now again Iraq invades a weaker nation, takes thousands of innocent people hostage and threatens the world with chemical warfare should anyone intervene. To the average onlooker, Islam seems to thrive on threats and revel in death. What a contrast to the teachings of Christ, the Prince of Peace. (I know, of course, that in the name of 'Christianity' there have been 'Holy Wars'; the slaughter of the 'Innocents', Spanish and other Inquisitions, etc. but these have certainly not been inspired by the teachings of Jesus, and there always has been a wide gulf between Christ and 'Christianity'). Thus it seems strange that hostages should have to be rescued from the clutches of men who devote their entire energies to Allah and who pray five times every day "to be shown the straight path." If a religion is only as good as it makes us, we can see what Islam has made of the Gulf States, particularly Iran and Iraq. It all seems light-years away from "Love thine enemy" and "do good" to those who despitely use you.

GOD'S INITIATIVE

God has always taken the initiative, especially regarding man's welfare. Obviously, in the first place, it was due to God's initiative that man was made at all. However, having made man, God has also been the Great Redeemer in retrieving man from all his many pitfalls. It was never within man's own capacity 'to pull himself up by the bootstraps' and God has had always to come to his rescue — even as early as the Garden of Eden. After Adam and Eve had disobeyed in the matter of eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, God appeared in the garden and sought them out: "Where art thou" (still a good question for man to ponder today). After admonishing Adam and Eve concerning their sin (and advising them on sin's remedy) God promised mankind, through Eve, a coming Redeemer, and that "The seed of the woman would bruise the serpent's head" (Gen.3:15). Meanwhile God offered them a substitute atonement for sins, involving the shedding of animal blood (until the Lamb of God should come). This, perhaps, was seen to much greater effect in the following generation (sons of Adam) and the sacrifices offered by Cain and Abel. Abel's sacrifice was acceptable; but not so Cain's. Abel brought of "the firstlings of the flock" (which pre-supposed sacrifice involving the shedding of blood) but Cain brought "of the fruit of the ground" representing only his own good husbandry. Cain was angry at the rejection of his offering but God had previously counselled both men on the sacrifice required (Hcb. 11:4) and so Cain's anger was quite unjustified and drew these words from God, "If thou doest well shalt thou not be accepted? And if thou doest not well sin lieth at the door."

God again took the initiative, many years later, when He saw the wickedness of mankind, in the days of Noah, and regretted that He had ever made man. He resolved to destroy the world but left the door ajar for repentance. Noah ceased not to warn men of what would befall them if they continued in their evil ways (and did so for well over a hundred years) but alas, in the event and after the flood, only eight souls were saved. Still, God had presented fair opportunity to man: all man had to do was to enter the Ark.

God also took the initiative in calling Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldees, promising him a country and a vast progeny, out from which would come a seed (singular), even Christ, who would be a blessing to the entire world (Gal. 3:16). There was no requirement upon God to involve Himself in the problems of man's own making,

but by virtue of His kindness and grace, God intervened. **“For God has so loved the world”** that He has always gone to great lengths, in every age and economy, to redeem man from the consequences and guilt of his foolish and evil disposition. Ultimately, of course, God so loved the world **“that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”**

Likewise in delivering the Children of Israel from their hopeless bondage in Egypt, God took the first steps and initiated their eventual delivery. It could not have been otherwise, for the Israelites were completely helpless and impotent. God assured Moses that He had seen their plight and would do something about it. **“And I have also heard the groaning of the Children of Israel, whom the Egyptians keep in bondage, and I have remembered My covenant. Wherefore, say unto the Children of Israel, I am the Lord and I will bring you out from under the burden of the Egyptians, and I will rid you out of their bondage, and I will redeem you with a stretched out arm and with great judgements.”** (Ex.6:5)

And so God is a God of initiative: He sees the need and comes to the rescue, even in the face of man's continual indifference and rebellion. When we consider man's dismissive attitude to God we marvel with the Psalmist, **“What is man that God is mindful of him, or the son of man that God would visit him”**.

GOD'S INITIATIVE IN THE N.T.

God resumed His initiative in the N.T., after some 400 years of silence, when we read that **“When the fulness of time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman ...** (Gal.4:4). Once again God, seeing the plight of the world sent the remedy: The REDEEMER.

Cruden, in his Concordance says, **“to REDEEM means (1) To buy something back that has been sold, by repaying the price to him who bought it. (Lev. 25:25) or (2) To deliver, and bring out of bondage, those kept prisoner by their enemy (Deut. 32:6; 1 Tim. 2:6 etc.).**

Land sold in a time of financial embarrassment could be redeemed again i.e. bought back and restored to the former owner, just as goods pawned today, in a time of temporary poverty, can yet be redeemed. Likewise prisoners can often be redeemed if the ransom price is paid. Jesus was both Redeemer and the actual Ransom price. In what sense was He those things? Because He paid the price (His life) to buy us all back from the kingdom of darkness. Paul says that Christ, **“gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time,”** (1 Tim. 2:5) and that Jesus **“gave Himself for us that He might redeem us from all iniquity.”** (Titus 2:14). The **“Giving of Himself”** was the purchase price. There are, of course, many in the world totally unaware that they need to be ransomed, and would even dispute that they are in any kind of captivity: or need rescue. The Jews resented the idea and claimed that they **“had never been in bondage to any man”** (John 8:33) but Jesus explained that although they were the Children of Israel, and sons of Abraham, they were also the children of the Devil and the sons of Satan, for **“whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin.”** and **“in the bonds of iniquity”** (Acts 8:23). We have all sinned and sold ourselves to the Devil. Paul said that **“Man was carnal and sold under sin.”** Having been sold we must also be bought back. Paul, continuing the theme, also said that we had been **“brought into captivity into the law of sin”** and asks the question, **“Who shall deliver us from the body of this death”**. He also answers it: **“through Jesus Christ our Lord”** (Rom. 7:14:25).

And so Jesus is our Redeemer having paid the purchase price: His own life. **“Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us, for it is written. Cursed is everyone that hangeth on a tree.”** (Gal.3:13). We were not redeemed with corruptible things as silver and gold, **“But with the precious blood of**

Christ, as a lamb without blemish and without spot". And all this was Christ's own initiative, for "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." (Rom.5:8).

AN INSPIRATION?

Whatever the colour of our political affiliations we must surely give full marks to **shall be saved. How then shall they call on Him of whom they have not believed? And** about it. If he had ignored requests to go, and had not gone, thirty-two aged and ill hostages would still be captive. He made the effort and success followed. No effort: no success.

In a much larger and greater context, but with similarities, Jesus said, "Get up and go". Jesus' final charge to His followers was, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature, he that believeth and is baptised shall be saved." As we have seen, Jesus, Himself, took the initiative and came into the world to save sinners. He came "to set the prisoner free" and to "proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound." (Is.61:1). We all live in prisons of our own making, but over and above that, the whole world is held hostage by the devil and needs to be rescued. Paul said that the Christians at Colosse had been "delivered from the power of darkness" and "had been translated into the kingdom of His dear Son" (Col.1:13). But **who shall go to rescue the perishing? Again, Paul, stressing the need for evangelism, declared, "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on Him of whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach except they be sent?"** (Rom.10:14). How indeed? And so Christ sends us into the world to preach the good news.

God took steps to save us, and expects us to take steps to save others. He expects us to use some initiative I suppose (like the kind Ted Heath showed), and yet it seems that we show more interest, alacrity and initiative to our earthly masters than we do to our heavenly Master. Truly there are difficulties, and the world seems unwilling to hear the message, but then again, every man must surely have the right to hear the true gospel at least once. In the context of world events, what Mr. Heath did was, to many, a small thing hardly worth the mention: but not so to thirty-two very grateful hostages. In like manner, the saving of **just one soul** (one sinner that repenteth) is of sufficient moment and gravity for rejoicing amongst the angels in heaven. Thus, in a measure, we have some idea of the interest the angels take in the saving of souls. But, have we an interest to match it? and can Mr. Heath's solo effort in compassion inspire us to greater efforts, and some new initiatives, in reaching the lost with God's good news?

Redemption! O wonderful story –
Glad message for you and for me:
That Jesus Has purchased our pardon,
And paid all the debt on the tree.

Editor.

GLEANINGS

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

SHARE YOUR LIFE

"For whether is greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? Is not he that sitteth at meat? But I am among you as he that serveth."

(Luke 22:27)

THE BIBLE SPEAKS

"Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many."

(Matthew 20:28)

"If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another's feet." (John 13:14)

"Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good." (Romans 12:21)

"As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith." (Galatians 6:10)

"So being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us."

(1 Thessalonians 2:8)

"And I will very gladly spend and be spent for you; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved."

(2 Corinthians 12:15)

"But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased."

(Hebrews 13:16)

SHARE YOUR LIFE

"Is your life a living power?

Self-entwined, its strength sinks low;

It can only live in loving;

Serving others, love will grow."

TALES WORTH TELLING

A young society girl said to a woman of eighty, who still attracted all in spite of her snowy hair, "Tell me the secret of your charm, and teach me to fascinate people as you do." "My child," was the gentle response, "remember just this: in the alphabet of charm there is no such letter as 'I', it is all 'U'."

SOMEONE HAS SAID

"I would give nothing for the Christianity of a man whose very dog and cat were not the better for his religion."

Rowland Hill.

GLEANINGS

"Christianity is something more than humanity."

Matthew Henry.

"We do not know how cheap the seeds of happiness are, or we would scatter them oftener."

Lowell.

"To improve the golden moment of opportunity, and catch the good that is within our reach, is the great art of life."

Dr. Johnson.

TIS THINE

Inscribed in an old-fashioned silver watch:

"Tis mine the passing hour to tell.

Tis thine to use it ill or well."

F.B.

A SECOND LOOK

HERE'S A THOUGHT: "While no one can afford to quit because the road gets rough, anyone can afford to take a second look to find a smoother road to the same destination,"

Shaw's.

TWO WAYS OF LIGHTENING A BURDEN

"There are two ways of lightening a burden — one is to diminish the load, the other is to strengthen the shoulders that carry it. The latter is often the more blessed, and often the shape in which God answers our prayers."

C.G.

WILLIAM JAMES SAYS

William James says that the crisis of self-surrender has always been and must always be, regarded as the vital turning point of the religious life.

Selected by Leonard Morgan.

HEAD COVERING AND THE HAIR

(Continued)

An examination of the teaching presented in *The Divine Pattern Advocate*, Vol. 2, Aug. 16, 1987. Having considered some fundamental concepts of this teaching under the heading "The Hair Ordinance" ("H.O.") we shall now cite some basic "H.O." propositions to which answers will be appended. These propositions are not necessarily quoted verbatim, but the substance of each statement has been checked with the Author for accuracy.

Prop. 1: "Long hair is a covering for the head, short hair is not."

Ans.: No such distinction is made in the Bible, nor in the common use of language. Ezek. 44:20, "Neither shall the priests shave their heads, nor suffer their LOCKS to grow LONG. They shall only poll (shear or trim) their heads."

Though their hair was relatively short, they still had locks. There is a distinction made between a man having short hair, and a man shaved bald. Hence a man's short hair is a natural covering for his head, as opposed to baldness when there is no covering for the head. The argument presented in "H.O." has this in common with the doctrine of transubstantiation that both demand acceptance contrary to the evidence of the senses. Anyone can see that a man's short hair is a natural covering for his head. But that does not seem to suit the "H.O." theory.

1 Cor. 11:4-6 "Covered" (Strong 2619) KATALUPTO — "To cover wholly; i.e. To veil." (Thayer, 17th. Zondervan Printing 1976): "To cover up." Also under EXO, KATA KETHALES EXON — "Having a covering . . . hanging down from the head. i.e. Having his head covered. 1 Cor. 11:4." The reference is essentially to some form of "covering" other than the natural hair. Since long hair in a man is shameful, a man having long hair at any time dishonours his head. The Christian male would always have relatively short hair. And if short hair is not a covering (according to the "H.O." theory) the command is unnecessary. A Christian woman would always have relatively long hair, for short hair is a shame to a woman whether she is praying or prophesying or not. Hence the command would again be unnecessary. The command has to do with covering or VEILING of the head when praying or prophesying. At such times a woman must be VEILED, and a man UNVEILED. At other times women may be unveiled, and men veiled. A man would not wear a hat, cap, or other form of head covering when praying or prophesying whether he has hair or not.

The woman's hair is a natural covering which is her glory. Verse 15 i.e., it is a point of natural beauty; but it can only be referred to as a VEIL in a figurative sense. It is for this reason that she must wear a veil or similar covering over her head when praying or prophesying, for no flesh should glory in the presence of God. 1 Cor. 11:15, 1:29, Rom. 4:2. That is what the covering of the woman's head is all about. The man should not cover his head, ". . . forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God." v.7.

Prop. 2: "H.O.", under "Men should be uncovered." Para 2, "The verb 'cover' means to place something ON or OVER."

Ans.: This cannot refer to the hair, because we cannot place natural hair on or over our heads at will. "To cover," "To veil," etc., are verbs indicating that something has to be done.

Prop. 3: "H.O." under "What Type of Coverings?", Lines 14-18. "ANTI means 'over against', 'opposite to', 'instead of', or 'in place of'. The Lord has specified that long hair be the covering . . . instead of a veil."

Ans.: The author has considered various meanings given for ANTI to determine which will suit his theory best, and has plumped for "instead of". He continues, "The inference is that the woman's long hair is the covering or veil required for the hair ordinance."

The first thing which must be considered here is when the woman was given her long hair for a covering or "veil". The answer must be that God gave the woman long hair for a covering when she was created. Paul says a woman's long hair is her glory, 1 Cor. 11:15 (a). God gave the woman her long hair for her glory when she was created, and that had nothing to do with praying or prophesying. A woman's long hair is a point of natural beauty and it was given her for that purpose in the beginning. Paul appeals to nature itself when teaching that a man having long hair is a disgrace. V. 14. But consider "instead of" in this context: If the Author's interpretation is correct, God gave the woman her long hair at creation **INSTEAD OF** "an artificial veil". Instead of what artificial veil? Either she had an "artificial veil", or there was some "artificial veil" which she might have had, but she was given her long hair instead of that "artificial veil" which when she was created. The term "artificial veil" has already been dealt with. The fact that she never had such a veil, and that there was no other such veil which she might have had reveals the utter absurdity of this "interpretation". The phrase "instead of a veil" is meaningless in this context. As opposed to this, Thayer's interpretation of ANTI PERIBOLAION makes sound sense, "To serve as a covering. 1 Cor. 11:15."

The term "artificial veil" insinuates that the hair is the real veil, and that any other veil is therefore "artificial". In actual fact, a real veil is a fabric covering. Hair is a "veil" only in a figurative sense.

Prop. 4. Rules of interpretation: (From *The Passover, the Crucifixion, and the Supper* by the same Author.) "One of the fundamental rules of grammar and Bible interpretation is that everything is to be understood **LITERALLY** unless one is **FORCED** to understand it figuratively."

Ans.: Everybody agrees with this rule. It is a matter of applying it to the passage under consideration: 1 Cor. 11:15 says a woman's hair is given for a veil. But a woman's hair is not a literal veil. So "covering" or "veil" appears in 1 Cor. 11:15 in a figurative sense.

The covering or veil referred to in 1 Cor. 11:4-6 needs no such interpretation. The meaning "literal veil" makes sense in every case, therefore that is the meaning of the word in these verses. A woman does not need a literal veil to be covered as in v. 15, for her hair is a natural though figurative veil. Although she has this figurative veil at all times, she is still required to be literally veiled when praying or prophesying, as in vs. 4-6.

Prop. 5: "The woman's long hair (at all times) is her covering. If she is shorn, she is uncovered."

Ans.: This "interpretation" makes nonsense of Scriptures:—

Written into 1 Cor. 11:5 we have, "Every woman who prays or prophesies with her head shorn, or shaved (therefore uncovered according to the "H.O." theory) dishonours her head . . . for that is all one as if she were shaved. In brief, if she is shorn or shaved, that is all one as if she were shaved. Which is absurd! Written into 1 Cor. 11:6 we have, "If the woman be shorn (therefore uncovered), let her also be shorn . . ." Which is equally absurd!

Those who teach that the woman's covering in 1 Cor. 11:4-6 is her long hair will have to explain why a woman who is shorn should be shorn!

"The Hair Ordinance" theory is contrary to Scriptural teaching, and is absurd. The plain teaching of the apostle is that when praying or prophesying, a woman's head (and hair) must be covered with a veil which is some form of fabric covering designed for that purpose. When she neglects to wear such a head covering in public worship, a woman dishonours her own head.

John Wood,

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AS IN THE DAYS OF NOAH

With reference to last month's editorial under the above title, I have received the following from Bro. Wood:—

As in the Days of Noah

Anyone engaging in religious correspondence will appreciate the difficulty of being both precise and brief; as is evident from the November editorial. It is to be regretted that my response to the September editorial could not be printed in full, for much has been lost in censorship.

Two events are predicted in Matt. 24. The problem in deciding which signs belong to which event (or to both) is due to the DELIBERATE AMBIGUITY of the language used. The Lord thus indicates to us in this generation, that A.D. 70 is an assurance of His near coming.

What was wrong with the people in Noah's time, ". . . eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage" if these are normal human activities?, but that they did so without regard to the existence and the will of God. The SIGNS of the coming flood were there in the person of Noah, his preaching, and his building of the ark. They all knew about it. God did not announce the date of the flood beforehand, but He did warn the people of its coming. The editor's statement that "Noah was preaching for years . . . but no one was listening" concedes the point. The people ignored the signs, and the warnings, and they perished as a result. Noah and his family heard the word of God. The unrepentant wickedness of the people was a SIGN to them that the flood would surely come. "As it was. . . So shall it be . . ."

No one knows the day or the hour of the Lord's coming, and it is futile to speculate; but the signs are there as is eloquently reinforced in 1 Peter 3. Note v. 4.

Matt. 24:29-33 is cited as being symbolic of the effects of the fall of Jerusalem, because verse 34 says, "This generation shall not pass till all these things be fulfilled." The difficulties (which are twice mentioned) must be evident from a consideration of verses 30-31. The sign of the Son of man appears in heaven; the tribes of earth mourn; they see Him coming in the clouds WITH POWER AND GREAT GLORY; He sends angels to gather His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other." I doubt if anyone can fit these as symbols into the facts of history, but am prepared to be corrected.

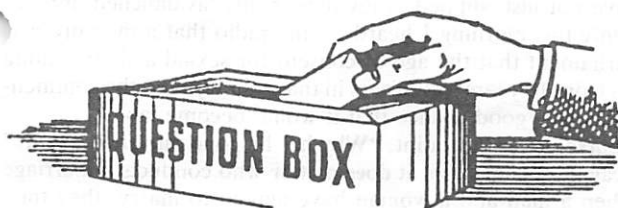
If verses 27-31 refer to the coming of Christ and the end of the age, these difficulties disappear. When the end comes to catch the vast majority of people completely by surprise, it will not be for lack of SIGNS, but for lack of taking heed, and doing something about it.

John Wood,
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Dunfermline.

(I tried to print as much of Bro. Wood's letter as possible; certainly the relevant parts: **and he was able to make his point**, i.e. that signs will be given to indicate the end of the world. John mentioned some of these signs, viz. The Jewish 6-day War (which he described as 'the most prominent sign of the Lord's coming'); the nuclear bomb; rising tide of pollution; famine, pestilence, earthquakes, the return of the Jews to Palestine; the end of the time of the Gentiles." **Not one of these**, in my view, **has any bearing whatsoever** in any kind, shape or form, with the end of the world. As for pollution, famine, pestilence and earthquakes: we have had all those for 2,000 years and the world is still here. Reference was also made to ". . . as in the days of Noah, they were eating and drinking etc. . . ." but surely Jesus made this remark to show that NO SIGNS would be given prior to the end of the world, i.e. the people were engaged in normal human pursuits right up until the flood carried them all away. Bro. Wood

says that Noah, his preaching and the ark were signs but if the preaching went on for over 100 years it was not much of a 'sign' (in the context of the signs given of the coming destruction of Jerusalem). After all, preachers have been preaching the gospel in all the world for the last 2,000 years: is that to be taken as a 'sign' of the end of the world? Signs, indications, portents, were given for 40 years prior to the destruction of Jerusalem and the disciples were to observe and watch out for them, and act upon them: but **no such signs** will be given re the end of the world. Like the flood in Noah's time it will come **suddenly, unannounced, and take everyone completely by surprise**. Jesus, Himself, said that it would be as **"a thief in the night"**. Surely a thief comes 'in the night' to spring a complete surprise, and certainly gives no prior indications of his coming. Readers can all judge for themselves whether the phrase **"As a thief in the night"** would lead us to expect any prior signs of the event, or whether it will come 'out of the blue' and catch everyone unawares. Mine may be the minority view but I hope it, and brother Wood's pertinent remarks, will be the means of readers having another look at Matt. 24.)

Editor.



Conducted by
Alf Marsden

"Does it really matter who marries us, buries us, or who baptises us: does it really matter who officiates, and could a denominational 'Minister' officiate? After all, Registrars officiate at weddings."

This is an interesting question and one that I would wish to answer, if only for the reason that the phrase 'does it really matter' is becoming more frequently used pertaining to questions with which we are faced, and to which we may not wish to give too much thought. What we are really asking I suppose, is whether one course of action is more important than another given any set of circumstances. I happen to believe that any decision which involves some action must of necessity have **some** bearing on something or someone, consequently, it behoves us to give some thought to every decision which has to be acted upon.

Let me give you an example, one not intimately associated with the detail of the question but relevant to the point I am trying to make. It is said that congregational autonomy is a strength of the Church because if one assembly were to defect then it wouldn't have a destructive effect on the whole of the Church. Well, that is true up to a point, but who would seriously suggest that such an event 'wouldn't really matter' to the rest of the Church? of course it would matter, especially if the defecting assembly had seemed to be a bastion of the Church in the past; the reason it would 'matter' would be that the effect of such a defection would reverberate throughout the Church and would possibly shake the faith and confidence of some saints. So there is another point of view relevant to the question under discussion, and I would like to explore it in detail.

Marriage

The elements of marriage in our society are both sacred and secular. Marriage was and is God-ordained, and its importance in the field of human relationships was endorsed by Jesus and the Apostles, particularly Paul. The secular element lies in the legal view that marriage is a contract between two persons, and fundamentally affects

the status of each of the contracting parties, and imposes specific rights and obligations. This is why, of course, a Registrar has to be present in most churches when a marriage ceremony is conducted; his or her function is to see to it that the legal part of the ceremony is carried out correctly.

I read some very interesting statistics recently. I am aware that too much can be read into statistics, but the real benefit of them is that they do indicate trends. It appears that in the year 1850 only 4% of British marriages took place in a Registry Office (this in contrast to marriages in church, chapel, etc); in the year 1979 this figure had risen to 51%. In view of what we have said, the trend would seem to be that marriage has become more secularised over the years. The figures would also indicate a marked disenchantment with church or chapel marriages, and this would further indicate changing attitudes toward the Christian religion in general, and to what I would call the 'sacred' element of marriage in particular. If one also takes into account the escalating divorce rate, then one can understand that an alarming attitude of mind has developed which says, "it doesn't really matter if the marriage fails, we can always get a divorce and try again." I believe it is true to say that we now live in a society whose Christian values have not just 'slipped'; they have really 'avalanched' into an orgy of self-indulgence. Only this morning I heard on the radio that a measure was to be put to the Dutch parliament that the age of consent for sexual activity among children should be reduced from 16 years to 12 years in that country, and the commentator seemed to think there was a good chance that it would become law.

You may be asking yourselves at this point, "Why has he gone into such detail?" Well, I'll tell you; it is because I believe that it **does matter** who conducts a marriage service in the Church. When a man and a woman have agreed to marry, they then choose who shall conduct the ceremony. They may choose someone who is one of their 'favourites', or they may be influenced by someone who excels in public platform work so that the whole service will 'go well' as they put it, or it may be for a variety of reasons best known to them. The ability to conduct such a ceremony well, of course, is vitally important, but I would also like to believe that an important consideration in the choice would be to the Christian commitment to teaching, practice, and integrity, of the one who was to conduct the service. I say this because I have long held the view that the one who conducts the ceremony should have counselled the couple, prior to the ceremony, on such things as, the indissolubility of the marriage bond according to God and Jesus, the fidelity which they should show to each other and the Church, the effort they should make in order that the marriage should 'work', and that in their relationship they should not capitulate to the 'modern' view as expressed by the world. They must be made to understand that these things are important to the Church, for the simple but profound reason that they are important to God and His Christ. It is sad to relate that many couples — but not Christians, I would hope — are married in Registry Offices because they just want to comply with the legal aspects of marriage and any subsequent divorce.

Regarding the legal aspects of marriage there are one or two other points we should know. The marriage must take place in a 'building which is registered for the purpose'. A further requirement is that only 'an authorised person' may conduct the ceremony; this is usually a priest, minister, or 'official' of the building in which it takes place. Two witnesses must be present, and the building must remain open to public access throughout the proceedings. Permitted times are between 8 a.m. and 6 p.m.

In view of the foregoing I re-iterate, "I believe it does matter who marries us." If marriage is seen as an occasion of great joy, then conversely death is an occasion of extreme sadness. This being so, the conduct of such a service should be both dignified and delicate. Suitable words of comfort have to be said, and suitable prayers

have to be offered, therefore, a suitable person should conduct the funeral service. The mourners may be overcome with grief, and emotions may be running high; in such circumstances the right words must be found, and the right approach is essential. It is no task for a novice. Some who have conducted such services have seen the party of mourners as a captive audience to whom they can preach the Gospel, but how can we assess the reaction of minds possibly made somewhat unstable by extreme grief? The intention may be good, but the ultimate outcome not so. Surely the occasion itself bespeaks the challenging issues of life and death; the skill of the one who conducts the service should bring these to the fore, along with the ability to comfort and console.

There are those who say that if the deceased person was a Christian then the departing to be with the Lord should be an occasion of joy. That may be so in the spiritual sense, but rather paradoxically most of us seem to enjoy life on earth so much that we do our best to put off that happy day. Quite naturally, the desire to live is strong within us, and this makes the physical parting with our loved ones more difficult. So even though the hope in Christ is very real, the pain of grief is nonetheless ever present. Yes, I believe that it **does** matter who conducts the funeral service, because in the past many of us who have had this task have experienced great difficulty. It is comparatively easy to eulogize someone who has been a faithful and loyal Christian, but not so easy to say something comforting and hopeful about someone who may have been weak in the faith, and possibly at times unfaithful.

Baptism

This, to my mind, is the most beautiful ordinance in the Church. To see someone who has confessed Christ as Saviour planted together in the likeness of His death by immersion in water, and then to see that person rise out of the water in the likeness of His resurrection to walk in newness of life, is an undiminished joy no matter how many times we may witness it. The Gospel is the vehicle of conception, baptism is the spiritual birth into new life in Christ. Should the joy, seriousness, and importance of this great occasion be devalued by the inexperienced handling of the overt act of baptizing? I think not. I have no scriptural warrant for saying this, but my own opinion is that one of the leaders of the Church should do the baptizing, or if that is not possible then the task should be delegated to a suitable person with the leader(s) in close attendance. I know that these remarks will not find favour with many people, but I am advancing the view that being immersed into Christ is to be seen as seriously (and with the same joy) as marriage. The one being baptized must understand that he/she is making a life-long commitment to Christ, one that must not wilfully be dissolved.

There are, of course, other things to be considered relative to baptizer and baptized, things such as physique, state of health of both, ability to control the situation and to detect incipient emergency on the part of the baptizer, and so on. I would tend to discourage such statements as "Do you want to have a go at baptizing, Joe?"; rather, I would establish continuity in this task by seeing to it that a suitable person was properly trained to do it. "Totally unnecessary," you say? Well, it's only a suggestion.

Conclusion

In answer to the question I have said that I believe it **does** matter who does the tasks mentioned, and I have given what I consider to be valid reasons for saying so. I must say, however, that I am not advocating any suggestion of a **special office** in the Church for the performing of these tasks. Indeed, one can see the danger as expressed by Paul to the Church at Corinth, where it seems that some who had been baptized were tending to give special honour and place to the one who had baptized them; this must never happen; all the praise and glory must go to the Lord. I do believe, however, that the seriousness of these great events in the life of the Church should be stressed to all who may have any involvement. It is for that reason that I believe it **does matter**

who controls them.

(All questions, please, to Alf Marsden, 50 Costessy Way,
Winstanley, Wigan, WN3 6ES.)

NOTHING DOUBTING

As frail human creatures we are sure, at times, to have the occasional attack of doubt. The basic cause of such doubt stems, of course, from that fallen angel: Satan. It is one of the agencies of the Devil, to create doubt in the mind, and draw away the disciple from his confident belief.

Doubt can affect us two ways: it can either stunt our spiritual growth or it can spur us on eventually to a greater depth of faith. It seldom leaves us the same as we were before. What is doubt? It is usually only of a temporary nature and arises from thoughts which cause us to waver, to be uncertain about an opinion or belief. Eventually we become withdrawn, pensive, even suspicious and lack conviction, confidence and trust. Even the greatest prophet of all, John the Baptist, had his wavering moments and, on one occasion, sent his disciples to Jesus to ask if He really was the One who was to come, or was he to look further afield for another.

Even a very small child can be coaxed to jump off a wall into the loving arms of a parent. The jump, to the child, is dangerous but the trust in the parent is strong, and the child focuses its attention on the outstretched arms. Quite often our faith in God's outstretched arm is blurred by our attention spending too long upon the dangers and the doubts. In simple words, beloved, we often tend to let our eyes stray from God, Jesus and the Church and fall victim to our doubts. An added doubt is sometimes the result of **doubting ourselves**, doubting our own judgement, our own abilities and our own strength. This may cause us to fear and fear can have a serious affect on us: so do take care, brethren. When confidence in self breaks down we tend to 'set up camp' not wanting to venture for the Lord or take any risks. No advance in life takes place. We need to remember verse 4 of the 23rd Psalm, "**Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me.**"

Why Should We Doubt?

Christ's own disciples, as close as they were to Jesus daily, had often to be warned about doubt. When Peter tried to walk on the water and began to sink Jesus caught him by the hand and said "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt"? This is always a good question. Why should we doubt? Sometimes doubts are born of waning belief. We need to know but also to believe the truth. Sometimes doubts are born of disobedience, and so we must be obedient, as never before: time is running out; God still cares; if in doubt call upon God. Again, doubt sometimes comes to us when we are at a low ebb in morale and even in poor health (as was probably the case with John the Baptist). We are perhaps physically and/or mentally run down and we begin to waver in our faithfulness. We might even separate ourselves from our God and from prayer. We might even contemplate separating ourselves from our brethren and from the church. He that thinks he standeth must beware lest he fall. Let us take care lest we fall. The best way to keep doubt at bay is to be strong in the faith (putting on the whole armour of God. Eph.6) and by keeping busy in the Lord's work (always abounding in the work of the Lord).

We must take note that God never withdraws His love from us: it is we who withdraw ourselves from God (sometimes knowingly, sometimes not). Someone has said,:-

"Whoso draws nigh to God one step
though doubting Him;
God will advance a mile,
in blazing light to him."

Andrew Sharp, Newtongrange.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Jan. 6	Deut. 5:1-15	Luke 6:1-19
Jan. 13	Ex.22:1-13	Luke 6:20-36
Jan. 20	Psa.37:1-22	Luke 7:1-17
Jan. 27	2Kings 4:17-36	Luke 7:18-35

LORD OF THE SABBATH

In the Ten Commandments we read: **“Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labour and do all your work; but the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord your God: in it you shall not do any work, you, nor your son, nor your daughter, you manservant, nor your maidservant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates: for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and hallowed it”** (Exodus 20:8-11). So we see that the sabbath day was a very special day in the Jewish calendar. That is still the case with orthodox Jews who, as I discovered in Jerusalem recently, ensure that all the shops in the Jewish quarter of the city close after sunset on Friday (the beginning of the sabbath). Failure to respond results in being fire-bombed.

Jesus in his day was attacked as being a sabbath breaker and a violator of God’s day (Luke 6:6-11). His disciples faced similar charges (6:1-5), but Jesus defended their actions by an appeal to an incident in the O.T. Scriptures (1 Samuel 21: 1-6). He concluded with the words that **“the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath”** (6:5). Albert Barnes has written: “David, among the Jews, had high authority. This act had passed uncondemned. It proved that in cases of necessity the laws did not bind a man – a principle which all laws admit. So the necessity of the disciples justified them in doing on the Sabbath what would have been otherwise unlawful ... To crown all, Christ says that He was Lord of the

Sabbath. He had a right to direct the manner of its observance – undoubted proof that he is Divine.”

THE TWELVE APOSTLES

Luke lists the twelve apostles for us: Simon Peter, Andrew his brother, James and John, Philip and Bartholomew, Matthew and Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, Judas the brother or son of James (also called Lebbeaus and Thaddaeus) and Judas Iscariot, who was the traitor. Why twelve? R.A.H. Gunner has written: “The Hebrew year was divided into twelve months, the day into twelve hours (John 11:9). Israel had twelve sons (Gen. 35:22-26; 42:13-32) and there were twelve tribes of Israel, the people of God (Gen. 49:28). Christ chose twelve apostles. Twelve is therefore linked with the elective purposes of God.”

The word “apostle” means one sent, that is, on a mission. Four things are implied: a sender, the one sent, the ones to whom he is sent and the message or mission to the latter. The twelve apostles of Christ, therefore, were special envoys, first to the lost sheep of the house of Israel and then to the whole world. They are unique. They sit upon the twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Matthew 19:28). Their names are engraved upon the twelve foundations of that great city, the new Jerusalem (Revelation 21:14). As one writer has said: “In spite of some modern teaching to the contrary, there are no modern apostles of Christ Jesus, no new ambassadors.”

BLESSINGS AND WOES

This so-called Sermon on the Plain (6:20-49) closely corresponds with the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew chs. 5-7). Dr. Barclay once said of these words: “They are startling contradictions of the world’s standards, sayings which no man could hear for the first time without a shock of amazement.”

There is the world and there is the kingdom of God. The apostle John

wrote "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (1 John 2:15). C.H. Dodd defined the world as: "Human society insofar as it is organised on wrong principles and characterised by false desires, false values and egoism. Kenneth Wuest said that "the world is a system, wicked and alienated from God yet cultured, educated, powerful, outwardly moral at times, the system of which satan is head." William Barclay commented: "The world is pagan society with its false values, its false standards and its false Gods." We see, therefore, that being of the world is a tale of woes, but being of Jesus' kingdom is a tale of blessings.

The Christian, of course, does not receive his full reward on this earth. He looks for a new heaven and a new earth wherein dwell righteousness (2 Peter 3:13). Poverty, hunger, tears, hatred, persecution, etc., for the Son of man's sake, might be his lot now, but riches, joy, honour and glory await him in the world to come.

LOVE

Under the Old Covenant there was the love of law; under the New Covenant there is the law of love. Love is the greatest force in the universe because God Himself is love. A.M. Hunter has written: "Love is **agape**, the love which seeks not to possess but to give, to spend and be spent for the object beloved. It is the energy which Christians are called to radiate among their fellow men, and its exemplar is Christ's own love." W. Carl Ketcherside once commented: "Christian love is positive, not negative; it is creative, not destructive; it speaks only good and never evil. It loses itself that it might live. And it is the only revolutionary force in the whole world which can survive the clash of the centuries and the crash of cultures."

I personally believe that a better understanding of love and the putting of it into practice could revolutionize the Church of Christ in this world. Many saints are timid and fearful, but the scrip-

ture says: "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear ..." (1 John 4:18). This love, of course, even extends to our enemies as Jesus said (6:27-35). Herein lies perfection or completeness (Matthew 5:43-48).

FAITH OF THE CENTURION

A Roman centurion was the equivalent of a modern-day sergeant major. I like the fact that the centurions of the scriptures are always praised. This one (7:1-10) was a man of compassion, humility and deep religious faith. He was a man who gave orders and knew that an order from Jesus could heal his slave. His love for his slave was very unusual. Masters normally regarded their slaves as living tools and not human beings at all. They ill treated them and sometimes even killed them: an act not condemned in law.

We read: "When Jesus heard these things, He marvelled at him, and turned him about and said unto the people that followed Him, I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel (7:9)." This was a remarkable testimony to the faith of a Roman. A similar instance of faith in another centurion is found in Acts 10:1-8. I like what is says in 7:10 "And they that were, returning to the house, found the servant (slave) whole that had been sick."

Ian S. Davidson, Motherwell.

NEWS FROM THE CHURCHES

Kentish Town, London: On October 6th the 119th anniversary of the opening of our building was held. We had a joyful and encouraging time, meeting together with some from other congregations to thank the Lord for His providence in enabling us to do so, and pray for His guidance for the coming year. Brother Philip Partington served us for the Saturday and Sunday and brought us four very helpful and thought-provoking messages. We especially thank him for travelling so far to be with us, and we

also thank the others who travelled too.

We pray that all who were with us experienced the same spiritual uplift as we did.

Also On Wednesday October 3rd the church at Kentish Town had cause for rejoicing when Allan Lemon decided to accept Jesus and was baptised into Him for the remission of his sins. We pray that his new life with Christ will be a great blessing and encouragement to him and to us all.

Dorothy Proud (Secretary).

Namiwawa, Zomba, Malawi: I should be grateful if you would publish the following report in your valuable paper "The Scripture Standard", on the progress of the work of our Lord, here in Malawi. As follows:-

Date	Place	Bapt.	Rstd.	Preacher
16/9/90	Chisuzi	10	3	Bro. Matore
23/9/90	Machinga	9	5	Bro. Chabwera
30/9/90	Makhasu	24	7	Bro. Ngwale
14/10/90	Chiphola	3	1	Bro. Masaula

Thank you.

W.F. Khonde, Secretary.

OBITUARY

Dennyloanhead : We regret to report the passing of Sister Helen Struthers, on 13/10/90, at Falkirk Royal Infirmary, aged 89 years. Helen gave her heart to the Lord as a young woman and led an active and happy life, both for her Saviour and with her family.

Sister Struthers, was the mother of Bro. Peter Weir, and at this time we remember him, and his wife Margaret and family over their sad loss. We thank our Heavenly Father for her life and for the promise of that more abundant life through Christ Jesus our Lord, and to those who remain faithful unto death. A service was held in Dennyloanhead Meetinghouse and also at Camelon Cemetery, the writer officiating on both occasions. We indeed rejoice that she is

now resting from her labours and awaiting that glorious day when Jesus returns for all those that love and serve Him.

Joseph M. Malcolm (Sec.)

Namiwawa, Malawi : We regret to record the passing of our dear Brother P.T. Jana, who died in Zomba Hospital on 28/8/90 in his 88th year. Bro. Jana was immersed into Christ in 1922 at Namiwawa, Zomba District, and worked as an evangelist from 1930 to the time of his death (which came after a long illness). Bro. Ketete officiated at the service and later at the graveside at Namiwawa Cemetery. Our love and sympathy goes out to Mrs. Jana, children and all relatives.

W. F. Khonde (Sec.)

CHANGE OF ADDRESS

The new address of Bro. and Sister Joseph M. Malcolm is:- 86 Kenmore Avenue, Gilston Park, Polmont FK2 ORG. Stirlingshire. Telephone 0234 714150.

NIGERIAN APPEAL

Thank you for your response to our appeal for funds and donors for the Scripture Standard and correspondence courses.

We have received £463.38 to date and our first consignment of Bibles was sent last month. As there is a considerable black market in Bibles in Nigeria and they may go missing en route we are waiting to see if they arrive safely. Even if they don't go to the people they were intended for at least somebody will be making use of them.

Due to the good response we have had for donations of the Scripture Standard most of our contacts will now be receiving a regular copy. Correspondence courses for those who have requested them have also been donated.

If anyone knows of any reliable Bible aids that are no longer needed we would be pleased to receive them for forwarding to Nigeria.

Thank you for the cheque received from Cornwall with no address.

Margery Purcell,
3 Dale Avenue,
Bramhall,
Stockport,
Cheshire.
SK7 2JP.

GHANA APPEAL

I wish to make an appeal this month for financial assistance for the work which was begun by a brother in Kumasi about a year ago. This brother worked in Kumasi on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Fridays. Another two brothers from Patriensa and Odumasi went to Kumasi on Saturday and Sunday to preach the gospel.

The church at Patriensa and Odumasi were financially assisting this work, i.e. transport costs and the running costs concerning the church work. Brother Bill Cook received a letter a few days ago informing him that the financial burden was too much and they had appealed to another church to help them as there were twelve men who regularly attended the meetings. The other church could not help.

On hearing this I have sent £200 to help out in this work from the Ghana fund and hopefully this will keep it going until Brother Bill Cook goes out to Ghana and assesses the situation. Meanwhile if any congregation or individual wishes to assist in this particular appeal please send cheques to the address below made out to "Graeme Pearson (Ghana Appeal)".

It would be good to have a collection waiting for instant use, if needed, after more details are available. May I once again express my thanks to those who continue to support this work in Africa.

Graeme Pearson,
13 Fairways,
Dunfermline,
Fife KY12 ODU.
Tel. (0383) 728624

CONSIDER

"Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin; and yet I say unto you that even Solomon in all his glory, was not arrayed like one of these" (Matt. 7:28-29).

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