

The SCRIPTURE STANDARD

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

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THE UNKNOWN GOD

I was in one of Edinburgh's many art galleries the other day, in connection with my work, and there was an exhibition of modern art being shown at the time. I was asked by an attendant if I had paid for a ticket and I assured him that now I had seen what was on show I was glad that I was there on business and wouldn't need a ticket. In my humble view the artist should have been paying the public to go and look at such stuff. I know that beauty is in the eye of the beholder but in this exhibition there was no beauty to behold. There were about five huge 'pictures' all fairly similar — they were mainly entirely white with one or two small black blotches thereon. There was one canvas entirely covered in red paint except for one yellow stripe down the middle. There was one canvas eight feet high and one inch (yes, one inch) broad, which was framed, believe it or not, and was entirely red (like a ribbon). Finally there was a canvas ten feet square which was entirely painted with matt black paint, including the frame, rather like a school blackboard. The gentleman who was showing me round the gallery asked me what I thought the artist was trying to say in the entirely black picture. I said that I thought that the artist was poking fun at those who would pay money to view such pictures, or worse still, was trying to tell them what fools they were. I should perhaps add that security in the gallery during the exhibition was extremely tight, a bit like Fort Knox, because that little handful of 'paintings' was worth two million pounds.

As I stood there in the gallery watching the paying public filing past these offerings of modern art, clutching their catalogues, and gazing wide-eyed for endless minutes at the 'blackboard' canvas I could not help from reflecting upon the complete gullibility of the human animal, in spite of his pretence of sophisticated intelligence and intellectuality. One of the gallery attendants, who confided to me that he thought the exhibition 'a load of rubbish', told me that many visitors spent a long time studying a red-painted knob on the wall (for setting off a fire alarm) thinking that it was part of the exhibition. Not many hard-bitten Scots paid to see these wonders, the visitors were mainly from abroad who had come to the annual Edinburgh Festival of Music, Art and Drama.

As I reflected upon the gullibility of man in matters of art it seemed a short step to think of his equal gullibility in the much more important matter of religion. Think of how easily gulled men and women are in the matter of religion. Think of what we will accept in the matter of religion. There is perhaps some excuse for us being 'conned' in the world of art, where there are no established rules and where, once a

man has an established reputation as a painter he can, thereafter, 'get away with anything'. In the realm of 'art' we can have our likes and dislikes, differing tastes and preferences, varying ideas of what constitutes 'art' and it would seem that in the present state of the religious world similar options are open to all. "Whatever turns you on" as they say. New religions are springing up almost every day, in the east and west, from astrology to Zen, from witchcraft to 'Jesus-freaks', from spiritualism to satanism, from religious psychiatry to transcendental meditation. Most of us have heard of, or come in contact with, Hare Krishna, Scientology, 'Children of God,' 'The Jesus Movement', Black Muslims, Zen Buddhists, Bahai' World Faith, 'Divine Light Mission', the Sun Myung Moon or 'Moonies', and yet these form only a drop in the bucket. The true God, the God of heaven and earth, was regarded, many years ago, by the men of Athens, as the 'Unknown God'. Alas, God is just as unknown today. Certainly many in the world seem 'turned on to religion' but it's the religion of the charlatan, the drug 'pusher', the 'weirdo', the 'drop-out', the fortune-seeker and the Indian Guru. It has little to do with God, the maker of heaven and earth.

We may feel that the chances of reaching those new religions with the truth are pretty slim, yet, as Solomon said: 'There is nothing new under the sun' and the world has seen all manner of strange religions before. For instance, in the apostle Paul's day, a Roman satirist said that it was easier to find a god in Athens than a man. On Paul's first visit to Athens he was appalled at the complete paganism and idolatry which prevailed. The Athenians lived on learned lectures and flourished on a diet of speculation, argument and discussion, strange religions thrived and all manner of gods had devotees. It is both instructive and interesting to read (in Acts 17) of how Paul went about the task of addressing the elite of intellectual unbelievers in Athens and trying to reach them with his God, the true and living God.

Paul's speech, we note, began with a compliment, "Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are more religious than others. For as I passed by and beheld your devotions, I found an altar to the UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship him I declare unto you." Paul had, of course, a difficult task before him because his audience played with ideas as children play with marbles and doubtless regarded him as just another professional peddler of new ideas. Nor could Paul refer such an audience to the scriptures. What he did do, however, was something we can all do in similar circumstances; he, by a series of telling comparisons, presented the true God in striking contrast to the puny gods of the Greeks. Paul here tries to build on what slender common ground there was by telling the Athenians how religious they already were — so religious in fact that they were searching for the unknown God. This showed that even 'devout pagans' are partly religious and have secret altars of their own. Clearly Paul wanted to win the Greeks rather than take them by force and so he urged them not to waste their precious capacity for religion on unworthy ends and on small gods. If they were going to have a god they should choose the real God — if they wanted a religion they should want the true religion.

Paul's opening assertion in his speech that his God, "made the worlds and all things therein" was clearly to show the inconsequentiality of all other gods and their complete irrelevance. Even as the Athenians reeled from such a contemplation Paul followed with another, equally shattering, that his God is "Lord of heaven and earth" and therefore there is little need or likelihood of Him dwelling in man-made temples; even the beautiful marble temples which abounded in Greece. Such a God clearly transcended Neptune, the so-called God of the sea, and Jupiter the god of the sky. Nor, said Paul, could his God be worshipped with men's hands (as though He needed anything) indeed it is God who gives to men life, breath and everything else — (a striking contrast to the deaf and mute gods of the Greeks.) Pagans used to place

food before their gods, whereas it is God who feeds man — quite a difference. Paul then went on to describe how God had made “all nations of men” brothers and of one blood, to dwell peaceably on the face of the earth and that God “determined the times previously appointed” and defined the bounds of mans habitations. This demolished the idea that pagan gods protected home and nation and showed that national boundaries, instead of being regulated by the gods, were under the complete control of Paul’s God, the true God. Paul then reveals that the eternal purpose of God in all these things is to induce men (God’s creation) to see after God, and find Him. What nobler purpose could there be, than to seek such a God? Although at first, in seeking God, we may grope around like blind men, yet Paul assures all that God is not too hard to find, since in Him we live and move and have our being. It is at this point that Paul quotes one of Greece’s own poets as saying that “man is the offspring of God” and, in agreeing with the sentiment, Paul adds that if men are the offspring of God we should not be so foolish as to imagine that God can be made of metal (gold or silver) or be carved from stone.

Drawing all the threads of his arguments together the apostle stresses the moral responsibility we have to the true God, in that we are His offspring. Thus, says Paul, God has winked at our ignorance and foolishness in the past but now calls upon us to repent for He has appointed a day of reckoning with His wayward creature; man. Here Paul introduces Jesus, not yet by name, nor yet as a loving Saviour, but as man’s universal Judge, and presents, as proof that Jesus will be Judge, the fact that God raised Him from the dead. As the Athenians were traditionally fairly well convinced that there was no future state many mocked the mention of the resurrection and apparently the meeting broke up at this point. Paul’s time had not been wasted, however, for we read that some believed and followed him.

There is hope for those who seek after God, even although they may presently see Him as the ‘Unknown God’ and doubtless there are some in the modern religions and cults of today who, basically, are searching for God, albeit in the wrong place. False religions change only in terminology and deity, and Paul’s discourse on Mars’ Hill, Athens, 2,000 years ago is as adequate an answer today to all followers of strange doctrines as it was when given. The true God transcends all and any others. He is the God of Creation, awesome but friendly and He gives to the world Hope. The cults don’t offer hope — rather they assist men in becoming reconciled to despair. The cults end in a not-so-spiritual cul-de-sac but God gives meaning and purpose to life. Men seem gullible in the galleries of art and are certainly vulnerable in the maze of modern religions. There are those who are blindly feeling after God. May we, like Paul, be able to point them in the right direction.

Editor

LOVE. THE GREATEST THING IN THE WORLD

6. Diamonds Are Forever 1 Cor. 13. 6b-7

How fitting that we conclude our consideration of this most wonderful chapter, where we have likened TRUE LOVE to an eternity ring studded with beautiful gems, to say the precious stones are all diamonds. “Diamonds are Forever,” so the popular saying goes, and the ring of Love is ETERNAL. Diamonds, by their cut, turn white light into all the colours of the rainbow. While the colours observed may be different and ever changing, the gem itself has no colour — just purity. Our effort

has been to give the subconscious mind something upon which to draw, to recall the thoughts expressed in our exposition of I Cor. 13.

We have five stones left to consider. Whereas Paul has often used the negative to enforce the positive, he now concludes with five positive, emphatic statements.

X. LOVE rejoiceth with the Truth

Literally, Love rejoiceth in that which is genuine. No matter what the subject, the pleasure to Love is that it is real and not a pretence. When Love looks at people it rejoices to see the real person displayed. So much pretence is abroad, hypocrisy it is called and that word is the perfect description. In the 16th and 17th centuries when the Bible was being translated into English, a "HYPOCRITE" was a person who acted on the stage and the word was used to interpret the Greek for "a false person." Love rejoices in the genuine; can you not hear the pleasure in Jesus' voice when he says, "Behold an Israelite indeed in whom there is no guile." No one minds when a man dresses in a moth-eaten overcoat and treads the boards crying, "Bah, humbug" and purports to be Dicken's Scrooge. It is a claim to Godliness by one whose actions belie their claim which is so strongly reproved in the Scriptures. Read what John says about pretence which is intended to deceive. "Whoso hath this world's goods and seeth his brother in need and shutteth up his compassion from him, HOW DOTH THE LOVE OF GOD DWELL IN HIM?" James uses the same illustration in regard to faith. How foolish we are to pretend to be what we are not, in front of our compatriots, when He who sees and knows all is the only One who matters, and is not deceived one little bit. Yes, Love rejoices when truth is enacted just as when it is spoken.

A school-master with a class of boys, was approached by the Head-master who considered one in the class had broken the study window. The teacher responded by saying he would ask the boy so accused.

"And what good will that do," snorted the Head. "He won't admit it?"

There was complete confidence and pleasure in the master's reply, "Oh Roger may be a bit of a scamp but he always tells the truth."

Love rejoiceth in/with the truth.

XI. Love beareth all things

This is one of the many statements in the Scriptures where it is essential to know what the Bible means by what it says; if we are to enjoy the full beauty of the text. This is definitely not a repetition of "Suffereth Long." This has nothing to do with bearing pain, suffering, nor a "cross" of any kind. This "beareth" means to carry away into hiding. Literally, "Love covereth or hideth all things." For illustration of the text, see the very last phrase in James' letter. The shielding from public view of sins which have received God's forgiveness. LOVE covers all things. How often do we expose, publish even embellish the misdemeanours we hear about. Note carefully the Apostle Paul's attitude in Gal. 6.1. If only we could all realise we are just as vulnerable, albeit in a different sphere. It would seem that nowadays Love could not be a journalist for it is only the things which Love would bear away and hide (permanently) which the public desires to read. Love beareth all things.

XII. Love believeth all things

No, this is not universal credulity. The man of Love is far too wise to believe that which is proved false, but Love is prepared to accept a person's statement, and to view all actions as done with good intent, to accept the professed motive. The negative or opposite approach may help to understanding of the statement. Love does not

go constantly looking for faults, is not forever questioning motives and doubting the veracity of statements.

Love believes the best and puts the best interpretation on all that is done, at all times.

XIII. Love hopeth all things

Hope is composed of two elements in equal proportions. Desire and expectation. I desire the unlimited wealth which would allow me to do all the good I dream about, but having no expectation, I cannot say I hope to be rich. Likewise, a man finding himself in the hands of the law because of his misdeeds, may well expect severe punishment, but never could it be said he desired it. Thus he did not hope for punishment although he had every expectation of it. Love is constantly hoping: desiring and expecting: good in respect of fellow creatures. An eager looking for good in and for all men. Love Hopeth all things. If desire is great enough and expectation is strong enough, the full realisation will be worked for. A hymn by G. Thring sums up these thoughts very well.

Hope on, hope on, the golden days
Are not as yet a-dawning,
The mists of night,
Precede the light,
And usher in the morning.

Hope on, hope on, though black the clouds,
Dark shadows intertwining,
Yet calm and still,
O'er heath and hill,
The stars will soon be shining.

Hope on, hope on, through frost and snow,
Through trouble, toil and sorrow,
Through wind and rain,
And tears and pain,
The sun will pierce tomorrow.

Hope on, hope on, though friends be few,
And dark the way before thee,
The God of Love,
From Heaven above,
Shall spread His radiance o'er thee.

XIV. Love endureth all things

In I Peter 2. 20. the same word is translated "take it patiently." Love takes everything patiently. The fourteenth and final diamond in our Eternity Ring of Love is patience. Now, as so often has been said before, Patience is not a resignation of effort, an idle waiting for God or someone else to fulfil our wishes. Patience is a working; watching; waiting for the desired end. Please read Eph. 6. 10-18. Here is Paul's example of Patience. Never ruffled by difficulties, never harrassed by opposition, but just, having made every possible preparation, keep on keeping on. Consistently working for the benefit and happiness of the beloved.

That is how Love endureth all things.

In conclusion

A statement by H. W. Beecher.

"A man may read aloud this chapter on Love and not a murmur of its meaning be in his heart. He will read it reverently as he thinks a Christian should: and will arise

and straight away do the opposite. Not long-suffering; not kind; not hoping, bearing, believing, enduring all things: but thinking evil, delighting in evil, behaving unseemly and allowing himself to be provoked. He reads it with never a thought that what he reads applies to himself."

What about you my brother, my sister. Each look at YOUR OWN hand and see if you are wearing this Eternity Ring of Love. I doubt if you will ever see it on anyone else's hand until it is on your own. Brethren get on to this real Loving for

LOVE is the Greatest Thing in the World.

PAUL JONES

GLEANINGS

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

SAINTS

"Saints" — a word that has been woefully misapplied both by the Church and the world. The former has given it as a special honour to a few, and "decorated" with it mainly the possessors of a false ideal of sanctity — that of the ascetic and monastic sort. The latter uses it with a sarcastic intonation, as if it implied much cry and little wool, loud professions and small performance, not without a touch of hypocrisy and crafty self-seeking.

Saints are not people living in cloisters after a fantastic ideal, but men and women immersed in the vulgar work of every-day life and worried by the small prosaic anxieties which fret us all, who amidst the whirr of the spindle in the mill, and the clink of the scales on the counter, and the hubbub of the market place and the jangle of the courts, are yet living lives of conscious devotion to God. The root idea of the word, which is an Old Testament word, is not moral purity, but separation to God. The holy things of the old covenant were things set apart from ordinary use for His service. So, on the high priest's mitre was written Holiness to the Lord. So the Sabbath was kept "holy", because set apart from the week in obedience to Divine command.

Sanctity, and saint, are used now mainly with the idea of moral purity, but that is a secondary meaning. The real primary signification is separation to God. Consecration to Him is the root from which the white flower of purity springs most surely. There is a deep lesson in the word as to the true method of attaining cleanliness of life and spirit. We cannot make ourselves pure, but we can yield ourselves to God and the purity will come.

But we have not only here the fundamental idea of holiness, and the connection of purity of character with self-consecration to God, but also the solemn obligation on all so-called Christians thus to separate and devote themselves to Him. We are Christians as far as we give ourselves up to God, in the surrender of our wills and the practical obedience of our lives — so far and not one inch further". Alexander McLaren.

CALLED SAINTS

"This whole subject of saintship is one of vital importance, because the one and only business of the Church of God in the world is to make saints; not to make scholars, not to make artists, not to make athletes, not to make politicians, not to make merchants, not to make manufacturers, but to make saints.

Some one here is immediately saying in his heart, or her heart: Yes, that is the kind of thing I do not believe in; that is where religion has gone wrong; this man is

not practical. What do you mean by practical? For a long time men have declared that the Church of God had failed because of her other-worldliness, that she is not practical. When the Church of God ceases to be other-worldly she loses all her power to touch this world with anything worth while.

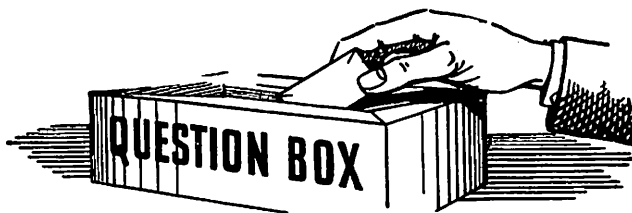
I do not say that the Church of God is not interested in scholarship, or in art, or in athletics, or in policy, or in merchant-men, or in manufacture; but that her business is not that of making men and women any of these things. Her business is that of making men and women saints, and from that standpoint she qualifies the scholar and the artist and the athlete and the politician and the merchant and the manufacturer.

Yet how afraid we are of the word. I think our fear is largely caused by two facts; first, mediaeval misrepresentation, and, secondly, modern misinterpretation of holiness. A man says: "I am a Christian but I do not profess to be a saint." I say to such a man: If you are no saint you are no Christian. If you are a Christian you are a saint." Campbell Morgan.

NOW SEE WHAT A CHRISTIAN IS

"Now see what a Christian is, drawn by the hand of Christ. He is a man on whose clear and open brow God has set the stamp of truth: one whose very eye beams bright with honour; in whose very look and bearing you may see freedom, manliness, veracity — a brave man, a noble man — frank, generous, true — with, it may be, many faults — whose freedom may take the form of impetuosity or rashness, but the form of meanness never. Young men! If you have been deterred from religion by its apparent feebleness and narrowness, remember — it is a manly thing to be a Christian." F. W. Robertson.

Selected by Leonard Morgan



Conducted by
Alf Marsden

"Why is it that leaders and preachers in the Church of Christ do not refer to themselves as 'the Minister,' the 'Reverend,' or 'the Priest,' etc., or do they secretly like these titles even though they do not use them?"

I understand that this question was posed to a brother by someone who is not a member of the church. Some people evidently take exception to the fact that there are Christians who simply want to say that they are members of the Church of Christ. Such people think that because we do not use sectarian names we are being exclusive and egotistical, and that we are somehow suggesting that we are inevitably right and that all others who profess christianity are inevitably wrong. This is far from the truth, but what we do say is that if by using Bible names we become exclusive, then we are glad to be exclusive. It was the Lord who answered Peter's confession by saying, "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church" (Matt. 16:16). The 'rock' was the truth of Peter's confession. "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God"; the personal possessive pronoun identifies the Church as the

Church of Christ. It was the Christ who named His Church in this *exclusive* sense; it was the same Christ who made His Church all-*inclusive*, "whosoever will may come."

Furthermore, we look to the Bible for a definition of the terms we should use for certain individuals within the Church who have to perform specific duties. When these definitions do not coincide with the titles used by other religious groups, we must not be misunderstood if we say that we wish to accept the authority of the Bible in this respect; indeed, we prefer to accept the authority of the Bible in *all* respects. So then, why do our leaders prefer not to use the titles 'Reverend,' or 'Vicar,' or any other similar title? We must look to the Bible for the answer to that.

The Ministry

There are those who say that they have been 'called to the Ministry,' as if this were some peculiar office in the Church rather than the 'service' to which all Christians are called. We find even in non-conformist circles that particular deference is paid to those who have been 'ordained' to what is called 'the Ministry,' and furthermore, we are aware that the 'episcopacy' has stood in the way of a true alliance between those who endorse it and those who refuse it. The word 'bishop' as used in a number of religious groups today, and which means a superintendent pastor set over other pastors, cannot properly translate the word 'episcopos' as it is used in the N.T.

History does not tell us a lot about the organisation of the primitive christian community from about A.D.70 until the turn of the century, but it seems fairly clear that the first type of rule in the Church was Apostolic, with James at the head of affairs, along with Peter and John, "who seemed to be pillars" (Gal. 2:9). Polycarp of Smyrna in his writings (to Philippi) shows a picture of a well ordered community, with its presbyters and deacons each occupying the appointed function. It was a Christian community concerned with its own life, with the spread of the gospel, and with the maintenance of the purity of the doctrine, and completely unconcerned with worldly affairs. This God-given order was not to last, however, for during the following two or three centuries the internal struggles for power within the Church, with the chief protagonists being centred in Rome, Carthage, and Alexandria, was to rend the Church into East and West factions, the west becoming predominant with its seat of power in Rome, its bishops claiming apostolic succession, and its clergy and liturgy firmly established. It is quite natural that the episcopacy should have developed as it has, and that there should be a distinction between clergy and laity; it is quite natural, we say, *but it is not scriptural*.

The Christian Ministry

This ministry is both mutual and general. It is as the N.T. depicts it, and as the first christian communities practiced it. The word used is 'diakonia' and means 'service.' This is well illustrated in Eph. 4:12 where Paul says that special functions were given, "For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the Body of Christ." J. B. Phillips renders this verse, "His gifts were made that Christians might be properly equipped for their service, that the whole body might be built up." Here Paul is speaking not in the sense of an ecclesiastical function, but in the general and mutual sense of that service which different parts of the body exhibit, so that 'the body grows and builds itself up in love as each part does its work' (v16 N.I.V.). Therefore we conclude that every member of the Church is a minister; the Body of Christ, the Church, functions by that "which every joint supplieth."

The work of a deacon has never been in serious dispute. The problem associated with Church Order has always revolved around the office of bishop; perhaps this is

because more credence has been given to the writings of the early Fathers rather than of the text of the N.T. These writings were apocryphal and therefore non-canonical, i.e., they were not included in the Bible as part of the canon or scripture. One of these documents was written by Clement of Rome and is known as the First Epistle of Clement. It seems that Clement was steeped in the writings of the Septuagint and was also a strong adherent of the moral and ethical code of Judaism. Clement obviously regarded the Christian priesthood as a continuation of the Levitical priesthood, for he says, "Of our father Jacob came the priests and Levites who serve the altar of God. From him comes Jesus Christ according to the flesh (ch 32:2). It seems fairly clear that Clement was one of the first bishops in Rome, so it follows as a consequence that the idea of a separate priesthood should have permeated the community there.

The N.T., though, does not substantiate this view; it says nothing of a sacerdotal class in contrast to a laity. As a matter of fact, Paul exhorts the brethren in Rome, "Therefore, I urge you, brothers in view of God's mercy, to offer yourselves as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God — which is your spiritual worship" (Rom. 12:1 N.I.V.). Furthermore, Peter, who is almost deified in some quarters as the first Pope, says, "You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 2:5 N.I.V.); also, "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belong to God" (v9). It seems to me that Peter knew nothing of a special class of priests in the Church, on the contrary, the priesthood, according to him, consisted of *all believers*; holy, so that they might offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God; royal, because they were entrusted with the dignity of showing forth to the world the Lord's excellencies. How can anyone teach in the Church a division of clergy and laity from statements like these?

Church Government

When we study the N.T. we should not be in any doubt as to what comprises Church government. We read that there were Elders in the Church at Jerusalem (Acts 11:30; 15:2); in Acts 14:23 we read that Paul and Barnabas appointed Elders in each Church in cities and towns of Asia Minor; in Acts 20:17 we read that Paul sent for the Elders of the Church in Ephesus; and Titus was left in Crete by Paul to straighten out what was left unfinished "and appoint Elders in every town, as I directed you" (Titus 1:5). Paul, in the preamble to his letter to the Philippians says, "To all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers (bishops, elders) and deacons" (Phil. 1:1).

The divine arrangement seen throughout the N.T. is for a plurality of Elders to be appointed in each Church. The word 'episcopos' indicates the function of overseer; the word 'presbuteros' indicates the spiritual maturity of such a person. The qualifications are given in 1 Tim. 3:17 and in Titus 1:6-9. Deacons are also an integral part of Church government and *their* qualifications are also set out in 1 Tim. 3.

Conclusion

I cannot say if there are any members of the Church of Christ who would secretly like to have the titles mentioned; all I can say is that I do not know of any, nor would I expect there to be any. The fundamental stance of the Church of Christ is in keeping with what is revealed in the N.T. and can be summarised as follows.

First, individual communities of Christians elect from among their number Elders and Deacons. Each community is autonomous under its elected leaders. We know nothing of any 'See' situation where one bishop presides over the leaders of a number of other communities.

Second, we believe that the verb 'to minister' applies to *all* Christians. We can find nothing in the N.T. relating to community leadership and autonomy when the word 'minister' is used as a noun and preceded by the definite article. If it is thus used by any secular authority regarding the status of any of our leaders we would expect that they, the leaders, would disabuse other people's minds concerning this, even though it might involve financial loss, or denigrate 'supposed' status.

Finally, we accept that true commitment to Christ implies genuine vicarious responsibility of Christian to fellow-Christian; hence, we do not need the office of Vicar. — (All questions, please, to Alf Marsden, 377 Billinge Road, Highfield, Wigan).

CHURCH ACTION: INDIVIDUAL OR COLLECTIVE?

Queries which concern the right of churches or individuals to engage in any activity are legitimate ones. If we become unconcerned with seeking a divine precedent for any action, we fail to carry out the mandate given by Paul to do all (word or deed) "in the name of the Lord." (Col. 3:17) The same willingness exhibited in encouraging one to conform to the practice and teaching of the apostles in reference to scriptural baptism or breaking bread on the first day of the week would urge investigation of the activities in which a church was rightfully allowed to participate.

It is with great interest that I read recent articles in "The Scripture Standard" which concern themselves with a discussion of the scripturalness of churches contributing or supporting an individual to do work other than that of heralding the good news of the gospel. To answer such a query, another must be raised. Is there a difference between the action of a Christian apart from other Christians (individual) as opposed to the actions of many Christians who act as one (collective)? If there is none, then churches may participate in any action in which Christians might participate. On the other hand, if a difference exists between the two, then each can act only according to the pattern or commands given to it in Scripture. The purpose of this article is to demonstrate that the Bible makes a distinct difference between one Christian, acting on his own, and many Christians acting collectively as the church.

Because the term "church" has several usages in the New Testament, "church action" needs to be defined. By this term, reference is not made to any "assembly" (Acts 19:39), but of those who are called by the gospel (II Thess. 2:14) and belong to Christ (Acts 20:28). Even then, the "church" belonging to Christ may refer to all men who are in a saved relationship with Christ (Eph. 5:25-27). As such, this universal body has no external organisation and has Christ as its only head (Eph. 1:22-23). However, when Christians meet together in a certain locality to function in matters that require collective action, they were known as the "church" in that area. (I Cor. 1:2; I Thess. 1:1). Our concern, then, centres around whether the collective action of any one of these local churches can be distinguished from the individual action of those members of whom it is composed.

What is collective action as distinguished from individual action? It involves the agreement of a plurality to act as one, pooling together their resources under a common guidance. The Common Market, then, is a collective venture among several nations that meets such criteria. Those who advocate that a country leave the Common Market recognize the difference between the participation of their country

in a joint venture as opposed to going it alone in similar pursuits as an individual nation. Likewise, the local church is the only joint venture in which Christians are to act, distinct from their acting individually.

Paul, who wrote and acted by Christ's authority, recognised such a distinction. When giving instruction concerning benevolence rendered to widows (I Tim. 5:16), he directs believing women to care for widows so that the church may relieve widows indeed. If no difference exists between the efforts of a believing woman (as an individual) and the church (as a collective), then Paul's appeal is made without a logical basis. He is repeating himself when he gives the two instructions. However, this is not the case. Christians are to act jointly (church) to provide for a special class of widows ("indeed"); individually, those who have widows are to care for them with their own means.

Christ himself distinguished between the action of one as compared to the action of all acting as one. When he gives instruction about confronting a brother in sin, we are to first do it alone. (Matt. 18:15) If such fails, he is to take other witnesses with him. (v.16) If this has no effect, the matter is brought before the church. (v.17) If a believer acting alone is the same as all believers in a group acting together as one, the first action should be identical to the last. However, there is a progression in the behaviour toward the sinner that changes each time he is admonished. If he cannot be gained, then the word is to be established by witnesses. If this fails, he is to be as a publican. Even if Christ is not describing his church here, he still indicates that individual action differs from collective action.

This difference is further demonstrated by some practical considerations. Suppose a Christian decides to run for a political office or enter into a private business. If the church may act together in whatever way the individual Christian may act, could the congregation decide to run a political campaign, funding it from their treasury to insure it's success? Could they supply a loan to a member seeking to establish a business or even enter as a partner in the business? If not, why not? The objection must be on the grounds that Christians, acting as a collectivity, are limited in their functions as compared to acting as individual Christians.

Local churches in the New Testament spread the gospel (I Thess. 1:8), edified themselves in their worship and teaching (Acts 20:7), and relieved the needs of their own saints or those in other churches who could not provide for themselves (Acts 4:34,35; Rom. 15:26). If there is not command or example for churches working as a local unit to provide for purely humanitarian needs existing among all mankind (sickness, hunger, etc.), then as that unit they cannot function together to meet such a need. This does not relieve Christians of their individual responsibility to act compassionately in helping the needy when opportunity arises (Gal. 6:10). Jesus emphasised such concern in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk. 10:30-37).

Some may view a concern for distinguishing between these two actions as a rigid view overly concerned with detailed instructions. Yet, loving God involves keeping commandments (I Jn. 5:3). Many of these commandments, revealed by the apostle's words and actions, require specific instructions which must be obeyed. If we insist that the Bible teaches immersion rather than sprinkling or singing as opposed to playing mechanical instruments of music, we understand the need of discerning exactly what the Lord has expressed. This concern must be equally manifested in all areas of service to God.

THE NEW NAME

FORETOLD BY PROPHECY

Isiah 62:2: 'And the Gentiles shall see thy righteousness, and all kings thy glory: and thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of the Lord shall name.'

Isiah 65:15: 'Ye shall leave your name for a curse unto my chosen: for the Lord God shall slay thee, and call his servants by another name.'

FULFILMENT IN HISTORY

Acts 11:26: 'And the disciples were called [Gk. *chrematizo*] Christians first in Antioch.'

The church began in Jerusalem and its first members were of the house of Israel. During the early days of the church, the members of it were known as Nazarenes and Galileans by their opponents, and among each other as disciples, believers, etc.

Persecution broke out in Jerusalem and resulted in events which brought the preaching of the good tidings to Antioch. Here men of Cyprus and Cyrene preached to the Gentiles, and "the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned unto the Lord" (Acts 13:21).

Thus the Gentiles did see the righteousness of the Lord and were joined together in the One Body with the Jews who were disciples also, and were now called by another name, a new name. For 'the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.'

The prophet said this new name would be named by the mouth of the Lord.

The Greek word *chrematizo* is used in other passages of the New Testament in such setting as to indicate the process of divine inspiration.

Luke 2:26: 'And it was revealed [*chrematizo*] unto him by the Holy Spirit, that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ.'

Acts 10:22: . . . Cornelius the centurion . . . was warned [*chrematizo*] from God by an holy angel . . ."

Peter used this God-given name when exhorting his brethren in persecution to honour it: 'If any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God on his behalf' (1 Peter 4:16).
From: 'The Young Christian'.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

December 6 Ezra 9. I Corinthians 7,1-24

December 13 Psalm 39. I Corinthians 7,25-40

December 20 Psalm 115. I Corinthians 8

December 27 Deut. 24,10 to 25,4. I Corinthians 9

MARRIAGE A PROBLEM

The closest relationship possible in this life is marriage simply because it is the union of two personalities. No two persons are quite alike. There are remarkable cases of unity such as that of David and Jonathan. The unselfish love of Jonathan and David's response to him cemented the union of heart. The question in the minds of the Corinthians

arose partially from the more than loose relationship of the sexes in that society. Roughly we may put it that sexual promiscuity was "the done thing" in that town. Therefore it was natural that young Christians should feel compelled to avoid all sexual intercourse.

It appeared to be an evil practice. The apostle agrees that complete denial of this human function could be a good thing. It was in his case for his life never stayed still. There was not time for thought of that kind. But how different it was for men and women continually "rubbing shoulders" in the work-a-day world! They were not called upon to "go." They were called upon to stay and labour for themselves and others. Industry of some kind was necessary (2 Thess. 3,13-16). They must set an example of honest work. Withdrawal was the penalty for not earning a living (II Thess. 3,6).

So the apostle commands monogamy, and faithfulness of the partners to one another — and thereby to society. We may well consider other words of the apostle including the family life sanctified by either or both parents. Basically he portrays the perfect marriage relationship in Eph. 5,22-33. Paul well knew that persecution must be faced by Christians if in fact it had not already reached a point of breaking marriages and families — something which was levied against Christianity and faithfulness to truth through the ages. We feel also that the expectation of the Saviour's return in glory soon was in view.

How reasonable the apostle is in his thinking, yet following the Saviour's own words about God's ordinance (Matt. 19,10-12). Doing one of the things for which we were created could not in itself be sinful, but its misuse can be disastrous. That is what was happening all around the newly born children of God. They must not join it.

Life's Use and Abuse (7,31).

Christians are to avoid change rather than alter their way of life, but to bring

new attitudes into everything they do. The reason for this is the comparatively temporary nature of this life. Paul would have them not distracted by worldly concerns, and responsibilities inseparable from marriage and family life tend to distract from spiritual exercise.

We are reminded of the Lord's words about our anxieties (Matt.6,25-34) where "taking thought" must mean "do not be anxious."

Becoming a Christian opens up eternity to view. Life truly becomes a pilgrimage. The earthly things lose much of their importance and yet they are the means by which we serve the Saviour. Our actions therefore have to be brought into harmony with the will of God. In the immediate situation that will is to be the instruction and commandment of the apostle as taught verbally originally and as now given by letter. The Corinthian Christians acknowledged this by asking advice. How are they to use their lives in respect of immediate problems?

The answer includes holding lightly those things which concern the present duties, joys, troubles, business. Use the world, Yes! But not to excess. The thought is illustrated by his own attitude on the question of his rights as an apostle. He had the right to expect support from his converts, but did not use it — to avoid a misunderstanding, and to maintain his individual responsibility. He did not use his right TO EXCESS. Neither were they to concern themselves in worldly matter TO EXCESS! ("abuse" 9,18). We are to be "not slothful in business" — R.V. "in diligence not slothful" Rom. 12,11) and yet not tied up in it.

Service of whatever kind demands "diligence" on the part of the Christian, for he has the final issue in mind always. The hymn writer had this in mind when he wrote "So that earth's bliss may be our guide, and not our chain" (Christian Hymnary 356: 1908 Book 548: 1957 Wigan 327) worth reading through. Although it is possible that the world

was due for change especially for the time of Paul's letter, may we not apply at all times the urgency of being faithful to attend upon the Lord without distraction?"

Martha was cumbered with much serving while her sister attended (Lit. "sat conveniently before or beside Jesus" — Stanley). Turning to the question of meats offered to idols this was a part of Corinthian life. Idols were of no importance but their use was universal, and impinged upon every Christian's daily life because of their power over the lives of the people. Christians had turned from them to the LIVING GOD but it was a revolution in thought for most of them and must take time to overcome. Superstition of many kinds is rife in this supposed enlightened age, but how hardly would it die in Corinth? Should a Christian have anything to do with it? No! and a Christian eating in a Temple would be a very extreme case of conformity to popular behaviour, and would of course be wrong. For us surely it is a lesson — "avoid every appearance of evil" (I Thess.5,22). Ought a Christian to be seen in a pub?

The Tent-maker Apostle

It would appear that some teachers had been at Corinth. They had depended for their keep on the church. They had in some way been harsh to the members (II Cor.11,20), had made claims upon them, had claimed apostolic authority, and in short had belittled Paul. We will read later Paul's further vindication. Here his emphasis is upon his special relationship involving a special right to expect pay — "reward" (9,17 and 18) is "Wages." They are required to exercise self-restraint for their brethren's sake (8,11 and 12). Here is a life-long measure of that same endeavour with the same object — the salvation of souls. Not that there was a matter for boasting seeing it is obligatory, whether by choice, or as obedience to a divine command (9,18). His wages were the privilege of giving glad service without price. There is no

"abuse" of right but contrariwise complete surrender of it (Phil. 2,7: Rom. 15,3). What he did receive was not requested, but as gladly given — and taken (Phil.4,17). Paul certainly makes his not being burdensome an important feature of his work for God. We have already noted this in the Thessalonian letters. It is an important point in his words to the Ephesian bishops, and is continued in dealing with his opposers of rival teachers at Corinth (II Cor. 11,7-12). Perhaps some would scoff at a preacher who took so much time working at a trade. Why did he not give all his time to teaching and preaching?

Keeping Fit

In the concluding verses of ch.9 we have the warning that great effort must be put into Christian life and work. The runner, the athlete and even the boxer are brought in to illustrate the importance of preparation. Self-restraint was in view in dealing with attitude to idols, a restraint on behalf of the weaker brethren. The word "temperance" is used in describing Christian character, and in that is rather the exercise of self-control. Happy are we when this means Christ control. "Each victory will help us another to win.

R. B. Scott

What reality is there in your religion if you look at men struggling in darkness and are content to congratulate yourself that you are in the light?

F. W. Robertson

NEWS FROM THE CHURCHES

Kitwe, Zambia

Gowa church growth. There are 28 congregations and preaching points in the Gowa area. Some places seem quite a distance away, especially if travelling through the bush. One preaching point is

in Mozambique. Mr. L. Kakobwe, minister at Gowa, returned from a 50-mile bicycle ride through the bush late on the evening of our arrival. There are 34 church buildings. During the period 1980-81 seven new preaching points had been organised — a sign of evangelism in action. Mission work in Gowa area was pioneered by British Churches of Christ and, at present, we are the closest British missionary family.

Angela and Chester Woodhall

KENTISH TOWN

The 110th meetings were held on October 3rd to mark another year of worship and service in Hope Chapel. We were grateful to have visitors from Brighton, Reading and Tunbridge Wells, and from the newer churches at Elephant and Castle, South Tottenham and Wallington. Brother Leonard Morgan from Hindley took the speaking duties on Saturday and the Lord's Day and gave stirring messages from epistles and gospels, reminding us of our privileges and duties, and unbelievers of their need of salvation. Brother C. T. Jones took the chair in the afternoon and Brother Kingsley Adu in the evening. These brethren with their wives have been serving the church for years but are likely to leave us in December. It was an opportunity to show our appreciation of the good service they have given. The Tunbridge Wells brethren were not able to remain to the evening as they have special services with Brother Murrell these few days. Their frequent co-operation has been warmly welcome. The old building has continued to serve the NEW life, and its interior has taken on a new appearance. We were glad to see members new and old from the Fellowship of churches recently formed. Between the meetings refreshments were capably and gladly provided by the sisters, and allowed for happy fellowship. Brother and Sister Morgan's visit was a special pleasure for those of us who remember the happy associations of the Hindley Bible School.

We are encouraged to continue the plea for Christianity in truth and simplicity. About 60 shared our uplift.

R. B. Scott,
c/o Daniell,
34 North Farm Road,
Tunbridge Wells.

OBITUARY

Wallacestone, Scotland: It is with deep regret that we record the passing of sister Grace Malcolm, widow of the late brother Joseph Malcolm. She fell asleep on Saturday, 12th September, 1981, and was laid to rest on Tuesday, 15th September, brother Alex. Brown officiating at both services.

Although unable for the past year or so to attend the Lord's table, because of ill health, she never lost her faith in Jesus as her Saviour. — James Grant.

Beulah Road, Kirkby-in-Ashfield: The church here sadly has to report the passing of our dear sister Winnie Longden on October 4th at the age of 77. Our sister, wife of brother Fred Longden, had been a member of the Lord's Church for over 45 years and was a faithful christian, attending the Lord's Table constantly, and provided us with the bread for that service without fail for many years. She was well known for the unstinting hospitality given to many visiting brethren over the years and she will be missed by many as well as her family and the church here. Our sister was taken from us rather suddenly after a short illness and we commiserate deeply with her loved ones, our prayers are for them and we commend them earnestly to the comfort and consolation of our Heavenly Father.

The funeral service took place on Thursday 8th October at the Beulah Road meeting house and later at the Mansfield Crematorium, Brother Tom Woodhouse officiating. — Tom Woodhouse (Sec.).

WISE WORDS FOR CHRISTIANS

- 1 When a church member rests he rusts.
- 2 Get the church into the world without getting the world into the church.
- 3 The biggest liar is the Christian who gives excuses for not doing his duty.
- 4 Rip Van Winkle is the only man who became famous by sleeping.
- 5 The devil is an artist: he paints sin in very attractive colours.
- 6 Do what you should do and you will have no time to do what you should not.
- 7 The Bible needs no defence: it needs investigation and study.
- 8 If you can't tell whether a person is a Christian, he isn't.
- 9 He who stops being better stops being good.

Sunday School Chronicle

WHAT DID JUDAS GET?

Judas got the bag to carry. He got thirty pieces of silver for betraying His Lord. He got his plans carried out for delivering the Lord to the mob.

But that wasn't all. He got sorrow and shame and disappointment. He got suicide: he hanged himself. He got a name that lives on in disgrace. He got his joy and his soul lost. He got his money back. He got his hopes blighted.

DID IT PAY?

"It is a 'pastor's' duty to feed the sheep rather than to amuse the goats."

"If your doctrine is too difficult for us, speak in parables, but do not water down the doctrine."

UNITED IN THEIR BELIEF

A small Scottish denomination, the Reformed Association of the Churches of Christ, are to join with the United Reform Church. It will be the first union in Britain between a church practising infant baptism and one practising the baptism of believers by immersion.

Celebrations in Scotland will be held in the United Reform Church in Dalkeith Road, Edinburgh, on October 10 when the Rev. Raymond Bade, a former chairman of the Churches of Christ in Scotland, will preside. The preacher will be the Rev. J. Howard Williams, Moderator of the northern province of the URC.

After the union both churches will honour and accept either form of baptism. The URC have adopted the Churches of Christ practice of elders being "auxiliary" ministers.

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