

The SCRIPTURE STANDARD

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

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THE TIME IS FULFILLED

Can we possibly imagine the excitement and euphoria brought about by the presence and preaching of John the Baptist, as his cry went up **"The time is fulfilled, the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand?"** God, we must remember had been completely mute for nearly four centuries, and His people were demoralised and suffering greatly under the Roman yoke. God's long silence is now broken and great news is on the lips of this latter-day prophet, John. Can we, then, possibly imagine the connection, the running to and fro, the animated discussions and surmising, the frantic searches being made in the O.T. scriptures, rediscovering what the ancient prophets had said, the enthusiasts and the doubters. **"The time is fulfilled!"** What time was fulfilled? The time specified by the prophets when great blessings would come to the world. In Abraham's seed would all the nations of the earth be blessed. To take but one prophet: Daniel said (re Nebuchadnezzar's dream) **"And in the days of these kings, shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed ..."** (Dan. 2:44). In the days of what kings? History tells us that Daniel's prophecy culminated in the time of the **Roman kings**. This was confirmed, of course, both by John the Baptist and Jesus Himself, for both preached that the time had come, and the Kingdom of Heaven was at hand. Our premillennial friends insist that the Kingdom has not yet come but Jesus and John said that it was 'at hand' and Jesus said that some who listened to His preaching would not die before they had **actually seen it come with power** (Mark 9:1).

It is very important to note that it was only **"at hand"** and was **not formally brought into reality** until after Jesus had died and risen. The prayer taught to the disciples had, as its first request, **"Thy Kingdom come"**. During Christ's ministry, and indeed John's ministry, the people were being urged to prepare themselves for the coming kingdom, and to set their house in order. When Jesus sent out the twelve, and later the seventy, they carried this same message, exclusively to the Jews at that time, that the kingdom of God was 'at hand'. Thus the emphasis during these years was upon repentance: **"Repent"**: why? for the Kingdom of God is at hand. During the personal ministry of Jesus the kingdom existed only in a subjective sense, as an emerging code of principles and moral rectitudes. A ship has gradually to be built before it can be launched. Likewise, the kingdom underwent a period of 'construction' prior to its 'launch' on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2). Thus it was not an objective, tangible, kingdom until Christ was risen from the dead, ascended to heaven and seated at God's right hand: King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Nor, I suppose, could it be operational until Jesus' death: for the Will, or last testament, does not become effective until the death of the testator. It was only upon, and after, **the evidence of Christ's voluntary humiliation** (being obedient to death) that God exalted Him and gave Him

a name above every other, and declared that all men everywhere should confess Him as Lord (Phil.2 5-11). And so the whole personal ministry of Jesus – His birth, life, teaching, miracles, death, burial, resurrection, ascension and coronation were all necessary and preparatory to the eventual establishment of the Kingdom of Heaven.

And What Shall I Do

So effective was the message of John (and later, of Jesus) that there was a mass exodus from the city of Jerusalem and indeed from the whole region of Judea (and all the region round about Jordan) “and they were all baptised of him in Jordan confessing their sins.” (This baptism of John, for the remission of sins, was superseded by Christ’s baptism at Pentecost, and those having had John’s baptism were required, later, to receive Christ’s baptism) (Acts 19:3-5).

During the three years or so of Christ’s ministry, and John’s, we can see that the kingdom of Heaven was the predominant theme of the preaching, and the subject of nearly all the parables. Christ’s parables were essentially mental pictures of what the kingdom of God was like; indeed Jesus prefaced most of them with “The kingdom of heaven is like unto ...”. Not only in the parables but in nearly all the private and public utterances of Jesus, the kingdom had a prominent place.

Naturally, as one would expect, the question which eventually dominated the conversations was one which sought to discover **WHO could hope to enter this kingdom, and HOW (upon what terms)?** That was why the disciples were so amazed to learn that the rich would find it extremely difficult to gain entry. We can imagine that this consternation would reverberate throughout the whole of Judea and bring about gasps of astonishment and incredulity. Who, then, can be saved? Does it take great quantities of learning (years of study); does it call for family pedigree (distinguished parentage): does it require bravery and distinguished service on the battlefield; does it call for wisdom in the council: does it require a high I.Q.; does it require a good business brain and acumen in the market place; does it call for good looks and personal charisma: or good moral standing? These, and questions of like nature, doubtless exercised the minds of the populace, and one can imagine the fanciful and outlandish notions of some. Fortunately there are a great many recorded instances of Jesus having been asked what a person must do for entry and we can study His replies. Men and women from all walks of life sought entry: some came stealthily and sidled up to Him with the question: and some even came by night. It seems that when Jesus was thus approached He looked the questioner up and down, asked a few penetrating questions and then prescribed the requirements for that particular individual. This tested the resolve and faith of the questioner, as in the case of the rich young ruler. Jesus did not tell everyone to ‘Go and sell what thou hast and give to the poor’, but thought it necessary for the young man, to put the quality of his desire for entry, to the test. In the event, the test was justified, for the young man turned and walked away sad: the price of entry was much too high.

Surprise For Nicodemus

What then are some of the prerequisites to entry into Christ’s kingdom? It should be noticed that the phrase used to describe the kingdom divorces it from all the normal concepts associated with **earthly kingdoms**. Christ’s kingdom is the ‘**kingdom of heaven**’: i.e. it originated there, derives its sustaining life from there, received its values from there: will eventually return to heaven, and so stands in marked contrast to the kingdoms of this world. It is certainly in the world, but not of the world. Like Christ Himself, the heavenly kingdom enters the hearts and minds of men: just as they enter into it: real but imperceptible “**the kingdom of God is within you**” (Luke 17:21).

Having come to terms with the assertion that the rich would find it difficult to enter: the people doubtless assumed that the religious elite would certainly qualify:

the Jews, who worshipped the one, true and living God. They could say "We have Abraham to our father", and were the chosen of God. Once again Jesus disabused us from all such thoughts. When the secret disciple Nicodemus came to Jesus by night to discuss entry to the Kingdom, he probably harboured the idea that the religious aristocracy would be welcomed with open arms. Nicodemus himself was a Pharisee and a man of authority among the Jews (John 3:1): a member of the Sanhedrin, a man of some wealth (John 19:39) and Jesus referred to him as "A Master in Israel". Nicodemus also imagined, in common with all his fellow Jews, that the everlasting Kingdom predicted by Daniel would be of great worldly splendour and might, whose armies would restore Israel and put to flight the Roman usurpers. He did not then know that Jesus came not to remove the Roman but the yoke of sin: had not come to restore Israel but to save the world: had not come to promote the righteous but to save sinners. We can imagine, therefore, that Nicodemus would be staggered by the response of Jesus: "**Ye must be born again**". "**Except a man be born of water and the spirit he cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven**". Jesus explained that just as we are born into this natural world so we must be **born into the spiritual, or heavenly, world**. This new birth is not from physical parents, but from God (for we are also His offspring) and something we must choose for ourselves.

"Born of water", means, of course, baptism (immersion) in water, and all Bible scholars of any note agree with this. Dean Alford (to mention just one) says, "**There can be no doubt, on any honest interpretation of the words, that 'born of water' refers to the token or outward sign of baptism — to be 'born of the spirit' refers to the thing signified, or inward grace of the Holy Spirit. All attempts to get rid of these two plain facts have sprung from doctrinal prejudices**". And on Pentecost, when the kingdom came with power, the apostle Peter called upon all his hearers to "Repent and be baptised" so that they might receive remission of sins and this gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). 3,000 souls availed themselves of that wonderful opportunity that day, and the promise and process has continued since, Paul later describing it as "**the washing of regeneration and the renewal of the Holy Spirit**". (Titus 3:3).

And so ancestry, history, and the genealogies so proudly gloried in by the Jews counted for nothing: family descent from Israel was worthless: all men had to be born anew.

Harlots, Publicans, Pharisees and Children

So far we have seen that the rich would find it difficult to enter the kingdom and that nobility of birth carries no favours. If time and space permitted we could go through many other false concepts which were rectified at the time, by Jesus (and John). Imagine how the Chief Priests and Elders of the Jews must have reeled back in horror when Jesus said "**the Publicans and the harlots go into the Kingdom of God before you**". (Matt. 21:31). And how was it possible that the dregs of Jewish society (prostitutes and tax-gatherers) could be preferred by God to the religious crème-de-la-crème of God's chosen race (the Chief Priests and elders)? — because the harlots and Publicans really believed John. And so, sanctimonious claims to piety are no substitute for simple faith and when we hear the assertions in the churches today that "we are the people of God" perhaps we should think back to similar claims from the élite Jewish clergy.

In any self-analysis of our lives we would fight shy of ever trying to quantify our righteousness (such as it is) but Jesus said, "**Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no wise enter the kingdom of heaven**." (Matt. 5:20) Here, entry into the kingdom depends upon our level of righteousness: upon its quantity and quality: and it must exceed that of the Scribes. This word 'exceed' occurs only in one other place (2 Cor. 3:9) where Paul says that the 'ministration of righteousness' (the kingdom, or church) 'exceeds in glory' the

'ministration of condemnation' (the Mosaic law). And so the righteousness of those in the former must exceed that of the latter, if we would be fit for the kingdom of God. The Scribes and Pharisees were extremely fastidious in religious observances, and went to very unusual lengths to be minutely correct in their outward forms of piety such as ablutions, fastings, prayers, alms-givings and they were also very proud of their good works. Some of it was to earn the plaudits and compliments of men: and we must be careful not to copy them in this. To enter the kingdom our righteousness must exceed theirs.

Space is dwindling but I would like to mention one other requisite mentioned by Jesus, occasioned as it was by the disciples squabbling over promotion in the kingdom, and who would be the greatest. It seems a sad failing of man that ere long he seeks pre-eminence over his fellows. We see it early on in school playgrounds amongst the infants, and indeed it soon surfaces when any group or association of humans get together. They say that if you give a man a uniform he becomes a little Hitler: and very often that is true. Thus anyone with thoughts on personal glory, or power from high office, may find it in Freemasonry or whatever, but they will not find it in the Kingdom of God. Jesus set a small child in the midst of the disciples and said, "**Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. Whosoever shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven.**" I know well that some of the little street-wise urchins in Palestine were thieves and pickpockets (and had to be to survive) but Jesus used a very small infant which he later took in His arms: and referred, of course, to the innocency, humility, simplicity of such a child and its readiness to learn, and obey. We are to be child-like. More often than not, we are like those wrangling disciples - childish.

Conclusions

Clearly the rules and values which operate in the world of men do not necessarily have any utility in the Kingdom of God. The things which count in our eyes do not necessarily rate in God's. Every one seeks to be rich whereas riches are the greatest impediment to entering the kingdom. Men also aspire to positions of power, and to high office, and stand on necks to get there, yet all men must humiliate themselves and repent: then seek to be reborn - born of water and the Spirit. Men are proud of nobility of birth, titles and insignia, worldly sophistication and deference from fellow-men, whereas we must all become as little children with a childlike trust in God: and the greatest in the kingdom are those quick to do the most menial task and to be the servants of all. The kingdom was taken from the Jews and given to the Gentiles (Matt. 21:43) because "**they would bring forth the fruits thereof**" The Jews disdained to receive it: how fit are we for this kingdom of heaven?

Editor.

GLEANINGS

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

WITHOUT SHEDDING OF BLOOD

"And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission."

Hebrews 9:22.

POWER IN THE BLOOD

"Would you be free from your burden of sin? There's pow'r in the blood, power in the blood: Would you o'er evil a victory win, There's wonderful pow'r in the blood.

Would you be free from your passion and pride? There's pow'r in the blood, pow'r in the blood; Come for a cleansing to Calvary's tide, There's wonderful pow'r in the blood.

Would you be whiter, much whiter than snow? There's pow'r in the blood, pow'r in the blood; Sin stains are lost in its life giving flow, There's wonderful pow'r in the blood.

Would you do service for Jesus your King? There's pow'r in the blood, pow'r in the blood; Would you live daily His praises to sing? There's wonderful pow'r in the blood.

Chorus:— There is pow'r pow'r, Wonder — working pow'r in the blood of the Lamb, There is pow'r pow'r Wonder — working pow'r in the precious blood of the Lamb."

(Redemption Songs No. 78).

THE FACT OF THE ATONEMENT

"As they were eating, Jesus took bread and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, "Take eat, this is My body which is given (or broken) for you: this do in remembrance of Me." And He took the cup and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink ye all of it; for this is My blood of the New Testament (or covenant), which is shed for many (or for you) for the remission of sins: this do ye as oft as ye drink it in remembrance of Me." Matt. 26. 26-28; Mark 14. 22-24; Luke 22. 19, 20; 1 Cor. 11 23-25. It appears, therefore, that our Lord declared that His Death is in some way related to "the remission of sins."

HIS BLOOD WAS SHED "FOR THE REMISSION OF SINS"

"He declared, indeed, that it was for the remission of sins that He was about to die. Other ends might be accomplished by His death, but at a time when we might reasonably suppose that His mind would be filled with the chief and direct objects of His Passion, this is the only one of which He speaks. His blood was shed for the remission of sins."

TO TRUST IN THE INFINITE LOVE OF THE FATHER

"He never says that He was tempted "for the remission of sins;" or that He endured hunger, thirst, weariness, and poverty, "for the remission of sins;" or that it was for this that He was transfigured, or that it was for this that He endured the agony of Gethsemane, or that it was for this that He spoke to men about the powers and laws and mysteries and glories of the kingdom of heaven. The whole of His ministry is a revelation of the righteousness and of the love of God, and authoritative appeal to the heart and conscience of the human race, a mighty force constraining men to repent of sin and to trust in the infinite love of the Father." ...

HIS MIRACLES, HIS TEARS

"The parable of the Prodigal Son has broken their hearts with sorrow for sin, and inspired them with trust in the Divine mercy. I suppose that there is hardly a word of His recorded in the four Gospels that has not drawn some men nearer to God. His miracles, His tears — tears shed at the grave of His friend and over the city of His murderers — all the incidents of His earthly life, are charged with the same wonderful power. In an indirect way, it might be said that His teaching from first to last, all that He did, all that He endured, was intended to secure for us the remission of sins. But never, even incidentally — never, even by implication — does our Lord affirm that it was for this that He wrought miracles, or revealed truth, or submitted to the sorrows and pains which preceded the cross. He does affirm that it was for the remission of sins that He died. He must have believed that the relation between His Death and the remission of sins is different in kind from that which exists between His teaching or His example and the remission of sins."

R. W. Dale.

Selected by Leonard Morgan.

REPORT ON GHANA

Ghana is a former British colony in West Africa which, prior to achieving independence in 1957, was known as the Gold Coast because of the gold found there. With an area of 92,100 square miles it is approximately the same size as Great Britain, but its population in 1986 was only 13,431,000 of which 2,000,000 live in Accra in 200,000 houses. There are about 75 different languages spoken in different parts of the country and very few would be understood outside their own area. Although English is the official language, an interpreter was always present when Bill was addressing the assembly.

We were there from the middle of July until the middle of August which was very hot and humid.

The unit of currency is the cedi and, although its value fluctuates, there are approximately 500 cedis to a pound. Poverty is widespread and with it comes corruption and bribery, which is prevalent at all levels. This is especially sad as the Ghanians are basically very friendly and hospitable. As our brethren refrain from dishonesty their position is even harder than their more worldly neighbours. A government employed labourer has about the lowest pay of 350 cedis (70 pence) a day including allowances while a senior officer, whose opposite number in Britain would have a salary of about £15,000 p.a., would receive approximately 20,000 cedis (£40) a month. Those on lower incomes struggle on by farming a small area of ground and their wives selling goods at the market. The plight of the unemployed is severe and statistics do not offer much hope of improvement. In U.K. 18% of the population is retiring from work while 16% are born. The figures in Ghana are 6% and 55% respectively. It may help us to understand their situation better when we consider that a couple with seven children need to spend about 1,000 cedis (£2) a day for very basic food.

All medical attention and medicines have to be paid for, and the state hospitals especially are basic. Private doctors are better but dearer. If a patient who has managed to see a doctor is given a prescription which is more than he can afford, he just throws it away. A young Christian couple in the church at Koforidua lost their baby two weeks before our arrival because they could not get medical attention quickly enough. Very few can afford to get proper medical attention.

Due to the unbalanced diet, poor hygiene and lack of medicine 57 out of every 1000 pregnant women die in childbirth in the city of Accra. In the country areas the figure is 1 in 10.

Also, due to anxiety, induced by economic conditions, there is a very high incidence of mental illness.

Doctors are generally reluctant to operate because, due to the lack of suitable equipment and the conditions in which they work, there is a relatively high chance of failure, which would tend to reflect badly on themselves. An x-ray on the head of a young Christian wife and mother in Takoradi showed a lump which is believed to be a tumour, but nothing is being done about it.

Normal housing accommodation for a family consists of either one room or two and furniture is basic. There is no need of a wardrobe or chest of drawers as their few items of clothing can be kept in a box or suitcase. The toilet is usually a hole in the ground outside and cooking is usually done over a fire, also outside. There is a public water supply in towns although, because of the low pressure in most towns, it is not usually available, in which case it has to be carried in a bucket from a nearby well or the water supply further down the hill. Usually the women carry the buckets of water on their heads, and in the outlying areas this can be for considerable distances.

The success of our task largely depended on finding a Ghanian, David Arku Mensah, and his Canadian wife, Sharon, who had lived in Britain for several years,

but moved to Accra in 1981. Because letters between the two countries rarely arrived contact with them had been lost, and we were extremely thankful to be able to find them on the day after our arrival. Fortunately David, who is a senior social worker in charge of the Accra area, had started six weeks leave on the day of our arrival. (Incidentally, we noticed at other times that circumstances which could have been disastrous turned out favourably to what we were trying to achieve). Because of this he was able to devote a great deal of time to us, and we learned much from the long talks we had with them, as well as being shown our way round Accra and being taken to visit members of the congregation. For this responsible appointment David receives, with allowances, about 20,000 cedis (£40) a month, which is augmented by Sharon's much smaller pay. If they had not accepted this deprivation the churches would be in a poorer state if, indeed, they were there at all. They have two children aged about four and nine.

There are three full-time supported preachers in Ghana; Abraham Mante who is based in Koforidua, 58 miles inland from Accra, and who also travels to encourage and teach other congregations; Kwao Dautey at the village of Huhunya, about 9 miles from Koforidua; and Kodwo Mensdah at Takoradi a seaport almost 200 miles east of Accra, who also visits small scattered villages. Although they all receive some financial support from America, both Abraham and Kwao have to augment this by each farming an area of ground which effectively reduces their time available for the Lord's work.

Travelling is generally by privately run transport and, as these vehicles do not leave until they are crammed full, much time is lost. This could be eliminated for Abraham if he had a small motor cycle.

Although state school's charge fees and do not supply books or jotters, the educational standard is low and pupils commonly leave at the age of sixteen more or less illiterate. Because of this, parents who can afford it, generally send their children to private schools, and their desperation for this can be illustrated by Abraham Mante who has seven children, but was unable to have them all at school at one time. In his anxiety he asked us if we could take one of his sons to Britain to be educated there. We pointed out that this may not be possible unless the boy was officially adopted but both he and his wife, Agnes, were prepared to suffer this emotional trauma if it was for the boy's ultimate good. However, when asked, none of the children would agree to leave home.

Most families have one Bible which they share, but there is a need for more to be supplied in the local dialect. There is also a need for tracts written in English, as most people are able to read it, and they could be distributed throughout the whole of Ghana. Both of these items can be printed and obtained locally.

We met a number of Christians, including Abraham's wife, Agnes, who are unable to read their Bibles because they are short sighted and can not afford glasses. We did not manage to find the cost of testing and supplying glasses from an optician but, even if second hand spectacles could be sent, this would be a great help.

Another example of their poverty was a young recently married school teacher who was greatly concerned because he could not afford a wedding ring for his wife. Because of prevalent immorality in the world he rightly felt that it was important as Christians that his wife be given this dignity.

Although we did not discuss this with any Ghanians, it has been suggested that by sending seeds to help them grow vegetables they may have a more balanced diet, and we feel that this is worth pursuing further.

There are so many urgent needs for the church in Ghana but there is one which is now desperate because the survival of the church, as a recognised body, depends on it, and that is the provision of a suitable meeting place. Due to some of their activities, and lack of them in the case of community work (which involves members

of the community doing work of mutual benefit, such as cutting verges or clearing gutters), the Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses fell out of favour with the government and were duly banned. Their grand buildings now stand locked and they are no longer allowed to meet there. The government then decided that to keep a tag on religious bodies they should all apply to be registered and for this there are a number of conditions, including submission of all their balance sheets and of their premises for inspection to see if they are suitable. The closing date for registration is 26th September 1989. Although rich spiritually, the churches are very poor in material terms and none have their own premises – they all rent accommodation for their meetings, often school classrooms. There is obviously no possibility of this being obtained within the remaining time period, but the saints there are hopeful that if they can convince the authorities that they intend to build one, and that the means will be there to do it, this will be accepted. They have already drawn up a constitution and David Arku Mensah has collected the financial statements of the various congregations. We understand that one suitably designed and constructed meeting place would suffice and it would be preferable to have it in the capital, Accra. Due to the high rate of inflation it is not possible to give an exact estimate of the cost of the land required, but this would probably be between £3,000 and £4,000 in Accra although in Koforidua, which is the regional capital of Eastern Region, and good central plot could be bought for about £800. Land outside main towns and in country villages is owned by the local chief and can be purchased very much cheaper. Also, in towns construction must be with traditional materials such as concrete blocks, but clay construction would normally be accepted in country districts. This is stronger than one might expect and would probably last about thirty years. With cement rendering it should last considerably longer.

Kwao Dautey, the preacher at Huhunya, bought a considerable piece of land with some money he was given. After clearing it of the dense growth, which is a mammoth task, he intends to build a meeting place and also a place to live himself. At the moment he is cultivating a part he has cleared with his cutlass – as all such work is done in Ghana.

The small village of Patriensa, about 170 miles east of Koforidua, has a strong congregation of about 45 members and has recently, from their own funds, bought four adjacent plots in a prestige area scheduled for future development, where only traditional concrete building will be permitted. They have had a professional drawing produced and are determined to build within the two year time limit given by the chief in the area.

The neighbouring congregation in Odumasi is much smaller and they bought two adjacent plots in a similar area just over a year ago. They are clearing the site, which would be a daunting task to us, but have been unable to find the money for the concrete foundation and bricks. Out of their poverty they must have sacrificed to buy the land. Can we help them to make a start by contributing to the cost of materials?

We made this journey to discover information about our brethern in Ghana, and to seek ways of helping them where needed. In this, through God's grace, we were successful, but we have also received a blessing in experiencing the caring hospitality of saints who face adversity and deprivation with such an undaunted faith.

We would be very pleased to answer **any** questions that anyone may have.

Bill and Ann Cook, 22 The Beeches, Woodside, Glenrothes, Fife KY7 5EA.

APPEAL FOR GHANA

As you have just read in Brother and Sister Cook's report there is a great need among our brethren in Ghana. They lack so many of the basic things which we take for granted.

There are many, inexpensive, ways we could help our fellow Christians but I think you will agree that the most urgent need in Ghana is for God's people to be able to continue to worship freely and to preach the gospel with out fear of persecution. To do this the church has to register as a religious body with the Government of Ghana, one of the requirements being that they have their own buildings (as house meetings, rented halls, etc., will, in future, be forbidden).

As you will appreciate this is rather a costly project and it is for that reason I am appealing to you once again to help raise the money needed for the brethren in Ghana to buy land and/or buildings.

Several brethren have donated so far and we have been able to send £2,600 already to David Arku Mensah for this purpose. Brother Bill and Sister Ann, in addition to this, left approximately £500 with David at the end of their trip.

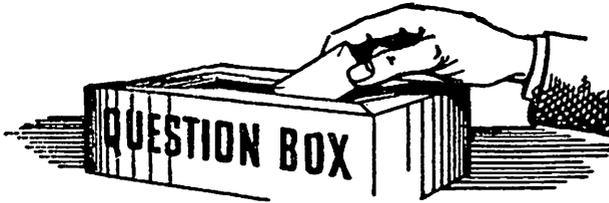
As you can see this is well short of the needs of our brethren. If any church or individual wishes to help, I can assure you that 100% of all money collected will be sent to Ghana.

In the next few months we will also be appealing for long term, very low-cost commitments for the other needs, such as:— Medical funds in selected areas, putting a child to school for a term, help for those with sight problems, food parcels and the spread of the Word.

This month, however, we must concentrate on helping our brethren worship in Spirit and Truth, legally, as registered churches of Christ.

If you wish to help please send any donations to me at the address below.

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



Conducted by
Alf Marsden

“Could you please explain all the implications in the passage of scripture Eph.5:22-33. I am a sister in the Church and I must confess that I am a little bewildered by the teaching I hear regarding the marital status.”

I can well understand the frustrations experienced by many of our sisters in the Church. All the teaching in local communities of Christians in open assembly is given by men, and unless they are truly altruistic their teaching may be influenced by their own relationships with wives or friends. It is not the slightest use being starry-eyed about the matter; if a husband has a wife who tends to be dominant then he perhaps adopts a more authoritarian stance than he would otherwise do. Conversely, if the wife is docile and pliant then the husband's expectations of her might exceed what is proper in a Christian marriage. The mistake we sometimes make is in not realising that the text of the Bible is referring to real people, each with hopes, fears, longings, and aspirations of their own; for the husband to say, “you, wife, must submit yourself to me in all things, irrespective of circumstances, because the text of the Bible says you must”, may be textually correct so far as the words go, but may need some

modification because of what the words portend. The text of the Bible is only true relative to the context in which it is found; the interpretation of the text may be much influenced by our relationships with other people – husband, wife, or anyone else – at any point in time. The sister who has sent this question is quite right in asking for an explanation of vv 22-33 of Eph.5 rather than just asking what verse 22 means.

Early Days of Christianity

In the early Church Christian women enjoyed a freedom and independence in marked contrast to the suppression and subjection of females in other parts of the East. This fact owes much to the general attitude of Jesus to women and the trend of Christian teaching. In the Jewish Church women were held to be inferior to men and they sat apart in the synagogue. In other places of worship the distinction seems not to have been so finely drawn. Acts 16 records that the women resorted to the river side where prayer was wont to be made, and there Paul and the others spoke with them. Lydia was one who heard Paul speak there. (See Acts 16: 13-15).

We must never forget that Christianity is a religion which makes its appeal to the individual soul, both male and female; the value of this is esteemed higher than anything else in the world and tends to break down minor barriers of distinction. Thus we find that Jesus appeals equally to women as to men. He chose to talk, to the amazement of His disciples, to an outcast Samaritan woman, and discussed with her some of the most fundamental religious themes (John 4:7ff). He loved Martha and Mary of Bethany (John 11:5). Women brought their children to be blessed of Him (Luke 18:15). Women followed Him on His last journey to Jerusalem and to the place of execution (Luke 23: 27,49). They performed the last rites and were first at the tomb on the resurrection morning. In the early Church important parts were played by such women as Tabitha of Joppa (Acts 9:36); Lydia of Philippi (Acts 16:14,16); and Priscilla (Acts 18:26). The statement by Paul in Gal. 3:27,28 would undoubtedly have guided the early Church in its attitude to women as distinct from the early days of Judaism, **“For as many of you as have been baptised into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus”**. At the same time we must not lose sight of the fact that it was Paul himself, while holding the dignity of womanhood, who taught that the wife must be in subjection to her husband (Eph. 5:22,23). We must now turn our attention to Eph. 5.

The Noble Picture

The passage of scripture mentioned in the question presents to us the noblest picture of marriage ever drawn. If all that anyone gets out of this passage is that women must be subject to men then that person, in my opinion, is guilty of the most gross misinterpretation of the text.

We cannot do justice to vv 22-33 without first considering v21. The A.V. makes it appear that v 21 is tied to the same thoughts as expressed from v 18, but v 21 would be better understood as starting a new paragraph. The participle is like an imperative. The R.S.V. reads, **“Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ”**; in N.I.V. reads, **“Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ”**; the Jerusalem Bible reads, **“Give way to one another in obedience to Christ”**; J.B. Phillips says, **“And ‘fit in with’ each other, because of your common reverence for Christ”**. All of these scriptures are emphasising the mutuality of subjection. Christ is subject to the Will of the Father; the Church is subject to Christ; husbands and wives are mutually subject to each other and to Christ; they have certain obligations to each other which they cannot lay aside. It is true, of course, that in the hierarchical structure of creation that ‘man is the head of the woman’ and consequently the wife would not seek to displease her husband, but the mutuality of subjection which Paul indicates means that the husband would

not abuse the sanctity of marriage by an authoritarian attitude towards his wife because by so doing he would displease 'his head' which is Christ. The words in the text mean quite literally that husband and wife must 'fit in' with each other.

The marriage relationship is a profound one and should not be taken lightly. The wife, by her attitude and disposition should help not hinder her husband; the intention of God in creation was, and is, that she should be 'a help suitable for the man'. The properties of a good wife are extolled in Proverbs 31: 10ff. Solomon rounds off that praise by saying, "**Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised. Give her the fruit of her hands; and let her own works praise her in the gates**".

The Christian husband should not be looking to exploit the good Christian wife. I like the words of J. B. Phillips when he says, "**So men ought to give their wives the love they naturally have for their own bodies. The love a man gives his wife is the extending of his love for himself to enfold her. Nobody ever hated his own body; he feeds it and looks after it**". The great mystery is that Christ has become one with His Church; the extension of that mystery is the consummation in marriage when the two become one flesh. Do we need reminding of the rudderless, meandering life of a husband when he lost his good, Christian wife? Our Christian wives are precious to us, and we should tell them so ere it is too late.

The Personal Viewpoint

The sanctity of marriage forbids the husband from treating his wife as if she were simply one of his 'chattels'. I do not believe I am saying anything wrong when I say that the head on the shoulders of a good, Christian wife is many times more wise and understanding than that of her so-called 'superior' husband. On many occasions he makes demands, while she makes sacrifices; the arrogant way in which those demands are sometimes made illustrates quite vividly the insensitivity of the one making the demands. Let us look at some practical examples in which the husband might fail.

Take perception, for example. There are occasions when the wife may be feeling 'below par', but does the demanding husband notice that? Oh dear, no. He goes on in his own sweet way, "Why is the meal not on the table; what are these children doing out of bed; what have you been doing all day"? Not the best way, perhaps, to invite a sweet response. We husbands should try to put ourselves in the place of our wives; its called empathy, I believe.

Then what about the conjugal rights of husband and wife as regards their sexual relationship? The husband is usually most motivated in this area, and demands his conjugal rights irrespective of how the wife may be feeling either mentally or physically. Is the husband then looking after his wife as if she were his own flesh?

The vexed area of dress frequently raises its head. It seems to me that if husbands want to insist on what their wives wear then they should go out and buy their clothes for them. It is said that it is unbecoming for a woman to wear slacks, but I have never heard this said about our Scottish brothers who wear kilts. In my humble opinion it is **more becoming** to wear slacks in some situations than it is to wear skirts or frocks.

One could go on multiplying these examples – in many cases involving trivia – but doesn't common sense dictate to us that husband and wife should 'fit in' with each other in order to make the relationship the noble and elevated experience which the Bible teaches it ought to be? To quote J.B. Phillips once again, "**In practice what I have said amounts to this: let every one of you who is a husband love his wife as he loves himself, and let every wife respect her husband**".

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

CHURCH BUSINESS MEETINGS

Who should make decisions in the church?

Paul wrote this charge to the young evangelist, Timothy: **“Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence”**. (1 Tim. 2:11,12 New King James Version).

Not only is a woman to be silent in the assembly (1 Cor. 14:34,35), but she is also forbidden to teach a man or to have authority over a man. (The word ‘usurp’ in the King James Version is not in the original language.)

A teaching article written by a woman and directed to men is just as much a violation of this command as when a woman teaches men in a Bible class.

This passage requires that decisions be made by the men of a congregation. If a congregation has elders the decisions are of course made by men, since only men may be elders! Also when a congregation does not have elders, decisions should be made by the men.

For decisions to be made in a meeting in which women have equal say with men would be a violation of 1 Tim. 2:12 because the voice of a woman would nullify the voice of a man, and if the women were in the majority they could rule the church.

In Acts 6 the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples, but they told the ‘brethren’ to seek out seven men, and they themselves (who were all men) appointed them over the business at hand (Acts 6:2,3). That women were present does not mean that they participated in the decision-making.

In Acts 15:22 we read that it pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole church to send chosen men to Antioch. But by whom was this question being considered? **“So the apostles and elders came together to consider this matter”** (Acts 15:6). And regarding this same decision we read in Acts 16:4 **“they delivered them the decrees for to keep, that were ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem.”** The decision was made by men (the apostles and elders) and the whole church was pleased with this decision.

An interesting passage regarding this question is found in Acts 1:16 where one was chosen to take the place of Judas. Although women might have been present (see verse 15), when Peter addresses the group he says: **“Men and brethren.”** Notice that ‘and’ is italicized which means that it is not in the original. Although the word ‘brethren’ can sometimes refer to both men and women, in this case the address: **“Men, brethren”** refers to the same people. As this matter was being considered Peter addressed the men.

Notice that this form of address is used in Acts 15 as the question of the Gentiles is being considered (in verses 7 and 13).

There are two words in Greek which are translated as ‘man’. Anthropos means ‘man’ in the sense of ‘person’ and refers to mankind in general, whether men or women. Aner means ‘man’ in the sense of a male person. In Acts 1:16 and in Acts 15:7,13 the word is aner, referring specifically to male persons.

God has ordained that in the church and in the home women are to be in submission to men (1 Cor. 14:34; 1 Tim. 2:11; 1 Peter 3:1,5).

Roy Davison,
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Wellen,
Belgium B3830.

(Sister Payne asked for information of this subject. Any others like to contribute?)

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Oct. 5	Mal. 3:13-18 to 4:6	1 Cor. 3
Oct. 12	Num. 12	1 Cor. 4
Oct. 19	Deut. 13	1 Cor. 5
Oct. 26	Ex 23:1-13	1 Cor. 6

The Temple of God

Paul told the saints at Corinth that they were **"God's building"** (3:9) and the **"temple of God"** (3:16). Corinth at that time had a famous temple, as many ancient cities had. It was built on the Acrocorinth, a hill that arose five hundred feet above the city, and was dedicated to Aphrodite or Astarte, the goddess of love and fertility. Worship of her dominated much of the social and religious life of the city, but tended to foster or even popularise immorality among both citizens and travellers.

Paul here was emphasizing the fact he proclaimed to the Athenians (who, incidentally, also had a temple dedicated to Athena — thus the name of the city), that God does not dwell in temples made with hands (Acts 17:24). He dwells in people. They constitute the house of God and each one of them is a living stone in the edifice. For some reason, this is a difficult concept for people to grasp. Just look at the multiplied millions that have been spent throughout the world on great buildings dedicated to the Almighty. Men, it appears, have attempted to prove the Bible is mistaken on this subject.

One writer put it this way: "Our service is not something we do inside a structure. It is directed toward the world of humanity. The real service does not begin on Sunday morning at 11.00 o'clock. It may well begin on Monday morning at 8.00 o'clock. God is as much concerned with how you act at home, on the road, in the office or shop, as he is with how you behave in a church edifice. Everything you do as a Christian should be worship. All should be done to the glory of God. The true Christian will no more shout an obscenity at a

road-hog who cuts in on his driving lane, than he would stand up in the meeting-house and challenge the preacher to fight because he stepped on his toes ... It is not the church building or the road that is holy. It is you! You are God's people. You constitute a holy nation. You are a royal priesthood."

Plight of the Apostles

Paul (in chapter 4) defends the apostles of Christ. In this defence he turns on the Corinthians with scathing irony. As William Barclay has pointed out: "He compares their pride, their self satisfaction, their feeling of superiority, with the life that an apostle lives." He chooses a vivid picture. When a Roman general won a great victory he was allowed to parade his victorious army through the streets of the city with all the trophies that he had won; the procession was called a triumph. But at the end there came a little group of captives who were doomed to death; they were being taken to the arena to fight with the beasts and so to die. The Corinthians in their blatant pride were like the conquering general displaying the trophies of his prowess; the apostles were like the little group of captives doomed to die. To the Corinthians the Christian life meant flaunting their privileges and reckoning up their achievement; to Paul it meant humble service and a readiness to die for Christ.

Paul was a spiritual father of the Corinthian church. He had, of course, established them in the faith and laboured to keep them there. He warned them that he was coming to sort things out (4:19). Timothy was sent ahead and was a mouth-piece for Paul until his arrival (4:17).

Timothy is an important figure in the New Testament scriptures and his life is worth studying. (Two letters by Paul, of course, bear his name.) F.F. Bruce has written of him: "All the affection which a father could feel for a likeminded son Paul felt for Timothy and in return he received from Timothy all the service

and devotion which a son could give to a father ... Of all the members of Paul's circle, there was none with whom he formed a closer attachment than Timothy."

A Horrible Sin and a Stern Remedy

"It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and immorality of a kind that even pagans condemn — a man has apparently taken his father's wife! Are you still proud of your church? Shouldn't you be overwhelmed with sorrow and shame? The man who has done such a thing should certainly be expelled from your fellowship" (1 Corinthians 5:1-2, J.B. Phillips' Translation). The Corinthians church tolerated this gross immorality, but the apostle certainly would not. His judgement was clear: **"Deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus"** (5:5). Please note that the act of withdrawal had to be done by the congregation of which the guilty one was a member (5:4). In other words, it had to be a public act.

W. Carl Ketcherside in his book **A Clean Church** had a lot to say about this case. For example, he wrote: "How can excommunication accomplish this (a change in the guilty one)? No man will leave his filthy practice unless he becomes ashamed of it. A refusal of fellowship is intended to produce a feeling of shame (2 Thessalonians 3:14). A man who has any feeling of fear of eternal judgment, must feel the sting of sin, by viewing his own evil in the proper light, if he is to repent. Nothing is more calculated to achieve this than a demonstration of intolerance for sin upon the part of the church. So long as the church shows a toleration for sin, that long will men feel safe in its practice. When the church refuses to condone evil, those who commit it will be forced to make a choice. Many of them for the first time will weigh the results of their actions and make the right choice. There is nothing to choose between, as long as the stan-

dard of the church is the same as that of the world".

There is every indication from Paul's second epistle to the Corinthians that this man repented of his evil deeds and was restored to fellowship. The action of the congregation, therefore, produced the proper effect. It was achieved by the right thing being done in the right way.

"Mixing" With The World

The Christian in the world is like a ship on an ocean. The ship is all right on the ocean so long as the ocean is not in the ship. Similarly, the Christian is all right in the world so long as the world is not in the Christian.

The Christian has to mix with all sorts of people on this globe (5:10), but this is unavoidable. However, he has not to conform to their standards, but to live unto the ideals laid down by Jesus. Paul put it this way to the Romans: **"And be not conformed to this world: but be you transformed by the renewing of your mind that you might prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God"** (Romans 12:2). The apostle John declared: **"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. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passes away, and the lust thereof: but he that does the will of God abides forever"** (1John 2:15-17).

Going To Law

In Britain today more and more people are resorting to the courts to settle all sorts of disputes and problems. New Testament times were no different. It was especially the Greeks who were notorious for litigation. Indeed, the law courts were one of their chief entertainments. Paul deplored the fact that brother went to law with brother, and that before pagans or unbelievers (6:6). He told them that it was a Christian duty to suffer injustice rather than to resort

to law (6:7,8); for compared to the momentous responsibility of eternal judgment, the things that pertain to this life, are among the "smallest matters" (6:2).

One Flesh

In Genesis 2:24 we read: "**Therefore shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh**". Here we have the constitution of marriage. "**Marriage is honourable in all**" (Hebrews 13:4). When we study the Bible, we see that God ordained it, Jesus sanctioned it, The Holy Spirit validated it and the apostles regulated it. Fornication and adultery, therefore are continuously condemned by God. And in this discussion by Paul on fornication, he clearly shows that the phrase "one flesh" has direct reference to sexual intercourse, "**What? know you not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body? for two, says He, shall be one flesh**" (6:16).

Ian S. Davidson, Motherwell.

NEWS FROM THE CHURCHES

Slamannan District: The Quarterly Mutual Benefit Meeting took place on Saturday 9th September at Dennyloanhead Meeting House when a goodly gathering discussed the subject for that day: "What kind of bodies will Christians have when Christ returns?". The Chairman was Joe Malcolm and the speakers were David Chalmers, Dalmelington, and Graeme Pearson, Dunfermline. The meeting gave a special welcome to Sister Jessie McLean, and son Stephen, from Burnaby Congregation in Vancouver: and also to Leonard and Rene Morgan from Hindley. An interesting time of discussion took place and a highly enjoyable time was had by all.

The next such meeting will be held, God willing, on Saturday 2nd December, at Tranent Meeting-house Chaired by Mark Plain and the speakers

will be Jack Nisbet, Haddington, and John Colgan, Tranent. The subject will be "How can we explain 1st John 3:9 and 5:18 in the light of 1st Cor. 8:12,13".

Kirkcaldy: Rejoice with us as our sister Jean Rowbotham and sister Jackie Lee have been restored to fellowship. We also give a warm welcome to sister Grace Watson. God bless these sisters as we all work to be more like Jesus.

At this time we are showing some Childrens' Bible Story Video's on Sunday evenings at 6-7 p.m. The response has been very good and we are greatly encouraged by the enthusiasm of the children to learn more about God's word.

Ruth Moyes (Sec.)

COMING EVENTS

Annual Social

The church at Newtongrange, intend, God willing, to hold their Annual Social, on Saturday, 14th October, 1989 at 4.00 p.m.

Chairman: Robert Hunter

Speakers:

Mark Plain (Tranent)

Harry McGinn (N. Cummnock)

Try to be with us.

A.P. Sharp.

Anniversary Meeting

The congregation at Hope Chapel, London, intend, God willing, to hold their Anniversary Meeting at the Meeting-place on Saturday, October 7th. 3.00p.m. Afternoon Meeting 4.45 p.m. Tea 6.30 p.m. Evening Meeting.

Bro. Geoff Daniell will speak at both meetings, and stay over to Sunday.

Everbody Welcome.

Dorothy Scott (Sec.)

The Bible dramatically deals with difficulties that discourage us, temptations that test us, and problems that plague us. It richly reveals the Christ who can change us, the Friend who can free us, the Light who can lead us.

AN EYEFUL OF JESUS

The Chinese are reported to have a favourite expression — "One Picture is worth a thousand words". The headmaster of the North Inglewood school, where my son and daughter attend, states it like this, "An eyeful is better than an earful". The Greeks who came to Philip wanted an eyeful of Jesus. They said, "Sir, we would see Jesus." The world today is waiting for an earful of Jesus Christ.

PICTURING JESUS

People can see Jesus when He is presented in the messages from the pulpit (Acts 8:35; 1 Cor. 2:2). They can see Him in baptism performed scripturally (Rom. 6); and in the Lord's Supper (Matt. 26:26-28). But the most lasting of all impressions is when men can see Jesus pictured in our lives. When we think, act, and speak as the Master thought, acted and spoke. It has been said that people retain 5% of what they hear and 40% of what they see. Theoretically, then, a far greater impression is made on people by what they see in us than by advice we might give. Seeing Christ demonstrated by a godly life will win one to Christ when earbashing fails (1 Peter 3:1). Brother F. B. Shepherd quotes a newly converted salesman who understood what it meant to give an eyeful of Jesus:-

"Henceforth I shall regard my life as being a sample of Christianity. I shall constantly remember that people are watching me. With the help of the Master I am determined to make good in the Christian enterprise. I must

make people like the same and in this way secure their order — win them to Christ. From this time on I shall sell merchandise in order that I might sell Christianity."

PICTURING JESUS "DAILY"

The Gospel is God's power unto salvation (Rom. 1:16). But the power will have its full effect only when preached (Mark 16:15) and lived (Phil. 2:15) — DAILY. The word "daily" is found in, what is to me, three significant places in the New Testament; In Acts 17:11 where it teaches we are to be "daily Bible readers"; in Acts 5:42 where it teaches that we are to be "daily Bible teachers"; and in Luke 9:23 where it teaches that we are to be "daily Bible lovers."

If we live daily for Christ He will manifest Himself in every facet of our lives — in our homes, business, entertainment, social circles, etc. We will be Christian when it is convenient and when it is inconvenient. People are far more interested, as a true test of our religion, in our actions in situations where it is disadvantageous to practise Christian principles, than they are in what we do in the church building on Sunday.

Jesus said, "He that hath seen Me, hath seen the Father." Is it true that to have seen us is to have seen Jesus and His Father? Peter's effectiveness for Christ increased with his consistency of life for Christ. May we consistently increase in giving an eyeful of Jesus to the unbelieving world!

R. Wyatt.

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