

The SCRIPTURE STANDARD

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

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AN OPEN LETTER TO CHRISTIANS CONCERNED FOR EVANGELISTIC CO-OPERATION

Dear brethren in Christ,

Alexander Campbell on page 81, paragraph X, of his *Christian System* writes:—

“Co-operation, as much as the intercommunion of Christians is a part of the Christian institution. We must ‘strive together in our prayers’ for one another, and for the salvation of men; and this, if there were no scriptural example nor precept on the subject, is enough. To pray for one another as individuals or communities implies that we shall assist one another in every way for which we pray for one another; otherwise our prayers and thanksgivings for each other are mere hypocrisy. He that would pray for the progress of the truth at home and abroad, having it in his power to contribute a single dollar to that end, and yet withholds it, shows how little value he sets upon his own prayers, and how much upon his money.”

Co-operation between Christians and congregations is an observable scriptural fact. Because the church in Jerusalem faced an urgent need it was met by the co-operation of other congregations. There is an urgent need in the churches in England today—that need is the proclamation of the gospel in a more effective manner than hitherto. This need must be met. Christians in England are numerically weak and are being further weakened by the activities of innovators. The one inescapable fact which every Christian must accede to is that the British congregations are small in numbers and in number. The gospel is being proclaimed in the daily round of Christians, from platforms to half empty buildings and often to the converted. One feels that this is not sufficient. Whatever manpower, abilities and energies we have must be utilised to the full. Churches in Scotland have for some ninety years in the Slamannan district operated a *modus vivendi* in gospel proclamation, not perfect but functioning, not anti-scriptural but non-scriptural (a method not to be found in the Bible). Their method is a commonsense expression of a desire to preach the gospel. All honour to them.

The evangel can be preached without the aid of full time proclaimers, but the realist nature in many of us prompts us to say that the activities of men who are able to devote all their time and abilities to preaching the gospel are an asset as we seek to extend the kingdom of God. Because of the size of the British congregations and their present level of contribution we must look for an expedient which will enable Christians to have the help of full-time proclaimers. The law of expediency is fraught with difficulties and offends the consciences of many of our brethren. Because of this many Christians look

with distaste on matters which are termed expedient. In the matter of evangelistic co-operation there is not a "thus saith the Lord" which excludes all methods except one. There are Christians who maintain that everything must be done through the local assembly. "From the days of the Apostles till now co-operative associations of churches have uniformly followed the political distributions of the earth. Those in 'Judea, Galatia, Achaia, Pontus, Cappadocia, Macedonia, Asia, Bithynia,' etc., are designations of churches and brethren familiar to all New Testament readers." (*Christian System*, pages 81 and 82, paragraph XI). Campbell goes on to say that co-operative groupings of Christians are a matter of convenience rather than of necessity, stating that churches can generally and more conveniently and successfully co-operate by districts, counties and nations rather than by any other divisions. But just as in the time of Campbell, so now it is necessary that we co-operate, but of convenience, that the churches in one district or area form the ways and means for co-operation.

In 1905, at Leeds, a group of Christians met and listened to a paper presented under the title "Evangelistic Co-operation in Relation to the Independence of Individual Churches." There follow extracts from this paper just as relevant now as they were then to the church of Christ:—

" . . . absolute independence is impossible; such could only be were churches altogether unrelated . . . The tide of love was intended to, and did, overflow the bounds of the individual assembly; the sense of unity was not purposed to be, and could not be, held within the limits of the local church . . . In the New Testament the church is a complete organism, qualified legally for every purpose for which it is called out assembly; and, while one in affection and community of aim with all others, is in no respect subject to their control, either as individuals or in combination. The grouping of churches so that a number may have a common government, and be described as a unit, is engendered and authorised by the apostasy . . . made possible by the failure of the churches to realise their position. Such an organic unity is foreign to the spirit of christianity . . . the advantage of co-operation for the great work of evangelisation in 'the regions beyond,' the union of small financial abilities for the support of proclaimers, and some arrangement for directing their labours is evident . . . such a co-operation being an expedient and not having divine authority, must be perfectly voluntary and makes no difference to the status of an assembly as a church of Christ . . . While a church has a right of judgement upon the question to co-operate or not, the affirmative exercise of that right modifies, and largely so, its liberty. It has become a partaker in joint enterprises, sharer in joint responsibilities, and in deciding other matters these have to be considered . . . "

This letter is a plea for someone, somewhere to make a positive beginning in the task and duty of evangelistic co-operation. "The necessity for co-operation is felt everywhere and in all associations of men. It is part of the economy of heaven. What are mountains but grains of sand? What are oceans but drops of water? And what are the mightiest and most triumphant armies but collections of individual men? How much good or ill can be done by co-operation than by individual enterprise, the history of the world, both civil and ecclesiastic, does little more than detail. One hundred churches, well disciplined, acting in concert, with Christian zeal, piety, humanity—frequently meeting together in committees of ways and means for building up Zion, for fencing the deserts, cultivating the enclosed fields, watering the dry and barren spots, striving together mightily in prayer, in preaching the word, in contributing to the necessities of the saints, in enlightening the ignorant, and in devising all practicable ways of doing good—would, in a given period, do more than twice the same number acting in their individual capacity, without concert, without co-operation and the united energy, always the effect of intelligent and cordial combination" (*Christian System*, page 82, para. XII).

We repeat, the churches in Britain are small. Attempts have been made before to co-operate for the purposes of evangelism. These previous attempts have failed because a method of doing so has been sought which is right to the exclusion of all others. There isn't one. The one method, working marvellously well in the first half of the century,

has been emasculated by the deliberate activity of a group of, we consider, misguided Christians. The present Conference Committee is not acceptable, presumably because of its membership and in some quarters its base of expediency. Evangelistic oversight is abhorrent to many Christians in Britain bringing with it particular distortions of practice. We object to this method of extending the kingdom and yet continue to stumble along under inefficient, inadequate and wasteful methods of preaching the gospel. We are not "anti-American": we object to some practices introduced by our American brethren, just as we would object to British innovators. We go so far as to state that, if the churches in Britain cannot organise themselves to preach the gospel in a more effective manner, then let us open wide our arms to our American brethren; let us accept their organisation; their energies; their dollars and their expertise; let us not be so critical as to be destructive of all attempts of concerned Christians to "preach Jesus and Him crucified." If we cannot do the job ourselves let us begin conversations with the concerned ones; let us bridge the gulf, before it becomes too wide, between the so called "anti-Americans," the "pro-Americans" and the American Christians themselves. One wonders if any definite prolonged effort has been made to acquaint both groups with the others' views, feelings and wishes.

Organise we must. For nearly a century the Slamannan district has been organised. There is a relationship between ten churches in that area which is resulting in the spread of the gospel, even if they do have their problems. One feels that they would be the first to admit that the conditions and circumstances of their base for co-operation is not the only method to present the evangel. The encouraging fact is that they have found a method which functions in their own environment and climate of opinion. Few British congregations can support a full-time proclaimer of the gospel. The concerned would say "Our real need is a re-awakening of the evangelistic zeal which marked the beginning of the movement, and which would find fitting expression in a willing, wholehearted devotion, not only of money, but of every power and ability with which we are gifted, to the service of the Master who bought us. In this is the cure for a disease, of which a money deficit is only a symptom; anything else can at best be but palliative." (1905 Leeds Conference).

Distance in these days of the motor car is no objection to co-operation and meetings for exchange of views. Within the northern counties and those of the Midlands are over twenty congregations. Is there not amongst these saints an individual, a group, an assembly with the courage, the foresight and the concern to originate positive action? Positive action is needed. The conditions which characterise the United States are fast being duplicated in England and very soon those congregations whose only concern is "to preach Jesus" will be forced to make a decision for one camp or the other. The experience, and straits, of some congregations are ample evidence of this.

There will be a concern expressed by those who do not wish to co-operate wholeheartedly outside the jurisdiction of the local church. This concern has been expressed by Christians since movements for evangelistic co-operation began from a movement started in the United States and this country in the early part of the last century. It is based on the desire to do only those things which are based on the "faith and practice of Apostolic churches" as revealed and described in the New Testament. In the pursuit of this ideal in co-operation a union of churches can never become an organic entity entrusted with the administrative functions of a central authority. We are not concerned about the establishment of a central authority: we recognise the danger. A resolution which must be basic to any co-operative activity is the declaration that co-operation is for evangelistic purposes only. If the Conference Committee is not acceptable then change it to an acceptable expedient before it is too late. Like those Christians who met at Leeds in 1905 we can say . . . "if we travel by ever so little beyond this line (evangelistic co-operation), we have entered the danger zone, and have started on courses of which conformity to the common type is the almost certain goal." However much we may desire that all communities of like faith and order should unite with the rest, the fact remains, that each has the right to decide the question, to co-operate or not, and for its

decision is not accountable to others. A church judging that it can better fulfil the purposes for which the Lord called it into being, without relations, except such as result from the family love, and so deciding, exercises an undeniable right. This means, as a necessary correlative, that the churches who wish to associate have the same right, which may be exercised without just blame, and without effect on the status of a church as a sister, which may, in the wisdom of the others, be or not be, welcomed into co-operation.

Reverting to the words of Campbell, ". . . but, in order to this [to co-operate], Christians must regard the church, or Body of Christ, as one community, though composed of many small communities, each of which is an organised member of this great organisation; which under Christ, as the supreme and sole Head, King, Lord and Law-giver, has the conquest of the whole world in its prayers, aims, plans and efforts. Hence there must be such an understanding and agreement between these particular congregations as will suffice to a recognition and approval of their several acts; so that the members or the measures of one community shall be treated with the respect due to them at home, in whatever community they may happen to be presented. On this principle only can any number of independent and distinct communities of any sort—political, commercial, literary, moral or religious—act in concert with mutual advantage to themselves, and with a proper reference to the general good."

That there is this desire to co-operate among many Christians is self evident; gifts are still being made to the Conference Committee; expressions of this desire are met everywhere Christians converse. Yet very little, some might say nothing, is done to realise this aim. Is it because we lack leadership of the correct stature? Certainly there is not a Campbell, a King or a Mauro in the church today. This is not an impassable bar to progress along organised lines, it is rather a result of the vacillating policy of the church in past years in its attempts to preach the gospel. Leadership of a very high order is desirable but not necessary to the extension of the kingdom. The meanest amongst us can and should be able to preach the gospel, if we remember that everything we do springs from an adoration we feel for Jesus. We must make do with what we are and what abilities we have; the greatest asset of the church is the ability of members of the Lord's Body yoked together and directed to the presentation of the evangel. These concerted abilities directed to the presentation of the word of reconciliation can become an extremely powerful weapon as we seek to convince men and turn them to Jesus.

Are there ten assemblies (an arbitrary number) willing to say in concert that we want to co-operate for the sake of the gospel? Ten communities might mean some two hundred to three hundred Christians. Three hundred Christians each laying aside two shillings per week, three pence and a halfpenny per day, can, in one year, raise almost sixteen hundred pounds. We regard this as minimal. Money is not and should not be allowed to be a barrier to the proclamation of the gospel. Are there men and women with the zeal we spoke of earlier; is there someone willing to harness this zeal? This is one occasion when we do need positive leadership—" . . . are we really unable to find among our number one man with enough sense . . ." to set the wheels of co-operation moving? The risk must be taken: there must be no destructive preliminary attempts to discover a method of co-operative evangelisation to the exclusion of all others; we must accept the expedient nature of the method; time is not on our side; a generation of young men and women, our generation, is growing up; which is frustrated by, and weary of, intolerance of other people's opinions shown by many Christians, backbiting and party shibboleths; "co-operation must never be debased to the level of a mere financial contribution; the churches will always be welcome even though they may need much, and have naught to give," . . . but equally the churches will grow to recognise that the co-operation once engaged in has a precedent claim to matters of great local importance, provided that these themselves belong to the realm of expediency. In matters of obligation laid upon the church by the Lord it has no choice. Such obligations, which include the relief of distress and the unavoidable expenses of the assembly must be met. However it is contended that the right of individual communities in other activities is modified by the liabilities of co-operation. Every activity involving the expenditure of time, energy, capabilities and money must be considered in the light of these liabilities. Before

an assembly incurs expenditure, even for so important a purpose as the erection of a more commodious meeting-place, or even the extension of local evangelistic work by expensive aid, priorities must be established in the context of liabilities which are contingent on co-operative activity.

Listen to our plea, consider our plea, pray for our plea, become party to our plea. For the sake of the Christ and the thousands in Britain who have not been given a fair hearing of the gospel because of our woefully weak and divided condition, is there not someone, some group, willing to begin positive action—now? Are there not Christians willing to meet on the understanding that co-operation is essential; on the understanding that the group are not meeting to define a method of evangelistic co-operation, but that they are met to begin co-operation?

J. DODSLEY, Kirkby-in-Ashfield

E. MAKIN, Ince

[We gladly publish the foregoing article. We feel that what is written has long needed saying. There is a dangerous vacuum among us, creating a frustration, especially as regards the church's most important task—to evangelise. Questions as to What, Why, Where, When? are constantly asked, and answers are not being given. There is a feeling of "Why doesn't somebody do something?" Well, why don't you, reader? Don't leave it for someone else to act. Act now by writing Ernest Makin, 95 Haigh Road, ASPULL, Lancs., as to your impressions of what has been said in the above statement, and how the suggestions made can be put into operation.—EDITOR]

BIBLE STUDY

II: BY BOOKS

THERE is a saying, "You can't see the wood for the trees." In other words, you can't see the general for the particular; you can't see the whole for the details; you can't get a general understanding for looking at the small components. The very details that make up the whole, as the trees compose the wood, are taking up your attention so that you cannot appreciate the design and beauty of the whole structure.

The saying is applicable to study of the 66 separate books of the Bible. There is much to be said for any and every mode of Bible study. Each has its uses and advantages and all are necessary for as firm a grasp of the scriptures as we can acquire. But it is advisable that we obtain a general, even if elementary, idea of a book of the Bible before we can dig deeper for the treasures contained in particular chapters, verses, subjects and even words.

For the study of a book of the Bible it is at least advisable that we learn, so far as can be known, something of its background—who wrote it, to whom, under what circumstances and for what purposes.

This statement may be thought a contradiction of what we said in the previous article. There is, however, no contradiction if it be understood that in those words we were urging the necessity of finding out God's will from His words in scripture reading and studying those words as themselves the best explanation of their meaning, without troubling to look into their background. In other words, *the Scriptures themselves and the Scriptures alone*. But in the study of a book we cannot always find from the words contained in it the details of background mentioned above. Hence, we have to try to ascertain such information from other sources—Bible encyclopaedias, dictionaries, commentaries, for example.

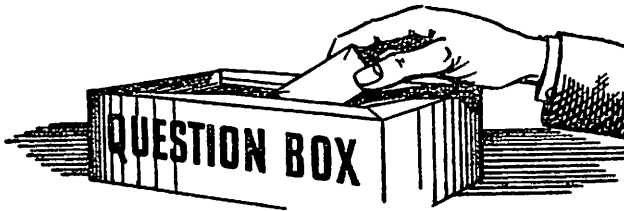
Just to read through a book of the Bible is an aid to understanding its parts by putting them into their true setting, their context. This is especially so in New Testament books. We thus grasp the main teachings and lessons of the gospels and of the epistles.

For instance we find Matthew often quoting the Old Testament books—"that it might be fulfilled which was written by the prophet, saying . . .": from which characteristic we understand that Matthew wrote to convince his fellow Jews that Jesus of Nazareth was Messiah. In reading Mark we are impressed by the stress laid on the works Jesus did, and by the characteristic "straightway" (immediately), demonstrating Jesus going about "doing good." There is a practicalness about Mark's book which was intended to convince the materialistic and sceptical Gentiles that this Jesus was Son of God. As we read through Luke we find, as in the same author's "Acts," the proofs of an accurate historian (and of a skilled doctor in the medical terms used). Even more, we discern Jesus Christ as not only the deliverer of His people, the Jews, but the Saviour of the world. And in John we have the great "signs" demonstrating Jesus as the Word made flesh.

In some instances the writers in a single verse or two clearly state their purposes in writing. Thus Luke in chap. 1:1-4, and John in chap. 20:31. In his brief epistle, the third verse, Jude states why he writes. We find much light thrown on statements in Paul's epistles when we turn to the record in Acts of what happened to Paul in those places to which afterwards he wrote the epistles.

It is much more difficult to find background information regarding Old Testament books than it is for the New. Very often we can find out much for ourselves by simply reading them in as many translations as we can. There is no substitute for reading the book itself, for this gives us a first-hand acquaintance with its teaching. We are able to form our own judgements, and it is all the better if our own reading gives us insight rather than our being slaves to other men's ideas. It is good to ask ourselves in our reading through or studying a book of the Bible "What does it convey to me?" "What message has this word of God for me?"

EDITOR



Conducted by
James Gardiner

"It is the custom to put a white linen cloth on the Lord's table. This is a very old tradition, but does it have any connection with scripture, or perhaps the Passover?"

I am sorry, but I can throw no light on the origin of the "very old tradition" of putting a white linen cloth on the Lord's table. It came as news to me that such a thing was a "tradition" at all, although I dare say in many congregations it is customary to spread a cloth across the table before setting the elements thereon—not necessarily white however, and not necessarily linen. I understand what the questioner means, of course, and from what enquiries I have been able to make it appears that the practice has no real connection with any scriptural injunction, but has arisen out of a desire to cover what would otherwise be a starkly bare table surface. It is therefore no more a "tradition" than our practice of putting a table cloth on the family table at every meal, in order that we might improve the appearance and suitability of the table as a place for spreading out food and utensils. Many of us use hired halls, and the state of the table surface on a Sunday morning often leaves a lot to be desired (tea and beer stains are not unknown) and therefore we spread a cloth to make a clean surface for the bread and cup. Even in our own hall and on our own table we usually spread a cloth, and although this is not to cover tea stains it still is an attempt at improving the appearance

of the table surface. Presumably when we do things for the Lord in service and worship there is a desire to do them in the best possible way and at least exhibit a little respect, care and forethought. Thus it is that the brother or sister spreading the *Lord's table* observes the courtesy afforded to the *family table*, and spreads a cloth before setting down the tokens. This has, of course, nothing to do with the feast and has no more relevance to the actual breaking of the bread remembrance observance than linoleum or a carpet has on the floor. I personally have no objections whatever to this spreading of a cloth, as I do not believe that it matters as to what kind of surface the table has—whether it be linen cloth, bare wood, French polished wood, glass or formica. It would matter, however, if someone insisted on the spreading of a linen cloth on the strength of its being a “very old tradition.” We would require to know by what scriptural authority it was insisted upon and exactly whose “very old tradition” it was claimed to be. Giving the table a decent working surface is one thing, but trying to beautify it is quite another. We see the occasional vase of flowers, and while perhaps this is innocuous enough, at the other end of the scale we have the table called the “altar,” carved and ornately wrought in silver and gold. Perhaps the table would be all the better for being as rough-hewn and rugged as the cross, and the simple beauty of the emblems on the table would not have to vie with cheap and tawdry elegance of a table itself, ornately gold.

The phrase “very old tradition” should perhaps receive a few comments. Traditions have no place in the worship of God unless they are God-appointed, e.g. 2 Thess. 2:15: “Therefore brethren, stand fast, and hold the *traditions* which ye have been taught, whether by word or our epistle.” These are the only kind of traditions to be followed. We read also of *traditions to avoid*, e.g. the traditions of men. Indeed there is the danger that men’s overlay of tradition may negate the very commands of God. Jesus in Mark 7:3 says that the *traditions* of the (Jewish) elders had “made the commandment of God of none effect”; Col. 2:8: “Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the *traditions* of men, after the rudiments of this world, and not after Christ.”

I know that the questioner is using the word “tradition” in the sense of “custom” or “practice,” and that she understands the difference between such a “tradition” and the traditions mentioned in 2 Thess. 2:15; but we have to be careful in case our hearers do not equally understand, and think we are advocating *human* traditions in the worship of God. “Now I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances as I delivered them to you” (1 Cor. 11:2). This scripture sums it all up, surely.

Questions, please, to James R. Gardiner, 88 Davidson Terrace, Haddington, East Lothian, Scotland.

“TAKING THE OVERSIGHT”

IN 1 Cor. 9:14 Paul says it is a law that those who preach the gospel should live of it. In view of his reference to the natural reward of the husbandman, the labouring ox and the soldier in warfare, it would appear that it was not necessary to be an apostle to come under this law. Turning to Acts 20:34-35, we find he gives a directive to the elders at Ephesus that, as he had worked with his own hands to support himself and others, so it was their duty to work for their own support and be of assistance to others. It would appear that these two laws were in conflict—“Preachers to live of the gospel” and “Elders to work.”

The first thing that strikes one here is that an elder is not a “preacher.” True he should be “apt to teach” as a qualification. There is a vast difference between “teaching” and “preaching.” Jesus said “preach” to the nations and “teach” disciples. Rarely is a combination of the two found in one person, the apostles being outstanding exceptions (see Acts 15:35). Almost anybody can preach (see Acts 8:4—and take note that the apostles were not scattered abroad), but few can teach.

Much is said about “mutual ministry.” All the “mutual ministry” we have found so far in the New Testament is that confined strictly to each local church. In the

event of the quarterly speaking arrangements of a church being filled by visiting brethren, where does "mutual ministry" fit in? In Eph. 4:16 Paul instructs these saints that its increase and building up is its own responsibility, "according to the working in measure of each several part" (see also Col. 2:19; 1 Thess. 5:11; 1 Cor. 3:10-17).

The New Testament church had its elders, deacons and teachers, all of whom are found in Paul's letters to Timothy. Now it also had its preachers—"for from you sounded out the word of the Lord" (1 Thess. 1:8). So there would be worship, mutual edification, and preaching.

This raises another question. Where does the office of evangelist come in? Well, nowhere. Paul in Eph. 4:13 says evangelists were for a limited period, "till we all come into the oneness of the faith." And here this fact needs keeping in mind—that the eldership and diaconate were to be permanent in view of the minuteness of their qualifications being laid down in scripture. In vain do we look for authority and qualifications for evangelists as a class. Some will say "Paul told Timothy to do the work of an evangelist." Well, what of it? Listen to one of our forebears: "Timothy was working among believers more like an overseer, instructing the flock. Who knows what parting instructions he may have received before the letter was written? The church did NOT have the New Testament, BUT IT HAD TIMOTHY. God gave some evangelists for perfecting of the saints. We now have our New Testament which is a surer guide than all the evangelists on earth."

Someone wants to be an evangelist. As there is no scripture on how to go about it other means are found. He becomes an evangelist and goes to "regions beyond," giving up work to do so. Now, what prevented him from doing the same work in his own church? Why desire the title of evangelist? Why give up work? We presume 1 Cor. 9:14 will be used. Let us look into the matter. From 1 Thess. 1:8 we learn there were preachers in the church. Now in 2 Thess. 3:6-12 Paul states that whilst he and his fellow-labourers were with them they worked with their own hands for their support. He also lays it down that as he had done so "night and day" (1 Thess. 2:9; note also 1 Tim. 5:8) these saints should imitate him and work for their living. This would include all in the church—elders, deacons, and preachers. The record of the church at Thessalonica (1 Thess. 1:6-8) stands to its credit down the centuries—striking contrast to twentieth-century clamouring for an obsolete office.

Reverting to 1 Cor. 9:14: from Paul's statement in verses 12 and 15 it appears this was not a standing law, seeing he set it aside. Yet he had the right to support from them. To meet this situation he accepted wages from other churches he was not serving (2 Cor. 11:8). In Eph. 4 he said, "Apostles, prophets, evangelists, etc."—that is GIFTED individuals—were to cease. With them the law of 1 Cor. 9:14 ceased. The directive given to elders at Ephesus and the Thessalonians is binding. In 1 Cor. 13 Paul says that tongues, prophecies, etc.—that is external evidences—were to cease with the advent of the perfected testimony of the apostles in the form of the New Testament "when that which is perfect is come." And note that in the New Testament this word "perfect" is used in two ways: Institutionally, referring to the church; and Conditionally, when referring to individuals.

So we are left with what? A perfect guide in the form of the New Testament. An institutionally perfect church, having its seat of authority in its elders, its servants in its deacons, its teachers and preachers; providing worship, mutual ministry, and personal evangelism. Now surely no one will deny that what was done and commanded to be done, can be done now, with the same results following. Let us think on these things.

ALFRED JACKSON

The chains of habit are generally too small to be felt until they are too strong to be broken.

There is no limit to what a man can do when he does not care who gains the credit for it.
W. T. Arnold

SCRIPTURE READINGS

JUNE 1968

2—Jonah 3	Matthew 12:38-50
9—Isaiah 6	Matthew 13:1-23
16—Daniel 12	Matthew 13:24-43
23—Proverbs 3:11-27	Matthew 13:44-58
30—Genesis 45:1-15	Matthew 14:1-21

RELATIONSHIP TO JESUS

(Matthew 12:49 & 50)

We like to have relatives who are good. We are proud of them. Their goodness reflects on us. On the other hand if relatives get into trouble through wrongdoing we hang our heads for shame. In other words we share the glory or the shame of the lives of those to whom we are closely related. They bear our name and are our flesh and blood. But the whole human race is related, and the genealogy of Jesus is traced back to Adam—and to God Himself (Luke 3:23-38). However, our text leads us to consider the closest relatives of our Saviour. It was their endeavour to interfere that resulted in His words on the subject (Mark 3:21 — the A.V. margin and later translations indicate that “friends” means strictly “kinsmen,” “relatives,” “family”).

No greater honour than that conferred on Mary, the mother of Jesus, has been given to our humanity. It has resulted, not perhaps surprisingly, in a much exaggerated veneration for her. The scriptures give us very little light on her life, but contemplation of her so close relationship to her child is startling when we recognise the Fatherhood of God and her motherhood. We can hardly measure the privilege also of the brothers and sisters in that household, and of course of Joseph. Jesus in the home as baby, boy and youth presents so wonderful a picture because we know he was absolutely without sin. Most of us have known good children as well as difficult children, but here was a perfect child. His influence must have been a marvellous help to the parents, and it seems clear that he followed Joseph in the work of the carpenter (Mark 6:3). The record states “the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him” (Luke 2:40).

Then follows the only other light on His childhood in the account of the visit to Jerusalem at the age of twelve. These solitary references to His childhood led Farrar to comment: “This silence of the evangelists is a proof of their simple faithfulness, and is in striking contrast with the blaze of foolish and dishonouring miracles with which the apocryphal gospels degrade the divine boyhood.” Jewish boys were called “little” up to this age and were then presented in the synagogue and regarded as “sons of the law.” While Jesus was not given any special training (and would so be regarded as “unlearned”), there is no doubt he would have access to the scriptures, and certainly knew them. The visit to Jerusalem then would be a special development in His life and presumably the first time His parents took him with them to the Passover celebrations.

In spite of the miraculous manifestations and visitations attending His birth, Joseph and Mary did not appreciate their son's messiahship in any full sense. They trusted Him completely to look after Himself for they went a whole day without anxiety. However we can readily understand the haste of their return to Jerusalem and the overpowering fear, growing hourly more unbearable, which filled their minds as they searched unsuccessfully for three days before they found Him where they should have looked first—in His Father's House! So deeply religious a boy would surely have his most serious interest in the worship. Then “He went down with them and was subject unto them.” His parents, with whom He would have the closest and most loving relationship, did not understand Him. Indeed, how could anyone appreciate the honour of being entrusted with “God manifest in the flesh”? Perhaps we cannot in the flesh realise how He was truly man. He so often used the title “Son of Man” to identify Himself with us, and we share the honour of the parents and their failure to grasp the truth “in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.”

It is assumed, and very reasonably, that Joseph died during the youth or early manhood of Jesus, and it was therefore left to the mother, brothers and sisters to come to the parting of the ways when Jesus left them. He left the work of the

carpenter to other hands, probably His brothers', was baptised in Jordan, and after the Temptation began His preaching, teaching and healing work in the towns of Galilee. The needs of the family were undoubtedly provided for otherwise. We try to realise what this meant to the home, but it is certain a keen interest would be taken in Jesus's work.

When the intensity of interest and popularity reached its height, they would likely share the view of those who said "He is beside Himself," not that they could think Him mad or under demoniacal power, but that He was utterly overdoing it. There was not even time to eat bread in the busiest days. They would be anxious for His wellbeing and even for His life, for they must have heard of the hostility of the religious leaders, whose influence was powerful. They may also have understood their desire to destroy Him. We connect Mark 3:21 with verse 31, our present passage, and Luke 8:19-21—which please read. In their anxiety to restrain ("lay hold on") Him they came desiring to speak with Him, to interview Him.

We cannot think Jesus had any objection to seeing His kinsfolk, or had the slightest ill-feeling against them, but He had a lesson to teach which was of primary importance, namely that any obligation of relationship could not be allowed to hinder His appointed work. Those who were crowding around and listening attentively were nearer to Him than fleshly relationship could make them. True kinship of a universal order depended on hearing the word of God, which was HIS WORD, and doing it (Luke 8:21). It was therefore His first duty and object to continue with such and increase their opportunity to come into the fuller and better relationship.

Everyone who is willing to listen to Jesus and take sincere interest in His teaching comes into close relationship with Him. Obviously the more time we give to learning His way, and the more we practise what we learn, the nearer our relationship. Every part of the life of a family is intimate and the way we think, speak and act affects all the members of it, and its reputation and influence. How intimate are we with our Saviour, and how are we affecting the reputation and influence of the household of God (Eph. 2:19; Gal 6:10)?

R. B. SCOTT

THE FISHERMAN'S PRAYER

Lord grant this day I catch a fish
So large that even I
In telling of it afterward
Shall have no need to lie.

NEWS FROM THE CHURCHES

Bonteheuvel (South Africa).—There was great rejoicing on 19th March when Mrs. Willie of Bridgetown (who for quite a long period has been attending both the services and cottage meetings) was baptized into Christ (Psalm 107:8).

Our prayers are that Sis. Willie might be the means of "leading her husband and children to the Lord."

Bedminster (Bristol).—We are able once again to rejoice, for the Lord has added two young men to His church by baptism.

We pray that they both may be kept faithful and a means of much blessing.

L.D.

Ince. — On Tuesday, April 30th, some Christians at Petticoat Lane were privileged to witness the birth of a child of God. Begotten by God many months ago, the immersion of William Nicholson, the husband of a gentle sister, marks his new birth, forgiveness of his sins, his reconciliation with his Father in heaven and, we pray, the beginning of a new and useful phase in life as he grows from a babe to a mature adult in Christ. Pray for the congregation and for your new brother.

E. Makin

Morley (Zoar Street).—Bro. A. E. Winstanley of Loughborough served us in a mission effort from the 6th to the 21st April. During this period we engaged in prayer and devotional meetings, gospel meetings, Bible study meetings and hospital visitation. Attendances and interest were high. The studies in Philippians helped the spiritual growth of the church, and the gospel went forth with saving power. During this effort four people accepted Christ as their Saviour and obeyed His gospel. They are: Susan Elsen, Peter Stell, Mary Hicks and Alice Haywood. The first

three are teenagers, and Sister Haywood has passed her "three-score years and ten." We give God the glory for this further evidence of the power of the gospel, and pray that these new Christians will be numbered with those who remain faithful to the end.

On "Easter" Monday we were led in a very enjoyable ramble through the country, when we were favoured with ideal weather conditions. This was followed by a social gathering.

To all who helped, in any way, to make the whole effort a successful one, we express our thanks and appreciation.

CAMEROONS EVANGELISATION FUND

Further to my report of last month I would like to add that I have received a letter from the congregation of the saints at Kumba, West Cameroon. They want me to convey to the British brethren their sincere and very heartfelt thanks for the help that we have sent them in the past, and they hope that we shall continue to try and support them in their present endeavours (mentioned in last month's report). They also speak highly of brother D. N. Elangwe. I quote: "... he is more than equal to the task of evangelisation. Few Cameroonians (if any) could favourably compare with him. He is a man with positively rare qualities. The tracts and other literature he publishes from the press you bought him are doing much to spread the gospel in West Cameroon and even in parts of East Cameroon."

Brethren please continue to actively support these good brethren and the spreading of the gospel in the West Cameroon (and apparently East Cameroon). We are fortunate in having some sound brethren, like brother Elangwe, over there in whom we can place trust and who are competent in preaching. We spend much money in distributing literature and invitations in Britain, most of which goes into the fire.

In some African villages a tract can be passed from person to person so often that the printing is rubbed off the paper. Surely we should and must jump at such an opportunity of printing and distributing as much gospel material as we can. Please send what little you can. The

appeal is to churches and individuals alike. Please act now, as the call is urgent to place the pure gospel in the hands of as many as possible.

All donations to James R. Gardiner, 88 Davidson Terrace, Haddington, East Lothian, Scotland.

During March and April, 1968, seven new congregations have been formed and 122 baptised.

D. N. Elangwe

OBITUARY

Leicester.—It is with deep sorrow that we report the passing of our beloved Sister, Annie Evelyn George, on April 19th at the age of 87 years.

She was regular in her attendance at the Lord's Table, but in recent years she could not meet with her brethren in the winter months because of ill-health.

She had been a member of the church for a good number of years, and everyone who met her soon knew what Christ meant to her. Even to the very end her mind was centred on the Lord Jesus Christ, and just before her end she was in prayer to God.

We commend those who are left to mourn her loss to our heavenly Father, and may God give them rest and peace.

S. Harbottle

Loughborough (Oxford Street).—Edward Percy Underwood fell asleep in Jesus on April 29th, aged 87 years. The funeral services were conducted on May 3rd by this writer.

Brother Underwood came to us less than three years ago, moving here from Leicester. Since that time he has been a very faithful, and much beloved member of this congregation. We thank God for him, and rejoice that he has passed into the Saviour's keeping. Our memory of him will be a sweet fragrance. "Then I heard a voice from heaven saying: 'Write this: Happy are the dead who from now on die in the service of the Lord!' 'Certainly so!' answers the Spirit. 'They will enjoy rest from their hard work; for they take with them the results of their service'" (Revelation 14:13). We rejoice in the "blessed hope" of the saints.

A. E. Winstanley

COMING EVENTS

Ince. — Bible School Workshop, Saturday, June 15th. Four discussion groups: (a) Objectives of Bible school work, A. Marsden; (b) Syllabus and content, A. Ashurst; (c) Use of visual aids, etc., A. Balmer; (d) Teaching methods, T. King.

2.0 to 4.45 p.m. will be occupied in discussion groups; reporting back to entire group; questions.

5.0 p.m.: Basket tea.

6.30 p.m.: Gospel meeting — J. Dodsley, Kirkby.

It is hoped to present the findings of the groups in printed or duplicated form and that this meeting will be the first in a series of such meetings, which will enable Christians to organise more effective schools.

E. Makin

Speaker: Bro. John Justin (Evangelist working in Lisburn, N. Ireland).

Please support this effort by your prayers, and by your presence, if that is possible.

THE HUMAN PAIN

How can one explain the heart—
Emotion deep and true,
The love for those who love us not,
The love for those who do;
The bitter pain which lies within,
The sigh for love undone;
The patient wait with tear-dimmed eye
For love once bought and won?
How can a heart that's torn between
A hope, a fear, a dream,
Be analysed or sought about?
LET GOD STAND IN BETWEEN!

Lily Renshaw

UNITED MISSION EFFORT

The Morley, East Ardsley and Dewsbury churches will be conducting a united mission effort from the 17th to 23rd June, 1968 (D.V.).

Meetings will be held in the meeting room of the East Ardsley Church in Main Street.

Monday, 17th, to Thursday, 20th. — Meetings nightly at 7.30 p.m.

Saturday, 22nd.—Meeting at 6 p.m.

Sunday, 23rd.—Meeting at 7.30 p.m.

CHANGE OF ADDRESS

Bro. John Rogers and his sister Tegwen: 10 Vale Close, Eastwood, Notts.

WANTED

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Please inform Philip Slate, Church of Christ, Barnhill Road, Wembley, Middlesex.

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