

The SCRIPTURE STANDARD

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

VOL. 55 No. 10

OCTOBER, 1987

THAT THE WORLD MAY BELIEVE

Prompted by brother Woodcock's recent letter (published August issue) I have been thinking about this question of Unity, and apparently, many others have been doing the same. It is always worthwhile to regularly re-examine our position on any, and every, issue. There are, I am told, over 300 (perhaps more) different religious denominations in the world, and in one country several different 'brands' of 'Churches of Christ'. This is a bleak picture indeed and must raise the question, "What caused such a situation to come about." It is surely a good approach to the consideration of Unity to sit down and try to identify the causes of dis-unity (noting that a 'Divinity' education is no defence against it, and that much of the deviation is perpetuated by highly-educated theologians, and clergymen.) Why are there so many denominations and what are the causes of division.? We can look at this in its broadest sense and then narrow down the enquiry by looking at our own experience: i.e. of the British churches of Christ. Was division caused by Bro. W. Crosthwaite, and the others, when they broke away from the Co-operation Churches and embarked on the road to the 'Old Paths'? Should they have remained where they were and tried to effect change from within? Would that have been possible? Should Martin Luther have remained in the R.C. Church? Bro. Woodcock mentions the instrument, and individual containers, but only twenty-five years ago the 'Old Path' churches were badly divided by the introduction of these containers (and the concept of a located ministry). Who did such a thing and, why? At the time, strenuous efforts were made to prevent it. **Indeed**, Bro. Albert Winstanley probably did more than anyone else in trying to avert this catastrophe. He initiated a letter which pleaded with the two churches using the containers to desist therefrom **in the interests of unity**. This letter was signed by many brethren from various churches (including Tunbridge Wells, Scholes, Wigan, Hindley, London, Newtown Wigan, Blackburn, Haddington, Dalmellington, Goole, Ilkeston, Tranent, Dewsbury, Heanor, Kirkby-in-Ashfield, Eastwood and Loughborough) but it fell on deaf ears. Many of us still have copies of all the correspondence that passed, and the events of the time are largely chronicled in the Bound Volumes of the "S.S." around 1961. And so, to the question "How can division in the church happen", the answer is, "It can happen very easily indeed". Similarly, it is now simply a question of historical fact as to why, and by whom, the instrument was introduced, and the divisive affect it has had in the U.S.A. upon the body of Christ. I daresay, men being men, there are numerous other issues in the pipeline, which in the fulness of time will become stumbling-blocks to the brethren. And so we need not puzzle at such things happening: but we should seek to profit by asking WHY they happen. Is it a selfish spirit within us (Rom. 8:13) or just a genuine, but misguided, desire to enhance the

Lord's church. Either way, the end result can be the same; strife and division.

A LACK OF LOVE?

Was there a lack of brotherly love on the part of the few who insisted on importing the containers? Ironically it was charged at the time, and even today, that the many who refuse to use the containers manifest a serious lack of brotherly love. (Bro. Alf deals with this in "Q.B.") If a brother seriously believes a certain practice has no sanction from God can he be expected to partake in it? Do we expect it? Can we teach against it and practice it both at the same time? Brotherly love is not involved.

Jesus often castigated certain types of people but it would be wrong to say that Jesus did not love all men. If we were to see a man beating his son we might conclude that 'love' was missing; but a father beats his son precisely because of his love for his boy. Likewise, God chastens those whom He loves. Parents with a son who is into the drug scene are unlikely to join their son in drug-taking but this is not because they do not love their son. Those who have no wish to worship God with an instrument, or individual containers, are very unlikely to join those who do so: but love has little to do with it. There is a conscientious objection to the practice: not the people. In Thomas Campbell's 'Declaration and Address' one of the stipulations was that "Nothing ought to be received into the faith, or worship of the church, or be made a term of communion among Christians, that is not as old as the New Testament". There are some brethren who really believe that an invention by a medically qualified clergyman, in 1893, is not remotely as old as the N.T. and therefore has no place on Christ's table. 'Love' for the brethren has nothing whatsoever to do with this conclusion. Few brethren are likely to be found, on a Sunday morning, in the local R.C. Chapel, or Mormon Temple, and love has nothing to do with that circumstance. If a brother genuinely believes, as many do, that the instrument has no sanction in God's infallible word, how can he be expected to use it? Love or fellowship has nothing to do with it: his priority is to God's word. Some might pity his ignorance, or weakness, but they should be slow to charge him with a lack of brotherly-love. Paul and Barnabas went separate ways for a while: did Paul not love Barnabas?

UNITY IN DIVERSITY

There are many articles written on this theme and it seems to have become a popular concept in recent years. Most of the writers of these articles seem to feel that unity is well nigh an impossibility and that we shall have to settle for something less: and indeed some try to show that "diversity" is actually beneficial to the church. It is very true that we can not expect everyone to agree about everything, or anything, as any business-meeting of the church will prove. We can hardly get agreement on the colour of paint for the door of the meeting-house, and so, some ask, how can we hope to achieve unanimity on doctrinal matters? 'Unity' and 'Diversity' are, of course, partly contradictory terms and we would have to define them carefully. Some, by unity, mean that we try to get along with one another despite our differences, and indeed, most 'Unity' initiatives amongst the denominations require that they ignore, or conceal, their differences. This is surely not unity in the sense that Jesus had in mind. When the Pope talks about unity he means that wayward protestantism should return to the R.C. fold. And so, everyone has their own idea of 'Unity' but surely we must search for the scriptural concept of it, and pursue that. Another catch-phrase is that 'Unity is not Uniformity' and again this is true, but only partly true, and depends upon what we see as "unity" and "uniformity." Yes there is diversity amongst the members of the church. Yes we all come from different backgrounds. Yes we all have different occupations and differing outlooks on life: differing political persuasions. Yes we have differences in I.Q. level, some are ready students, some are slow. Yes, some have had different ethnic origins; and racial prejudices. Yes, some have had

different upbringing and varying experiences. Yes, some come into the kingdom of God late in life, and some early. Yes, some are aged and seem to fail to understand 'the young' and vice versa. Yes, some are well off, and some are exceedingly poor. Some even have tuneful voices and some certainly not. Yes, some are married and interested in the future of their children and some, perhaps, don't like noisy children. Yes some are the 'outgoing fresh-air types' and some are the studious and sensitive types. Some were born with a generous spirit and bright personality, and some are introspective and real 'worriers'. We could, I suppose, spend all day listing the various kinds of diversity (if this is what we mean by diversity) amongst members of the church, but at the end of it all we might have the urge to say, "So what". Once we become members of the Lord's church we must surely suborn any 'differences' we have to conformity with the teachings of Jesus and His appointed apostles. The only advantage of this 'Diversity' amongst the members is that all the multifarious talents in the church can be brought together in the cause of Christ and in the wellbeing of the congregation. The member who is a carpenter, or painter, can help maintain the meeting-house, the member who is an accountant can look after the finances, and the sisters can use their many special talents in looking after the needy and the sick. At the end of the day, however, all our 'diversity': all our differences in background, outlook and experience must be dissolved and our sole aim in life must be to discover what Jesus requires us to be, and to do, and to be it and to do it. There could have been no greater difference in background in N.T. times than the difference between Jew and Gentile yet both were required to come together and forget those differences. True, God was patient in the early years of the church with those who could not entirely grasp this fact (even with Peter) but it came to pass nevertheless and now, in Christ, there is no such things as Jew, or Gentile, neither bond nor free, male nor female. The rich who came to Christ would have to be generous, the soldier who came would have to consider whether he could take life: the African who came would have to reconsider whether he could retain several wives; the cannibal would have to give up his partiality to human flesh; the alcoholic would have to give up his addiction; the atheist would have to change his ground and so we could go on. Any difference, or 'Diversity' we might have, which is not in conformity with the teaching of the N.T. would have to be abandoned: and all personal foibles and opinions subjugated to the word of truth. We surely understand that, notwithstanding our diversity, we must all obey the laws of the country, and it's no excuse to say "I'm different." Paul would be quite conversant with the fact that people were coming into the church from all kinds of backgrounds and conditions but he does not seem to encourage them to pursue their individuality but rather, he says, "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that we all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgement." (1 Cor. 1:10) Many articles have been written on this passage and many have watered it down until it is fairly meaningless, but if words have any meaning at all, unity, rather than diversity, would seem to be what the apostle had in mind. I read, somewhere, that the church is to be a seamless robe, not a coat of many colours.

THEY ALL MAY BE ONE

I agree with brother Woodcock that we are all different, but would add that we must smother our differences in the interests of the church. Some, however, go as far as to say that we can never have unity (and indeed produce scripture to prove it) and point out that even Barton W. Stone looked upon unity merely as 'our polar star'. It is suggested that just as it is desirable to convert every single person in the world to Christ, it is equally unlikely. Global conversion is theoretically possible (and desirable)

but extremely unlikely. Similarly it is claimed, church unity is possible and desirable, but men being men, is extremely unlikely. To many, unity simply means general agreement on the death, burial and resurrection of Christ: and that all others matters are open to personal preferences. Indeed, many teach that the above passage (1 Cor. 1:10) refers only to the basic doctrine concerning Christ's deity. There is, however, surely one passage in the New Testament, spoken by Jesus, incapable of being watered down, and that is Christ's prayer for unity in His church. If any prayer can be rightly termed the "Lord's Prayer" surely this is it. Jesus prayed "Neither pray I for these (the apostles) alone, but for them also which shall believe on Me through their word. That they all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent Me." This prayer was made generally (and not in response to the correction of any particular false doctrine) and calls for a very close and compact form of unity. How close? As close as Father and Son — "As thou Father art in Me and I in Thee." This is the quality of unity required and, by no stretch of the imagination could it be termed 'unity in diversity'. There are those who would even try to dilute the meaning of this prayer and who say that Jesus simply meant that we should be 'one in purpose' but not necessarily one in any other sense. It surely must be a dangerous game to qualify the words of Jesus in this way, for certainly Jesus could, Himself, have so qualified them had He so desired. True, we shall never equally have the same degree of knowledge of God's word (for some study more than others) but this fact does not militate against unity: it just means that some brethren are more knowledgeable than others. The unity for which Jesus prayed was not simply a general acknowledgement that Jesus was the Christ, but was a unity **THAT CAN BE SEEN** by the world. "That the world might believe that Thou hast sent Me." Could there possibly be a more vital reason for real unity (not just a closing of the eyes to serious differences)? It is not enough for the religious world to say that 'at heart' we believe fundamentally in the same things. The world can easily see the paper over the cracks. On a Sunday, churchgoers can readily be seen passing one another, as they go in all directions, to their various places of worship. This has exactly the effect Jesus said it would have. Surely there is no other source of skepticism so fruitful as sectarianism, and division amongst Christians. Christians should seek unity for **this very reason alone: that the world might believe in the Son of God.** Twenty-six years later, when we can calmly reflect upon the division the 'Old Paths' churches have suffered, we can see how very destructive it all has been and how **completely unnecessary.** Certainly nothing has been gained, but who can estimate what has been lost; and who can foot the bill?

"Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity."
(Ps. 133:1).

EDITOR.

GLEANINGS

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

PERFECTION IS A RELATIVE TERM

"Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect." Perfection is a relative term. "A thing is perfect when it precisely and fully meets what is reasonably required and expected of it." The machine is perfect which, to the extent of its power, does the work for which it was constructed. In like manner the Christian attains unto perfection when his life measures up to the standard which is in Christ Jesus — when he performs all that is reasonably required and expected of him."

H.G. Harward.

MAN'S INHUMANITY TO MAN

"In times when vile men held the high places of the land, a roll of drums was employed to drown the martyr's voice, lest the testimony of truth from the scaffold should reach the ears of the people — an illustration of how men deal with conscience, and seek to put to silence its truth-telling voice."

Arnot.

CONSECRATION

"Consecration is not wrapping one's self in a holy web in the sanctuary, and then coming forth after prayer and twilight meditation, and saying: "There, I am consecrated." Consecration is taking all advantage of trust funds — as confidential debts owed to God: it is simply dedicating one's life, in its whole flow, to God's service.

H. W. Beecher.

THE GOSPEL IS GOD'S EVANGEL

"The Gospel is God's Evangel. This is the inspired word itself, in English form. It well deserves a place in our vocabulary, for several reasons. By its relation to angel, messenger, it reminds us that it is a Message, and as the word angel in Scripture usage is generally appropriated to denote a divine, a heavenly messenger, so is the word Evangel generally taken to represent the divine Message from heaven, of which, by anticipation, no human mind could have conceived. Moreover, he who gives himself to the work of proclaiming this Evangel is an Evangelist, while they to whom it is adequately made known are Evangelised, and all that relates to the Evangel is truly Evangelical. Our more common English equivalents are Gospel, Good-News, Glad-Tidings. But if we have supreme regard to the full meaning of the original Greek word, Glad or Joyful Message is perhaps the most adequate designation that our language will afford."

J. B. Rotherham.

THE MEANING OF CONVERSION

"'Convert' may be said to be a Latin word in English dress. Taking the root part of the word, 'vert,' we note its meaning as 'turn.' In numerous words 'vert' may be seen to have this meaning. To 'advert' is to 'turn to'; to 'revert,' to 'turn back'; to 'subvert,' to 'turn under,' i.e., upside down; to 'pervert,' to 'turn in a wrong direction.' So in 'convert' there is the idea of 'turning.' The prefix 'con' denotes company, in conjunction with, as in congregate, to gather together; and in connect, to tie or fasten together. It is the same as co in co-operate, operating together, working harmoniously. 'Convert,' therefore, according to its component parts, indicates a turning in company with some one, a turning to go along with another. But con is often intensive, as in commotion. 'Convert' might hence mean a turning of a most complete or thorough nature."

Alexander Brown.

CAN CHRIST BE RICH AND I POOR ?

"As I read I saw it all! 'If we believe not; He abideth faithful.' I looked to Jesus and saw (and when I saw, oh, how the joy flowed!) that He had said: 'I will never leave you'. 'Ah, there is rest,' I thought. 'I have striven in vain to rest in Him. I'll strive no more. For has He not promised to abide with me — never to leave me, never to fail me?' And, dearie, He never will. "But this was not all He showed me, nor one half. As I thought of the Vine and the branches, what light the blessed Spirit poured direct into my soul! How great seemed my mistake in having wished to get the sap, the fulness out of Him. I saw not only that Jesus would never leave me, but that I was a member of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. The Vine now I see is not the root merely; but all — root, stem, branches, twigs, leaves, flowers, fruit: and Jesus

is not only that: He is soil and sunshine, air and showers, and ten thousand times more than we have ever dreamed, wished for, or needed. Oh, the joy of seeing this truth!"

Hudson Taylor.

(A letter to his Sister)

Selected by Leonard Morgan.

THE BASIS OF UNION

Writing on 'The Basis Of Union; (in the 'Scripture Standard' October, 1935), brother Crosthwaite said, "More than a century ago our pioneers, with marvellous clearness, marked out the ground on which Christian Union can be attained, and nothing better has been or can be presented. But men arose claiming to be wiser than the pioneers, and thinking the end could be obtained by more speedy methods, have diverted the movement from its original purpose, caused division, and hindered progress." He quoted instances of American movement in Britain which were failures. Then he quotes Bro. James Anderson, in Conference Paper 1903, who said "Christianity is a perfect, divine system, or it is a fraud".

If God has given it, it is worse than folly to try to improve upon it. All such attempts have been failures, and must continue to be so till the end of time. When the day comes that men will have so much faith in God that they will not dare to take from it, or add to it, or in any way tamper with the Faith that was once and for all delivered to the Saints, then the day of Union is at hand. It is God's place to speak, it is ours to do or die. When we learn this lesson, union will come naturally as any effect comes from its cause. It is impossible that it can come in any other way, and absurd to expect it. Union must be based upon truth, error or time-serving policy can never bring it about.

C.H. Spurgeon once said at an Annual meeting of the British and Foreign Bible Society:-

"When we shall all become reverent subjects of God, and obedient to God's will, as we find it in the Scriptures, we shall all come close to one another. All attempts to create unity apart from the truth must fall to the ground and let them."

Be not deceived, God is not mocked, for whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap.

SPIRITUAL BASIS FOR CHRISTIAN UNION

- (1) The need for Unity.
- (2) God's desire for Unity.

The need for unity is because the Church will not exist without it.

(United we stand, Divided we fall.)

Man was perfect in the beginning, but because of Sin he lost that state of perfection, "or unity". Because in unity is perfect Holiness. (Hence the need for unity).

When the Children of Israel were united in God and His ways, they were victorious. When divided and against God they lost. God withdrew His presence from them. "Hence the need and God's desire for unity".

PSALM 133:1.

"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for Brethren to dwell together in Unity."

EPHESIANS 4:3.

"Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of Peace."

VERSE 13 "Till we all come in the unity of the Faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."

Churches of Christ plead for the unity of all Christians by a restoration of Chris-

tianity as revealed in the New Testament.

There are two parts to this plea:-

First there is a call to all who would follow the Lord Jesus to be united, and then the way in which this unity may be achieved is indicated by a return to Christianity of the New Testament.

Jesus prayed for His Disciples "That they all may be one."

The Churches of Christ seek to work for the fulfilment of this prayer of Jesus by following the way that Jesus and His Apostles taught.

Since Jesus prayed that all His followers may be one, it is clearly the Lord's will that His Church should be united. We can safely conclude that He has provided all that is necessary to achieve that oneness.

A united Church is not an ideal which requires each Christian to be perfect before it can be achieved. In the New Testament times was a oneness in the Church in spite of very evident imperfections, so to-day the **Unity of Christians is possible**. So long as we live in this world there will be differences of opinion amongst the followers of Christ. But there is ample room for such differences, provided that all keep those essentials which make for unity within the Church. The desired oneness can be as much prejudiced by insisting on the acceptance of the opinions of men, as by departing from essentials. Liberty and Loyalty are both needed. **Liberty of opinion. Loyalty** to the principles of the Faith.

What are the essentials of unity:-

The Apostle Paul wrote to the Church at Ephesus about these essentials saying:-

"There is one Body, and one Spirit even as ye are called in one Hope of your calling. One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all."

Unity comes because there is:-

- One Body of which all are members.
- One Spirit who dwells in all.
- One Hope which all cherish.
- One Lord whom all obey.
- One Faith which all believe.
- One Baptism which all have received.
- One God who is Father of all.

Since the unity of Christians is to be obtained by a restoration of Christianity, as revealed in the New Testament, the authority for the doctrine is to be found in the New Testament itself. Only the teaching of Christ and His Apostles, as preserved for us in the New Testament, is to be regarded as being the **One Faith**.

The Bible is accepted as the Word of God. By that is meant that God speaks to us through the Bible, and that we can learn from the Bible what is the will of God for us. The Bible must be studied with proper care and attention. Like every other book, its true meaning is obtained when it is studied in the light of the circumstances in which it was written.

Why is the name 'Churches of Christ' used?

The local Churches are called Churches of Christ in no superior sense, but simply because this Scriptural name fittingly describes local congregations which endeavour to work according to the will of Christ.

Party names have been deliberately discarded because it is only when sectarian names and the sectarian spirits are set aside that the unity will be achieved for which Jesus prayed.

David Chalmers,
Dalmellington.

HOW LONG WERE THE DAYS OF GENESIS?

The allegation is frequently made by those who affect to believe the evolutionary theories and the Genesis account of creation that the two may be harmonized with the assumption that the "days" of the Mosaic record were, in reality, long geological ages, and not ordinary days of twenty-four hours. Liberal theologians have long advocated this view; and, we have been saddened lately to note the disposition on the part of some among us to give credence to this modernistic speculation.

It is very true that the Hebrew *yom*, translated "day" has the same ambiguity as our English word day (the day of adversity, the day of prosperity, etc), and the question is not one which may be settled either way by etymology. Other considerations however, do settle the question and establish clearly the fact that the "six days" of Gen. 1, were simply days, days of twenty-four hours each, days in the usual and ordinary import of the term. Those who accept the premise that God did not need ages in which to accomplish the work designated as having been done within that period are under no necessity of assuming that long geological ages were involved, and the following considerations require that the usual and ordinary meaning of the word day be assigned.

The day-age theory is a consequence of the evolutionary theory. But for that speculative view such a hypothesis would never have been advanced. The theory itself is patently opposed to other affirmations of the sacred writings; why, then, should we concede that there is merit to its imaginations in this area? Conservative geologists (E. G., George McReady Price), have long since shown, in the most convincing fashion, that the "onion skin" hypothesis and the geologic time-time based thereon are fanciful and false; we ought not, therefore, to give credence to its suppositions in an area where it is obviously in conflict with inspiration. It is not possible to force the Mosaic account of creation into conformity with the evolutionary hypothesis. Life, according to that theory, began in the water; life, according to the Holy Spirit, began on the land! Which shall we believe?

The "days" of Gen 1, are divided into light and darkness, exactly as is characteristic of the day known to us. "And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness. And God called the light Day, and the darkness Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day." (Gen. 1: 4, 5.) This simple and sublime statement is decisive of the matter. Of what was the first day composed? Evening and morning. Into what was it divided? Light and darkness. The Hebrew text is even more emphatic. The translation, "And the evening and the morning were the first day," is, literally, "And evening was, and morning was, day one." The two periods — evening and morning — made one day. The Jewish mode of reckoning the day was from sunset to sunset; i.e. evening and morning, the two periods combining to make one day. If to this the objection is offered that the sun did not shine on the earth until the fourth day, it should be remembered that it is the function of the heavenly bodies to mark the days, not make them! It is night when no moon appears; and the day is the same whether the sun is seen or not.

Botany, the field of plant-life, came into existence on the third day. Those who allege that the days of Gen. 1, may have been long geological ages, must accept the absurd hypothesis that plant-life survived in periods of total darkness through half of each geologic age, running into millions of years! Jehovah finished his labours at the end of the sixth day, and on the seventh rested. The narrative provides no basis for the assumption that the day he rested differed in any fashion from those which preceded it. It evidently was marked out and its length determined in the same manner as the others. If it was not a day of twenty-four hours, it sustains no resemblance to the sabbath which was given to the Israelites. More-over, there is no indication that we

are now out of the seventh geological age if the evolutionary theory is true, in which case God is still resting. Yet, Jesus declared that he came to do the work of his Father! (John 9: 3, 4.)

Granted that the Hebrew *yom* translated "day", is ambiguous, being rendered, in the sacred writings, by such terms as now, the present, this day, for ever, etc. yet when preceded by a numeral it is not possible to use it other than in a literal sense. Such usage is common in the Old Testament. We read of the second day, the seventh day, the seventeenth day, the thirty-second day, always in a literal sense. In Ex. 20, we are informed that "in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it." (Ex. 20:10.)

Adam, the first man, was created in the sixth day, lived in Eden through the seventh day, and into at least a portion of the eighth day. If these days were geologic periods of millions of years in length, we have the interesting situation of Adam having lived in a portion of one age, through the whole of another age, and into at least a part of a third age, in which case he was many millions of years old when he finally died! Such a view of course is absurd; and so are the premises which would necessitate it. We agree wholeheartedly with the scholarly Hebraist Kalisch, when he said, "It is philologically impossible to understand the word 'day' in this section, in any other sense than as a period of 24 hours."

Guy N. Woods.

IF ANY MAN SPEAKETH (1 PETER 4-11)

Brother Stephen Woodcock's reaction to the articles headed "Chat With An Old Pather" highlights the distressed feelings of many younger brethren confronted with the issues at large (or under the surface) amongst churches of Christ. Brother Gardiner's invitation for dispassionate studied articles on interpretation and unity is very welcome, and timely. There is much confusion in the minds of brethren on how to decide what one should or should not do. Teaching and discussion on some subjects is avoided. Being bound together in the love of our Lord Jesus, we should be able to examine these issues without unpleasantness.

Accepting that we all agree that the bible is the inspired word of God and acknowledge it as sole authority for all matters of faith and practice, where then is the Confusion?

Sometime someone set forward criteria by which many of us have endeavoured to form conclusions on what practices are scriptural or otherwise. For example, to be scriptural a practice must be taught by direct command or approved example or necessary inference.

"Greet one another with a holy kiss/kiss of love" is a direct command stated five times. (Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:12; 1 Thess. 5:26 and 1 Peter 5:14,) but we content ourselves with a holy handshake.

What decides that an example is approved? Paul took a vow (Acts 18:18.) Paul and Barnabus had a "sharp contention", so that they parted asunder (Acts 15:39.) Paul had the son of a Jewess circumcised (Acts 16:3.)

Hymn books, buildings for worship, and even tuning forks/pitch pipes are regarded as necessary by inference, but not organs/pianos etc.

It is suggested that some commands required compliance with social customs of the time and are therefore not applicable now. Foot washing and head-covering usually come under this heading. According to Smith's Dictionary of the Bible, the custom of baptism was a necessary prerequisite to admitting proselytes. Nevertheless we insist on it.

Various well-intended catch phrases were coined. For example "We speak where the bible speaks and are silent where the bible is silent". Some interpret this to mean that where the bible does not comment on a practise we should remain silent and not forbid it, opening the door to crosses, vestments candles etc. Others interpret it to mean that we have no right to practise anything that the bible does not authorise. I have failed to find any authority in the Old Testament for the cup of wine at the passover feast. Jesus apparently did not object to it.

By now you may be wondering what Allan Ashurst believes. For the record my views on some current issues are as follows.

Instrumental worship is unscriptural.

Women's glory should be concealed with a discreet covering during public devotion, or the glory removed.

The local assembly should be autonomus and extraneous organisations are unscriptural.

Elder's should not employ "minister"/"evangelists" to do their work for them.

There should be one drinking vessel and one loaf on the Lord's table.

Even so I do not disrespect brethren who disagree with me and it may be that as a result of the studies which the Editor is initiating, I might be obliged to modify my views. What I would like us to do is to re-examine every principle of interpretation we use to see if they are viable. In doing this we might both highlight any faulty premise which has led brethren to differing conclusions and also pave the way to healing breaches. Burying our heads will not solve the problems. Jesus shed his blood for each of us. Consequently we do love each other. We should then be able, with His graciousness dwelling in us, to achieve something.

Let's clear the decks by disposing of, what is to me, one of the more evidently faulty thought-processes which are subconsciously indulged in and yet are obviously wrong when spelled out.

Reference is made to non-essentials and matters of opinion. When asked what is meant, it is asserted that things not necessary to salvation are matters of opinion. Surely if God wants us to do; or refrain from something, we ought to comply with His wishes regardless of whether He is "holding a gun to our heads".

In the same connection it is said, surely we should concentrate on things that matter and not get involved in secondary issues. Granted there are "weightier matters" which should not be neglected but remember Jesus required attention to all matters, great or small. "These ye ought to have done and not to have left THE OTHER undone." Matt. 23:23.

In an effort to "prove all things" in order that we might "hold fast to that which is good" (1 Thess. 5:21), with the Editor's permission, I would like to submit for your consideration a series of studies on pertinent scriptures. Any constructive criticism will be welcome. Your prayers are requested. May the Lord Jesus be glorified.

Allan Ashurst,
60 Kenwood Road,
Stretford, Manchester.

If you want to be miserable, think about yourself; about what you want, about what you like, what respect people ought to pay you and what a really grand person you are. With such a disposition misery is inevitable.



Conducted by
Alf Marsden

“According to Bro. Alf’s views on fellowship in the June issue Bro. Crosthwaite, Bro. Barker, and all others should never have left the fellowship of the Co-operation churches. Some of us don’t fellowship the URC or the Fellowship churches. Why not? surely it must be doctrinal differences.

Bro. Marsden’s reply in Question Box on fellowship using the ‘family’ analogy, and testing our ‘love’ rather than testing fellowship is puzzling. Surely there are very good people in the Baptist Church and Catholic Church who love God even more than we do. The only reason we don’t join them, and support them, is that we can’t in ‘all good conscience’ because of what they teach and practice. Surely the same obtains within the schisms of ‘Churches of Christ’? It is not a lack of love at all, is it?”

The substance of these two comments leads me to believe that my answer in the June issue of the S.S. was not very clear; for that, if it is the case, I apologise. I would like it to be understood that my beliefs are as fundamental as the next man’s; I would never compromise the Word. The burden of my answer was to pinpoint attitudes towards fellowship now in Churches of Christ, over issues which, in my opinion, ought not to result in the withdrawal of fellowship. Perhaps reference to some of the points I made would help to explain what I mean.

HOW MANY WITHDRAWALS?

It is suggested that according to what I said, brethren should never have left the fellowship of the so-called Co-operation Churches. I do not accept that criticism. At the time such withdrawal took place I was not a member of the Church, but I was listening to my first Gospel messages, and I was also listening in amazement and watching with disbelief the way in which Christians dealt with each other. In retrospect, if I had not been drawn irresistibly to the Church by the power of the Lord’s love, it is extremely doubtful that I should have been drawn by the **lack of love** exhibited by some who professed to bear His name. The debate on some of the issues engendered bitterness, acrimony, and dare I say it, even hatred. Looking back and analysing some of the issues from a personal standpoint it is my considered opinion that some issues were very badly handled and ought not to have resulted in the schisms which followed. Once the bitterness and lack of love had been exhibited there was no way back into fellowship for the conflicting parties, and sad to relate, there has been no way back even to this day. It has always been my belief that Christian issues should be handled in a Christian manner and attitude; may God forgive us when we forget this.

However, there was one issue of that time which was suitable ground for withdrawal; I refer to the teaching being given at one particular Christian College. Broadly speaking, this teaching endorsed the idea that infant sprinkling could be substituted for N.T. baptism. Obviously, teaching such as this struck at the very heart of the Gospel and could not be tolerated. If you recall, I said in my answer, quote, “So far as we understand it, the fellowship of the saints is rooted in God and His Christ, and sown through the Gospel”, unquote. I then referred to 1 John 1:3. I then went on to say, quote, “I would be the first to say that the Apostle’s doctrine should be taught and adhered to at all times because that is one of the functions of the Church that we have to ‘continue in’”, unquote. Consequently, if there is a fundamental misrepresentation of the Gospel which could affect salvation then that must be challenged. Under

those circumstances the brethren mentioned were right to withdraw their fellowship. I personally left the Methodist Church not because I thought I would automatically live a better life in the Lord's Church, but because I had not obeyed the fundamental requirements of the Gospel.

I suppose the question I am really posing is this, "Is playing a musical instrument in worship, or not having head covering (in the case of sisters), or drinking out of more than one container in the Breaking of Bread service, as fundamentally damaging to Salvation as not obeying the Gospel"? And how many times do we continue to withdraw fellowship? There was a united front presented by those brethren who withdrew from the Co-operation Churches because of infidelity to the Gospel by other brethren, but it wasn't very long before they were withdrawing fellowship from each other because of the advent of other issues, and so it goes on. As an Elder I was always a strong advocate of no-instrument worship, head-covering for Sisters, and against the use of individual containers; that is still the position I hold. However, there are quite a number of immersed believers who do not see the necessity for holding the same views on these topics; in that case I believe it is my duty to teach them, and to go on teaching them, and not to automatically consider them to be 'beyond the pale', and withdraw from them. If such brethren persist in defying the teaching of the Elders, and cause offence to the Community in general, then there is a clearly defined procedure in the N.T. for dealing with such cases.

OTHER DENOMINATIONS

It would ill-become me or anyone else to deny that there are very good people in other denominations, but I take exception to the statement that they love God more than we – members of the Church, I take it – do. The Lord Himself made the point, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15), and in 1 John 5:3 we read, "For this is the love of God, when we love God and keep His commandments". So I conclude that if people in other denominations have the Gospel taught to them, or read the Word for themselves, and they choose not to obey what they hear and read, then on what basis do we say that they love God more than we do? I suppose there are many good people in the world who never set foot inside a Church building, but we are not talking about how good people are but how obedient to Christ they are, and that is a vastly different matter. The comment made, quote, "It is not a lack of love at all, is it"? unquote, is not one that I can subscribe to. It is a matter of love from beginning to end. The first fundamental principle that any Christian should learn is that to keep commandments without love may be a good exercise of the mind and a certain discipline of the flesh, but to keep them with love is an outreach of the heart to the One who gave them.

In conclusion I would like to make this point. Man is a gregarious animal. He has relationships both inside and outside his immediate family. Relationships within the family are not always the same; they can be either strong or loose. I suppose it is true to say that we form the strongest relationships with those, inside and outside the family, who think and act as we do. It seems to me that Communities of Christians are something like this. We say quite fervently that it is good for the peace of the world if the East and the West keep talking to each other in order to resolve their differences. Why is it that we find this so difficult to accomplish within the Church?

(All questions, please, to:

Alf Marsden, 20 Costessy Way, Winstanley, Wigan, Lancs WN3 6ES.)

ASAPH'S SONG (Psalm 73)

In psalm 73 we have recorded a song of woe. It is Asaph's. He was one of King David's chief musicians. Everything looked rather bleak for this man. He could not

find the joy that he knew should have been his. He felt real bad about it, so much so that he sat down and wrote a sad song. A song of woe. In it he recorded his reasons for being so miserable.

He tells about being envious of his rich neighbours. They were so wealthy you could see it in their eyes. They had more than anyone could want. What was worse, they were over-confident, trouble-free, and proud with it. They scoffed at God, suggesting He did not care about anything. They lived a life of ungodliness, yet they wallowed in luxury. It did not seem right. What an awful time Asaph must have had. It just did not add up. Here he was, a follower of God yet he did not enjoy what the others were experiencing. Why.? The answer is in the Psalm.

In the middle of his song Asaph begins to reflect upon his own situation. He had been trying to do what was right. For his efforts in trying to please God, what does he get.? He writes "For all day long I have been plagued, and chastened every morning". (v.14). Trying to understand the inequities of it would be painful to him. How could life be so unfair.? Have you, dear reader, ever felt this way.? Have you looked around at the circumstances of others and wondered?. Being human, perhaps we have. Do we despair at some who scoff at God and prosper.? Some with so much and others with so little? God knows best. Asaph's analysis isn't new. What did this man do to escape his trials.?

THINGS IN PERSPECTIVE

He "went into the sanctuary of God" and after some reflection said "I understand their end" v.17. The rich are not always happy: anything but. And sometimes the grass only seems greener on the other side! Seeing things from God's perspective Asaph could truly understand that the world's riches have but the life-span of a soap bubble. He then realised (as we should) that the spiritual victories of life are the ones that bring lasting joy. Did Asaph's circumstances change? – apparently not: but his view of life certainly did. His problems and difficulties had resulted from taking his eyes off the Lord. He thought that his problems could be solved by improving his economic status, but now saw it as a falacy. He saw and realised God was good even although God did not shower Asaph with riches and with ease.

More important, when Asaph "drew near to God" he saw and realised what we should see – that life is blessed when we take our eyes OFF circumstances and put our "trust in the Lord", (fully). The moral is, seek not the riches of the world; seek not the friendship of the wicked; envy not the prosperity of others. Rather lay up treasurers in heaven. Asaph's song began as a dirge but ends in swelling words of ultimate triumph "Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides Thee." If life seems unfair, let us think on these things.

Andrew P. Sharp,
Newtongrange.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Nov. 1	Isaiah 53	John 12, 37-50
Nov. 8	Psalm 51	John 13, 1-20
Nov. 15	Job. 19	John 13, 21-38
Nov. 22	Ex. 33, 7-23	John 14
Nov. 29	Isaiah 5, 1-10	John 15, 1-11

Works & Words in Vain

With what deep sorrow must the Saviour's heart be filled when even a voice from heaven (12, 27-36) failed to reach their hearts, and both words and works were fruitless. Just as the words of Isaiah mourned in anticipation of rejection. Faith was rendered fruitless by fear of men and failure to accept right

motives. Even "many" rulers had to believe the evidence but they failed to take it to heart. Perhaps some were among those 3,000 on the day of Pentecost. Meanwhile they remained in the darkness by rejection of the clearest messages of the Father's LIGHT and LOVE. John surely heard the words of the Saviour's prayer and the voice which made the promise of glorification through deepest agony of TRIAL.

Supper-time Lesson

It is not possible to conceive the immeasurable agony, or the greatness of the love, which Jesus is now facing with His twelve apostles around Him. Within so short a space of time before the spiritual and the physical torment are to be borne. He takes upon Himself the lowliest service to teach the very vital lesson which they needed so badly because of human weakness. Hence divine love and wisdom was exercised upon them. Peter's response to rebuke and longing to show it, received the warning, and the subsequent humiliation.

The Traitor

Very deep must have been the "trouble in spirit" (13,21) as Jesus declared the traitorous intention of the one who should betray Him. The fatal intention finally moved him to decision when the sop was given as indicated to John and Peter only, the other disciples being ignorant of the object of his going. Is this the deepest sorrow of all? However the chapters we are about to read (15 to 17) are indeed the final words to strengthen His own for their immediate further trials, and failure: including Peter's disobedience, taking the sword, his escape from arrest by miraculous intervention (Luke 22, 50 & 51), and his denial so shortly to demonstrate his weakness, and the flight of the disciples (Mark 14, 50).

Abundant Assurances

Many thousands of souls in dire need have blessed God for His Assurances: these which Jesus has provided. He knew the weakness of the flesh being tried and tested in all points. In a few

verses are His assurances summed up. Words we know so well, expressing absolute confidence in future security. Close association with His apostles in particular are the complete answer for the natural fears. The week from beginning until present moment have confirmed Thomas saying, "Let us go and die with Him" (11/16). Accordingly Jesus turns to truths beyond the immediate present and to future certainties — belief in Me, His eternal home, their future with Him, His many mansions, His leaving them only temporary, their being finally present with Him. No wonder they ask questions for eternity is in view — and trouble is so close at this hour — Gethsemane and the cross: His identity with the Father is brought nearer and still more personal. The Father is so close. Obeying Me on account of your love for Me — ask! Talk to Him! He will help because you are close. Your Father will come with Me and stay with Us! The Comforter, the Spirit of Truth will abide with you, be your companion and advocate.

The Promise of the Spirit

Finally yes! I am leaving you but the Comforter will come. He will be with you to make you my special messengers, give you powers, not given to others, enable you to give memory and power to express truth. You will recall to mind all that I have spoken to you. We do know that these powers were given to no others directly, but remain their special portion from the Holy Spirit to provide for the welfare of the church of Christ so providing for the world's greatest need. Today it has no greater need and no greater power for good. Whatever real goodness is in the world owes its existence to the life, death and resurrection of the Saviour.

The True Vine

I had the priceless privilege of being compelled, alas often unwillingly, to learn by heart many passages of scripture. One of them was these eleven verses. I should also mention the three chapters 5, 6 and 7 of Matthew. The

more exercises of this kind we learnt when young, the better it would be for all. I fear the modern world does not keep the custom, much to our loss! Jesus chose this parable for His lesson on fruit bearing. What a lesson it is! I feel deeply my need, never can we bear too much or enough to humble us or inspire enough earnest effort to take it to heart. We began our thought with the failure of man to take Jesus to heart. Shall we summarise these great lessons enshrined in that grand and vital spiritual necessity of "abiding in the vine" — keeping close to Jesus, bearing chastening without complaint, observing His words and His commandments, looking to Him for guidance, assured of His love and sharing it with others according to opportunity. We grieve for shortage of fruit and plead for grace, knowing that the fruit of joyful living depends on our response to His will and His love.

R. B. Scott.

NEWS FROM THE CHURCHES

Kitwe, Zambia: There are 205,000 starving in drought stricken areas of Zambia's Southern Province. Zambian Premier Kebby Musokotwane, member of the Church of Christ, accompanied Don Yelton of Whites Ferry Road Church of Christ on a tour of drought areas. The visit received widespread coverage on Zambian radio and television and in the Zambian press. Jonathon Phiri, RCU graduate and Zambian member of the Church of Christ in Kitwe, gives a lot of his leisure time voluntarily to nutrition group work and efforts to avoid and solve problems of starvation and, in particular, starving children.

Churches of Christ in Zambia and abroad are concerned about the problems of starvation.

Angela Woodhall,
Church of Christ,
P.O. Box 22297,
Kitwe, Zambia.

Slamannan District: The Quarterly 'Mutual Benefit' Meeting was held at the new Meeting-house at Haddington on Saturday 12th September, when a large gathering met to discuss the subject:— "What does the Word of God teach about homosexuality and How should we respond to those with the disease of AIDS." Ian Davidson occupied the Chair, and the two speakers were Mark Plain and Harry McGinn. As usual there was plenty to talk about during the hour-long 'open-time' for questions and comment. The next Meeting is arranged, God willing, to be held at Motherwell, on 5th December, when the Chairman will be James Sinclair (Snr.) Tranent, and the speakers will be Hugh Davidson, Motherwell, and James R. Gardiner, Haddington. The subject will be, "As citizens of the U.K. what are our duties to the State, and are we ever justified in disobeying the Civil Powers." H. Davidson (Sec.)

OBITUARY

Brighton: We record with sadness the passing from this life of our brother Washington I. Ascough on 9th September aged 83 years. Poor health in recent months has prevented Washington from attending church services and a few weeks ago he suffered a heart attack in a local nursing home. His cheerful disposition and fourteen years of most helpful service as Church Secretary are remembered with gratitude and we give thanks for his good influence and fine example. Our sincere sympathy is extended to his wife Vanna, family relatives and friends who mourn his loss; we pray that they may be sustained by the grace and love of our Heavenly Father.

E. Daniell.

COMING EVENTS

Annual Social: The church at Newtongrange (God Willing) plan to hold their Annual Social on Saturday 17th October at 4.p.m. at their Meeting-

house. Chairman: James Morris Speakers: Joe Currie (Newtongrange) David Scott (Tranent) ALL WELCOME.

THE DIARY OF A BIBLE

'The Word of the Lord was precious in those days' (1 Sam. 3:1). What is it to you?

January 15th. — Been resting quietly for a week. The first few nights at the beginning of this year, my owner met me regularly, but he seems to have forgotten me once more.

February 2nd. — Clean up. I was dusted with other things and put back in my place.

February 8th. — Owner used me for a short time after dinner, looking up a few references. Seemed to be in a great flurry. Went to Sunday School.

March 7th. — Clean up. Dusted and in my old place again. Have been down in the front hall since my trip to Sunday School.

April 2nd. — Busy day. Owner led meeting and had to look up references. He had an awful time finding one, though it was there in its right place all the time.

June 5th. — In grandma's lap all afternoon. She has come here for a time. She let a teardrop fall on Col. 2:5-7.

June 7th, 8th, 9th. — In grandma's lap every afternoon now. It's a comfort-

able spot. Sometimes she reads me and sometimes she talks to me.

June 10th. — Grandma's gone — I don't think she felt very much at home here. I seemed to be her chief friend. Am back in the old place now.

July 3rd. — Packed in a trunk with clothes and other things. Some talk about 'vacation,' whatever that means.

July 10th. — Still in trunk; though nearly everything else has been taken out.

Sept. 29th. — Home again. Rather stuffy and hot. Have two magazines, a novel and an old hat on top of me. Wish they would take them off.

October 5th. — Used by Mary a few moments today. She was writing a letter to a friend whose brother had died, and wanted an appropriate verse.

HOUSE AND HOME

Every unkind word you speak, every petty or selfish act, every careless flash of temper, every hour of sullen resentment, every thought of word or deed that cuts the heart strings of a loved one, increases the sum of unhappy memories that may finally change a home into a house. A house is finished, but you keep on building a home all your life.

THE SCRIPTURE STANDARD is published monthly.

PRICE PER YEAR — POST PAID BY SURFACE MAIL

UNITED KINGDOM and COMMONWEALTH	£ 6.00
CANADA & U.S.A.	\$10.00
AIR MAIL please add £1.50 or \$3.00 to above surface mail rates	

DISTRIBUTION AGENT & TREASURER:

JOHN K. KNELLER, 4 Glassel Park Road, Longniddry, East Lothian, EH32 0NY
Telephone: Longniddry (0875) 53212 to whom change of address should be sent.

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Scotland EH37 5PT. Telephone: Ford 320 527

"The Scripture Standard" is printed for the publishers by
Lothian Printers, 109 High Street, Dunbar, East Lothian. Tel: (0368) 63785