

The SCRIPTURE STANDARD

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

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THE SPIRIT OF DIVINATION

Few of us can have failed to notice the recent upsurge of interest in astrology. Particularly over the past year or two we have been bombarded, both in the daily press and on TV, with much propaganda extolling the alleged benefits to be derived from 'the stars', and offering daily horoscopes (or "Horrorscopes"). People like Russel Grant, and many others, have risen from total obscurity and now grin at us from every hoarding, bill-board, magazine and paper-rack recommending the merits of their own brand of fortune-telling, but managing to keep a straight face when asked to describe the utility of their banal utterings. Obviously here, as in the USA, astrology has become a multi-million dollar industry and vast amounts of money are being made: thus the steady and sustained promotion of the industry by the media. In a recent TV discussion involving the studio audience and some 'astrologers' one newspaper editor admitted that, if stuck, he would use last years' horoscopes with no apparent adverse reactions. Most of the male "astrologers" wore ear-rings (?) and when members of the audience were asked if any horoscopes had come true there was much giggling but little else. In an age of 'Yuppie' culture some professional astrologers are kept very busy with private consultations but for the 'man in the street' astrology is usually confined to horoscopes in the daily papers. These so-called horoscopes are well known for meaning whatever we want them to mean (i.e. meaningless) and to illustrate the point I quote from *The Sunday Post* (Jan 7th) at random, which says, under Saggitarius, "Treat yourself to something new as you really deserve it. Surprises are not far away." One wonders how much skill in star-gazing was needed to come up with that little prediction.

I am sure that if the media moguls get their way we shall increasingly be subjected to more and more in the way of articles and magazines (and serious books) on astrology, to crowd the bookstalls and to lend credence and respectability to an otherwise worthless subject.

Astrology

Solomon said that "There is nothing new under the sun" and certainly astrology goes back to the dawn of time. A distinction must always be made between astrology and astronomy. **Astronomy** is a valuable and proper science engaged in the study of the solar system, the discovery, identification and movements of all heavenly bodies, the tides, the seasons, eclipses and so on. **Astrology** is not a science but is claimed to be a study of the stars and heavenly bodies in the context of their alleged influence upon our lives. Astronomy and astrology have intrigued man from time immemorial. Even 'pre-historic man' could not ignore the earth beneath his feet or heaven's canopy above his head. Shepherds and mariners constantly scanned the skies, tracing the

regular paths of the stars and planets, and made amazing progress in solving the mysteries of the firmament. The ancient Greeks, without telescopes or other instruments acquired an incredible knowledge of astronomy but owed a great debt to earlier civilisations like the Chaldeans and the Egyptians. Ptolemy, for instance, the Greek astronomer, although he was wrong about the earth being the centre of the universe, more than 1,000 B.C., had the idea that the earth was spherical, could measure latitude, foretell eclipses and had worked out the precession of the equinoxes (once every 26,000 years) which makes a difference of a few minutes to the length of a year. "Astrology" is from "Astro" (meaning stars) and "ology" (speech) – i.e. the stars speak. Astrologers are scathingly referred to by Isaiah (47:13) when he indicts Israel and says, **"Let now the astrologers, the star-gazers, and the monthly prognosticators stand up and save thee from these things that shall come upon you."** Some of these "star-gazers and monthly prognosticators" on a TV programme lately were trying to suggest that the Magi were guided to the manger in Bethlehem by their skill in astrology and that this fact gives Biblical support for their trade. Readers will readily see how foolish this is. The 'Signs of the Zodiac', by the way, go back at least to 2,000 years B.C. and reference to them is on some fragments from the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Divination

Divination is the pretended art of obtaining (divining) "the secret counsels of God," especially with reference to the future, by the use of omens and signs. It is also alleged to be the means of counteracting destined evils by the use of spells and charms, and, by similar methods, to bring evil upon enemies. Heathenish countries like Babylon and Egypt originated most forms of divination but the Chaldeans and the Assyrians were also deeply into the practice. God prohibited the Hebrews from any participation in any form of divination but they were ultimately caught up in it. Priests and sorcerers in these nations soon "controlled the destiny" of everyone, having exclusive recourse to the unseen world, and soon became rich, powerful and even despotic. All the kings of Babylon consulted diviners and would not take any decision without favourable omens. Records of Sargon I show at the head of each paragraph. "Omens" for each day. In Egypt great libraries of books on magic belonged to the king and were used exclusively by the priests of the Sacred College. Hitler had three astrologers on his staff but they all must have refrained from predicting the sticky end the Fuhrer would have, and of course American Presidents, and no doubt many other prominent people, have communed with those that peep and mutter.

Divination involves all manner of natural phenomenon, including fire, water, earth, air, light, the flight of birds and their singing, casting of lots, dreams, staff or wands, entrails of victims and cups: to mention but a few. Although the heathen nations, and not the Hebrews, were responsible for the introduction of the many forms of divination, the Jews soon got involved. As early as Ex. (7:11) we read of Moses' confrontation with Pharaoh's "wise men and sorcerers: and magicians" who could almost match Moses for performing incredible feats of magic. Even earlier, when we read of Joseph's brethren being falsely accused of stealing Joseph's silver cup, the cup is described as the one "in which Joseph drinketh, and whereby indeed he divineth" (Gen. 44:5). So the reading of cups went on, even then. But surely Joseph, even in Egypt, didn't engage in divination? The "wise men" mentioned above (Ex. 7:11) comes from a Hebrew word meaning "the knowing ones" (wizards) who claimed superior knowledge (of the future). Their female counterparts also existed (witches) but like the wizards were, in God's eyes, worthy of death. (Ex. 22:18). Indeed the Witch of Endor consulted the dead Samuel at the behest of King Saul but reminded Saul that the penalty for her action was death (1 Sam. 28:9).

Other Forms of Divination

The various forms of divination are too numerous to mention but a few can be

selected. For instance, in Ezek. 21:2, reference is made to **belomancy** where the King of Babylon used his arrows (with words written thereon) to give him the answers he sought. This verse also mentions the king inspecting the liver: which was probably the oldest form of divination. Great store was placed upon the state of entrails and sheep's liver. The Cumerians and the Semites believed that the functions of the mind were controlled by the liver and called the planets "sheep far away". Thus **Hepatoscopy**, or divination from sheep's liver is thought to be the oldest known method of divination. Clay models of sheep's liver have been found, and were used in the schools of hepatoscopy.

Rabdomancy, or divination by rods or staffs is mentioned in Hosea 4:12 and this consisted of short pieces of stick (with bark left on one side but bare on the other) thrown in the same way as dice and the turning up of the bare side being a good omen. Divination by **Cups** (previously mentioned) is still practised by the Arabs. **Oneiromancy**, or divination by dreams was a common but very important means of divination and this is well illustrated by the incidents involving Daniel. When Nebuchadnezzar had his arresting dream he called immediately for his "**magicians, astrologers, sorcerers and the Chaldeans**" to describe and interpret the dream. Even the Hebrews placed great store upon dreams. **Lanconomancy** was the study of omens derived from the behaviour of drops of oil in water. **Necromancy** (**Necro**: the dead; and **mancy**: the divination of) was widely practised and as the name suggests referred to consulting the dead for information as to future events, and this overlaps somewhat with "consulters with familiar spirits" (and involves spiritism).

In short, every phenomenon of nature, trivial or otherwise, was seized upon as an indication or foreboding of coming events. The actions of dogs, horses, birds, fish and especially snakes were fraught with meaning and studied in incredible detail. Misbirths of both humans and animals were of particular interest and significance. In Sumer, Babylon, Egypt and Assyria these things completely dominated the lives and actions of all the people (and other nations as well) for over 4,000 years, with a complete abandonment to "fate" and to the "decree of the gods".

Harmless Fun?

With Israel being surrounded by nations early steeped in idolatry and divination, it was inevitable that Israel would be similarly overtaken. Both idolatry and divination were, however, continually denounced by God and described as **abominable**. God has revealed to man only as much as God wants man to know: the rest is secret. Indeed Moses (Deut. 29:29) says, "**The secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but those things which are revealed belong to us, and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law.**" This is the deal that God has made with man. That which is revealed belongs to everybody: that which is not revealed is still God's. Apart from general statements about the future: including Christ's return and the Judgement, our own personal future is hid from us: and in fact any of us could die within the next hour.

Israel was continually warned against being contaminated with the evils of divination. In Deut. (18:9) God charged Israel thus: "**And when thou art come into the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not learn to do after the abominations of those nations. There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch. Or a charmer, or a consulter of familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer. For all these things are an abomination unto the Lord, and because of these abominations the Lord shall drive them out before thee.**" From this we learn that Israel **must not** copy the heathen nations in these abominations. Firstly, they must not engage in human sacrifice (that of burning their children in the white-hot arms of the god Molech) and secondly, we note that all these forms of divination catalogued by Moses are placed **upon the same level** of depravity as human

sacrifice to Molech. **Anyone** engaged in divination, whether an observer of times, an enchanter, a witch, charmer, consulter of familiar spirits, wizard or necromancer: commits an abomination in God's sight. And it was **because** of these abominations that God was going to drive out these pagan nations to make way for Israel.

Sadly we read that, at a later date, Israel rejected these admonitions **"and became vain and went after the heathen that were round about them. And they left all the commandments of the Lord their God, and made them molten images, even two calves, and made a grove and worshipped all the host of heaven, and served Baal. And they caused their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire, and used divination and enchantments, and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke Him to anger."** (2 Kings 17:15). In effect Israel did everything they had been adjured not to do, and precipitated their own ultimate downfall. Thus **all forms** of divination are an abomination and while we might consider astrology as amusing and harmless fun, yet "astrology, star-gazing and monthly prognostications" are part and parcel of divination and far from harmless. Paul encountered the young damsel who had **"a spirit of divination"** which brought her masters much gain (there's the rub) and Paul cast the spirit out: albeit incurring the wrath of the masters. Reading the cups, or the Tarot cards, or sitting in on the seance, are all indicative of a desire to know the unknowable: the future. If such 'divines' could tell the future, even to reveal the winner of the 3.30 p.m. race at Ayr, they would put the Bookies out of business: but there is no danger of that and they stick to meaningless and puerile horoscopes.

Closing Remarks

Divination does not seem to have been a great problem in the early church and the N.T. has not much to say about it. Certainly Paul in Gal. 5 describes witchcraft as still being an evil work. Some superstition still persisted amongst the Jews in the time of Christ (Luke 11:19) and Paul, more than once encountered sorcerers. Simon The Sorcerer (Acts 8) recognised the 'real thing' (compared to his own magical trickery) and wanted to buy Paul's powers with money. On Paphos Paul struck Elymas The Sorcerer blind, for trying to pervert the gospel (Acts 13).

In Ephesus (Acts 19), as a result of Paul's preaching and miracles, a great number of sorcerers were so impressed that they gave up their dishonest trade – **"Many that believed came, and confessed, and showed their deeds. Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together and burned them before all men, and they counted the price of them, and found it 50,000 pieces of silver."** And so, those who obeyed the gospel gave up their activities in divination: and the same should happen today.

Isaiah, a long time ago, gave good advice to those seeking to know the future – **"And when they shall say unto you, Seek unto them that have familiar spirits, and unto wizards that peep and mutter, should not a people seek unto their God? for the living to the dead? To the law and the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them."** (Is. 8:19,20). In fortune telling, or future telling, if we really want the truth (and not everybody does) we shall certainly not get it from astrologers that peep and mutter, but in the testimony of God: the Bible. **All forms** of divination are an abomination to God and can never be engaged in or regarded as harmless fun.

Editor.

Folk who live too much for themselves are apt to be corrupted by the company they keep.

GLEANINGS

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

WE QUOTE — FRANCES RIDLEY HAVERGAL

Lord, speak to me, that I may speak in loving echoes of Thy tone;
 As thou hast sought, so let me seek Thy erring children lost and lone.
 O lead me, Lord, that I may lead the wandering and the wavering feet;
 O feed me, Lord, that I may feed Thy hungering ones with manna sweet.
 O strengthen me, that, while I stand firm on the rock, and strong in Thee,
 I may stretch out a loving hand to wrestlers with the troubled sea.
 O teach me, Lord, that I may teach the precious things Thou dost impart;
 And wing my words, that they may reach the hidden depths of many a heart.
 O give Thine own sweet rest to me, that I may speak with soothing power
 A word in season, as from Thee, to weary ones in needful hour.
 O fill me with Thy fulness, Lord, until my very heart o'erflow
 In kindling thought and glowing word, Thy love to tell, Thy praise to show.
 O use me, Lord, use even me, just as thou wilt, and when, and where,
 Until Thy blessed face I see, Thy rest, Thy joy, Thy glory share.

THE THINGS OF OTHERS

"But in lowliness of mind each counting other better than himself"

(Philippians 2:3. R.V.)

"Yes, our defence against these perilous usurpations of the Divine prerogative must be sought in "lowliness of mind". And how beautiful is the grace which is here described! Lowliness is our word "tapestry," and I think I shall not be far away from the Apostle's mind when I say that he counsels us to lay our own life down like a soft tapestry carpet — in kindly thought and gracious sympathies and helpful services, in order that the weary, bruised feet of other people may find ease and comfort on the road".

THE BLESSED PRIVILEGE OF CHRISTIANS

For some of the ways of life are very rough and flinty, and the sharp jagged edges of circumstances cut the feet most sorely, and "going" is for many people a matter of ceaseless pain. It is a blessed privilege of Christians to lay a soft surface on the roads, by spreading over them the graciousness of tender compassions, so stooping that other pilgrims can "walk over us" and so forget the hardships of the way.

THE SECRET

That is surely the secret of "lowliness of mind." It is the very opposite to the spirit of haughtiness and pride, a spirit which multiplies the difficulties of others, and terribly aggravates the agonies of the road. And how different is all this to the mood of the "natural man," and to the principle by which he orders his goings. With him it is ever "the weakest to the wall": crushed against the wall by the thoughtless, brutal energy of the strong. With him "might is right," and the "first come" must be "first served."

"OTHER BETTER THAN HIMSELF"

With the Christian the first to be served is the brother, for the Christian counts

“other better than himself.” He makes a place for him, shares his interests, and seeks to guide his feet into the ways of pleasantness and peace.

J. H. Jowett.

NEW MEN

“They who are truly converted are new men, new creatures: new, not only within, but without; they are sanctified throughout, in spirit, soul and body; old things are passed away, all things are become new; they have new hearts, new eyes, new ears, new tongues, new hands, new feet; i.e., a new conversation and practice; they walk in newness of life, and continue to do so to the end of life.”

Jonathan Edwards.

A BEAUTIFUL YEAR

“The only way to have a year at its close stainless and beautiful is to keep the days, as they pass, all pure and lovely, with the loveliness of holy, useful living. It is thus, in little days, that our years come to us, and we have but the one small fragment to fill and beautify at a time. The year is a book, and for each day one fair white page is opened before us; and we are artists, whose duty it is to put something beautiful on the page; or we are poets, and are to write some lovely thought, some radiant sentence, on each leaf as it lies open before us; or we are historians and must give to the page some record of work or duty or victory to enshrine and carry away.”

J. R. Miller

HELP TO STRENGTHEN OUR HIGHER LIFE

“How can we be but weak, and our labour vain and fruitless, if the Bread of Life is little eaten, and the Water of life little drunk? Does not each individual experience, testify, on the contrary, what vigour and refreshment, what encouragement in disappointment, what sympathy in joy, and success, result? By frequent consideration of the Word of God, indeed we help to strengthen our higher life. In this way most of all should thought and feeling be influenced and action and speech directed.”

Miss Precious (B.A. Oct. 1, 1980)

“WHITED SEPULCHRES”

“Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which outwardly appear beautiful, but inwardly are full of dead men’s bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but inwardly ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity” (Matt. 23: 27,28; ASV).

Earlier in chapter 23 of Matthew (v.13) Jesus began his pronouncement of the seven woes. This was his last public discourse before the crucifixion and perhaps his strongest. He gives seven denunciations of punishment against the scribes and Pharisees, whom he has been chastising all during his ministry for their wrong conduct. This particular woe is the sixth one of the seven. Let’s now go into a deeper look at this sixth woe and see what applications can be made to us today.

A.T. Robertson, in his *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, states that the word for whited sepulchre in the Greek (*taphois kekonianmenios*) refers to the tomb being whitened with powdered lime dust; the sepulchres of the poor on the roadside, not of the rich, who had rock hewn tombs. These were whitewashed a month in advance

so travellers going to the Passover could see them and avoid being defiled by touching them.

This same lesson is taught in Luke by an exact opposite figure. In Luke 11:44, Jesus has been asked to dine with a Pharisee, and some murmur because he hadn't taken a bath beforehand. Jesus then went about telling of their faults in three woes. In verse 44 he says, "*Woe unto you! for ye are as the tombs which appear not, and the men that walk over them know it not.*" According to the old Mosaic law, anyone touching a grave was unclean. The grave was defiled for seven days (Num. 19:16). They were usually whitewashed once a year as a warning to other Jews. But Jesus likens the Pharisee as a tomb having not been whitewashed. Their hypocrisy covered up what they really were, so that unsuspecting men were corrupted or hurt by their influence without knowing it. This surely would make the Pharisees to whom Jesus was speaking cringe, to think they had been compared to something as repulsive as an unmarked grave.

Are we any Better?

If it made the Pharisees upset, what would that same type of language do to us if we were spoken of as graves full of dead men's bones? Most, if not all, of the Pharisees would deny this accusation. If it had been preached to us, instead of them, would we examine ourselves to see if it was true of us, or would we, as the Pharisees, deny that it was true? Knowing how defensive of our actions we are, I suspect, we, too, would cast it off as being false, without one consideration of its being true. We expect the solemn truth from everyone else. We want to know the true facts, about the things we buy and about our friends and leaders. Truth in advertising is something we demanded.

Yes, we are concerned in having honesty, *except* when it applies to ourselves. What we do is *our* business. How we sell our old car is not half as important as it is to sell it. All the rules of fair play are cast aside when it applies to us. We, somehow, are exempt from truthful and honest practices. We *appear* to be concerned and honest to others, yet inside we are full of deceit and lies. We are filled with "dead men's bones." This has been concerned mostly with the business and wordly nature of us, but what about our spiritual side? Are we really concerned Christians, or is that just our outward appearance, while we have a different nature or character underneath? In other words, are we really what we profess to be?

Jesus was looking at the hearts of the Pharisees and contrasting that with what they professed to be when he pronounced the woes upon them. What they claimed to be didn't measure up with what they really were. Do we fit in this category? Does our heart match up with our actions or do they conflict? Do we *profess* one thing while we *perform* something else totally different? A popular saying of recent years is "what you are speaks so loudly I can't hear what you're saying," and its true.

Men, are we the type of person who has a Christian appearance, but lose it at work, or as soon as we leave the church building? Women, do we profess our faith and dedication to God on Sunday and then gossip about various members to our neighbours on Monday? Young people, do we tell of our love and zeal for lost souls to brothers and sisters, and yet tell filthy jokes to those lost souls at school? Are we the type of Christian that can live as wild a life as the sinner does? If so, we are not Christians at all. This type of life has done more for driving away lost souls than any other factor I can think of. Our life is an example to those around us. What kind of example has yours been to others.

Motives In worship

But let's delve one step further. We have looked at how we behave among other Christians vs. the outside world. Let's now look at our actions during worship. What are our motives during services? Is it just to receive praises from men, or from God?

Earlier in chapter 23 of Matthew Jesus spoke of the Pharisees in this way: *“But all their works they do to be seen of men: for they make broad all their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments, and love the chief seats in the synagogues, and the salutations in the marketplaces, and to be called of men Rabbi.”* Customs may have changed from Jesus’ day to ours, but people haven’t. We still sit by those who’ll gratify us, we still love to hear how well we can sing, lead a prayer, give a talk, etc. We still are rejecting God, for we still would rather have the “praises of men” than “praises of God.”

One of the best examples of useless worship is a case we all have witnessed. Everything this person does for his religion was loudly publicized. It seems he (or she) has to tell all of us if he’s baptized someone, counseled someone, brought one back to the fold, etc. He lives to hear praise of how great a Christian he is. All his efforts seem to be for the purpose of being seen of men. But Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, had something different to say. *“Take heed that ye do not your righteousness before men, to be seen of them: else ye have no reward with your father who is in heaven.”* *“Verily, I say to you, they have received their reward”* (Matt. 6:1,5). Worship is from the heart. How can we expect, then, to receive the praise of God when we do our righteous deeds for praise from our friends? We have not worshipped God at all! Our reward will lie with the recognition of men, not from God on the day of judgment.

Ritualism

We must, then, be careful of our motives in worship. We also must not fall into the snare of ritualism. Do we just sing three songs, have a few prayers, take of the Lord’s Supper, hear a sermon, visit with friends for a few minutes, and go home feeling secure? We still haven’t worshipped the Lord. John 4:24 tells us that *“God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”* Men must offer a worship that is similar with the nature and characteristics of God. A.T. Robertson relates the phrase “in spirit and truth” (*en pneumatikē kai aletheiai*) in this way. *“This is what matters, not where, but how (in reality, in the spirit of man, the highest part of man, and so in truth). All this is according to the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:5) who is the Spirit of Truth (John 16:13). Here Jesus has said the final word on worship one needed today.”* Our attitude of mind, of heart, is most important when we turn our thoughts and affections to the One worthy of worship. Our devotion must be placed with God, not with the admiration of men

Jesus compared the Pharisees and scribes to whitened sepulchres; white out side, but full of dead men’s bones, being hypocritical and filled with iniquity. We must strive not to fit this description of Jesus today. We must be a Christian not only during worship, but at work, home, school, etc. We must carefully monitor our motives in worship, to make sure we are in harmony with Biblical teaching. We must also take care to watch our works *for the Lord*, not for men. *“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”*

R. Johnson.

CORINTH — A NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

The expression “the New Testament church” has a high place in our religious vocabulary. And rightly so, for it is a good phrase which expresses an ideal and a desire to restore the first-century church in both spirit and form for our generation. Like every other human formulation, however, this statement faces the danger of oversimplification, sloganeering, and a confusion between the wording of a goal and the accomplishment of that goal. A study of the church in Corinth should help us keep a scriptural balance.

As a first step let us look at the church in Corinth as the Bible describes it. On one hand we see a church which belonged to God, consisted of people who were called to be saints and who called on the name of the Lord (1:2); its members had received the grace of God (1:4); were not lacking in any spiritual gift (1:7); were in fellowship with Jesus (1:9); had the Holy Spirit living within them (3:16; 6:19); had been washed, sanctified, and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ (6:11); participated in the body and blood of the Lord (10:16); were working in the Lord (15:58); met regularly to take the Lord's Supper, teach, study, sing, pray, and contribute (11: 23-29; 14:6, 15, 26,; 16:1-4).

On the other hand Corinth was a church which was troubled by divisions and quarrels (1:10-12); stunted (3:1); worldly (3:3, 4; 6:1-8); confused about the doctrine of the resurrection (15:12-19, 29-34); impatient and thoughtless (11:17, 21, 22); competitive and over-individualized (12:4-30); careless, immoral and proud (5: 1-3). (All references are in the book of 1 Corinthians.)

After we have read the Corinthian story it is tempting to become either careless or cynical. Careless because the inclusion of such a mixed-up congregation in the New Testament record might seem to indicate that moral and doctrinal standards are not important. Cynical because the Corinthian situation could be taken as proof that Christians are hypocrites who never try to live up to their calling. Actually the Corinthian story is a challenge for us to follow Jesus' words, "**Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment**" (John 7:24).

Troubled, stunted, worldly, confused, impatient, thoughtless, competitive ... "Appearance judgment" says, "Who would want to be identified with a church like that? I'll never put my membership in with that bunch ..." But righteous judgment" says, "Wait, who did identify with the church in Corinth? Who said, "This is my church?" The answer is a shock – GOD DID! "The church of God which is at Corinth." That fact calls us away from worldly measurements and brings us face to face with the divine method and standard. The church is not a story of human perfection – it is about God's grace and the climate which he provides for human growth.

When the Lord created the world he put all kinds of seeds here. But not only seeds – there is also earth in which they sprout, sunshine to warm them, rain to refresh them, seasons to bring them to harvest. When a seed is planted the earth receives it and God's process of growth begins. Soon the seed is transformed from a brown speck to a green, fruitful plant.

What was the Lord doing in Corinth? *He was growing a church* (1 Cor. 3:6-9). The seed didn't look like much. Some of the plants were going wild. Insects were a problem too. But the Lord put his name on it, his Spirit in it, and his Son in control. "**Grace to you and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ ... The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you**" (1 Cor. 1:3; 16:23).

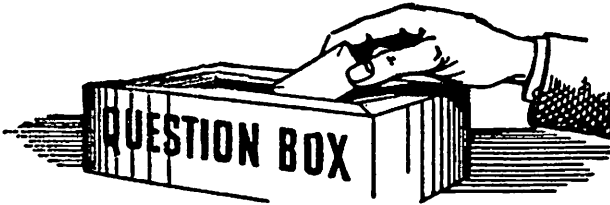
Have you ever noticed how the New Testament almost never uses our favourite terms – "a true church," "a loyal church," "a sound church." Could it be that such local churches were few and far between? Could it be that "a growing church" comes nearer to describing what the Lord does among people?

Does the Bible picture also call our attention to the value of basic honesty and realism in our 'church talk'? It has often been suggested that our talk about the church should be in terms of ideals and positive accomplishments. Paul had not heard our advice. There was no cover-up at Corinth. We get uncomfortable and defensive if anyone begins to dig beneath appearances to the reality of the shortcomings in our practice of the ideals we claim. We contend that realism will destroy hope. After a careful reading of Paul's words to Corinth it is clear that of all the additives to the soil of the Christian garden, honesty is the most powerfully spiritual.

Let us come back to the expression with which we began – "a New Testament

church.” What does that mean? To what does it refer? A New Testament church is a church as it is shown in the pages of the New Testament. It is not a composite made up of snippets of perfection selected and pasted together by human hands. It is the church – warts and all – held together by God’s grace-power. On the one side it is the ideal “without spot or blemish” – on the other it is the real “my brethren, such things ought not to be.” In the light of this we think of the church in the hope of growth and in the willingness of repentance.

E. Prout.



Conducted by
Aif Marsden

“I have always wondered about the division of the Bible into Old and New Testaments. Do they just follow on from each other in time, or if not, did anything of importance happen in the time between them?”

I firmly believe that there is one very important fact which we must understand relative to the Bible as a whole. That fact is the central theme of the Bible and tells us that a loving God is constantly showing His love to His people. This love is a constant message from Genesis to Revelation, and as such it is indivisible; even though events are different historically, the God of the book of Malachi is the same God as the One recorded in the Gospels. He is unchanging, and the message of love permeates both Old and New Testaments. The last book in the O.T. bears this out when God says to His people, **“Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in my house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it”** (Mal. 3:10). The same message is stated at the beginning of the Gospels, for John says, **“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life”** (John 3:16). The love of God is central to the whole revelation of God. The foregoing needs to be understood or else we shall look at the Bible in a piecemeal way, as many do.

From Old to New

Our questioner asks, “do the Old and New Testaments follow on from each other in time”. The answer is no, they do not. From the time that King Artaxerxes allowed Ezra and Nehemiah to leave Babylon in order to see to the law and the rebuilding of Jerusalem respectively, a period of 400 years was to elapse before the coming of the Messiah; this period of time is known as ‘the inter-testamental period’. The voice of prophesy seems to have been silent because no further books were added to the Canon of Scripture after Malachi and until the Gospel records. However, the Bible student should not suppose that this period is of no significance, on the contrary, I would say that the Book of Daniel would be difficult to understand if the events of this period were not taken into account when studying it. Furthermore, a proper understanding of the N.T. would be difficult as well.

The books comprising the ‘Apocrypha’ shed some light on the historical events of the period under consideration. Books which are ‘Apocryphal’ are books of doubtful authenticity, not accepted by Jews and not included in the Canon of Scripture. Nevertheless they do, as I say, give us some insight into a very interesting period of time. The author of the First Book of Maccabees describes a time of great affliction for Israel. We shall return to this later.

The Book of Daniel — Its Importance

Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon was no fool. After the Lord had given Jehoiakim and Jerusalem into his hand, he removed some of the holy vessels from the house of God and put them into the house of his god. He was also very selective in the personnel that he took; the record says that they should bring, **“Children in whom was no blemish, but well favoured, and skilful in all wisdom, and cunning in knowledge, and understanding science, and such as had ability in them to stand in the king’s palace, and whom they might teach the learning and the tongue of the Chaldeans.”** In other words, he took the cream. Of these were Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego; they went to the pagan palace, but they would not endorse pagan practices. The Book of Daniel has many dreams and visions, and it was Daniel himself who was skilled in the interpretation of them. It also tells of the rise and fall of great empires. The best known dream and its interpretation is the dream of Nebuchadnezzar as recorded in chapter 2, because the interpretation has a direct bearing for New Testament Christians, i.e., the prophesy concerning the Kingdom, the Church.

In the dream the king saw a great image. The image’s head was of fine gold, his breast and his arms of silver, his belly and his thighs of brass, his legs of iron, his feet part iron and part clay. The king then saw a stone which was cut out without hands. This stone then smote the great image, and the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver and the gold were broken to pieces together, and they were carried away by the wind like chaff.

Daniel then interpreted the dream. He recited the greatness of Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian empire, and said to the king, **“Thou art this head of gold”**. The Babylonian empire lasted from 605 – 539 B.C. The Book of Daniel then describes the events at the feast of Belshazzar and the subsequent writing on the wall, and Daniel concludes his interpretation by saying, **“Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians”**. That same night Belshazzar was slain, and Darius the Median took the kingdom. This Medo – Persian empire was to last from 539 – 331 B.C., and is generally acknowledged to be the breast and arms of silver of the great image.

The next great empire to rise was the Greek empire under Philip of Macedon. Philip’s son, Alexander the Great, continued this empire, and after a series of great victories defeated the Persian army in 331 B.C. This is the third kingdom of brass which **“shall bear rule over all the earth”**. This kingdom was to last from 331 - 63 B.C. However, Alexander died in 323 B.C. in Babylon. According to historical records this was the signal for his empire to be broken up into four parts under his generals. The two parts which were to play the most important roles in the history of Israel were Syria and Babylonia, and Egypt. The vision given to Daniel, as recorded in Daniel chapter 8 is most explicit regarding the history of the great empires we have mentioned.

In 63 B.C., the Roman general Pompey reached and conquered Jerusalem, and Judea became a Roman Protectorate. Some 23 years later Herod was made ‘King of the Jews’ by the Roman Senate. The Roman empire of course, continued into the Christian era, and had a profound effect on the fortunes of the Jewish people. This empire was the fourth kingdom in the vision of the great image, the kingdom which was **‘as strong as iron’**. The feet and toes, made of potter’s clay and iron, signified a ‘divided kingdom’, partly strong and partly fragile; strong in law, discipline, and organisation, but weak because of the armies which had to be deployed over a very wide area, and constantly had to subdue warring factions in the countries which formed the empire.

Now if the events we have catalogued can be accepted as true and history records that they are – then the stone which was cut with out hands is a Messianic prophesy concerning the establishment of the Kingdom of God, the Church. This, according to

the prophecy, should take place ‘in the days of those kings’, i.e., the days of the fourth kingdom, the days of the Roman Empire. So the Kingdom was established after three kingdoms had fallen, and during the reign of the fourth kingdom. It was small at first, but destined to be world-wide in scope and operation (see Matt. 28:19,20). Daniel said that The Kingdom should never be destroyed (2.44), and the Writer to the Hebrews says, “Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear” (Heb. 12:28). According to Daniel “it shall stand for ever”.

There is much more in the Inter-Testamental period that we cannot go into just now. There is the rise of Antiochus Epiphanes (175 – 163 B.C.) who claimed to be an incarnation of Zeus, ‘the lord of heaven’ He suspended the Temple sacrifices, ordered the destruction of the scriptures, discontinued circumcision and Sabbath laws. Many welcomed death rather than defilement, and this may have been the period referred to in Heb. 11 (Read 1 Maccabees in the Apocrypha). There were also a number of battles fought under the leadership of Judas Maccabaeus which resulted in many victories against the Selucid and Egyptian forces. It was the Zealots who tried to continue these political wars of independence in later days, but as we know the Kingdom of God was of a spiritual nature and not political. Yes, this was a very interesting period in history, impinging as it does on events in the Christian era. I wish we had space to say more about it.

THE GOSPEL AND THE NEW COVENANT

The gospel is that message which was preached by the apostles on, and subsequent to, the day of Pentecost. It has been faithfully recorded in their sermons in Acts. People obeying the gospel preached then were saved just as they are today. Anything added to those gospel messages would constitute a different gospel.

The days in which those gospel sermons were preached were the days foretold by Jeremiah (Jer. 31:31-34). People obeying the gospel preached in those days entered into a new covenant relationship with God having their sins forgiven as foretold by Jeremiah. People obeying the same gospel today also enter into covenant relationship with God having forgiveness of sins. The so-called New Testament was not even penned when the new covenant foretold by Jeremiah had its fulfilment in the hearts of faithful converts as they obeyed the gospel. Do we know anything other than obedience to the apostles’ gospel which is required in order to bring about the new covenant (that arrangement whereby God forgives sins) in the hearts of people today?

Whilst on earth Jesus mentioned some truisms surrounding the new covenant to come. It was to be a new kingdom which we see in the church at large. Its subjects would have reformed hearts. They would have fresh covenant responsibilities.

1. **The new kingdom.** Jesus dealt with this mainly in parable form. It was to be a rule over the hearts of God’s people, not an overt external kingdom with the trapping of such. It would have emphasis on the value of each soul and of God’s love for each one. Motivations would come from within and this God would see and reward. Its propagation would be, not with ostentation but with faithful sowing of its seed – the simple truth of the gospel.
2. **The state of the heart.** Jesus stressed that this was of paramount importance. In His sayings and stories Jesus is asking us all to face the following. What proceeds from you and me? What is our disposition before God – is it humility, contrition, thankfulness, or the opposite? What do we think and plan with regard to our fellow man – is it loving or the opposite?
3. **Covenant responsibilities.** Jesus referred to prospective new covenant responsibilities when He spoke about rebirth through water and the Spirit and when He

requested remembrance of His sacrifice through the Lord's supper. In empowering the apostles to bind and loose he laid on them authority to release the Jews from the laws and ordinances of the former covenant and to bind certain matters under the new. Their binding is seen in such things as church oversight, worship, discipline, gospel teaching and preaching, stewardship, sanctified marriages, etc. It is to the apostolic letters therefore that we need to go for our instruction about the new birth and the Lord's supper. If we could go beyond the apostle's doctrine for such things then there would be no reason why, for example, foot washing should not be considered a covenant responsibility today.

In brief, the good news which brings salvation is the covenant of the saved. It is found in apostolic preaching to sinners subsequent to the cross. The responsibilities peculiar to God's covenant people today (not laid on unbelieving aliens to perform) are found in apostolic teaching to saints subsequent to the cross.

Logic demands that if the foregoing is true then the gospel cannot be understood as comprising all of the new covenant scriptures. This conclusion is reinforced when we realise that matters which were unknown by the apostles (at the time they began preaching the gospel) could not possibly have formed components of the gospel. The book of Revelation for example was not revealed by God to John until years after the gospel was first preached. Our plea must be to return to apostolic preaching to sinners if we are truly to discern the gospel.

John Grimditch,
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(Brother Grimditch was baptised in 1955 at Eastwood and is, therefore, well known to many brethren in Britain. He asked for this article, and other material, to be given to me for possible publication. John does not subscribe to the "Scripture Standard" but I try not to be too petty-minded and am happy to print this first article. Ed.)

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Mar. 4	Gen. 3	1 Cor. 15:20-34
Mar. 11	2 Kings 2:1-18	1 Cor. 15:35-58
Mar. 18	Joshua 1	1 Cor. 16
Mar. 25	Psa. 69:1-17	2 Cor. 1:1-20

IMMORTALITY

A lot of peopel today talk about the immortality of the soul. The Bible never does. It speaks of the immortality of the body. Paul responded to the questions: "How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come (15:35)?" "It (the body) is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: it is sown dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: it is sown in a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body ... The dead shall be raised incorruptible and we shall be changed.

For this corruptible must put on incorruption and this mortal must put on immortality" (15:42-44: 52-53).

Paul also gave comparison between Adam and Christ. He pointed out that "as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly" (15:49). The apostle John wrote: "Beloved, now are we the sons of God and it does not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2) What a day when we shall be like our glorified Lord!

A question often asked is: In our glorified bodies, will we recognise one another? Personally, I believe so. Surely Abraham, Joseph, Elijah, Paul, Peter and John will be easily identifiable in the glory world? I think the same will go for Alexander Campbell, Walter

Crosthwaite, David King, Louise King, Alexander Brown, James Anderson, etc.

HADES

There are three Greek words translated as "hell" in the N.T. scriptures. They are **Hades**, **Gehenna** and **Tartarus**. Interestingly, Hades is translated once as "grave" and it is found in 1 Corinthians 15:55: "O death, where is your sting? O grave where is your victory?"

Hades is the region of departed spirits. The lost and the blessed are both found there, although there is a great gulf fixed between them. The story of the rich man and Lazarus in Acts 16 is quite revealing on the subject. Lazarus rested in Abraham's bosom, which was a state known as paradise to the Gentiles. Jesus went to paradise on his death (Luke 23:43).

One day, Hades will give up its dead. "And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works" (Revelation 20:13). John went on to reveal the final outcome of Hades: "And death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death" (20:14). In other words, once the judgment has taken place, Hades is no longer required and is, therefore, destroyed by God. (An interesting analysis on Hades is found in the writings of the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus (A.D. 37 - c.100), who began his discourse by saying: "Now as to Hades, wherein the souls of the righteous and unrighteous are detained, it is necessary to speak of it ...")

THE COLLECTION FOR THE SAINTS

Paul talked about "the collection for the saints" (16:1) and their "liberality" (3). This was an undertaking very dear to Paul's heart (Galatians 2:10; 2 Corinthians chapters 8 and 9; Romans 15:25; Acts 24:17). William Barclay has pointed out that, in reference to this collection for the poor saints in Judea, Paul used no fewer than nine different words

to describe it. Here the term is **logia** and means an extra collection.

The gift of this money from Gentile Christians especially to Jewish Christians must have gone a long way in promoting the unity of the church. No wonder, therefore, that Paul requested the Roman brethren "to strive together with me in your prayers to God for me; that I may be delivered from them that do not believe in Judea and that my service which I have for Jerusalem may be accepted of the saints . . ." (15:30-31). Rejection of the contribution would have been a serious barrier to unity.

In Acts 24, we read of the imprisonment of Paul for two years. The record says: "He (Felix) hoped also that money should have been given him of Paul, that he might loose him . . ." (26). Perhaps, he had heard about the money Paul had brought with him to Jerusalem and was looking for some of it to be re-directed to his pocket. No funds were ever forthcoming. Christians do not get involved in bribery and corruption.

NAMES

Timotheus was regarded by Paul as his son in the faith. He became an important evangelist in the early church. He was a native of Lystra (Acts 16:1). Apollos was a Jew of Alexandria and was once described as a man "mighty in the scriptures" (Acts 18:24). Once the way of God had been expounded to him more perfectly, he became a powerful figure among the early saints. **Stephanas**, **Fortunatus** and **Achaicus** might have been ex-slaves, but we cannot really tell. Certainly, Paul baptized the household of Stephanas (1 Cor. 1:16). **Aquila** and **Priscilla** were a husband and wife team for the Lord. They are always mentioned together. They played a notable part in Paul's missionary enterprises.

2 CORINTHIANS

Writer: the apostle Paul.

Date: c A.D. 57, probably just a few years after the first epistle.

Background: "Leaving Ephesus, he went into Macedonia, on his way to Corinth. While in Macedonia, in the

summer and autumn of A.D. 57, in the midst of many anxieties and sufferings, after long waiting to hear from Corinth, he met Titus, returning from Corinth with the word that Paul's letter had accomplished much good (2 Corinthians 7:6); but that there were still some of the leaders in the Corinthian church who were denying that Paul was a genuine apostle . . . Then it was that Paul wrote this letter and sent it on ahead by Titus (8:6, 17), expecting soon himself to reach Corinth" (Halley's Bible Handbook).

"2 Corinthians is perhaps the most intensely personal of all Paul's letters. We feel for ourselves the weight of his burden of care for all the churches (11:28): the depth of his love for them and his anguished concern for their spiritual progress. We see in personal terms the cost of his missionary programme: hardship, suffering, deprivation, humiliation, almost beyond human endurance, and we see unshakable faith shining through it all, transforming every circumstance" (The Lion Handbook to the Bible).

SUFFERING FOR CHRIST

Paul was no stranger to suffering for the Master. A study of the book of Acts of the Apostles will reveal the many dangers he had to face in his missionary work. He later told the Roman saints: **"For I reckon that the sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us."** (8:18).

We recall that Paul himself at one time persecuted the early church. We read: **"As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison"** (Acts 8:3). He simply hated the name of Jesus and all who followed Him. In the end, of course, the persecutor became the persecuted. But he could never forget what he had done. **"For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God"** (1 Cor. 15:9). He must have taken huge

comfort from the fact that God not only forgave him when he came to Jesus, but also wiped from his memory all those evil deeds. The record says: **"For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more"** (Hebrews 8:12).

Ian S. Davidson,
Motherwell.

COMING EVENTS

Tranent: Annual Social at Lochside Centre on Saturday, 17th March at 4 p.m.. Speakers: John Wilson, Jnr. (Slamannan), Peter Sneddon (Dennyloanhead). All welcome.

Kirkcaldy: Annual Social on 21st April, 1990 at 3.30 p.m. (Tea at 4.45 p.m.). Speaker: Mike Heinemeir. All welcome.

THANKS

Alf and Edna Marsden wish to thank all relatives, brethren and friends for the many expressions of concern, prayers and get-well wishes. This fellowship is extremely important and precious to both of us as we strive towards recovery.

Alf and Edna.

MISPRINTS

We try to keep spelling misprints and errors to a minimum but some slip through as in last month's issue: 'tendency' and 'respectors', and perhaps a few more. Sorry!

Ed.

OBITUARY

HINDLEY: It is with a deep sense of loss that we report the passing from this life of two of our dearly loved sisters in Christ.

Emma Davies fell asleep on Lord's Day November 12. She was one of this world's underprivileged. Although unable to read or write she was able to listen and understand. During the Bible School and mission held in 1962 she acknowledged Jesus as Her Saviour and

was baptized being added to the Lord's body. She has been a willing and faithful member. Our thanks go to her dear sister Alice, who over the years, so willingly looked after her, eventually taking her into her own home. To her and those who loved her, we express our loving sympathy and pray they may find divine comfort in the Lord Jesus.

Sister Alice Mills passed onward to the Blessed rest on Friday, December 1st. Along with her husband Robert, she was baptized into the blessed Name on 11th November, 1967 and both have continued as faithful members of this assembly. Alice suffered much during the years, and yet it came as a severe shock when she entered into hospital where no cure could be found. Robert tended to her over the few remaining days, when she closed her eyes in the sleep of death. Our hearts go out in sympathy and love to all her dear ones, and particularly to her dearly loved husband, our Brother beloved in the Lord. As a faithful worker in the Lord we know that he will find true comfort in Jesus, and in his beloved brothers and sisters.

"Asleep in Jesus, O how blest,
Are those who find in Him their rest.
We loved them well, but Jesus loved
them best;
And so good-night 'til Jesus comes."

Tom Kemp.

**GHANA (low Cost Appeal)
CEMENT**

Now that a number of Old Path churches in Ghana have purchased plots of ground for building meeting places, would it not be good to assist in purchasing BAGS OF CEMENT?

Building regulations in Ghana require city buildings to be constructed in concrete blockwork on concrete foundations. Village buildings may be built with cement rendered clay blockwork.

A bag of cement in Ghana costs about the same as a bag in Great Britain, £4 per 50kg. bag.

There is a congregation in ODUMASI which must complete their building this year. . . or . . . hand back the plot of ground as per the condition of sale. Bags of cement are their greatest need at the moment.

Anyone, or church assembly who may wish to make a contribution towards the purchase of bags of cement, please contact me at the address below. Cheques should be made out to: Graeme Pearson (Ghana Appeal).

Graeme Pearson,
13 Fairways,
Dunfermline,
Fife, KY12 0DU.

Telephone: (0383) 728624.

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