

The **SCRIPTURE STANDARD**

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

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INJURIOUS SPEECH

Ever since Salman Rushdie was sentenced to death for alleged blasphemy against the Islamic religion, many of us, I suppose, have been intrigued by this fairly rare mention of blasphemy and interested to learn a little more about it. This, plus the fact that the subject came up last week at the Mutual Benefit Meeting of the Slamannan District of churches (when blasphemy against the Holy Spirit was discussed) prompts me to offer the following remarks. Because some of us have lived an entire lifetime without ever hearing of anyone accused of such a crime, we have, perhaps, assumed that blasphemy was something peculiar to the O.T., and not something that need concern us. And yet, when we reflect upon the meaning of the term, there seems to be no reason at all for supposing that God and Christ can not be, and are not, blasphemed as much today as ever they were in Bible times.

“Blasphemy” comes from **blapto** — to injure: and **pHEME** meaning speech: and means “injurious speech” or defamation. It can include evil speech against anything or anyone, but is usually restricted in application to deity. A broad definition would be, “To speak of the Supreme Being in terms of impious irreverence, to revile, to speak reproachfully of God, of His titles, attributes, ordinances, word or works.” Cruden defines it “To revile or curse God, or the king who was God’s representative. It means intentional indignity offered to God or sacred things”.

From that definition we can see that God is subjected to blasphemy every day of the week, but obviously it is a matter of degree. How culpable, vile, evil and irreverent must our speech be to constitute blasphemy? In the O.T. (and indeed the early days of the N.T.) blasphemy carried the death penalty and was, therefore, regarded as one of the worst crimes possible. It should not be confused with taking the Lord’s name in vain. To curse and swear, and utter profanities, is not, it seems, necessarily blasphemy. In Ex. 20:7 we read, “**Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh His name in vain**”. God said that He would not hold such a person guiltless, but that seems a far cry from a death sentence. Nor should we confuse blasphemy with heresy (although there may be elements in common) because even in the N.T. the heretic is “**after the first and second admonition to be rejected**” (Titus 3:10) and this, again, seems a long way short of a death sentence. One also might imagine that when an atheist denies the existence of God that that must surely constitute blasphemy, yet it seems very doubtful. The Psalmist (14:1) remarks that “**The fool hath said in his heart there is no God**” and so classifies the atheist as “a fool,” and not a blasphemer: and not worthy of instant death.

BLASPHEMY IN THE O.T.

Nothing beats an illustration or two and perhaps we can learn from one or two examples in the O.T. just what kind of injurious speech against God came to be regarded as blasphemous.

The very first mention we have of blasphemy (Lev. 24:10) involves the son of an Israelitish woman (and an Egyptian father) who got into an angry dispute with an Israelite and, it seems, came to blows. During the quarrel this man **"Blasphemed the name of the Lord and cursed"** and was arrested and locked up. Moses did not seem to know quite what to do in the circumstances, but God interposed and instructed that the death penalty must be implemented in any such case. From this we can assume, perhaps, that this was the first instance of such a sin. God further commanded Moses that the whole congregation should stone the man to death, adding, **"Whosoever curseth His God shall bear his sin. And he that blasphemeth the name of the Lord shall surely be put to death."** This does not tell us what the nameless man said but obviously it must have been very seriously evil and involved cursing God. God must receive our respect, not to say, our reverence, and quite often He does not receive it from us. To flick through the many references in the O.T. to blasphemy makes us quickly aware that this sin was prominent in Israel amongst the many others. God could say, **"... and My name continually every day is blasphemed"** (Isa. 52:5), and Isaiah also records, **"Your iniquities, and the iniquities of your fathers together, saith the Lord, which have burned incense upon the mountains, and blasphemed Me upon the hills: therefore will I measure your former work into your bosom."** Idolatry, mentioned here, clearly involved blasphemy.

In II Kings (19: 6-22) we have an instance which does throw some light upon the actual nature of the blasphemy and the words spoken. It also shows that blasphemy can be written (as in a letter). This involved the siege of Jerusalem by Sennacherib, the King of Assyria. Sennacherib had a vast army and those inside Jerusalem, King Hezekiah and the Israelites, were very dismayed and fearful. Sennacherib taunted the Israelites who stood upon the walls of the city and called upon them to surrender. He recounts his previous victories over many nations and attributes his success mainly to the superiority of his gods over all other gods. In the process he belittled the God of the Israelites and called their faith, trust misplaced. He called upon the Jews to abandon Hezekiah and save their own skins urging that they **"hearken not unto Hezekiah when he persuadeth you, saying, The Lord will deliver us. Where are the gods of Hamath, and of Arpad? where are the gods of Sepharvaim, Hena, and Ivah? have they delivered Samaria out of my hand?"** And thus Sennacherib classified God with all these heathen 'deities' and reviled Him. He also sent a letter in similar terms. Hezekiah, having read the letter placed it upon the altar in the temple asking God to read it: to open His eyes and ears and note **"the reproach"** upon the living God. And so the blasphemy by Sennacherib consisted of insults, accusations of impotency, contempt, dismissal and general vilification of God by voice and pen.

REFERENCES IN THE N.T.

We encounter references to blasphemy early on in the N.T. and these formed the substance of a charge against Jesus. Luke describes the Lord's cure of the palsied man and the wonderful initiative of the man's friends in removing tiles from off the roof in order to reach Jesus. (Luke 5: 19-24). Christ marvelled at their faith and cured the man: adding, **"Son, thy sins be forgiven thee"**. The Scribes and Pharisees immediately construed this to be blasphemy and asked, **"Who is this which speaketh blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?"** Another similar and well known instance, again involving Jesus, was when Christ was being examined by Caiaphas, and the Sanhedrin, prior to the trial before Pilate. In being adjured to say whether he was the Christ or not, Jesus replied, **"Thou hast said nevertheless, I say unto you,**

Hereafter shall ye see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.” “Then the High Priest rent his clothes saying, He hath spoken blasphemy, what further need have we of witnesses? Behold now ye have heard His blasphemy.” (Matt. 26: 65). These two examples illustrate, perhaps, the kind of language which, to the Jews, would constitute blasphemy. Jesus had claimed equality with God, and authority to forgive sins. I suppose the Jews rightly regarded such claims as blasphemous in the ordinary course of events, but failed, of course, even with the evidence of the miracles before their very eyes, to recognise that Jesus was the Messiah: that He was the Son of God and did have authority, and power, to forgive sins.

On another occasion, when one of Christ’s miracles could neither be ignored nor gainsayed: (i.e. the casting out of the evil spirit from the man dumb and blind – Matt. 12:22) the Pharisees grudgingly acknowledged the miracle but explained it away by claiming that Jesus cast out devils only because He Himself, was in league with Beelzebub, the prince of demons. This was, of course, a dreadful accusation and drew from the lips of Jesus the fact that it was not only a most heinous blasphemy against Himself, but also a blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. He also added that while it was possible to be forgiven by God for a blasphemy, or sin, against himself, it was quite impossible to be forgiven for blasphemy against the Holy Spirit: “No; neither in this world, and neither in the world to come.” Clearly it is just as possible to blaspheme Christ today as ever it was and recently we have seen Him pilloried in films and accused of having been a homosexual etc., but it should certainly exercise the human mind as to whether, at the same time the Holy Spirit is also being blasphemed, for, for such, there will never be forgiveness.

Stephen was also falsely charged with blasphemy by the synagogue of the Libertines, Cyrenians, etc. who apprehended Stephen and placed him on trial facing the following charge: “This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law: for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us.” (Acts 6:13). Once again we notice the important ingredient in blasphemy; i.e. injurious speech (“we heard him say”). This defamatory speech is, apparently, similar to that wrung from early Christians by Paul when he forced them to recant, when he was engaged in the persecution of the church. He himself said, “And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme” (Acts 26:11). Whether Paul tortured his prisoners to force them to blaspheme, we are not told, but it was something which seemed to haunt him for a long time afterwards, even although he was forgiven. Later, in describing God’s wonderful grace towards him, he could say with regard to his former conduct, “who was before a blasphemers, and a persecuter, and injurious: but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.” (1Tim. 1:13).

Space restricts mention of many other references to blasphemy in the N.T. but before leaving the theme it might surprise us to know that blasphemy was one of the sins the Christians at Colosse were urged to put off. “Put off these,” said Paul, “anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, and filthy communication out of your mouth” (Col. 3:8). Paul also “delivered unto Satan” both Hymenaeus and Alexander “that they might learn not to blaspheme.” (1 Tim. 1:20).

SINCE N.T. TIMES

As we can imagine great changes in men’s attitudes to blasphemy have taken place since N.T. times (notwithstanding the Islamic death sentence for those who ‘blaspheme’ that religion) and certainly there seems to be no evidence of the apostles calling for any death penalty; albeit they mention blasphemy many times. However, during the Middle Ages Ecclesiastical Courts tried many blasphemy cases and many a poor wretch was burned at the stake (just as many innocent people were burned as

witches). I believe the last burnings took place in 1612. These Ecclesiastical Courts had to differentiate between heresy and blasphemy, and anyone simply holding an unorthodox religious view could quite easily have it construed as blasphemy, and pay the consequences. After the Star Chamber, and Court of High Commission, the ordinary **King's Bench** took over and blasphemy was answerable at **Common Law**. Numerous test-cases since then have occurred and the Law has evolved into what it is today. In the Taylor's Case (1675) the offensive words were "the Protestant Religion is a cheat" and this 'blasphemy' was regarded as "a crime against the State, and the Law" and "subversive to good government". Part of Taylor's punishment was to stand in a pillory in Westminster Palace with a placard on his head "for blasphemous words tending to the subversion of good government". In 1728 Lord Raymond said that judges would not meddle with any difference of religious opinion but would only interfere "where the very root of Christianity was struck at," and Lord Mansfield, in a case in 1762 said "The common law of England knows no prosecution for mere opinions." Mr. Justice Erskine (Shore v. Wilson 1842) ruled that "It is still blasphemy, punishable at common law, scoffingly or irreverently to ridicule or impugn the doctrine of the Christian faith, yet any man may, without subjecting himself to any penal consequences, soberly and reverently examine and question the truth of those doctrines which have been essential to it." Lord Coleridge, in two cases of alleged blasphemy declared "that it is no longer true to say that Christianity is part of the law of the land, and if the decencies of controversy are observed, even the fundamentals of religion may be attacked without a person being guilty of blasphemous libel." He was followed by Judge J. Phillimore who said, in the Boulter case (1908) "A man is free to speak and to teach what he pleases as to religious matters, though not as morals, but if, for the sake of argument, he were to make a scurrilous attack on doctrines which the majority of people hold to be true in a public place where passers-by may have their ears offended, or where young persons may come, he certainly will render himself liable to the law of blasphemous libel.

The House of Lords (in the Bowman v. Secular Soc. Ltd. 1917) said that "assuming the objects of the defendants to involve a denial of Christianity, they were not criminal inasmuch as the propagation of anti-Christian doctrines, apart from scurrility or profanity, did not constitute the offence of blasphemy." These are just a selected handful of a great many other legal pronouncements on the subject over many hundreds of years which show the gradual change in attitude towards blasphemy, and how the common law perception of what was once a heinous crime has been greatly modified. One wonders what would have to be said, today, and how awful the words would have to be, to bring men before the courts on a charge of blasphemy. In Scotland, the penalty for blasphemy was death, but by an Act of 1825 (amended in 1837) the penalty was changed to a fine, or imprisonment, or both.

A LESSON

How then can we make a brief summary of this subject? We have seen that blasphemy was not unknown amongst the churches in N.T. times, that exhortations against it were delivered and that Hymenaeus and Alexander were given to Satan that they might learn not to do it. However, Paul's main pre-occupation with it seems to have been that the church can be, and often is, blasphemed because of our behavior, and this surely is the lesson which emerges. For instance, Paul calls upon those in the service of a master to honour such masters and do well, "**that the name of God and His doctrine be not blasphemed.**" (1 Tim. 6:1). Similarly he exhorted the young women, "**To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed.**" Paul probably remembered Nathan's words to David, "**Howbeit because of this thy deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme.**" (2 Sam. 12:14). This was the unexpected by-product of David's

actions, and I suppose, at one time or another, our speech or actions have given great occasion for the enemies of Christ to blaspheme His name and cast a reproach upon His church. This possibility is ever present, and something to keep in mind.

Editor.

GLEANINGS

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

WHAT IS MEEKNESS ?

"Nor does it mean weakness in personality or character. Still less does it mean a spirit of compromise or "peace at any price." How often are these things mistaken! How often is the man regarded as meek who says, 'Anything rather than have a disagreement. Let's agree, let's try to break down these distinctions and divisions; let's smooth over these little things that divide; let's all be nice and joyful and happy.' No, no, it is not that. Meekness is compatible with great strength. Meekness is compatible with great authority and power. . . ."

STRONG MEN, YET MEEK MEN

"The meek man is one who may so believe in standing for the truth that he will die for it if necessary. The martyrs were meek, but they were never weak; strong men, yet meek men. God forbid that we should ever confuse this noble quality, one of the noblest of all qualities, with something merely animal or physical or natural."

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones

THE LORD'S POWER IN THE DISCIPLE'S LIFE

Phillippians 2:12-18

"We have in this passage one of the richest and most beautiful expressions found in the whole New Testament of that great principle, that at the very heart of a true life of holiness there needs to lie the law of holy kindness. The connection of thought between ver. 13 and ver. 14 is deeply suggestive here. In ver. 13 we have the power and wonder of the operative Indwelling of God. In ver. 14 we have depicted the true conduct of the subjects of the Indwelling; and it shines with the sweet light of humility and gentleness."

HIDDEN POWER

"It is a life whose hidden power, which is nothing less than divine, comes out first and most in the absence of the grudging, self-asserting spirit; in a watchful consistency and simplicity; in the manifestation of the child-character, as the believer moves about "in the midst of" the hard and most unchildlike conditions of an unregenerate world."

DIVINE POWER

"There is to be action as well as patience; this we shall see presently. The disciple is to be aggressive, in the right way, as well as submissive. But the first and deepest characteristic of his wonderful new life is to be the submission of himself to others, "in the Lord, and in the power of His might." We have this aspect of practical holiness presented to us often in the general teaching of the New Testament; but seldom is it so explicitly connected as it is here with that other spiritual fact the presence in us of the divine power."

THE INDWELLING OF CHRIST

"Perhaps our best parallels come from the two other Epistles of the Roman Captivity, Ephesians and Colossians. In Ephesians, the third chapter closes with the astonishing prayer that the Christian (the everyday Christian, be it remembered) may be, through the indwelling of Christ, "filled unto all the fulness of God"; and then the fourth chapter begins at once with the appeal to him to live "therefore" a life of "all lowliness, meekness, longsuffering and forbearance in love."

ACCORDING TO THE MIGHT OF HIS GLORY

"In Colossians we have the same sequence of thought in one noble sentence (ver. 2) of the first chapter: "Strengthened with all strength, according to the might of His glory, unto all patience and longsuffering, with Joy." In all three passages comes out the same deep and beautiful suggestion. "The Lord is not in the wind" so much as in "the still small voice." Omnipotent Love, in its blessed immanence in the believer's soul, shows its presence and power most of all in a life of love around."

H. G. C. Moule

IF LIVED FOR THEE

"How blessed is life if lived for Thee,
My living Saviour and my Lord;
No pleasures that the world can give,
Such perfect gladness can afford."

Selected by Leonard Morgan.

COVENANTS AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Dear Brethren,

I am anxious to obtain as wide a circulation of these notes as possible in order to get a reasonable amount of feedback from within the churches. Would you therefore please pass this letter on to fellow Christians – preferably those mature in the faith. My concern has to do with an outlook among us which views the marriage arrangements of aliens as being subject to the new covenant of our Lord and which can lead to refusal of baptism. Obviously such a doctrine is sufficiently serious as to split churches and so should be given the most serious attention.

1. Briefly there are three basic outlooks on the divorce/remarriage controversy with regard to aliens who have divorced for reasons other than adultery and have remarried. The three views are set out as follows.

1. They are really still married to their first spouses and cannot be baptized unless they repent and return to their first spouses or else get out of their present marriages and stay celibate. Some will baptize and perhaps allow them into fellowship but still view the present marriages as adulterous.
2. They sinned when they remarried but may have that sin forgiven upon baptism and may therefore keep their present marriages.
3. They were not under covenant responsibility to God and therefore have a valid marriage if a valid marriage was the intention. This has no reference to bigamous, adulterous, homosexual, etc., relationships.

It does seem to me that the whole issue centres on the question of accountability. If God is holding all people of all time accountable for sin and intends to have a day of judgment in which that accountability will be considered then we should indeed look at this matter most carefully.

2. There should be no doubt in our minds that all reasoning persons are accountable and that their sins are quite specific. It should also be evident that such persons must have awareness of specific sin if they are to be finally held accountable for it by God. Is there any one among us who believes that on the day of judgment God will raise matters of judgment of which we are totally ignorant? Or would we, being evil alongside God, even treat our own children in such a manner? Would we punish our children for matters in which they were totally ignorant?
3. If we are agreed that accountability for sin involves knowledge of that sin then we can progress in our thinking. Let me hasten to add that I am not suggesting that every sin is accompanied by knowledge of the sin. Plainly this is not so as Paul shows from his own experience. Also the question of culpability which asks, "Could a person have had knowledge of wrongdoing with reasonable diligence?" I am happy to leave

in God's hands. What I am emphasizing is that the alien will **know** why he is lost. Accountability must mean that every sin for which the alien will be brought to account should have been carried out when the alien knew full well it was wrong. In the absence of knowledge (law) sin cannot be imputed – Rom. 5:13.

4. How does the alien have knowledge of sin? What is the mechanism by which the knowledge is obtained? Paul in writing to the Romans (ch. 1 & 2) informs us that man has enough evidence in his environment to tell him that there is a God who should be sought and that man should behave properly to his fellows or incur judgment. Our own experience underscores this. As we got to an age of accountability we just knew there had to be a God. We also found that certain courses of wilful action on our part caused physical or mental pain to others. Knowledge of the wrongness of wilfully hurting those around us is basic to our human nature. It does not depend on whether or not we have been in contact with the Bible. This is what Paul means when he says, "... do instinctively, or by nature, the things of the Law" – Rom 2:14. The work of the law written on Gentiles' (aliens) hearts (Rom 2:15) stems from their sure knowledge that there is a God to whom they are answerable and that they should be moral. It is because of this great truth that apostolic preaching of the gospel could always immediately proceed. It was on the divine assurance that people **knew** they were sinners. In the same way Jesus speaks of judgment on the basis of His sayings Jesus' answer to the lawyer in Lk. 10: 25-28 also bears this out – to seek God to love and serve Him and to love one's neighbour is life and judgment.

Special Responsibility

5. Before we make application and look at particular questions there is another factor we need to consider. God had given, by means of verbal revelation, extra knowledge to believers no matter what age they lived in. We see this verbal revelation, both oral and written, being received by God's people as we turn the pages of the Bible. It is important we recognise that such revelations from God were only applicable to those to whom they were directed. In this context we think of worded revelation given to Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses and of course the Apostles of Christ. We might say that these extra expectancies of God for certain people were 'covenant responsibilities' and the context determines which peoples were encompassed. Thus no believer today has an Eden to attend, an ark to build, a son to sacrifice or a law to deliver, etc. Believers today are expected to obey the gospel and keep the faith. The point made here is that the extra knowledge received by believers (given to them by God) is for them alone and certainly not to the world in general. Those in covenant with God therefore have always had particular covenant responsibilities given to them by God over and above the general responsibility of all men to seek God and be moral. We have no reason to believe that this general principle changed at the cross. The trend in the church today to attempt to lay purely covenant responsibilities on alien sinners is not scriptural and will inevitably lead to confusion and to another gospel.

Specific And General Responsibilities

6. If we are agreed that covenant responsibilities should not be laid on or expected of non-covenant people then the next logical question should be, "How can we know or recognise purely covenant responsibilities as distinct from those general responsibilities laid on all men to seek God and be moral?" The answer is not difficult. All covenant responsibilities have been revealed by God through **verbal** (oral or written) revelation. We see this in contrast to the general revelation "by nature" as Paul puts it, which is laid on all men. It is noteworthy that God has always addressed those expectations or responsibilities, which cannot be known instinctively, directly to His people by divine verbal revelation". We note that such revelation is addressed to those people alone and to no one else. Such revelation includes sabbath keeping, circumcision, the priesthood, etc., for the children of Israel under the old covenant and

believers' baptism and the Lord's supper for God's people under the new covenant. It is stressed they can only be known by means of words, hence 'verbal' revelation.

Divorce & Remarriage

7. The question must now be answered with regard to divorce and remarriage. Are God's rules on divorce and remarriage known instinctively or are they found only in verbal revelation? We must all answer, "They are found only in verbal revelation". Because they can only be known and understood by means of words then they are in the category of covenant responsibility only and the context will determine which covenant is the governing rule.

8. A little thought on the subject of matrimony at this point will show that the above-mentioned statement makes sense. Intermarriage between closely linked blood relatives was allowed by God in the beginning – it was His arrangement. However under a subsequent arrangement or covenant at Sinai it was disallowed. After the abolition of that old covenant nothing more was said by God to His people on the matter so we must look to man's laws and our own good sense for our conclusions. It is not written into that area which we term covenant responsibility for Christians.

9. The question of polygamy follows a similar course. God's covenants with the patriarchs and with the children of Israel allowed polygamy. Under our covenant however it is disallowed. Evidently we are not looking at a matter like the question of morality the details of which are fixed eternally and are laid on all men. We are looking at a matter in which God has allowed change for His covenant people and has communicated it to them. What of alien sinners during these ages – those who knew nothing of God's wishes for His people? It would be foolish to suggest that they too would be allowed plural wives at one stage but would be held accountable in their ignorance for the practice at another. Their area of accountability was and is fully known by them and never has required the issue of a code of practice in order to inform them of particular sins for which they will be held accountable. We should treat the issue of divorce and remarriage in just the same way.

10. Certainly the alien sinner can and does know that it is wrong to break a marriage agreement and to be unfaithful. However an alien can know nothing of God's covenant revelations on divorce or on remarriage. This is as true for aliens today as it was before the cross. Again it would be foolish to suggest that the aliens' area of accountability changed at the cross in this matter. However it is not foolish to say that accountability for covenant people in this matter changed at the cross. Indeed it did change but again it can only be known by means of verbal revelation and is for God's people only.

Matt. 19:3-13

11. It seems that the most misunderstood passage of scripture in this controversy is Matt. 19:3-12. Here Jesus was asked a question on old covenant law. It seems it was one of the most hotly debated questions and it had been aired by scholarly rabbis down the centuries. Some interpreted Deut. 24 to mean that a man could only divorce for unfaithfulness (adultery). Others said he could divorce for any cause. Jesus settled the question for them by saying in effect that although their covenant allowed divorce for any cause, in heaven's sight they were committing adultery when they practised it. This evidently shocked them but it was the reality of the matter.

12. We can only bring confusion if we try to apply this Jewish old covenant matter to persons other than those to whom it was given. Plainly it was never given to Gentiles. The early church would have reflected problems if Gentile marriages had been questioned and we would know about it. Strange indeed that after almost 2000 years Judaism should once again rise, this time with rules on who may or may not marry or even be baptised!

13. Brethren we must return to the apostles. Paul tells us that God made them (the apostles) adequate – worthy or competent as servants of the new covenant — 2 Cor. 3:6. God commissioned the apostles only as dispenser of the new covenant with its responsibilities and we should be in no doubt where to look for our new covenant responsibilities today. In the matter of divorce and remarriage Paul neatly sums up our responsibilities in 1 Cor. 7.

Old and New Covenant

14. The distinction between old covenant responsibilities and new covenant responsibilities should be clearly made in our minds. The old covenant is found in the writings of Moses and remained unchanged right up to the cross. Like other prophets before Him, Jesus simply reminded His Jewish hearers of their responsibilities under that covenant when He had reason to refer to it. It is true He alluded to a new covenant but then so did Isaiah and Jeremiah. The new covenant or testament arrived on the day of Pentecost with the forgiveness of sins through a crucified Saviour. What was preached as the gospel to the unsaved became the new covenant of the saved. Because the gospel received is our covenant – that which is forever written on our hearts, it should be apparent that what we generally call the New Testament (Covenant) is in fact simply a collection of books written by inspired covenant people to fellow covenant people. We should perhaps more correctly refer to those writings as new covenant scriptures. Even then we need to remember that the four gospel accounts (good news accounts of Jesus) must be seen against their old covenant backdrop. Their happenings occurred whilst God's people were still subject to old covenant responsibilities.

15. It is realised that many Christians view the Matt. 19 passage as part of our new covenant and my opening paragraph was accommodative in that sense. But then they have to nominate themselves as arbiters concerning which of the personal teachings of Jesus refer to old covenant responsibilities and which refer to new covenant responsibilities. We ought not place ourselves in that position. God has already chosen men who were to do the binding and loosing in this matter of covenant responsibility.

Binding and Loosing

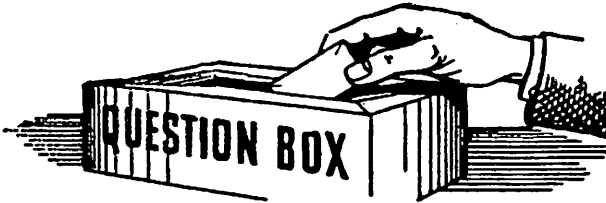
16. That binding and loosing had to do with purely covenant things for God's people (and not with matters of morality which are unchanging). Certainly nothing changed for Gentiles in the matter of matrimony. Marriage arrangements between aliens are not the subject of covenant responsibility and never were. Marriages between non-Christians are not sanctified but are in the same category as any other civil covenant or agreement. Civil rules governing marriage, divorce and remarriage vary with the society, tribe, etc. If a society deems that a marriage is valid upon say the exchange of goods, the mutual consent of parents or just plain cohabitation then so be it. The rules on divorce and remarriage are likewise matters to be fixed by that society. They are civil law matters and should be so understood by all. God has given us no responsibility to question the bona fides of accepted civil marriages. Even the apostles never encroached on that area.

One could say much more but perhaps this is sufficient for the present purpose. I trust I may have stirred minds to consider and re-consider the subject of Covenants and Accountability. I would be pleased to receive comments and/or correction. It is not my intention to be dogmatic but to find a clearer expression of the truth in things.

I pray that God will bless us in this endeavour.

Sincerely - John Grimditch,
14 Franmaree Road,
Launceston, Tasmania 7248.
(late of Eastwood).

(Readers who wish to respond to the above may write to brother Grimditch, or submit a reasoned article: not too long, for possible inclusion in the "S.S.". I have numbered the paras. for ease of reference. Ed.)



Conducted by
Alf Marsden

“The bread and wine used at the Lord’s Table is made by non-Christians. Is this right ?

In order to clarify this question the brother who sent it adds, “I know the R.C. nuns make it such for Mass. I also know that a sister in one of our churches who prepared the bread and wine each week. I firmly believe it should be prepared by Christians only.”

An Analysis Of The Question

We need to analyse this question and the accompanying statement in order to get a clear picture of what our brother has in mind.

First of all there is what appears to be a definitive assertion, “the bread and wine used at the Lord’s Table is made by non-Christians”. This assertion is undoubtedly true of **some** assemblies but not of **all**. I, like our brother, have known sisters in the Church who have for years baked the ‘loaf’ used at the Breaking of Bread service, the constituent parts of such a ‘loaf’ being **plain** flour and water; to some, **self-raising** flour was not acceptable. I personally have not known any assembly to actually make its own wine; a variety of ‘bought in’ liquids have been — and still are — used, ranging from soft drinks to high quality non-alcoholic communion wines. As regards the ‘bread’, it seems that many assemblies use the crisp-baked wafer style of biscuit; I have seen some of the packets containing these marked ‘Not for Passover Use’; this must have some implications for the consumer. We shall return to this point. As regards being made by ‘non-Christians’, I believe our brother means they would not be members of Churches of Christ; if that is so then I suppose the Assertion, as far as it goes, may be classed as true.

Our brother’s comment about the R.C. church also has some validity. While visiting a small engineering firm in Liverpool to do a training survey, I came across several small ovens with hot plates which the firm were producing. On inquiry I was told they were being sold to R.C. churches in Liverpool for the production of communion wafers. I never discovered any vineyards, though (vineyards in Liverpool?). Anyway the R.C. church takes a somewhat different view of the emblems when they are used in the Mass.

We shall also need to understand what is meant by the word ‘prepare’. does it mean actually ‘making’ the emblems or food which is to be consumed, or does it mean just ‘making ready’ for the meal; the food etc., having been produced elsewhere?

First of all however, we need to look at the text of the Bible in the relevant places, and try to separate fact from assumption. I do not intend to comment on the vexed questions associated with the Lord’s Table; in my view they have been discussed *ad nauseam*.

The Stage Is Set

The reader needs to be familiar with the O.T. references to the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread, particularly in Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy, Numbers, etc. The Passover was associated with the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and was

to be held on the 14th day the first month of the Jewish calendar, Abib (see Num. 28:16 and Dt. 16:1ff); and the Feast of Unleavened Bread was to begin on the 15th day and to last seven days. The first and seventh days to be 'holy convocations' on which no servile work might be done. The Passover celebrated the deliverance from the Egyptian bondage, and the Feast of the Unleavened Bread celebrated the new harvest. The ritual prescriptions are, as I say, given in the O.T., although in the time of Jesus, the observance had changed somewhat.

Matthew, Mark, Luke and John agree that Jesus kept the Last Supper with His disciples, although John fixes the event a **day before** the Passover Festival. A number of scholars are more comfortable with John's record because they argue that the priestly hierarchy would not have taken Jesus and tried him during the Passover Festival. Be that as it may, the important point is that Jesus **did** institute the feast which we know now as the Communion or Breaking of Bread.

Luke tells us that Jesus had a great desire to eat the Passover meal with His disciples before He suffered. He sent off Peter and John to **prepare** the Passover meal, and He directed them to the house and the very room where it should be held.

Now what had they to **prepare** ? Well, the lamb would have to be slain according to ritual prescription. They would have to go to the Temple precincts where a line of priests would be waiting, each holding a bowl made of gold or silver. The sacrificer would use a sharp knife to open the carotid artery in the neck of the lamb and would drain the blood into the bowl held by the priest. This would then be transferred along the line of priests to the altar where it would be splashed on the base of the altar (this was instead of the doorposts and lintels as in early days). The lamb was then to be roasted and eaten the same night with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. No bone of the lamb be broken, and special care was to be taken to see it touched nothing — not even the side of the oven when being roasted. If any part touched, it had to be cut off. The supper was to be completed by midnight of the 14th. For the supper the other materials necessary were four cups of red wine for each member of the company, the bitter herbs, dipped once in salt water or vinegar, and the unleavened cakes. During the course of the meal the story of the Exodus would be retold.

Such would be the preparation. Did Peter and John actually **do** all of this or were they helped by someone else, e.g. the 'goodman' of the house? We are not told. Where did the lamb come from? It was probably brought into the city because we cannot visualise the disciples carrying one about with them. Where did the unleavened cakes come from? They would also be bought in the city, special dexterous skills being necessary to produce the thin wafer-like cakes which could be dipped into the bowl and then eaten. So you see, **other people** could have been involved in the **production** of the contents of the meal even though Peter and John might have **prepared** it for the event. We must understand of course, that the food and drink on the table would be as used for the **Passover Meal**, because the disciples **could not have known** that Jesus was going to use some of the items and attach a special significance to them.

I think you will readily see that the point I am making is that even though Christians will **prepare the table** for the Breaking of Bread service, it would not violate any great scriptural law that I know of if the wafers and wine were 'bought in', providing that the bread was unleavened and the wine unfermented, i.e., non-alcoholic.

Other Considerations

There are one or two other thoughts which invade the mind relative to the subject under consideration; in discussing these with you I shall be brief, and I trust, uncontentious.

Some Christians will no doubt find it strange that the Lord was willing to partake in a Passover Feast which was not celebrated according to the original ritualistic

prescription. You will recall that when the Feast was first instituted, the Israelites had to 'eat in haste, with loins girt, feet shod, and staff in hand'. When Jesus celebrated the Feast with His disciples, it seems to be fairly evident that they adhered to the custom of the day, i.e., they reclined at the table. The **essentials** of the Feast were on the table — the lamb, the bitter herbs, and the unleavened bread — but the **situation** in which the Feast was held had changed with time, and it seems the Lord acknowledged that change. It is vital to keep **essentials** but perhaps **procedural** changes are possible. There may be room for discussion without acrimony on points like this.

Some have held quite strongly that the loaf, wafer, or whatever, **should not be broken** before passing to the assembly; presumably, this action is associated with no bones of the Lord's body being broken when He was crucified. But isn't it more reasonable to believe that the non-breaking of the Lord's bones was more related to the **sacrificial Lamb** rather than to our bread? I know that the loaf on the Table **represents** the Lord's body, but is it **salvation-threatening** if the presiding brother breaks it before passing it to the assembled Christians? The R.C. church take an entirely different view of the emblems; it is held that during Mass the bread and the wine become the 'substance of the Lord's body and His blood', therefore, the implication is that the emblems would be handled with reverential care. But when, in their view, does the 'trans-substantiation' take place? Is it during the making or preparing stage, or is it only when blessed by the priest during the Mass.

There are other points we could consider, but my aims and objectives both in writing and speaking, are quite clear and unambiguous to me. I want to examine all situations — both actual and philosophical — which I find in the Bible and in the world around me. I want to think things through from beginning to end, and if that 'end' leads me to conclusions not hitherto thought of then I need to do some serious thinking. I have lived my life like that otherwise I would not now be in the Lord's Body. Perhaps you would want to do the same, or maybe you think the idea is unmitigated rubbish. But as always you are entitled to your opinions, provided that they are backed by reasoned argument.

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

SCRIPTURE READINGS

May	6Gen. 50:14-26	2 Cor. 7:2-16
May 13	Ex. 35:20-35	2 Cor. 8:1-15
May 20	Ex. 36:1-13	2 Cor. 8:16-9:5
May 27	Isa. 55	2 Cor. 9:6-15

TITUS

Paul regarded Titus as his "**own son after the common faith**" (Titus 1:4). Out with the epistle that bears Titus' name, he is mentioned in 2 Cor. 7:6; 8:6, 16, 23; 12:18; Gal. 2:1:3 and II Tim. 4:10. Obviously, as F.F. Bruce says of him: "He was a member of the circle who enjoyed Paul's confidence and appreciation in an exceptional degree.

Titus was a Gentile and some have suggested that his home town was An-

tioc. He went early on with Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem to discuss their missionary activity (Gal. 2:1). But why did they take Titus with them? Martin Luther has suggested that he was taken as a test case "to prove that grace was equally sufficient for Gentiles and Jews, whether in circumcision or without circumcision."

We next read of Titus in the Corinthian correspondence. Titus was sent by Paul to report back on the church's reaction to his first letter. Paul was so anxious about things he journeyed to Macedonia to meet Titus as he travelled north (2 Cor 1:23-2:13). He brought him good news. Paul's letter had been completely effective. As one writer has said: "The Corinthians had certainly vindicated Paul's good account of them. Titus

was impressed by them. In fact, he had established friendly relations with them on his own account. He was overjoyed by his reception, as Paul was by his report" (2 Cor. 7:6-16).

The question of the relief fund for Jerusalem again arose and, therefore, Paul sent Titus and others back to Corinth to help them complete their contribution to the collection for the saints. (The outcome was not so happy as we shall find in later chapters).

We do not have sufficient space to consider the work of Titus in Crete, (which is what the Titus epistle is all about). His task there was to "set in order the things that are wanting and ordain elders in every city, as I (Paul) had appointed you" (Titus 1:5). Again it is clear from this letter that he was a much loved and trusted companion of Paul.

A question often asked is "Why is there no mention of Titus in Acts" This is a surprising omission but we simply do not know the answer.

GIVING

Under the old covenant, the people of God were tithed. Under the new covenant the people of God have to give as God has prospered them (1 Cor. 16:2). The giving has not to be done grudgingly, but cheerfully, "for God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Cor. 9:7).

In all the congregations I know, a collection is made each first day of the week when the saints are gathered together around the table of the Lord. (Some churches have resorted to deeds of covenant to collect funds, but I believe there are scriptural objections to this practice — not the least in the taking of money from the State. When did the churches in New Testament times do this?).

As a banker, I am fully aware of the importance of money to our society. In fact, next year I am going to alter all my plans and (D.V.) spend the twelve months studying money, riches, poverty, giving, banking ancient and mod-

ern, etc. I think it will be a profitable exercise. (Forgive the pun!).

Jesus said: "But seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these (earthly) things shall be added unto you" (Matthew 6:33). I accept, of course, what he said, because it is the truth, Jesus had also declared: "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one and love the other: or else he will hold to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon" (Matthew 6:24).

I find that there are tremendous demands made today on congregations to give. Hardly a week goes by without hearing of another worthy cause. Congregations can only do as they can and I am sure this fact is appreciated by all. Not long ago at a Slamannan District Mutual Benefit Meeting we discussed the topic "As Congregations. How should we spend our money: How should we not spend our money?" It was quickly pointed out that it was the Lord's money and as His stewards we shall be judged in our handling of it. Quite a thought, is it not?

MACEDONIA

Macedonia is mentioned in this portion of scripture. This was the province which embraced the northern part of Greece. The region to the south was known as Achaia where were sited Athens and Corinth. Philippi and Thessalonica were famous towns of Macedonia.

Alexander the Great was a Macedonian. In fact his father was known as Philip of Macedon. The Greek empire which they established should, therefore, be more accurately called the Macedonian empire.

There was a programme on the other night on the television which showed some of the recent outstanding archaeological discoveries made in Macedonia, including the tomb of Philip of Macedon himself. Macedonia has always been regarded as the poor relation of southern Greece, but these findings

are beginning to change many scholars' perception of the place.

In Acts 16:9 we read : **"And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: there stood a man of Macedonia and prayed him saying, Come over into Macedonia and help us."** He responded — and what a historical journey that was : the first visit by an apostle of Jesus to the continent of Europe. Europe has never been the same since.

PAUL

Paul later wrote : **"Beside these things (suffering and persecutions) that are without, that which comes upon me daily, the care of all the churches"** (2 Cor. 11:28). To the church at Thessalonica, for example, he once described himself as a nurse and as a father unto them (1 Thessalonians 2:7,11). Bruce has written : "His converts were his pride and joy. When he writes to them he is like a father addressing his children. He commends everything that is praiseworthy in them, where others might have found little enough to commend. He scolds them for their shortcomings and warns them that if they do not mend their ways he will take a big stick with him the next time he comes. But he encourages them for all his worth, and makes no secret of his consuming desire that they should grow up to be hundred-per-cent Christians, worthy of the honourable name they bear."

I know what it is like to be under pressure. I have been on the edge on many occasions. Sometimes, I have even been driven to tears. But everything pales into insignificance in the light of the life of the apostle Paul. He had seen it all and had been through it all. Of course, he could only have made it with God's help. It was Christ living in him that made all the difference. (Gal. 2:20).

Paul is an inspiration to every Christian. He earlier wrote to the Corinthians: **"Be you followers of me, even as I also am of Christ"** (1 Cor. 11:1). Yes, we can trust Paul and we can be guided by him because he was a chosen and faith-

ful apostle of the Master. The gospel he preached was the true gospel and the teaching he gave was sound doctrine from God. I do not know about you, dear reader, but I want to study his life and writings every season of the year. I want to be uplifted, refreshed and strengthened by his insights into the mind and workings of God. He remained faithful to the end, therefore, anticipated that **"crown of life"** (2 Tim. 4:6-8). Oh! that everyone who reads this article will in some measure emulate his labours of love.

Ian S. Davidson. Motherwell.

GHANA REPORT

There was a very encouraging response from the Ghana Cement Appeal in the month of February.

As a result we were able to send £500 to ODUMASI and £500 to PATRIENSA. Both congregations have begun building. By the end of February, David Arku-Mensah informed me that the church in Koforidua had now purchased land with the money sent in December and they are now building. David is still searching for land to purchase for the church in Accra.

Also in the month of February we sent £200 to a disabled Brother (who has attended a tailoring course) to purchase a sewing machine to enable him to earn a living.

£50 worth of seed was sent and to husband in a car crash in December, 1989.

£50 worth of seed were sent and to date (3rd March) a number of brethren have written letters of thanks.

£100 was used to purchase teaching tracts for general distribution.

At the time of writing £580 was in the Royal Bank Ghana Appeal Account.

G. Pearson,
13 Fairways, Dunfermline,
Fife. KY12 0DU.
Tel. 0383 728624.

GHANA APPEAL – ROOFING MATERIALS

By the time you read this, three congregations will have the walls of their buildings well under way (if not complete). Roofs are expensive relative to the overall cost of a building and the range of materials available differ greatly in cost. As many people will appreciate, after the storms of February in this country, roofs are normally the weak point in a building when put to the test. It would be good if we could assist these congregations to put a good roof on their meeting places to avoid the temptation to 'cut corners' through lack of finance. Whatever has been collected this month for roofing materials will be sent to Ghana on April 30th. The transfer takes about 7 days but can take 3 weeks to clear in Ghana, therefore will be received by the end of May.

June is the end of one wet season (which begins in April) and the next wet season begins in October therefore it would very much appreciated if donations, on this particular appeal could be sent to me for 30th April.

I am very pleased to report that to date (3/2/90) a total of £11,175.80 has been collected for the work in Ghana. The brethren in Ghana are very grateful to all who have donated so far and have asked me to inform you that your donations have greatly encouraged the church there in their time of need. Donations should be made out to Graeme Pearson (Ghana Appeal).

G. Pearson,
13 Fairways, Dunfermline,
Fife. KY12 0DU.
Tel. 0383 728624.

P.S. — Thank You IMB for your donation of £10 received on 17/2/90 for cement appeal.

Thank you ANON for the seeds sent to me for posting to Ghana on 8/3/90.

NEWS FROM THE CHURCHES

Haddington: The church here have just held a Gospel Meeting Week-end (9th - 11th March), (Friday, Saturday & Sunday Evening Gospel Meetings) with Bill Mair, from Buckie doing the preaching. The meetings were well supported by brethren of neighbouring churches and all enjoyed splendid messages from Brother Mair each evening, and were all encouraged thereby. We can but hope and pray that the seed sown has found good ground. Brother Mair also served the church on Sunday morning and we thank Bill and Jessie for their visit and efforts in the gospel.

R. Nisbet (Sec.).

Slamannan District: The Quarterly Mutual Benefit Meeting of the Slamannan and District Churches was held at Haddington Meeting-house on Saturday, 3rd March, when a goodly company discussed the question, "What is the Irremissable Sin". Chairman was James R. Gardiner and the speakers were John Kneller, Tranent, and Ian Davidson, Motherwell.

As usual, after tea, the speakers were allowed 15 mins. each to open up the subject and thereafter questions and comments from the audience, for one hour were engaged in. As usual, many interesting points were raised and much was learned. A most enjoyable time of fellowship was enjoyed.

The next meeting, God willing, will be at Wallacestone (or Motherwell) on 12th May, when the topic will be "What should be our strategy to evangelise the world. What methods are available to the church in the 1990's". John Kneller will be Chairman and the speakers will be James Sinclair (Sen.) and Mark Plain (all Tranent).

ONLY one principle will give you courage – that is the principle that no evil lasts forever, nor indeed for very long.

It isn't possessions that condemn a man, but how he obtained them and the use he makes of them.

COMING EVENTS

Buckie Annual Social: Saturday, 26th May, (D.V.). Meeting Place: Buckie. Speaker: Nat Cooper. All Welcome.

Kirkcaldy Annual Social: Hayfield Road, Kirkcaldy. Saturday, 21st April, 1990, 3.30 p.m. (Tea 4.45 p.m.) Speaker: Mike Heinemeir.

Brighton 100th Anniversary Meeting: Saturday, 7th April, 1990, at 6.00 p.m. At BRIGHTON. Speaker: Geoffrey Daniell (Bristol). Light Refreshments provided after the Meeting. All Welcome.

Saturday Meetings: The church at Dennyloanhead intend (D.V.) to hold Saturday evening Gospel Meetings on
28th April at 6.00 p.m.
26th May at 6.00 p.m.
23rd June at 6.00 p.m.

Speaker for 28th April is David Ferguson. Others to be announced later. All Welcome.

GOLDEN WEDDING

Hearty congratulations to James and Elsie Sinclair, 62 North Seton Park, Port Seton, East Lothian. Married at Ferguson's Rooms, High Street, Port Seton, on 22nd March, 1940, by T.J. Dyer.

STRENGTH BY PROVIDENCE

We never have more than we can bear. The present hour we are always able to endure. As our day, so is our strength. If the trials of many years were gathered into one, they would overwhelm us; therefore in pity to our little strength, He sends first one, then another, then removes both, and lays on a third, heavier perhaps, than either; but all is so wisely measured to our strengths that the bruised reed is never broken. We do not enough look at our trials in this continuous and successive view. Each one is sent to teach us something, and altogether; they have a lesson which is beyond the power of any to teach alone.

UNDERSTANDING ITS PURPOSE

The Church is not a refrigerator for preserving perishable piety. It is a dynamo for charging human wills with power. The object of the church is not to tell men how to dodge difficulties, but to furnish strength and courage to meet them. The business of the church is not to furnish hammocks for the lazy, but rather it is to offer well-fitting yokes for drawing life's loads. — Woodstock (Cape Town) "Bulletin."

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