

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"



The historical and cultural background to the New Testament (12)

Ian S Davidson, Motherwell

THE HOLY KISS

We read: **"Salute one another with a holy kiss. The churches of Christ salute you."** (Romans 16:16) **"Greet you one another with a holy kiss."** (I Corinthians 16:20b; 2 Corinthians 13:12) **"Greet all the brethren with a holy kiss."** (I Thessalonians 5:26) **"Greet you one another with a kiss of love."** (1 Peter 5:14a)

So this greeting is positively commanded five times in the epistles. I understand that this was the usual method of salutation in the East and, indeed, still is in some countries, even in the West (for example, France). 'Christians are to love one another as brethren. This is the grand standard of their affection. Whatever way, then, I express love to my natural brother, I should express it to my Christian brother. If the custom of the country and those habits of expressing affection which it familiarises to our minds, require me to salute my natural brother when I meet him, by a kiss on the lips, neck, or cheek, so let me salute my Christian brother. But if the right hand of friendship be the highest expression of love and affection for a natural brother, to salute a Christian otherwise is unnatural.' (Alexander Campbell) If the New Testament Scriptures constitute a specific law, compiled as a written code, then the holy kiss is obligatory upon saints today. Strict legalism can lead one to many difficulties.

WASHING OF FEET

We read: **"Jesus rose from the supper and laid aside His garments; and took a towel and girded Himself. After that, He poured water into a**

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basin and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith He was girded...So after He had washed their feet, and had taken His garments, and was set down again, He said unto them, Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Master and Lord: and you say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; you ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you." (John 13: 4-5; 12-15)

I have read of Christian groups who have practised or still practise this as an ordinance to be observed by the congregation. But are they correct in doing it? As one writer has put it: 'Due to the terrain over which they travelled, and because men wore sandals or walked barefoot, it had long been a custom to set a basin of water before a guest that he might bathe his feet. Eventually the act was performed by a servant, or slave, of the household, who washed the feet of the visitor and dried them with a towel with which he had girded himself. In view of this, it came to pass that when a host wished to demonstrate special honour to a guest, he personally performed the task, thus regulating himself to the role of a menial in kneeling before the guest.'

The washing of feet was not a religious observance or an act of social worship, but a good work. Paul once wrote this of a widow: **"Let not the widow be taken into the number under three score years old, having been the wife of one man, well reported of for good works; if she have brought up children, if she have lodged strangers, if she have washed the saints' feet, if she have relieved the afflicted, if she have diligently followed every good work."** (I Timothy 5:9,10) Alexander Campbell has written: 'Paul ranks it not amongst social acts of worship, not amongst religious institutions, but amongst good works. When, then, it is a good work, it ought to be performed, but never placed on a level with acts of religious worship. It is a good work when necessity calls for it, and though a menial service, the Saviour gave an example that no Christian should forget, of that condescending humility which as Christians we are bound, both from precept and example, to exhibit towards our brethren in all cases when called upon.'

MEAT OFFERED TO IDOLS

There were many pagan temples all around the Roman Empire in New Testament times. For example, Ephesus had its temple to *Artemis* or *Diana* (one of the seven wonders of the ancient world); Corinth had, atop the Acrocorinthus, the temple of *Aphrodite* (goddess of love); Smyrna had one of many of its temples dedicated to the cult of Rome; Sardis, like Ephesus, had a famous temple in honour of *Artemis*; Miletus's oldest temple was built for *Athena*; Pergamum had the famous sanctuary of *Asklepios*; Athens was named after *Athena* and her statue could be seen in the magnificent many-columned Parthenon; Rome itself had large and impressive temples built to the many state deities like Jupiter, Apollo, Saturn, Juno, Hercules, Castor and Pollux, etc. Food offerings were made to these gods and many others. The food (Greek *broma*) is referred to as "meat" in the Authorised Version.

The eating of food once dedicated to a pagan god and later sold in the market place was a "hot" subject in New Testament times. Paul deals with the subject in I Corinthians 8 and 10. Was a Christian housewife at liberty to purchase, for example, meat from a meat-dealer, who had received it from pagan temple officials? Conviction in the Corinthian church was sharply divided. Paul's answer is that a Christian is permitted to eat such food, but he has a qualification. 'The qualification is that the 'law of love' must be observed, and a



Christian's own freedom to eat such food must be waived if the conscience of the 'weaker' believer is likely to be damaged and he is thereby caused to stumble (10:28-32), or if a Gentile is scandalised by this practice.' (10:32) (R.P. Martin)

THE FEMININE VEIL

The teaching on this subject is found in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16. Many believe today that the wearing of the veil was an ancient custom, which has no relevance in the twenty-first century. In Corinth and in many other Eastern cities, the veil was worn, as one writer has put it, as 'a visible token of the fact that the woman recognised status of social subordination. It was a badge of authority on her head (verse 10) and was indicative of that becoming modesty associated with the finest quality of feminine grace. Only the women of bad character who depended upon their physical charms to enhance their profession appeared without the veil.' The sisters in the Corinthian church apparently thought their freedom in Christ meant that they could disregard this practice. Undoubtedly, their action scandalised their heathen neighbours and brought disrepute upon the church. Paul had to rectify matters by addressing the subject in the clearest of terms.

I observe that the N.I.V. has these verses in the Bible under the heading *Propriety in Worship*. So the indication is that Paul is dealing with a subject that extends far beyond any ancient social custom. He is giving ordinances (verse 2) that stand for all time. After all, what brother today would think of publicly worshipping God with his head covered? We read: **"A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God..."** (verse 7a) If brothers in Christ comply with this teaching today then should not sisters in Christ also comply today with Paul's clear instructions for them?

I think brother Worgan handled this subject very well in *Question Box* in July/September 2002. I know his articles caused much discussion at the time because the head covering is not widely practised, especially in America. We recall his words: 'If today, it does not matter whether or not a woman has her head uncovered in worship, would we be happy if a man were to pray or preach with his head covered? And if, as the scriptures state, when a woman fails to wear a head-covering she dishonours Man, who is her head - (i.e. her 'origin'), would not Christ, Who is the head of Man, also be dishonoured, if a Man prayed with his (physical) head covered? It is surely significant that, throughout the ages, for a man to remove his hat - (or cap, or whatever he might be wearing on his head) - has been the sign of respect in the presence of one whom he wishes to honour. Even today, in civilised society at any rate, men still raise their hats to ladies and remove their hats as they enter a house or church building. Paul says that when a man prays or preaches (*'prophets' means 'to speak forth'*) - he must be bareheaded, because Christ, his Head, is present. Where women are concerned, the opposite is true. He says that, if a woman prays or speaks in public with her head *uncovered*, she shows disrespect for the one whom God has declared to be her head - the man - because, by her action she declares that she does not recognise the presence of the invisible head.'

This is the final article in this particular series and on behalf of readers I thank Ian for bringing out some of the social, political and religious issues of the day that influence our understanding of the environment in which the public ministry of Jesus, and the work of the early church, were conducted. The better we understand the historical context of the life of Jesus (and that takes us back to before the creation of the world), the better informed will be our present day Christian witness. I'm delighted to report that Ian will be commencing a new series of studies in the next issue. Editor.

Understanding the Life of Jesus

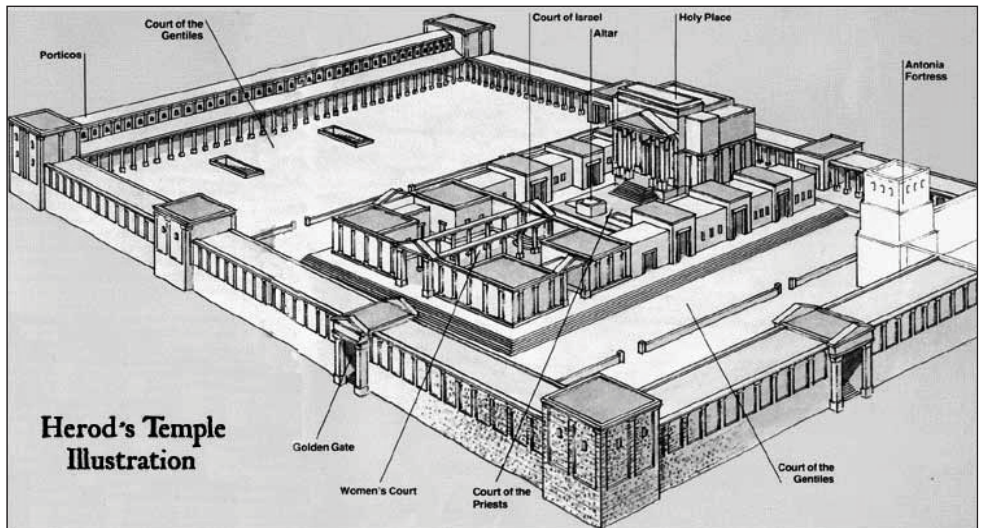
Clearing of the Temple (Jn 2:13-22)

(Stephen Woodcock, Wigan)

In John's gospel this incident is recorded at the beginning of His ministry straight after the Miracle at the Wedding Feast in Cana (2:1 – 11). Matthew, Mark and Luke record Jesus clearing the Temple near the end of his ministry, before His crucifixion (Matthew 21:12 – 13; Mark 11:15 – 18; Luke 19:45 – 46). So why does John record Jesus clearing the Temple at the very beginning of His ministry and not at the end as the other writers do? There are two possible hypotheses for this:



1. John was not concerned about chronology in his record of the life of Jesus, but more concerned about putting incidents into a theological context. One commentator wrote about this passage: "We must always remember one thing – John, as someone has said, is more interested in the truth than in the facts. He is not interested in writing a chronological biography of Jesus. He is supremely interested in showing Jesus as the Son of God, and the Messiah," (Barclay).
2. Jesus did clear the Temple at the beginning of His ministry. The support for this comes from **chronology**. Jesus had attended the Wedding at Cana (2:1 – 11). Then He spent some time with His family and disciples at Capernaum (2:12) before going on to Jerusalem for the Passover. There is also another chronological clue to support the clearing of the Temple at the beginning of His ministry. The Jews told Jesus that it had taken forty-six years to build the Temple. Herod's Temple was started in 19BC (Bruce, Barclay), or 20BC (Wescott), which means that this incident took place in 26/27AD, right at the beginning of His ministry.



The illustration shows that the Temple consisted of a series of courts leading into the temple proper and the Holy Place. There was first the Court of the Gentiles, then the Court of the Women, then the Court of Israel, then the Court of the Priests. Now all of this buying and selling was going on in the Court of the Gentiles.

The oxen, sheep and doves were used for sacrifices. According to the Law, the animal sacrifices were to be without blemish (Lev 1:1 – 3), so they were inspected by appointed inspectors, who charged a fee. If the animal was bought outside the Temple then it would probably be rejected, forcing the

pilgrim to buy another one at a higher price within the Temple. The money-changers also provided a convenient way for the pilgrims to pay the annual half-shekel towards the Temple-tax at Passover. However the pilgrims had to have their money changed into local currency because the annual Temple-tax had to be paid in that currency. The commission charged was twelve and a half percent. Huge amounts of money were being made. When Crassus captured Jerusalem in 54BC he raided the Temple treasury and took from it £2,500,000 without coming near to exhausting it. (Barclay).

The Action of Jesus

Many have expressed surprise that Jesus would make a whip and use even mild force on animals. However He used it in a controlled way to get the animals out. If He had let the animals get out of control, then a riot may have ensued attracting the attention of the Roman authorities in the Antonia fortress (see diagram). Jesus also scattered the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables, an act that also has surprised many people. Obviously Jesus was angry, but why was He angry?

This event marked the start of His public ministry, but it was no accident that He started it this way because it was prophesied. Malachi 3:1: ""Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to His temple; the messenger of the covenant whom you desire, will come," says the Lord Almighty."" He was angry because His Father's house was being desecrated by the paraphernalia of religion that was preventing people from communing with God. The worshippers were only concerned with making sure that they had the right sacrifices and what made it worse was that the Temple was being used as a market for those sacrifices. The Court of the Gentiles, where the market was, was meant for a place for all nations to come to and pray. Notice Jesus said: **"My Father's house,"** (v.16). It was at this event that Jesus publicly revealed that God was His Father for the first time and that He was passionate about what His Father wanted. So because of this the disciples remembered a quotation from Psalm 69:9: **"Zeal for your house will consume me."**

The reaction of the Jews

They demanded a sign (v.22). Their reaction was natural because they wanted to know the credentials of someone who would act in this way because they acknowledged the action of Jesus to be an act of someone who claimed to be the Messiah.

The Answer

"Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days." (Jn 2:19) At His trial He was accused of making a similar statement (Mark 14:58) and he was taunted with it while He was on the cross (Mark 15:29, 30). The Jews obviously did not understand Him because they thought He was referring to Herod's Temple. Commentators inform us that the word here translated "temple" refers only to the sanctuary or the Holy Place, where God was believed to dwell. John informs us that Jesus was referring to the temple (sanctuary) of His body (v.21). By saying this Jesus was affirming that He was Deity in the flesh (John 1:18) and that He would die and be raised again. He was also emphasising the fact that Herod's temple would become obsolete (Mat 23:38) because a new spiritual temple would emerge. This is of course what the apostles would later teach. (see 1 Cor 3:16, 17; Eph 2:21, 22; 1 Peter 2:4, 5)

It was only after His resurrection that the disciples realised the significance of this statement. John tells us that they believed the scripture, but he doesn't specify which. However it is believed by some commentators that he was referring to Psalm 16:8 – 11 which was used by Peter at Pentecost (Acts 2:25 – 28) and Paul in Acts 13:35. John also says that they believed the words that Jesus had spoken, implying that we can trust everything He taught because of His resurrection.

Jesus radically challenged the Jews of His day to look beyond the religiosity of what they were doing and find out what God really wanted. He challenges us to be the people that God wants us to be. The church is not a fossilised institution but it should be the organic body of Christ in this world reaching out with His message of love and forgiveness.

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QUESTION – What does the New Testament tell us about ‘Easter’ and should Christians celebrate it?



By the time you read this, ‘Easter’ will already have been celebrated by Churches in the Western World, and, although ‘Easter Eggs’ were on sale even before the ‘Christmas Trees’ had been dismantled and the remains of the turkey had been disposed of, ‘Easter’ will once again have passed off with little notice having been paid to it by society at large.

After the merry “Ho! ho! ho!” festivities of the commercially exploited “*Christmas Holiday*”, the ingenious devisers of commercial advertising-campaigns have not yet managed to invent a way of ‘selling’ Easter to a population which appears to be becoming more and more irreligious. I suppose that the business-world’s marketing managers find it far easier to deal with a baby in a manger, than with a Man on a Cross.

Still, whilst some diaries do not even mark the day, - (the one before me as I write makes no mention of ‘Easter Sunday’ although it *does* tell me that “Easter Monday” is a Bank Holiday) - “Easter” will no doubt remain on the religious calendar, and I am writing this because it has raised two questions to which I hope to be able to provide at least partial answers. Because of the constraints of space, I shall deal with the first question this month, but the second, which I believe is the more important of the two, must wait, (d.v), until the next issue.

Question No.1 asks, “**What does the New Testament tell us about ‘Easter’ and should Christians celebrate it?**”

Question No. 2 asks: “**How long was Jesus really in the grave?**”

The New Testament and Easter

The simple answer to our first question is that ***the New Testament scriptures tell us nothing at all about an annual celebration of ‘Easter’***. In fact, the only place the word ‘Easter’ can be found in the New Testament scriptures is in the ‘Authorized’, or ‘King James’, version of Acts 12:4, where it is a mistranslation of the Greek word ‘*Pascha*’, which, in all later revisions, is correctly rendered ‘*Passover*’. In that chapter ‘*Pascha*’ is used with reference to the Jewish Passover feast, and has nothing whatsoever to do with the ‘Easter’ celebrated by denominational churches today.

‘Easter’s’ Origin.

Indeed, the origin of ‘Easter’ has remained a debating point for centuries. ‘The Venerable Bede’, who is remembered as a great theologian and historian and who was born in the year 673 A.D., offered the most likely explanation when he indicated the word’s pagan origin. He declared that the word is derived from ‘*Eastre*’, which was the name of an early, now-forgotten pagan ‘Dawn goddess’.

Even the Roman Catholic Church candidly concedes this non-Christian origin, when it admits that the familiar ‘Easter Eggs’, ‘*may possibly be a ‘baptized’ pagan custom*’, because they are ‘*an obvious symbol of fertility*’ connected with the worship of this pagan goddess.

These admissions, however, have not lead Rome to reject either Easter, or Easter Eggs, because, although it also declares that ‘*Chocolate eggs and such like fooleries are a degeneration of no significance*’, it speaks approvingly of the ‘*bringing of baskets of eggs to church for a blessing, before or after Mass*’.

The historic truth is that when the Emperor Constantine banned paganism and ordered Christianity to be recognized as the official religion of the Roman Empire, the Church of Rome set about the process of turning pagan temples into ‘Churches’, giving the names

of 'Saints' to the pictures and statues of pagan deities, and 'baptizing' or 'Christianising' both the gods and the festivals of the pagans, throughout his Empire. In the process of 'converting' these heathen festivals, 'Easter' was pronounced by Rome to represent the birth of new life and declared to be the memorial of the death, burial and rising again, of the Lord Jesus.

The Date

For almost the first three centuries Christians did not know an annual observance of the Lord's death and resurrection. Consequently, having created this new festival, the Roman Church authorities then had to decide on a date for its celebration, and it was the Council of Nicea, in 325 A.D., that settled the matter. The Council ruled that 'Easter Sunday' should be designated the day of the Lord's resurrection and celebrated on the first Sunday after the full moon occurring on, or next to, March 21st; in other words, the full moon after the vernal equinox. As a result of this ruling, 'Easter' became a 'moveable feast', which can occur between March 22nd and April 25th, both dates included. This year "Easter Sunday" happens to fall on April 16th.

This ruling brought 'Easter' into line with the Jewish Passover, which celebrated on the 15th of Nisan, the month that corresponds to our March-April. There is always a full moon at Passover-time, and Jewish Christians certainly believed that this was the time when Jesus was arrested, tried, crucified, buried and raised from the dead.

Conflict of Calendars.

However, the Nicean Council's decision was neither appreciated nor accepted by many of the divisions of the Christian world outside of Rome's authority, because churches in different parts of the ancient world used different calendars. For example, since the establishment of the Church in Jerusalem, history records that believers outside of Italy have known;- the Armenian Calendar, which celebrates 'Christmas' on Jan. 6th, the Byzantine Calendar according to which the year begins on September 1st, the Coptic, the Syrian, the Chaldean, the Julian, and finally, the Gregorian Calendar which we follow here in the West today; (although, oddly enough, we still follow the Julian calendar for Income Tax Returns and national accounts, made up on April 5th!)

Furthermore, the Jewish year functions according to two calendars, the older, civic year has a calendar which begins with the month Tishri, and a calendar for the religious year, which, according to Exodus 12:2, at the command of God, was adopted in the time of Moses and which begins with the month Nisan. Exodus 12 states, **"In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month in the evening, you shall eat unleavened bread until the 21st day of the same month in the evening"**.

Commenting on this passage, the Jewish historian, Arthur Hertzberg, tells us that 'Passover begins on the 15th' of Nisan. The 14th of Nisan, in the evening, is when the Passover Meal is eaten, followed by the Passover's seven days of unleavened bread.

You will remember that Matthew 26:2 records the words of Jesus spoken to the apostles. **"You know that after two days is the Passover, and the Son of man is betrayed to be crucified."** Now go back to Exodus 12, where we read that the Passover lamb was killed and its blood applied to the doorposts and lintel of each home, and, having made themselves ready for departure, the Israelites ate the roast lamb as part of the special meal commanded by God. Then, after God - (*not* 'the Angel of Death!') - had passed over Egypt, having been saved by the blood of the Passover lamb, they left Egypt and entered upon their freedom.

It is here that we see how the Lord's death corresponds with the Passover celebration, and are able to understand why he chose to die at that time. Paul writes, in 1st Cor. 5:7, that Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. On the 10th day of the seventh month, Tishri, the Jews observe the Day of Atonement ('*Yom Kippur*'), the most solemn

day in their religious year, when the High Priest offered a sacrifice, first for his own sins, and the sins of the priesthood, and then those of the people.

But Jesus did not choose to be sacrificed on the Day of Atonement. He chose the Passover. The reason? The Day of Atonement had to be an annual solemnity; a constantly recurring event, because the people's sins were recurrent and on that day there was a **"remembrance of sin every year"**. (Heb.10:3)

The Passover, on the other hand, occurred only once – never to be repeated. **"He appeared once, at the end of the age, to put away sin by the offering of himself."** (Heb.9:26) And, when He had, **"by the offering of himself, purged our sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high"**. (Heb.1; 3) **"So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many, and to those who look for him, he shall appear the second time, with sin, unto salvation."** (Heb.9:28)

A Final Observation.

Over the date of the Lord's Incarnation there will, in this life, always remain a question mark, with a very strong case to be made against the notion that He was born on December 25th. So, if there is one good thing that 'Easter' does for us, it is to remind us that we can, with accuracy, fix the time of the year when He went to the cross and when He arose from the dead.

As Christians, we have no need for an annual commemoration of the His atoning work. When we meet at the Lord's Table, week after week on His own day, and in obedience to His clear command/request, we **"proclaim the Lord's death, until he comes again"**. (1st Cor.11:26) So, let us **"not neglect to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encourage one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching"**. (Heb.9:25) Do you want to celebrate the *real* 'Easter'? ***Then, be at the Lord's Table next Lord's Day!***

Freedom of Speech?

WHAT IT MEANS FOR CHRISTIANS

Language is one of God's precious gifts to mankind but like with most things in life we only begin to appreciate it when we lose the ability to speak. Speaking is our main source of communication and though we can get along by other forms, there is nothing quite like this special gift. Like all of God's grace gifts, language is given to us for our use but we are responsible for how we use it.

Today we hear much about free speech and in this country we have prided ourselves in being able to speak without fear. This is a great blessing that many in other countries don't have. Undoubtedly this freedom appears to be gradually being eroded due to pressures from many quarters.

As Christians we must not allow these pressures to turn us aside from speaking what is right and godly. But we must be careful to speak the truth in love for this is always acceptable to our Lord and is best for mankind.

Recent events raise the question, **"Does freedom of speech allow us to say anything, anytime, anywhere, anyhow?"** Has the Lord given us this kind of freedom? Like every other gift from God he gives us guidance for use. Believers who look for and live by the principles he gives will be wise in the use of them and benefit both themselves and others. So what are these guiding principles?

There are several guiding words given in God's word that we need to take on board. Ecclesiastes 3:7 states: "There is a time to be silent and a time to speak." What a pity that some do not heed this advice. How many have not learned even this first rule of speech? They just can't keep their mouths shut! Someone said: 'God gave us one tongue and two ears to teach us to listen more than we speak.' It was Amos (5:13) who said: **"He who is prudent will keep silent."** There are those also who think it is their duty to speak their mind no matter whose feelings they offend. 'I just tell it as it is!' They argue that is being honest and truthful. But does the Lord have anything to say about this kind of speaking? Proverbs 12:8: **"Rash words are like sword thrusts."** How many have been wounded and hurt because of such words and all because we didn't learn to curb the tongue? So often it seems that our tongue is out of step with our brain. Everything that our Lord says about use of speech says that this is not acceptable behaviour.

To speak the truth is certainly the way we should behave. Proverbs 12:22: **"Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord."** One of David's descriptions of the godly includes one who **"speaks the truth from his heart"**, (Psalm 15:2) and it was the Lord himself who said, **"let your yes, be yes and your no, no."**

Paul records in Colossians 4:6 another ingredient that the Holy Spirit adds when he states **"let your speech always be gracious"**. Kindness must temper the words we say and must be fashioned to bless, encourage, and motivate others to do good. Do you recall the scripture that says "Fathers provoke not your children to do evil"? How careful we must be not to provoke one another wrongly. In Ephesians 4:15 Paul writes: **"speak the truth in love"**. Remember before you speak, what you say must not only be true but equally must not be hurtful, unhelpful or ungodly.

It is very clear from the word of God, that God considers our use of speech to be a very serious matter. How we conduct ourselves in speech reflects what is within us and will have consequences. During the war years the need for careful talk was constantly stressed. Today we are in spiritual warfare and we need to conduct ourselves appropriately. Let us not allow Satan to gain the advantage over us by deceiving us and hurting others around us by the way that we speak. Here are a few things that we are to refrain from in our speech:

- Grumbling or murmuring: 1 Cor 10:10; Phil. 2:14; Jude v16.
- Gossiping: Romans 1:29
- Godless chatter: 1 Tim 6:20
- Evil talk: Ephesians 4:29.
- Slandering: 1 Tim 3:11
- Blasphemy: Titus 3:2
- Filthy talk: Colossians 3:8
- Controversy, perverse disputes, trivial wranglings: 23 Tim 2:23; 1 Tim 6:4
- Disputing about words to no profit: 2 Tim 2:14

When we look at what the Lord says we can understand just how easy it is to slip into the way that the world behaves. The final word comes again from the Lord, words recorded in Matthew 12:26: **"I tell you, on the day of judgement men will render account for every careless (idle) word they utter."**

(For personal reasons the writer has asked for his name to be withheld. However I can confirm to readers that the brother is known to me and is a respected member of the Church. Editor)

GOD'S SYSTEM

An exposition of Ephesians chapters 3 and 4

(Allan Ashurst, Stretford)

Alexander Campbell is probably best known for his books* entitled "The Christian System" in which he gives his understanding of the scriptures on the constitution of God's church. That work, together with much of his other writings, greatly influenced a movement in the USA towards "restoring New Testament Christianity" generally known as "the restoration movement." Churches of Christ in the United Kingdom were encouraged to learn of this movement and began exchanging letters with churches of Christ in the USA. This first came to my attention when I was shown correspondence of that time between a church of Christ in Manchester and a church of Christ in New York. Alexander Campbell's writings also greatly influenced Scottish Baptist and other British churches to abandon their denominations. So the drive to ensure that faith and practice was scriptural gained momentum. Understandably, perfection was not achieved immediately, and sadly there have been serious reversals. Also it would be folly for us to assume that we have got it so right that there is no room for improvement. We must always search the scriptures lest we have misunderstood, overlooked, neglected or deviated from their teaching.

If any passage of scripture outlines God's organisation of the church and how he intends it to function, it is perhaps Ephesians 4:3-16. Much has been written about verses 4 to 6. Some have seen it as the divinely inspired creed of the church. There is no doubt it thrills the soul to read it.

(Ephesians 4:4) **"There is one body, and one Spirit, even as you are called in one hope of your calling; (5) One Lord, one faith, one baptism, (6) One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all."**

In the next verses we have God's methodology for achieving this unity. You will agree that alternative methods for doing it cannot be scriptural. His system for achieving it is introduced pictorially like a victorious emperor giving responsible roles to his citizens for the administration of his empire.

(Ephesians 4:7) **But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. (8) Therefore he said, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men... (11) And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;**

GIFTS OF GRACE [GRACE means the same as FAVOUR]

These responsibilities are called gifts of "grace" because they are favours granted by the LORD. This is understood better if we see what Paul says of his gift of grace in chapter 3:1-11

(Ephesians 3:1) **"For this cause I Paul,... (2) If you have heard of the stewardship of the grace of God which is given to me toward you: (3) How that by revelation he made known to me the secret;... (5) Which... is now revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; (6) That the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel: (7) Of which I was made a servant, according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effectual working of his power. (8) To me, who is less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ;"**

Paul sees himself as being given the undeserved favour, the responsibility of preaching the

Gospel. There is no evidence of pride in his words. There is a danger that people put in these roles will think they are superior to the rest of the flock. Some have even caused splits in churches because a relative has not been appointed to an "office". This tragic misunderstanding has partly arisen because of the use of the word "office" in the Authorised Version in 1 Timothy 3:1, 10 and 13. They are not "offices", they are responsible roles granted as favours from the LORD. They are not granted on the basis of degrees or diplomas. There are no graduation ceremonies. They are to be like their chief shepherd who gave his life for his sheep. His diploma was being spiked naked to a tree. His graduation ceremony was being spat and jeered at whilst in agony. Paul had his proud past crucified with Christ. The paradox is that our pride is in Christ. He was disgustingly crucified as though he was the scum of humanity so that we could have the glory of eternal life.

There is no word "office" in the Greek text in 1 Timothy 3:1, 10 and 13. It was inserted by the translators. The translators of the Authorised Version were ecclesiastical officers in the Anglican hierarchy. There is no scriptural authority for that kind of hierarchy in the LORD's church. Let us not ape such. Let us take to heart Paul's humility.

BY THE CHURCH

The Lord Jesus set up roles of responsibility in the church for its development. God always intended that his multifaceted wisdom should be made known, in the heavens and on earth, by the church.

(Ephesians 3:9) **"And to make everyone see what *is* the fellowship of the mystery ... (10) To the intent that now the multifaceted wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in heavenlies, (11) According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord."**

The church is God's institution for this purpose. So you will agree that alternative institutions cannot be scriptural.

FOUR ROLES IN THE CHURCH

(Ephesians 4:11) **"And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some pastors and teachers;"**

Some apostles and some prophets

Apostles and prophets have left us with the books of the New Testament and the information that they have laid down is the foundation of our faith.

(Ephesians 2:20) **"And are built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner *stone*; (21) In whom all the building fitly framed together grows to a holy temple in the Lord: (22) In whom you also are built together for a habitation of God through the Spirit.**

Some Evangelists

"Evangelist" means "gospel preacher." Timothy, the evangelist, was appointed by his church (1 Tim 4:15) to accompany Paul to preach the gospel in new territory. He was chosen on the basis of his reputation. (Acts 16:1-3)

Some pastors and teachers

"Pastors and teachers" is a couplet referring to two aspects of the same role. Pastors means shepherds. Shepherding and teaching are two aspects of the same role. A direct translation makes it more obvious that there are four roles and not five:

(Ephesians 4:11) **"And himself gives: certainly the apostles, as well as the prophets, and as well as the gospel preachers, as well as the pastors and teachers."**

They were also called elders, which referred to their maturity. (1 Tim 3:6) Elders had to be competent teachers of the word of God, (1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:9) and they had to look after their congregation like shepherds tending their flock. (Acts 20:17,28) That is why they are referred to as pastors as well as teachers. Someone aptly expressed it this way, "Elders must smell of sheep". Where they had men qualified (1 Tim 3:2) the members of each congregation chose several men. There was no such a thing as a one-man "Pastor" in the New Testament church. (Acts 6:3; 14:23) These men were appointed to be the elders in their own congregation.

Elders are also called "overseers". (Acts 20:17,28) They were responsible for overseeing their congregation only. (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet 5:2) They had no jurisdiction over any other congregation. There was no such thing as dioceses or of "mother churches" having subsidiary churches. Each church was autonomous, responsible directly to the one and only head - Christ Jesus. (Eph 1:22; 5:23, Col 1:18) Sometimes the word for "elders" is transliterated "presbyters" (1 Tim 4:15) and the word for "overseers" is transliterated "bishops". (Titus 1:5-7, 1 Tim 3:1,2) "Elder", "bishop", "overseer", "pastor and teacher" all refer to the same role.

So in the New Testament "elders" are "bishops" and "bishops" are "elders." Congregations chose for themselves several "elders". In other words, congregations chose for themselves several "bishops". There was no such a thing as several churches under one "bishop" or even one "bishop" over each church.

The apostles and prophets have provided us with the word of God. Evangelists break new ground. Elders oversee and teach the membership in their local congregation. These are the four roles the LORD put in place for the spiritual development of his people.

ITS PURPOSE AND THE TARGET

Guided by the scriptures, elders in each congregation were to be responsible for overseeing the spiritual welfare of their congregation and for developing every member's talents to their full potential, the stature of Jesus Christ being the ultimate ideal. This would embrace all aspects of service in the Lord's work, developing everyone's talents, whether they were in visiting, in teaching, in training others or in pioneering work in new places as evangelists. Every congregation was God's institution, God's college, God's training centre. It follows that extraneous institutions cannot be scriptural.

(Ephesians 4:12) "For the maturing of the saints, for the work of service, for the building up of the body of Christ: (13) Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ: (14) That we will not be children any more tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, by which they lie in wait to deceive; (15) But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, who is the head, even Christ: (16) From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplies, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, making increase of the body to the edifying of itself in love."

Some say that the "till we all come to the unity of the faith" refers to the completion of the New Testament, implying that this passage is no longer relevant. That is false. The phrase "we all" means every individual. Each individual is to arrive at that unity, knowledge, maturity, and stature. It is folly to write off what the LORD has set in order in the church as not being relevant now and to resort to other methodologies, systems and institutes.

WHAT ABOUT DEACONS AND MINISTERS?

The word "deacon" means servant. All Christians are servants of the LORD but in 1 Timothy, it is used specifically of members in a congregation who are allocated a special role. The main distinction between the qualifications required of elders and those of deacons was that deacons

did not have to be able to teach. (1 Tim 3:8-13) Since deacons did not have to be able to teach they were evidently chosen for roles that did not entail teaching. For example in Acts 6:1-6 we read of several men being chosen by the congregation to see to the needy. This left the Apostles free to concentrate on teaching the word of God. So "deacons" would not have the responsibility of supervising the spiritual development of church members. That was the role of elders. That is evidently why they were not listed along with the four roles given in Ephesians 4:11.

Also "ministers" are not mentioned. The concept of having one man as a "minister" or "pastor" relieving the elders of their responsibilities, doing all the "platform work", baptising, marrying, and visiting, is not in the Scriptures. It is a relic carried over from the denominations out of which some churches of Christ came. The only times "ministers" is used to designate a specific role in the church is in 1 Timothy 3:8 to 13 and Philipians 1:1 where it is transliterated "deacons". There is no role in the New Testament like that of "the minister".

WHO DOES THE CHOOSING?

It is significant that even though the apostles appointed the men to "serve tables" they did not do the choosing. (Acts 6:3,5) There is no such a thing as "apostolic succession" in the Bible. The apostles stated the qualifications that the men had to have and the congregation did the choosing. Elders should not, on their own, choose elders, evangelists or deacons. The congregation should be made aware of the qualifications and do the choosing.

WHAT ARE THE QUALIFICATIONS OF AN EVANGELIST?

The qualifications of elders and deacons and even their families are outlined in 1 Timothy 3:1-13 and Titus 1:6-9, there is no list of qualifications for evangelists. This kills stone dead the outrageous idea that the evangelist is over the congregation, and I speak as an evangelist. Also the absence of any mention of a role of "minister" kills the idea that one man should rule the elders or rule the church. How can someone, in a role for which no qualifications are listed, have the rule over those who do have listed qualifications?

In Paul's letters to the evangelists Timothy and Titus we see desirable qualities an evangelist should have, and Churches should consider these carefully in commissioning men for that work, bearing in mind that choosing and commissioning evangelists to be let loose in virgin territory incurs responsibility for having done that. If we choose our elders, we deserve the elders we get, but the world does not choose the evangelists we send out. From my own experience, I can also see wisdom in sending them out in twos, like the Lord sent out his disciples in twos. It can be very lonesome and stressful work.

SUMMARY

The Lord's church must develop, grow and expand. This work is committed to earthen vessels such as you and me. We should follow the Holy Spirit's guidance as revealed in the scriptures in doing this. The fact that other methods and institutions outside the Church have been resorted to and come to be depended on in many quarters is a sad reflection on the state of the Church. Many Churches are relying on man-made institutions to train "ministers" to run their congregations. At worst they are unscriptural. At best they are crutches for ailing Churches. We must trust God implicitly and do it His way, with thanksgiving, prayer and supplications. Then He will get the glory though His church and not through institutions of man's making.

Wouldn't it be wonderful to have Churches where every member, male or female, is developing to their full potential in the service of the LORD? Let us strive to see that even now "the multifaceted wisdom of God might be made known **by the church** to the principalities and powers in heavenlies, According to **the eternal purpose** which he purposed **in Christ Jesus our Lord.**" [Ephesians 3:10-11] As long as the LORD carries it is never too late.

(* "books" - the version published in the UK, in parts, differs significantly from the USA version.)

News and Information

Ghana Appeal

Since the introduction of the Ghana Appeal countless brethren have been cured of life threatening ailments from malaria to snake bites. Cases such as hernia are particularly serious for brethren such as farmers who are unable to attend to their crop for a long period of time.

The husband of a sister who suffers from epilepsy has thanked you for the life-saving operation to their son. The life of one brother or sister in Christ, as well as of their children, is precious – and your donations have saved many. The need is continuous and will not go away.

The Appeal was first introduced to deal with such cases but, largely due to the strong spiritual commitment of our Ghanaian brethren, it was very soon funding evangelism. Through this, new congregations continue to be established in outlying areas as well as locally and the result has been well beyond our initial dreams.

As funds are limited we cannot now afford to fund the building of meeting places, but we do help to provide bibles.

Those wishing to help, please make cheques payable to: **Dennyloanhead Church of Christ Ghana Fund** and send to treasurer, **Mrs. Janet Macdonald, 12 Charles Drive, Larbert, Falkirk, Stirlingshire. FK5 3HB**
Tel: 01324 562480

Obituary

Buckie: It is with deep sadness that the Church in Buckie reports the death of sister Elizabeth Jane Roberts (Lizzie) on Tuesday 24th January.

Lizzie was 91 years old and had been a Christian for 70 years. She will be greatly missed for her happy smile and her contented attitude. She was an inspiration to all who knew her, particularly to the brothers who

preached the Gospel, always stressing the great need to stand up for the truth of God's word.

In her younger life she lived in Kirkcaldy with her husband and family where she was renowned for her hospitality and loved to serve her brethren.

The writer was privileged to conduct her funeral service in the Church in Kirkcaldy on Saturday, 28th January. Bro Bill Barnes of the Kirkcaldy congregation officiated at the graveside.

We ask for your prayers for her family, especially for her daughter, our sister Betty, who loved and looked after her so well during the last few years. Lizzie was a great encouragement to us all, demonstrating godliness with contentment and her perpetual smile. A visiting brother and myself visited her on the Sunday before she died and as we waved goodbye, it was as though she was sitting with her bags packed and patiently waiting to be transported into Glory to meet her Lord and Saviour whom she loved and served.

We, in Buckie, thank God for the seventeen years of fellowship with such a wonderful Christian lady.

Bill Pirie
Church of Christ, Buckie

Newtongrange: Our dear sister in Christ, Jamesina 'Ina' McLachlan (nee Wilson) passed away on 18th January 2006. Ina was born on 18th May 1928 and was baptized at the age of 17. She attended Sunday School and Bible classes at Newtongrange and went on many Bible Class holiday camps to Portnockie. Over the years she traveled all over the world on her many holidays. Ina married Peter in 1950 and they lived in Stirling and then in Plean until Peter's death in 1977. Ina then moved to Edinburgh and then finally to Bonnyrigg.

Ina was a much loved and loving Christian lady who spent much time at Bible studies. She also played a huge part in the Ladies Class – arranging speakers and organizing outings. Ina delighted in giving gifts to the ladies and the speakers at the closing social in December each year. Ina had not been well for some time but struggled on to meet with

us each Lord's day, and, although in great pain, met with us on December 18th before being admitted to hospital that week. Ina will be greatly missed by all her brethren, family and friends.

A service was held at the meeting place here on Thursday 26th January, followed by a service at Mortonhall Crematorium. Bro. David Ferguson conducted both services. Ina's ashes were interred at her parent's grave at Cockpen Cemetery on Thursday 23rd February, Bro Joe Currie conducting the service.

M Hunter (Secretary)

Simply Christian Website Report

The members of the Church in Stretford, Manchester and their helpers in India, Singapore, Australia and USA are grateful for the generous help received from brothers and sisters in the UK and abroad. We felt that the best way to update you on the work being done in distributing literature and CD's is to give you a few extracts from the many letters expressing gratitude for this work.

"May the Lord Jesus bless you and your ministry. I need more tracts or leaflets. Many brothers and sisters and also the Muslims are reading them." Ghana

"The tracts too are helping very much... about 10 people are asking for some to study." Ghana

Now I request you to help me in this regard by sending some books, booklets ... At the moment we are 11 seekers of truth from which I am only the educated one... I have made them aware of seeking truth." Pakistan

"We are regularly studying materials you supply to us. We find that they are helpful in our gospel meetings." India

"India has 1 billion people and 330 million gods. More than 82% are Hindus, 12% are Muslims, though Christians are said to be 2%... By the power of the gospel, some souls are being added to

the Lord's Body." India

Please help me to pray about the work of the vineyard of Christ not only the Islam but also the tribal people here at Sarangani province." Philippines

"I am particularly happy because I have been able to read more about the beliefs of Islam and Qur'an... Please send more tracts to help me to understand the Bible to teach others." Zambia

"Thank you for the literature. It is very noble. I am learning a lot, especially the approach. I will use material in Chinhoyi because the Moslem religion is growing very fast in the southern part of Africa." Zimbabwe

"Simply Christians ministries has become a very powerful tool for our preaching and teaching in the church and our house to house evangelism and the results always profitable and encouraging. Some brethren in sister congregations are still demanding for your CD's. Please send some more CD's to us." Nigeria

" Many people have been now converted into our Lord's Church as a result of the efficient use of your materials. We are highly in need of more materials." Nigeria.

These are just a few of the appeals received almost daily. About 1800 people from 103 different countries have contacted us and many write back for more CD's, leaflets and courses, Bibles and other aids to study. Sometimes, unfortunately, we cannot send as much as they can use for lack of funds.

Please try to have a look at the website at <http://members.aol.com/eusebos> This contains a vast amount of very interesting material and more is added regularly. All this is sent out on the CD's including a reliable translation of the complete Bible in English and commentaries on some of the books. So far the information for Muslims has been the most popular request from all around the world.

As more people have access to computers, it seems likely that this method of spreading the Word will continue to grow fast. Very remote regions of the world can be reached in this way. We recently had a very welcome request from China.

Brothers and sisters, can you help with this good work? Imagine the costs of postages, envelopes, blank CD's, photocopying of courses and leaflets, and in some cases arranging for Bibles in local languages to be sent to those who have none. If you could make a regular contribution this would be especially encouraging.

Simply Christians is a registered charity and all the work involved in sending out the material is being done by volunteers. Please make cheques payable to: "Simply Christians" and send to: Allan Ashurst, 60 Kenwood Road, Stretford, Manchester. M32 8PT

Coming Events

European Christian Workshop

**Lancaster University:
31st August to 2nd September 2006**

Speakers are:

Alastair Ferrie (Dundee)
Mark Hill (Loughborough, UK)
John Griffiths (Wembley, UK)
Trevor Williams (Bristol, UK)
Tony Coffey (Dublin, Ireland)
Earl Lavender (Lipscomb Univ., USA)
Mike Williams (Lipscomb Univ., USA)
Evertt Huffard (Harding Graduate School of Religion, USA)

For more information visit our website:
www.christianworkshop.net

Alternatively you can email for information to:
paulhalliday@yahoo.com
stephen.woodcock@tesco.net

We are in the process of finalising costs but will provide that information as soon as possible.

**Paul Halliday (Newport)
Stephen Woodcock (Wigan)**

Stretford, Manchester

Saturday evening Gospel meetings.
Each to start at 7.00 p.m.

April 22nd

Speaker: Mark Hill, Loughborough.
Subject to be announced.

September 23rd.

Speaker: Ernest Makin, Longshoot.
"Who is Jesus?"

October 21st

Speaker and subject to be announced.

Kirkcaldy, Scotland

Annual Social

Saturday, April 15th at **1.30 p.m.**
Speaker: John Mooney, Livingston.

PLEASE NOTE CORRECTION OF TIME

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DISTRIBUTION AGENT & TREASURER:

JOHN K. KNELLER, 4 Glassel Park Road, Longniddry, East Lothian, EH32 0NY.

E-mail: john@kkneller.freereserve.co.uk

Tel: 01875 853212 to whom change of address should be sent.

EDITOR: ROBERT MARSDEN, 4 The Copse, Orrell Road, Orrell, Wigan, England, WN5 8HL. Tel: 01942 212320 E-mail: bobmarsden@bulldoghome.com

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