

# The SCRIPTURE STANDARD

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*"Let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us looking unto Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith"*

## *Editorial* "Speaking where the Bible speaks (2)..."

As we noted in last month's editorial, the Thomas Campbell slogan about speaking where the Bible speaks and being silent where it is silent has become one of the dominant slogans of the modern Christian era, particularly amongst what is regarded as 'the Restoration Movement'. Last month we applied some thought to the Church's traditional teaching concerning the gospel and my own conclusion was that, in general the Christian communities that most of us are involved with

have remained faithful to the fundamental principles of the primacy of faith in Jesus and the gift of grace delivered through His once-for-all sacrifice as the only basis of our relationship with God and our hope of eternal salvation.

### The Stone-Campbell Vision of Unity

It is when we stray beyond the basic parameters of the Pentecost gospel message that the problems really start and those problems have not just presented themselves in an inter-denominational context, but have over the years been the source of enormous and damaging conflict within what, for these purposes, might be referred to as the denominational 'Churches of Christ'. And yet, we must remind ourselves that Thomas Campbell's objective, later taken up by his son Alexander, was to unite Christians rather than to divide them. In many respects Campbell was influenced by, and took up the theme of, the pleas for tolerance of one another's opinions that had earlier been expressed by John Locke a couple of centuries earlier. The context in which Locke made his pleas was a far more violent and physically intimidating environment than we encounter today, or Campbell encountered in his day. In John Locke's day, and he lived between 1632 and 1704, religious intolerance was state-sponsored, and for the previous 200 years or so, beginning with Henry VIII, English kings and queens had exerted a considerable influence over religious thought and practice, and dissenters often paid for their religious beliefs with their lives. It had been a period when state and 'church' were intertwined. Parliamentary acts such as The Act of Toleration

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and The Act of Uniformity had been passed. Religious intolerance was not simply a matter of theological differences expressed in 'debating chambers' and church halls but was quite literally often a matter of physical life and death. When viewed in that context it makes some of the verbal jousting that Christians have engaged in, and divided over, seem very self-indulgent. It was in this context, in 1689, that John Locke wrote his treatise entitled 'A Letter Concerning Toleration', essentially a plea against religious intolerance and against the charge of heresy that was brought against anyone not subscribing to the traditions of the state church, and seeking to apply principles that would bring about unity within Christianity. In that letter Locke wrote: **"The toleration of those that differ from others in matters of religion, is so agreeable to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and to the genuine reason of mankind, that it seems monstrous for men to be so blind, as not to perceive the necessity and advantage of it, in so clear a light."**

Unity or Uniformity – there is a difference!

Thomas Campbell and his son, Alexander, shared a real enthusiasm for trying to bring Christian groups together and ultimately it was their efforts in the United States, alongside those of Barton Stone of the Disciples of Christ movement, that led, for a time, to some real progress in the cause of Christian unity. I make again, though, the point that unity really only happens at one level. Real unity is that God has called all of his followers, that is, all Christians, into the unique fellowship of the family of God. This fellowship is best described to us, through Jesus' intimate statement to his disciples recorded in John 17. This unity is a gift; it is not something that we can build or destroy; it is not a unity for which we can set the terms and conditions or have any say in them; the terms have been set by God, and our enjoinment into that family is by the grace of God and has been won by the sacrifice of Jesus and our faith in Him, and His saving grace. Christians are 'united in Christ' and that unity is indestructible for all faithful Christians (Romans 8: 39ff).

Beyond that there is the 'unity' that essentially seems to devolve down to, and is best expressed by, the idea of uniformity of practice. The general principle amongst many Christians would seem to be that if we have uniformity of thought and practice then we are united; if we don't have that uniformity then unity is elusive. Can we then be 'united in Christ' without total uniformity? Of course we can, otherwise early Gentile and Jewish Christian communities were not 'united in Christ' and the community in Corinth was not 'united in Christ' (something that Paul never said, despite all his criticism of some of their actions). This aspect is within our control and is it therefore little surprise that the natural instincts of men (and sometimes women) for influence and power over the thoughts and actions of others has pervaded religion in its broadest sense. This 'unity' is ephemeral and it will always be so; it ebbs and flows; it depends on human emotional strength (or frailty) rather than divine design. Sometimes a measure of 'unity' is won by the sheer persistence and determination of influential people to try to achieve it; it almost invariably involves not a uniformity of practice, but compromise and toleration of differences. But in truth it only lasts until someone determines that the degree of toleration required has become unacceptable and ultimately decides to set up another 'faction' that is more faithful to the principles that the individual in question holds dear. And then it seems impossible for that individual or group not to evolve into a larger grouping as others attach to it so that eventually some form of 'organisation' is formed, the organisation spawns leaders (or the prime movers in the establishment of the organisation assume leadership), the leadership forms policies and creeds, gives the group a title, and so another denomination becomes established. It's the circle; the circle of religious life. Writing in *The Christian Baptist* in 1824, Alexander Campbell wrote: 'So long as unity of opinion was regarded as a proper basis of religious union, so long have mankind

been distracted by the multiplicity and variety of opinions. To establish what is called a system of orthodox opinions as a bond of union was, in fact, offering a premium for new diversities in opinion, and was increasing, ad infinitum, opinions, sects and divisions. And what was worse than all, it was establishing self-love and pride as religious principles, as fundamental to salvation, for a love regulated by similarity of opinion, is only a love to one's own opinion; and all the zeal exhibited in the defense of it, is but the pride of opinion.'

## Mankind's 'unity' – doomed to fail?

I made reference earlier to the efforts of the Stone-Campbell Movement (note the title; note the word 'movement') to bring about unity in the States in the 19th century. Despite some extremely fundamental differences about the openness of communion, the Trinity and premillennialism to name just three (the Stone 'Christian Churches' were generally regarded as liberal and the Campbell 'Disciples of Christ' Churches conservative) they made it work to some extent and for a period of around 70 years from 1832 to 1906. Then, almost inevitably, the 'unity' began to break down. The 'Disciples of Christ' and 'Churches of Christ' drifted apart and in truth it seems that they never, even during the period of working together, got rid of their separate identities despite the fact that they were 'united' and both part of the 'Restoration Movement'. Many of the problems that emerged had at least as much to do with political differences arising from the American Civil War, and the relative prosperity of the northern and southern unions of the United States, as they did with religious attitudes and Christian beliefs. Then of course in the 20th century, again in the States, the more prosperous southern communities began to support orphan homes, built colleges, sponsored mission work, established large buildings for worship and started to hold Sunday Schools.

I've recently read over twice a smallish book that was left with us by the leader of one of the groups of Lipscomb students that have regularly worked with our community in Longshoot over recent years. Entitled "Renewing God's People" it charts the history of the development of the so-called Restoration churches in the United States and some of the history referred to above is from that book. The powerful alliance of two people dedicated to Christian unity, and basing their ideals on the New Testament, overcame differences. The book tracks the period of 'unity' in the 19th century, the effects of the Civil War, and the gradual breakdown of the united front. It deals with the issues that arose in the early 20th century and it was here that the narrative started to have some personal relevance. I think it was the phrase about the divisions that arose between 'Sunday School churches' and 'non Sunday School churches' that really started me thinking seriously about the whole 'speak where the Bible speaks ....' philosophy, especially in the 'disallowing' way that it had come to be interpreted, and, in a broader sense, about denominationalism in general. Remember the Campbells used this phrase to promote the idea that if the Bible does not **expressly state** that a practice is forbidden or unacceptable, then avoidance of such a practice should not be made a test of communion or fellowship. And yet we now had people stating that because the Bible did not expressly state that a practice **was** allowable, then on the basis of scripture's silence it should be avoided. The emphasis had shifted dramatically.

As I noted a little earlier, the debate about Sunday School was something of a touchstone for me because it was so relevant to my early experience. I'd heard all the stuff about Christian colleges of course and their supposed role in bringing a liberal agenda forward; but Sunday Schools? I'd grown up in Sunday School without a second thought about whether it was 'scriptural' or not. Sunday School was inherently good; It was there so that young children right through to teenagers and

beyond could be taught the truths of the Bible; it was in Sunday School that Bible stories were told and came to life; where songs about Moses crossing the Red Sea, S.I.N being a little word that always spelled disaster and locking Satan in a box and throwing the key away were learned and sung; where the books of the Bible were learned verbatim. Sunday School was the second of three family walks to church each Sunday (always walking with dignity and decorum as dad used to say just about every time), fitted in between the morning worship and the gospel meeting. And because 'we speak where the Bible speaks and are silent where it is silent', and, in the modern interpretation of the slogan, because the Bible does not expressly talk about Sunday Schools, Christian churches actually divided over Sunday Schools. And on the basis of a man-made slogan we had the improbable position of something as good and wholesome as Sunday School (nothing more than a get-together where the Bible was taught) being challenged as unscriptural. And looking after orphans in homes was considered wrong. And going to Christian colleges rather than secular colleges was considered wrong too. And one then begins to reflect on how many contemporary divisive 'issues' have resulted from the same kind of opinions.

## Christians only

I now genuinely believe that over the years we have massively overcomplicated the reality of Christianity. It has become a veritable minefield of personal opinion, denominational differentiation, factionalism and all of the other interests that have blighted Christianity over the years. Is there a way out of this morass (if indeed you think of these matters in these terms)? One thing that we must bear in mind of course is that neither John Locke, nor the Campbells, nor Barton Stone, nor any other of the great characters of Church history should ever be regarded as the 'founder' of the modern Christian Church. People of great influence, certainly, but founders, never. That status will forever and only ever apply to God working through Jesus. Neither should any of their letters, declarations or slogans be accorded any authority or legitimacy beyond what they are – which is that they are the statements of Christian men who at a point in time in Christian history sought, through the written and spoken word, to influence a generation of Christians towards a common goal of 'unity'. They may well cogently and succinctly express a principle that is dear to the hearts of many people but that does not give them any kind of divine authority. The emphasis of Campbell's phrase has been distorted from its original intention and the result has, regrettably, been that in the 20th century at least, less rather than more unity has often resulted.

Let me begin to sum up with a question. How do you define the 'Churches of Christ' in, say, the United Kingdom in the 21st century, remembering in answering that question that there is no central earthly hierarchy and that there ought to be a generally accepted principle of congregational autonomy. Would it be any local assembly that has 'Church of Christ' or similar above its door or notice board? Would it be by reference to some listing of 'Churches of Christ'? (Please note that I am not referring to the CW Directory here, which makes no claim so far as I know to be a definitive listing of 'Churches of Christ'). Would it be by reference to some sort of 'loose federation' of local assemblies, operating on an autonomous basis but of which there is common knowledge, and having sufficient commonality of practice to be regarded as 'faithful' assemblies? And without any central hierarchy, who decides anyway whether any particular assembly is to be regarded as 'in' or 'out' of any definition of a denominational 'Churches of Christ' or one of a non-denomination group of 'churches of Christ'? And what practice or practices does an assembly need to adopt, or fail to adopt, to put it outside of any such definition? The reality is that there is no acceptable answer to these questions without immediately falling into the flawed concept of denominationalism.

The articles on denominationalism started at Pentecost and those articles, and these latter ones on Campbell's motto and its effects, must also end there. The call of the apostles was to **"repent and be baptised... in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."** In doing so the Lord adds us to His Church, the universal called out people of God. I am not a member of any denominational 'Church of Christ' but a member of the Lord's Church; not a member of a 'Sunday School church' or an 'a capella church', but a member of the Lord's body; I am not a member of the Restoration Movement or the Old Paths Fellowship, or any other kind of man-inspired grouping, but simply a member of God's family, and not because I have chosen to join His family but because He has added me to it. Our salvation is individual and rests on God's grace and our faith. It is not 'a Church' or a congregation or a denomination that will be saved, but individual, faithful Christians wherever they are found. In pursuit of maintaining my faithfulness and, as God has required, I meet for communion and fellowship with a group of fellow Christians in Longshoot, Wigan and in that community we have sought out Christian men to guide, feed and protect the flock as best they are able based on their own understanding of scriptural principles. We support and encourage each other along the way, nurturing our young, tending to the sick, supporting the weak, raising the fallen and putting the strong to useful work in the Lord's service. Without at all suggesting that our congregation is perfect or indeed uniform in the beliefs of its members, like many other Christian congregations, it demonstrates some of the best aspects of a Christian community. Let Paul, the apostle, remind us from the 1st century how this works best:

"And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, and sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of our Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." **(Col 2:15-17)**

When we step outside of the conventional and traditional definitions of the body of Christ and make a deliberate policy of moving away from the denominational mindset, we inevitably move out of our comfort zone. If we stop regarding the denominational Church of Christ as the one true church, then exactly how do we define the body of Christ? How wide is our fellowship? Even today, most Christians that I know are, on the basis of the 6th commandment, opposed to war and killing yet seemingly regard themselves quite readily as members of the same universal fellowship as Christians who are members of the armed forces, and presumably therefore ready to go to war if their government demands it; in the community that I worship with we are far from uniform in our views about the nature of the Godhead; yet I suspect that if my local assembly started to use a guitar in worship services or employ interactive media to deliver teaching, or appointed a deaconess, our notoriety and indeed 'unfaithfulness' would very quickly spread amongst other congregations amongst which we are known, and we may well become regarded as 'unsound'. These are, to me anyway, challenging questions, to which I have only one answer and that answer is, as I believe God will do, to consider the faithfulness of individuals rather than groups, our response to the Bible rather than men's opinions, faithful Christians rather than faithful congregations, one called out people of God and not one 'denomination'. Our unity, that is by definition the unity of all Christians, is in Christ and let us go one exalting and glorifying His name, producing the good works that His workmanship demands and growing ever closer to a loving Saviour who gave His life for His Church.

# STUDIES IN GENESIS 7

(Ian S Davidson, Motherwell)



## ISAAC AND JACOB

Jesus once encountered a Roman centurion in Capernaum (Matthew 8: 5-13; Luke 7: 1-10). He begged Jesus to heal his servant and he believed the Master could do it from a distance by a simple command. Jesus said of the centurion: "...I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and

Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth...and his servant was healed, in the selfsame hour" (Matthew 8:10a – 13). Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were men of great faith (Hebrews 11: 8-21). God was pleased to call Himself the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob on a number of occasions (three times, for example, in Exodus chapter 3). (See also Exodus 4: 5; 1 Kings 18: 36; 1 Chronicles 29: 18; 2 Chronicles 30: 6; Matthew 22: 32; Mark 12: 26; Luke 20: 37; Acts 3: 13; and Acts 7: 32).

## ISAAC

Isaac was born to Sarah when she was 90 and Abraham was 100 (Genesis 17: 17; 21: 5). His birth, therefore, was miraculous. Isaac was the seed through whom the line of promise was to continue. For example, we read: "But my covenant will I establish with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear unto you at this set time in the next year" (Genesis 17: 21). God later put Abraham to the test with the command to sacrifice Isaac. He passed the test! And in place of Isaac, Jehovah provided a ram for His purposes. The promise was then renewed that Abraham would have much seed through Isaac his son (Genesis 22). (Incidentally, I recently read David Pawson's large volume entitled *Unlocking the Bible*. Concerning Isaac, he wrote: "Most of the pictorial representations of the sacrifice of Isaac paint him as a boy of 12. But if we examine the text surrounding this event we see that the very next thing that happens is Sarah's death at the age of 127, which would make Isaac 37. So Isaac was probably in his early thirties at the time of the sacrifice. He could therefore have resisted easily, but he submitted in faith to his father Abraham, an old man").

Isaac later married Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel, Abraham's nephew. We see from chapter 24 that Abraham was anxious all along that Isaac would marry the "right girl". The indication is that God's providence had a large part to play in Isaac and Rebekah coming together. Following the marriage, they waited twenty years before the twins were born. The boys are well known figures in the history of the Old Testament – Esau and Jacob.

## JACOB

Jacob and Esau even fought in the womb (Genesis 25: 22). God spoke to Rebekah thus: "Two nations are in your womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from your bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger" (25: 23). The elder was Esau and the younger, Jacob.

There was favouritism in the family because "Isaac loved Esau...but Rebekah loved Jacob" (25: 28). In the end, this led to the break-up of the family unit. It was Esau who sold his birthright to Jacob for "bread and pottage of lentils" (25: 27-34). Later Esau distressed his mother and father by marrying women of the Hittite race (26: 34-35). Rebekeh planned the deception of Jacob obtaining the blessing from his aged father (chapter 27). Jacob was then sent to Paddan Aram to find a wife from the daughters of his uncle Laban (28: 2). Isaac did not want him to marry any of the daughters of Canaan (28: 1). Eventually, Jacob married the love of his life – Rachel. Rachel was his second wife because Laban had deceived Jacob into first marrying Leah, his elder daughter. (I presume deception was achieved by the use of the veil.)

Jacob ended up with twelve sons and one daughter. But they were not all born of the same mother. Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun and Dinah were of Leah; Dan and Naphtali were of Rachel's maidservant Bilhah; Gad and Asher were of Leah's maidservant Zilpah; and Joseph and Benjamin were the children of Rachel. Prior to his coming to Paddan Aram, Jacob had arrived at Bethel (a place associated with Abraham). There he had a vision of a ladder between heaven and earth and Jehovah standing above it. The promise to Abraham was confirmed to him. We read: "I am the Lord God of Abraham your father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon you lie, to you will I give it, and to your seed. And your seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in you and in your seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed. And behold I am with you, and will keep you in all places where you go, and will bring you again into this land; for I will not leave you, until I have done that of which I have spoken to you" (28: 13-15).

## JACOB AND ESAU

"I have loved you, says the Lord. Yet you say, Wherein have you loved us? Was not Esau Jacob's brother? says the Lord: yet I loved Jacob and hated Esau and laid his mountains and his heritage waste for the wild animals of the wilderness" (Malachi 1: 2-3). Paul quotes this passage in his epistle to the Romans (9: 13) and his words, like all portions of scripture, should be read within the context.

The words from Malachi are tough, plain and arresting and the contrast is typical of the way things are put in Hebrew. Nevertheless, I see here Jacob and Esau representing two nations – the Israelites and the Edomites. The Edomites were condemned by God because of their treatment of Jacob's (Israel's) descendants. W.R. Bradlaugh has written: "The grievous and deliberate injustice of Esau's conduct is very plain, 'Edom came out against him (Israel) with much people, and with a strong hand: thus Edom refused to give Israel passage through his border, wherefore Israel turned away from him' (Numbers 20: 20, 21). This inhospitable cruelty to a harmless brother-race, was the more guilty, as it was their only answer to the humblest application, and offers to pay for even the very water they wished to drink (ib. vers. 17-19). Read also Deut. 2: 4-6 and 27-29; Judges 11: 17,18; Ezek. 25: 12, 13, etc. and Obadiah 10, etc."

The interesting thing is this: No one can find an Edomite on the face of the earth today, but no one can fail to find a descendant of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob virtually anywhere in the world. The Bible deals with a people still with us. Their history is long, fascinating, joyful, tragic and true.

# The Matchless Pearl

— Author Unknown

David Morse - American missionary to India - became great friends there with the pearl diver, Rambhau. Many an evening he spent in Rambhau's cabin reading to him from the Bible, and explaining to him God's way of salvation.

Rambhau enjoyed listening to the Word of God, but whenever the missionary tried to get Rambhau to accept Christ as his Saviour - he would shake his head and reply, "Your Christian way to heaven is too easy for me! I cannot accept it. If ever I should find admittance to heaven in that manner - I would feel like a pauper there... like a beggar who has been let in out of pity. I may be proud - but I want to deserve, I want to earn my place in heaven — and so I am going to work for it."

Nothing the missionary could say seemed to have any effect on Rambhau's decision, and so quite a few years slipped by. One evening, however, the missionary heard a knock on his door, and on going to open it he found Rambhau there. "Come in, dear friend," said Morse.

"No," said the pearl diver. "I want you to come with me to my house, Sahib, for a short time — I have something to show you. Please do not say 'No'."

"Of course I'll come," replied the missionary. As they neared his house, Rambhau said: "In a week's time I start working for my place in heaven; I am leaving for Delhi — and I am going there on my knees."

"Man, you are crazy! It's nine hundred miles to Delhi, and the skin will break on your knees, and you will have blood-poisoning or leprosy before you get to Bombay."

"No, I must get to Delhi," affirmed Rambhau, "and the immortals will reward me for it! The suffering will be sweet - for it will purchase heaven for me!"

"Rambhau, my friend - you can't. How can I bear you to do it - when Jesus Christ has suffered and died to purchase heaven for you!"

But the old man could not be moved. "You are my dearest friend on earth, Sahib Morse. Through all these years you have stood by me in sickness, in want - you have been sometimes my only friend. But even you cannot turn me from my desire to purchase eternal bliss...I must go to Delhi!"

Inside the hut Morse was seated in the very chair Rambhau had specially built for him - where on so many occasions he had read to him the Bible.

Rambhau left the room to return soon with a small but heavy English strongbox. "I have had this box for years," said he, "and I keep only one thing in it. Now I will tell you about it, Sahib Morse. I once had a son..."

"A son! Why, Rambhau, you have never before said a word about him!"

"No, Sahib, I couldn't." Even as he spoke the diver's eyes were moistened.

"Now I must tell you, for soon I will leave, and who knows whether I shall ever return? My son was a diver too. He was the best pearl diver on the coasts of India. He had the swiftest dive, the keenest eye, the strongest arm, the longest breath of any man who ever sought for pearls.

What joy he brought to me! Most pearls, as you know, have some defect or blemish only the expert can discern, but my boy always dreamed of finding the 'perfect' pearl - one beyond all that was ever found. One day he found it! But even when he saw it - he had



been under water too long... That pearl cost him his life, for he died soon after."

The old pearl diver bowed his head. For a moment his whole body shook, but there was no sound. "All these years," he continued, "I have kept this pearl - but now I am going, not to return, and to you, my best friend - I am giving my pearl."

The old man worked the combination on the strongbox and drew from it a carefully wrapped package. Gently opening the cotton, he picked up a mammoth pearl and placed it in the hand of the missionary.

It was one of the largest pearls ever found off the coast of India, and glowed with a lustre and brilliance never seen in cultured pearls. It would have brought a fabulous sum in any market.

For a moment the missionary was speechless and gazed with awe. "Rambhau! What a pearl!"

"That pearl, Sahib, is perfect," replied the Indian quietly. The missionary looked up quickly with a new thought: Was not this the very opportunity and occasion he had prayed for - to make Rambhau understand the value of Christ's sacrifice? So he said, designedly, "Rambhau, this is a wonderful pearl, an amazing pearl. Let me buy it. I would give you ten thousand dollars for it."

"Sahib! What do you mean?"

"Well, I will give you fifteen thousand dollars for it, or if it takes more - I will work for it."

"Sahib," said Rambhau, stiffening his whole body, "this pearl is beyond price. No man in all the world has money enough to pay what this pearl is worth to me. On the market a million dollars could not buy it. I will not sell it to you. You may only have it as a gift."

"No, Rambhau, I cannot accept that. As much as I want the pearl, I cannot accept it that way. Perhaps I am proud, but that is too easy. I must pay for it, or work for it..."

The old pearl diver was stunned. "You don't understand at all, Sahib. Don't you see? My only son gave his life to get this pearl, and I wouldn't sell it for any money. Its worth is in the life-blood of my son. I cannot sell this - but I can give it to you. Just accept it in token of the love I bear you."

The missionary was choked, and for a moment could not speak. Then he gripped the hand of the old man. "Rambhau," he said in a low voice, "don't you see? My words are just what you have been saying to God all the time."

The diver looked long and searchingly at the missionary, and slowly, slowly he began to understand. "God is offering you salvation as a free gift," said the missionary. "It is so great and priceless that no man on earth can buy it. Millions of dollars are too little. No man on earth could earn it. His life would be millions of years too short. No man is good enough to deserve it. It cost God the life-blood of His only Son to make the entrance for you into heaven. In a million years, in a hundred pilgrimages, you could not earn that entrance. All you can do is to accept it as a token of God's love for you - a sinner.

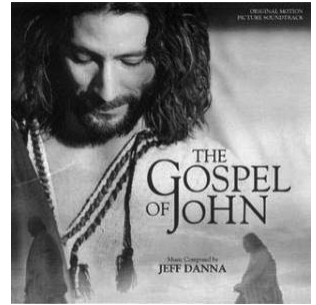
"Rambhau, of course I will accept the pearl in deep humility, praying God that I may be worthy of your love. Rambhau, won't you accept God's great gift of heaven, too, in deep humility, knowing it cost Him the death of His Son to offer it to you?"

Great tears were now rolling down the cheeks of the old man. The veil was beginning to lift. "Sahib, I see it now. I have believed in the doctrine of Jesus for the last two years, but I could not believe that His salvation was free. Now I understand. Some things are too priceless to be bought or earned. Sahib, I will accept His salvation!"

# *Understanding the Life of Jesus Mary of Bethany anoints Jesus*

**(Robert Marsden, Wigan)**

In the previous article in this series we considered the events surrounding the raising of Lazarus, the friend of Jesus and brother of Mary and Martha, from the dead. It was a defining moment because John records in Chapter 11, verse 53 that, as a result of this action and the prophecy of Caiaphas that so unnerved the Pharisees, they (the Pharisees) "took counsel how to put him to death". Jesus now receded from the public scene for a while, and travelled up to Ephraim, north of Jerusalem, to spend some time together with his disciples. It is only conjecture, but one can imagine that this was a period of what we might now call 'quality time' with his disciples as he prepared them privately for the events that were to unfold in Jerusalem. Nevertheless such was the widespread effect and knowledge of his actions that Jesus was far from forgotten and speculation was rife amongst the Jews preparing to gather in Jerusalem for the Passover feast as to whether Jesus would attend. Neither were the Pharisees inactive, putting word about that anyone who knew of the whereabouts of Jesus should tell them so that he could be arrested.



Towards the end of this short period out of the public gaze Jesus and his disciples made their way back to Bethany, to the house of Simon the leper where Mary, Martha and the risen Lazarus were in attendance. So Jesus was now back within a couple of miles of Jerusalem, with the Passover only 6 days away, and one can imagine that the Pharisees were in a state of high alert about a possible appearance of Jesus. Jesus took supper there with this group of some of his closest friends during which Martha served at the table.

In a beautiful account of the deepest affection of one person for another all of the friction generated by Jesus' deliberate arguments with the Jewish authorities and his knowledge of the impending trauma of Gethsemane and his crucifixion, is set aside for a brief, intimate moment. It is abundantly clear from the account of Mary's action in anointing the head (Matthew and Mark) and/or feet (John) of Jesus, that Mary had a very deep affection indeed for Jesus. Much to the surprise and even annoyance of the disciples she takes a flask of very expensive ointment that had a value equivalent to almost a full year's wages for a labourer in those days (the ointment cost 300 denarii, and a labourer could expect to earn 1 denarius each day; just for a point of reference only, in today's terms if we assume a labourer's wage to be, even at the level of the minimum wage, say, £12,000 per annum, we are talking of somewhere around the equivalent of £10,000 for the cost of the ointment.)

Mary's actions suggest that she had some special insight into the fact that she was unlikely to have any further opportunities to express her deep love and affection for Jesus in this way nor to have other opportunities to acknowledge Jesus as her Lord

and Master. Indeed it was normally the duty of slaves to anoint feet so Mary is demonstrating her utter servitude to Jesus. Perhaps Mary's actions are borne out of a sense of deep gratitude towards Jesus, as well as their long-time friendship, in response for his actions in raising Lazarus. Do you recall that at the tomb of Lazarus that it was when Jesus saw Mary weeping that he himself became "deeply moved and visibly distressed". It seems that perhaps even more than the disciples, Mary had a clearer picture of the fact that Jesus' time on the earth was coming to a close. In the accounts of Matthew and Mark it is Jesus himself who, in response to the indignation of the disciples, and most particularly Judas, responds to that indignation by telling them that Mary had done 'a beautiful thing' for him and that she had done everything that she possible could do for him at this stage by anointing his body in preparation for burial.

The other unusual feature of this short account is that Mary, instead of using a towel to wipe the excess oil from the feet of Jesus, as would be the norm, actually wipes his feet with her hair. We can interpret this as an act of the utmost humility on the part of Mary as there is no more humbling experience than to kneel or be prostrate at the feet of another (probably in this case as Jesus, like the other guests, reclined at the supper table). I believe that in this act we see Mary acknowledging Jesus as her Lord. However it was also the custom that a Jewish woman would never display her hair in public, except to her husband, and by doing this she reveals publicly and without shame the deep personal intimacy of her relationship with Jesus. Jewish women were also proud of well-kept hair and it was inevitable that after this act Mary's hair would appear unkempt and dishevelled. None of this is meant in any way meant to imply that Mary regarded Jesus as her husband nor to suggest that there was any impropriety in the relationship. Far more likely in my view is that this was a further acknowledgement by Mary of the headship and primacy of Jesus in her life and affections. Indeed it is gratifying to know that our Lord was able to enjoy such affection from his dearest friends.

It is significant that Jesus raised no objection to the use of such expensive ointment for his anointing on this occasion. I have no doubt that he was fully aware of the cost of the ointment and that, had it been sold, the money raised could have been used for many worthy causes as the disciples implied (though the real motives of Judas were likely to have been far less pure and noble than that). When the rich young ruler had asked Jesus what he had to do to be saved, Jesus had told him to go and sell all that he had and give it to the poor. Yet here Jesus effectively tells the disciples that Mary's action was fully justified because the poor would be with them long into the future, but that his time on earth was now very short indeed. We should not interpret this as Jesus being arrogant or conceited about his position or of being unconcerned for the plight of the poor. Jesus is simply signifying that his time with them was coming to a close and that this act of love by Mary was entirely appropriate in the circumstances. Jesus was Mary's friend. He was someone she could call on when her brother was dying. He was the person that she had followed, watched, listened to and learned from. Her friend was about to leave her and love demanded an embalming before he went away – an act of true friendship.

We need not be in any doubt as to significance that our Lord placed upon this act of humble and selfless devotion either because both Matthew and Mark record that Jesus said "that wherever the gospel is preached in the whole world, what she (Mary) has done will be told in memory of her."

# INFLUENCES ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHRISTIANITY IN THE FIRST CENTURY

(John H Diggle (Nottingham))

## STUDY 6 – the Jerusalem council.

Acts 15 records the meeting of what could, in many ways, be called the first doctrinal council. As well as the immediate and important issue that was the object of its deliberations, and of which much more shortly, it proved to set something of a precedent for such gatherings, which were almost certainly not in the minds or intentions of its constituent members.

### **Councils in religious matters**

The calling of councils on matters of doctrinal dispute subsequently became a favoured means of dealing not only with sincere and genuine quests for the truth of God's will, but also as a means of imposing dogma that had origins in the minds of men and little to do with that which was Spirit inspired. Unknowingly and unintentionally no doubt this first assembly of its kind provided pseudo-scriptural sanction for a view of the Churches relationship with scripture that they can never have imagined and which continues to be held both legitimate and weighty in a vast segment of the 'Christian' religious world of today. John Stott addresses this subject in his book, "Christ the Controversialist", which is well worth a read for fuller treatment than I will be able to give it here. It is all the more telling for his position as an Anglican clergyman, albeit one of very evangelical outlook.

Roman Catholic reasoning takes the following view of the relationship between the authority of scripture and that of the Church, by which it means itself, of course. Beginning from the premise that the apostles were what it calls churchmen, and advancing along the lines that subsequent 'officials of the Church' are their successors, it has reserved to itself the right of declaring substantive dogma, to be believed and practised by priests and members. The result of this has been that a theology, deeply dyed with that church's own slants and preferences, its interpretations and innovations, have been afforded the status of parity with scripture itself. Those who hold this view that the Church is the source of scripture rather than its servant are no less guilty than those whom Jesus condemned for "teaching for doctrines the commandments of men".

We have generally been, and continue to be, rightly wary of the dangers of any kind of assembly called for the purposes of trying to dictate 'an official church position'. However, whilst there has been laudable care to avoid this on any formal or official basis, we have perhaps not been as scrupulous about it in allowing ourselves to fall into the trap of those who require the observance of a kind of 'official position'. So that no mistake ought to be made about what I am saying here, let me put it in as straightforward terms as I can manage – all scripture is God-breathed and as such carries the total weight of His authority as His will for every part of our belief, conduct, obedience and practice. Our interpretations of scripture, preferences, opinions and long-held traditions, hold no such inspiration and no such inherent authority.

In case anyone should think that statement insufficiently respectful of the contributions, teaching and faithfulness of our spiritual forefathers, let me hasten to add that the vast majority of them would have believed and spoken no differently: like Isaac Newton, we can truly say that this is a respect in which we 'stand on giant's shoulders'.

I hope it is becoming apparent that in the course of these studies, we are being helped to be aware of those factors that directly affected not only the first century Church, but that also have proved to be the seeds of developments well beyond that time, often up to and including our own.

It was not of course the council of Jerusalem that was responsible for the misuses, as precedent, to which it has been subjected. From the beginning, the purpose of the brethren at Antioch was to be sure that God's will was being understood and taught correctly, and there was evidence of considerable caution in ensuring that no man's will as either accepted glibly, or dogmatically imposed, was without complete correspondence with His intentions. It is also important to notice that, concerning the way of salvation as it did, this was no trivial matter, but one of vital significance to the most fundamental of fundamentals.

### **The Council and its judgement**

Although the matter of dispute first flared at Antioch between Paul and Barnabas and some who had come down from Judea, it is evident both from the remainder of Acts 15 and other sections of the New Testament, such as the letters to the Galatians and Timothy and to Philippi, Rome and Corinth, that the problem was far from confined to that place alone. Was it worth contending over, and what does it have to say to us about that which is, and that which is not, important? Since this has been discussed in a previous article, only the briefest of memory refreshment will be given here. In any case the words of Paul and Barnabas, that salvation is only and always offered on the basis of grace, and through obedient faith in the all sufficiency of Christ's atoning sacrifice apart from Law, (c.f. Romans 3:21–26) is succinctly expressed and twice repeated in verses 1 and 5. Understandably so to an extent dispute and debate between believers is often the sharper for that intensity of feeling fuelled by sincere passion for the importance of what is at issue.

Especially so given his own involvement in the same or a very similar issue at Antioch, Peter's counsel to the council is evidence of a doubtless, Spirit-moved, growth and maturity. His testimony could hardly have been more spiritually precise, nor his analysis of the essentials more accurately identified. Far too regularly we have proved ourselves ill equipped, or disinclined, to prevent heat from overtaking light, as the outcome of our conversations, on that over which we do not see eye to eye.

The manner of these proceedings is as illuminating as any decision that came out of them. After a brief report from Paul and Barnabas giving details of what God had accomplished through them among the Gentiles, and notice that they do indeed speak of what He, not they, had done, it was left to James to summarise and advise as to the best future course of action. No more strongly does he put it than that it is 'his judgement' that unnecessary obstacles to the turning of the Gentiles to God, should be avoided. There is a seeming gentleness and absence of self-importance to his tone, on which the significance of his position and the weight of his authority, as an apostle, is worn lightly. It remains plainly conscious of striving to act in accordance with God's intentions, rather than falsely gracing the intentions of himself or the council, with a weight to which they are not entitled. It is based on, and delivered on the basis of, clear and cogent scriptural teaching, and it is deeply conscious of the subsidiary principles that may yet have a bearing on the way that it is received in practice.

### **The duty to act in love**

The cynically-minded may have the inclination to describe the few additional requirements included in the letter expressing the outcome of their deliberations, as a cop-out clause, or as a 'sop' to those belligerent Judaizers who were probably not best pleased with the outcome. Difficult to deal with and irritating they may have been, but, even though there was far from universal acknowledgement of the wisdom of the council's view, neither James, nor any of the other apostles, were prepared to

condone, or appear to condone, a thoughtless or brutal trampling over of the delicate feelings of those who remained blood-bought brethren. A time would come when intransigent refusal to accept the increasingly evident will of God in this matter did indeed lead to the formal recognition that some of them had effectively removed themselves from the body of Christ; but that was no source of satisfaction, let alone triumph, to the apostles or any other sincere Christian.

I would like to encourage you to take a good look at Romans 14 and 15 on this subject, especially if you have not done so recently, and, even within that important context to especially 'read, learn, and inwardly digest, as I used to be told with irritating frequency at school, the words of Romans 14:15. [***"If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy your brother for whom Christ died."*** (NIV) – Editor's insertion]. Brethren really do look so, so different when they are viewed through that filter, and it is the one through which God regards all of us constantly, praise be to the glory of His grace.



What do you think?

## DID JESUS ENJOY DIVINE PROTECTION?

The nature of Jesus has been a subject of intense debate over the whole history of Christianity and it remains so to this day. For some the 'human' characteristics of Jesus have the greater resonance whilst for the others the emphasis is on the divine attributes of Jesus. In describing Jesus the phrase that he was 'wholly God and wholly man' has become popular; other descriptions refer to Jesus as 'God in the flesh', that is retaining all of his divine characteristics whilst being in 'the form of man'.

What we do know, because it is explicitly stated in scripture, is that God has a plan for the salvation of mankind and that plan was to be effected through Jesus, the Christ of God. Paul wrote to the Ephesians: "For he has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth" (Eph 1: 9,10).

The life of Jesus was the outworking of prophecy, not in a formulaic sense but in the sense that Jesus was fulfilling, at the behest of God, those things that had been foretold. Jesus never appeared to express any doubt at all that the will of the Father would be carried out and it would be bizarre to think that the plan of God for salvation, His plan for the fullness of time, should in any way be left to chance of fortune. So was Jesus miraculously and divinely protected? Here are some possible examples.

1. After the birth of Jesus, when Herod ordered that all male babies under the age of two were to be killed, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph and told him to flee to Egypt and remain there until he was told that it was safe to leave. This was prophecy fulfilled.
2. Similarly, after the death of Herod, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph and told him that it was safe to return to Israel, but under further instruction eventually went to the Nazareth in the district of Galilee.
3. As Jesus taught in the temple at the Feast of Tabernacles and some of the crowd became agitated at his teaching, John records: "So they sought to arrest him; but no one laid hands on him, because his hour had not yet come." (John 7:30)
4. Similarly John records that as Jesus taught in the treasury about being the light of the world: "These words he spoke in the treasury, as he taught in the temple; but no one arrested him because his hour had not yet come." (John 8:20)
5. On a number of occasions we read of Jesus upsetting the Pharisees and escaping to quiet

- places until the storm that he had created settled down again.
6. At his arrest in the garden at Gethsemane, Jesus indicates that all the events that took place were at a designated time of God's choosing at not at the whim of men: "Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then should the scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so? At that hour Jesus said to the crowds, "Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs to capture me? Day after day I sat in the temple teaching, and you did not seize me. But all this has taken place, that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled." (Matthew 26: 54-56)

## WHAT DO YOU THINK?

- Was it ever possible, for example, that Jesus might have died during birth, or suffered an accidental death as a child?
- Does it seem unfair or unjust that the parents of Jesus were apparently granted a special favour to enable Jesus to escape the cull of male babies demanded by Herod?
- Was Jesus protected from illness and disease?
- If he was so protected, does it for example make his approach to lepers and the sick any less laudable and compassionate?
- Is it conceivable that God's plan for the salvation of mankind could ever have been undermined or thwarted by the actions of men? Could prophecy have remained unfulfilled.

If you have any thoughts that you would like to share on these questions then please submit to the editor (details on the back page).

## News and Information

May I remind you that copies of the book, "Historical Survey of the Churches of Christ in the British Isles" are still available, and we would encourage you to buy and read the book, because we think you would find it both interesting and enlightening. I say this with confidence because we have received many encouraging messages from those who have read it, and they tell us that they have received a much clearer picture of the history of the Church than they had previously.

We would also like you to know that the book has not been produced as a profit-making venture. It was written because it was felt important to produce an accurate account of the history of Churches of Christ in the U.K. whilst it was still possible to have access to sources that are becoming increasingly rare. Hundreds of hours of research, involving - quite literally - hundreds of books and documents, went into its making, and we do not think that anything like it will ever

be produced in the future.

In other words, this is, indeed, a 'special edition', and, as the Supermarkets are fond of saying, "When they're gone - they're gone!"

Here are some more facts in which you may be interested:

The book has been made possible with the financial support of the British Bible School, and the School alone will benefit from whatever profit is made from the sales. None of the ten brethren who have written for the book will receive any payment whatsoever.

This means that if you buy the book you are actually helping to spread the Gospel by contributing to the funds of the British Bible School.

It is not widely known that, at the present time, there are graduates of the 'BBS' serving the Lord in about 40 different countries. Some of them have established Schools in Ghana, Malawi and India, and they still wish to send men to study at the Bible School, who will then return to their own countries to teach their own people. This is real missionary work, and, although you may have heard whispers suggesting that the

BBS is likely to close, I can assure you that so long as there are brethren who wish to study the Word of God, and funds to support them, the work of the British Bible School will continue.

So! What about the book? It was printed in the United States by a printing-company owned by members of the Church.

This means that it costs about half what it would have cost in this country. It is very well produced on high-quality paper, hard-backed, bound in blue cloth with gold lettering and contains over 300 pages.

Because the Post Office has raised its rates since the book was published earlier this year, the cost, including postage and packing, is £10. If you could arrange to have a copy picked up for you, the book alone costs £8. And you may contact us by letter, email or 'phone and we will despatch your copy the day we receive your order.

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And, as Trevor McDonald says, "Thank you for listening"!

## Question Box

Readers are reminded that any questions that arise in discussion or from personal study can be forwarded to Bro. Frank Worgan for his consideration. At the moment the Question Box is empty and the feature will not appear in the SS until Frank has questions that he can usefully answer. Our policy is that only genuine reader's questions will be answered and that questions will not be fabricated just for the purpose of continuing this feature of the magazine. We are lucky to have the benefits of Frank's long experience and study at our disposal and I hope that through your questions we can get him back to work on your behalf as soon as possible. Please forward your questions directly to Frank by post to: Frank Worgan, 11, Stanier Road, Corby, Northants NN17 1XP or by email to: [Frank@fworgan0.talktalk.co.uk](mailto:Frank@fworgan0.talktalk.co.uk)

## Coming Events

**EUROPEAN CHRISTIAN  
WORKSHOP**  
**LANCASTER UNIVERSITY**  
**THURS 28TH AUG – SAT 30TH AUG,**  
**2008.**  
*(More details to follow later)*

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