

The SCRIPTURE STANDARD

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

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THE BOUNDS OF HABITATION

Once again we are seeing the importance of boundary lines. Once again, because of boundary lines, we seem to be on the brink of war, (occasionally, this time, by the "appropriation" of Kuwait by Iraq). It appears that President Saddam Hussein of Iraq, being rather hard-up after his dreadful war with Iran has solved the problem by "annexing" the land (and wealth) of a next-door-neighbour, and declaring it part of Iraq. We can but hope and pray that good sense will prevail but there is a feeling that 'good sense' will play little part in the final outcome. Although Saddam Hussein has, in effect, stolen this prosperous land of Kuwait, he is certainly not looked upon as a thief by his own country-men, but is regarded as a hero. Why? Because, in their eyes, it is not a question of robbery but one of redressing a former injustice, and the recovery of what formerly belonged to Iraq. In short, the restoration of the 'proper' boundary line. This is, of course, quite an ingenious strategy to justify grand larceny, and it has all been done before. Indeed, most ruthless dictators, with envious eyes on other lands, have come up with this kind of justification for intrusion into weaker nations. Adolph Hitler roused the support of the whole German nation in his alleged claim that he would win back land lost to Germany in previous wars, and restore original boundaries. It is a very popular rallying point and was, ostensibly, the reason (rightly or wrongly) for Argentina's invasion of the Falkland Islands; and Spain's continual agitation for the possession of the rock of Gibraltar. Iraq seems to be harking back in history to the time of the Ottoman Empire, and I suppose if every country were to do that, they could all have claims upon one another, and we could have a world war on a really grand scale.

BOUNDARY LINES

Squabbles over boundary lines have always been, and still are, a fruitful source of smouldering animosity or open conflict. It is evident all over the world: either on a national scale, or on a merely personal level. Every week mindless atrocities are carried out by the I.R.A. and other terrorists because of a boundary line drawn across Ireland about 1921, but similar situations abound. There are currently border-line clashes between China and Russia; India and Pakistan (boundaries again fixed by the British); between Palestinians and Israelis; between the Greeks and Turks on Cyprus, and there are a great many more, in Ceylon, Africa, etc. Boundary disputes go back, I suppose, to the time when there was strife between Lot's herdmen and Abraham's herdmen (when Abraham suggested that Lot make his choice of the land he wanted, and Abraham would take what was left; and thereafter they would keep within their boundaries: Gen. 13:8), or when Gerar's herdmen strove with Isaac's herdmen over wells and water-rights (Gen. 26:20).

On a personal and every-day level, boundary lines are just as important, no matter how small the scale. Think of all the bitter and on-going domestic disputes, between formerly good neighbours, when one of them plants a hedge or builds a fence, on what does not appear to be the exact line of demarcation between the properties, or consider how even a small child jealously guards its little domain when once allocated its "own room" in the happy household. There are also additional boundaries in some countries which segregate its citizens into classes and races, and restrict access to certain vehicles and areas to "Whites Only". Thus boundaries, whether in terms of concrete, like the Berlin Wall, or whether just lines drawn on a map, confer, by their very nature, rights to some, and restrictions on others.

Boundaries are very necessary just the same: indeed quite essential. We all like to know exactly where we stand in life, with regard to governments, employers, neighbours and even friends. We are constantly engaged in drawing boundaries, and changing them, and there are places to which we would not go, ("No go" areas), and people with whom we would not mix. Basically most of man's problems are related to an encroachment into the boundary lines of others, whether on a national level (Iraq invading Kuwait) or whether on a personal level, neighbour going to law with neighbour. Indeed lawyers spend much of their time drawing up legal boundaries, or investigating a possible breach of boundaries already established our prisons are full of men who have already trespassed such boundaries. In Britain, in many towns there is an annual trek around the Parish boundaries just to re-affirm, to all and sundry, the full extent of the border. In England this old custom of 'Beating The Bounds' is still observed in some Parishes and villagers, clergymen and Town Officials, traverse the boundaries, small boys placing willow-wands here and there on the actual line, and being 'whipped' now and then at intervals to 'make them remember' the boundary lines. A similar custom is observed in Scotland but mainly carried out on horseback owing to the extensive nature of the Parishes, and called "The Riding of the Marches (Boundaries)".

THE BOUNDS OF OUR HABITATIONS

God was the first to recognise boundaries and inaugurated them as early in human history as the Garden of Eden. Later, the boundaries of the land promised to Abraham were described as containing all the many countries encompassed in that vast area which lies between "the River of Egypt unto the great river, the River Euphrates" (Gen. 15:18). After the flood, God "set the bounds of man's habitations" and (in Gen. 10) we read of the allocation of parcels of land to Ham, Shem and Japheth, and all their progeny. This fact is referred to several times in the O.T. and is also commented upon by Paul in his 'potted' version of the O.T. to the Athenians (in Acts 17:26) when he says that "God made of one (Adam) every nation of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed seasons, AND THE BOUNDS OF THEIR HABITATIONS." This is surely a very interesting statement and confirms us in thinking that God has a firm hand in the history of men and nations: regulates their periods of prosperity (or otherwise) and controls the bounds of their habitations. One Bible Commentary on this verse says, "The apostle here opposes both Stoical Fate and Epicurean Chance, ascribing THE PERIODS and THE LOCALITIES in which men and nations FLOURISH to the sovereign will and prearrangements of a living God." (Jamieson, Fausset & Brown).

On a lesser scale, but of no lesser importance, God also decreed that no man "Shall remove his neighbour's landmark" and in fact "Cursed be he that removeth his neighbour's landmark." (Deut. 27:17). "Landmark" in the Hebrew (according to lexicographers) means a 'Border' or 'Boundary' and so, in effect, the prohibition was "Thou shalt not remove THE BOUNDARY of thy neighbour fixed by the ancients." In a land without fences and dykes, such as the Middle East, boundaries were, and

still very often are, indicated by stones or heaps of stones: or, alternatively, a ploughed double-furrow with a large stone at each end. Such boundaries are obviously quite vulnerable, and human nature being what it is, men look with envious eyes upon any fertile land of a neighbour and would try to appropriate a bit, if possible. Even amongst God's chosen people there was an obvious need for God's strong prohibition of cheating on boundary lines, for we find references to it in Deut. 27:17; Job 24:2; Pr. 22:28; and Ho. 5:10. The Gentiles were equally persuaded that boundary lines were sacrosanct and indeed the Romans slew anyone caught tampering with them. And as we know Arabs have been disputing boundaries with one another (and with the Jews) from time immemorial, and are still at it today as aggressively as ever. And now again, in 1990, we have an Arab nation not only disputing the boundary of another Arab nation but actually invading it and taking it over altogether. God not only **approves** of boundary lines: God invented them.

NEITHER TO RIGHT NOR LEFT

When God set boundaries and restrictions in the Garden of Eden, some of them were not only geographical **but moral**: for we read that it was as early as Eden that sin entered the world. The sin in the Garden did not consist of sexual intercourse between Adam and Eve as is commonly supposed (indeed they were instructed to be fruitful and to multiply) but consisted of disobedience, especially in the matter of eating from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. (Neither is there any mention of any 'apple' in the Garden as is very commonly supposed). The word 'Sin' has to do with God's boundaries: for the word itself means "To miss the mark"; i.e. a bowman missing the target with his arrow (the target area being circumscribed with a boundary line). Similarly, the term "Trespass" means movement over a borderline into forbidden territory. The whole world is "in trespasses and sins" by violating the boundaries by God's Word. Joshua, after the death of Moses, urged the people to "**Be ye therefore very courageous to keep and do all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, that ye turn not aside therefrom, to the right hand or to the left.**" (Jo. 1:7). They were not to deviate to either side of the line drawn in the Law of Moses. And so God's Word sets boundary lines. Jesus changed the boundaries set by Moses, but nevertheless set His own demarcation lines. (There are, it seems, boundary lines also in heaven for we read of angels who fell, and who "left their first Estate").

In all facets of life we realise that "the line must be drawn somewhere and God has drawn the line in His word. God's Word must be made known to the world; so that the world may know where the line has been drawn, and stay within the permitted bounds. For God's laws are for man's total and ultimate good. God's law is impartial and simply informative. Paul could say, "**What shall I say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay I had not known sin but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet.**" (Rom. 7:7). The Law of God does not cause sin or excuse sin: it merely identifies it. God's law is as neutral as a looking-glass. If we look into a hand-mirror and we don't like what we see we don't accuse the mirror. Likewise, in looking into God's word we are reflected in a bad light and made acutely aware of all our deficiencies. This is no reflection upon God's word, but upon ourselves. The law of God brings knowledge; and that brings responsibility; and that brings accountability. Thus God's laws do not produce sin, encourage sin, excuse sin, or forgive sin: they merely define sin, and by defining it identify it. It also highlights human frailty and the difficulty of man to remain within its bounds. Again, Paul could say, "**For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would, I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do.**" (Rom. 7:18). And so the apostle echoes the feelings and experience of most of us, and acknowledges the tendency of most of us to serve God's law with the mind, but with the flesh serve the

law of sin. "O Wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death: I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord."

A GREAT GULF FIXED

Thus we have a fellow feeling with Paul and can equally confess that oftentimes we err and find ourselves trespassing the lines drawn by God, and missing, so often, the mark. "All we like sheep have gone astray, and have turned every one to his own way, and the Lord hath laid upon Him the iniquity of us all." (Is. 53:6). The good news is that there is a remedy for sin and trespass. The trespass offering has been made by Jesus and God has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. We have all violated the boundaries set by God, "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God," and so we all require to avail ourselves of God's grace and forgiveness. The remedy is revealed in the gospel of Christ and requires that we acknowledge Him as our Lord and Saviour: that we repent of our past careless way of life; that we resolve to copy the life of Jesus all the days of our lives, and that we begin by cleansing ourselves from all our past transgressions. To honest enquirers the apostle Peter gave these simple but vital instructions, "Repent, and be immersed every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins ..." (Acts 2:38) and again, "Arise and be immersed and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord." (Acts 22:16). To those who had already obeyed the gospel, and thereafter had fallen short in their in faithfulness to Jesus, the apostle John had these very comforting words to say, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness". (1 John 1:19).

The world, quite rightly, takes boundary lines very seriously and, at the present moment, nearly every country has joined the general condemnation of Saddam Hussein for crossing Kuwait's border. God also takes His boundaries seriously and expects us to take them seriously. By contrast, the Devil sets no boundaries, but rejoices in setting men's feet "on the broad way which leadeth to destruction." Jesus said, "Narrow is the way which leadeth unto Life and few there be that find it." (Matt. 7:14). The Way (Line) is narrow and we must try not to deviate from it, neither to the right or to the left. Our reactions to God's boundaries in this life will affect the boundaries of God yet to be encountered, in the future. In the Judgement God will draw a line to separate the peoples of the nations, "And shall set the sheep on the right hand but the goats on the left." Then shall the King say unto those in His right hand, Come ye blessed of My father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." (Matt. 25). And even in the intermediate state boundaries will exist for "...there is a Great Gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence cannot: neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence." (Luke 16:26). And so boundaries THEN will be determined by our attitude to God's boundaries NOW. Yes, they are important.

EDITOR.

GLEANINGS

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

NEVER ALONE

"Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee."

(Hebrews 13:5).

WITH HIM BY YOUR SIDE

"You'll never be lonely while Jesus is near;
His comforting presence casts out every fear;

And all through life's journey, whate'er may betide,
You'll never be lonely with Him by your side."

F.E.L.

THE BIBLE SPEAKS

"Jesus answered them, Do ye now believe? Behold, the hour cometh, yea is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me."

(John 16: 31, 32.)

WE QUOTE — F.W. ROBERTSON

The deep Humanity of the Soul of Christ was gifted with those finer sensibilities of affectionate nature which stand in need of sympathy. He not only gave sympathy, but wanted it too, from others ... Even this verse testifies to the same fact. A stern spirit never could have said, "**I am not alone: the Father is with Me**" — never would have felt the loneliness which needed the balancing truth. These words tell of a struggle: an inward reasoning: a difficulty and a reply: a sense of solitude: "**I shall be alone;**" and an immediate correction of that, "**not alone — the Father is with me.**"

NO, NEVER ALONE

"No, never alone, No, never alone;
He promised never to leave me;
Never to leave me alone.
No, never alone, No, never alone;
He promised never to leave me,
Never to leave me alone."

LONELINESS

It is amazing what a kindly word will do to lift the gloom from the spirit of a despairing man or woman. Try it, you lonely people. A great Russian writer, Turgeneiv by name, once wrote a prose-poem that teaches a wonderful lesson to all lonely people. It is about a beggar, who asked for alms. He who was asked felt for money, and, finding none, said: "Brother, I have none." "But you said "**brother**", answered the beggar, "and that was an alms." It is remarkable but true that, as you help others, you begin to realize that all along you have had an Unseen Companionship. "I am not alone, for the Father is with me."

Gardner Miller.

THE STRENGTH OF THY MASTER

"Thy secret place of victory, O my soul, is not the place where thou shalt assert thy strength; it is the place where thou shalt assert the strength of thy Master."

C.M.

COMFORT IN LONELINESS

"**LONELINESS** is one of the most pathetic of human experiences. The yearning for companionship is one of the deepest of all yearnings. The religion of Christ has something to meet every human need; what is its blessing for loneliness? We may turn to the Master's own life for answer to our question. He met all the experiences that ever become ours, and He found for Himself the best there is to be found in the divine love to meet His experiences. Thus He showed us what we may find in our times of need, and how we may find it."

J.R. Miller.

TALES WORTH TELLING

A farmer and his son went into the field to work. The boy was told to throw a pile of rocks into a ditch. For a long time he worked, but after a while he cried out, "There's one rock here I can't lift, I've tried with all my might, but I can't lift it." "No my son," replied his father, "you have not tried with all your might, for I am here as part of your might. You did not ask me to help you."

C.G.

Selected by Leonard Morgan.

MUTUAL MINISTRY

(Part One)

THE PRIESTHOOD OF BELIEVERS

“One of the great principles of the Reformation was termed the ‘priesthood of believers’. The Reformation argued that there was no precedent in the early church for the priest as mediator. Such a role was not part of the gospel. They also argued that nothing in Scripture supports the secular power of the clergy.

This doctrine meant that there were no longer two levels of Christian, spiritual and lay. There was one gospel, one justification by faith, one status before God common to all men and women, clergy and laity. Protestants opposed the idea that authority rested in an exclusive priesthood. People were freed from their vague fear of priests in this massive liberation movement”.

(Quoted from *The Lion Handbook of the History of Christianity*).

Unfortunately, the churches which emerged from the Reformation developed their own styles of clergy. The clergy became known as ‘Ministers’ as distinct from the other members of their congregations. Titles came with these ‘Ministries’ such as ‘Reverend’ and ‘Pastor’. These ‘Ministers’ became the only people who could ‘officially’ interpret the Bible for their flocks. So what started as a movement towards Biblical Christianity ended up becoming composed of splintered groups, each developing different theologies and organizations. In this maze of denominationalism the principle of the ‘priesthood of believers’ was lost to a large extent. So it seems, at least in part, that the leaders of the different branches of the Reformation still wanted to hang on to the idea of a clergy and laity. This in turn led to the drawing up of creeds and church manuals which became the constitutions of different denominations. Some denominations founded headquarters from which their churches could be governed.

On the whole it seems that the Reformation failed to live up to its promise of establishing the principle of THE PRIESTHOOD OF BELIEVERS. But the question that we must ask is this – IS THE PRINCIPLE OF THE PRIESTHOOD OF BELIEVERS BIBLICAL? This we shall examine now.

Peter wrote a letter, which we refer to as I Peter, to scattered Christian communities in Asia Minor. He wrote to encourage them in their struggles. In this letter he spoke of their hope of Heaven (1:3-5) and that hope was based upon the fact that every Christian has been redeemed with the precious blood of Christ (1:18,19). In 1:17 he established that God is the Father of every Christian and that He shows no partiality. He also informed his readers that they were saved through ONE GOSPEL (1:10-12; 22-25). So all Christians share a common hope, have a common Saviour, have one Father, (see also Ephesians 4: 1-6) and are saved through one gospel. With this in mind we can look at what Peter wrote in chapter 2 of his letter.

In verses 1-3, Peter told his readers to put away evil qualities and long for the spiritual milk so that they can grow up in their salvation. Obviously some who read this letter were recent converts who had come to know the goodness of Christ.

In verses 4-10 Peter describes what Christians ARE, which is based upon what Christ had done for them, (read again chapter 1). Both Christ and His followers are described as the LIVING STONES of a SPIRITUAL HOUSE; Christ being the CORNERSTONE who supports the aesthetics of the building. The cornerstone had to be right if the rest of the building was to be correct in its proportions. If then we are talking about a spiritual building then the cornerstone has to be spiritual. Paul, towards the end of Ephesians 2 comes to the same conclusion, “So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure is joined together

and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built into it for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit." (v. 19-22, R.S.V.).

However, Peter describes Christians as a PRIESTHOOD, and the letter to the Hebrews calls Christ our GREAT HIGH PRIEST (Heb.4; 14-16). Peter describes Christ's followers as both a HOLY (v.5) and a ROYAL (v.9) priesthood. This new priesthood was to offer up SPIRITUAL sacrifices (v.5). Paul in Rom. 12:1 says, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable (spiritual) service (worship)." **Our priestly service to God can only be acceptable if we give ourselves to Him and in so doing we separate ourselves from such things that destroy spiritual development.** John, in Rev. 1:6, wrote this about Christians, "And he made us to be a kingdom, to be priests unto his God and Father; to him be the glory and the dominion for ever and ever. Amen." (Revised Version).

Yes, I do believe that the PRIESTHOOD OF BELIEVERS is a Biblical idea and because it is, it is the responsibility of the church, for which Christ died, to preserve this privilege. However, I believe that the church is drifting away from this principle and I have written this article out of a deep concern about what seems to be happening.

If the Editor allows, I would like to explore further the practical implications of EVERY CHRISTIAN BEING A PRIEST. If any reader has found a fault in anything that I have just written, then I would appreciate this being brought to my attention.

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IN THE TIME OF TROUBLE

"For in the time of trouble He shall hide me." Psalm 27:5.

All experience trouble of some sort or another. Some people are called upon to endure more than others. To some, molehills are mountains; to others, mountains are molehills. It depends entirely upon the frame of mind we are in.

The waters of trouble had passed over the Psalmist; one day shallow, another day very deep, yet through them he had learned God's care and benefits. "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble," he declares. "In the time of trouble He shall hide me in His pavilion; in the secret of His tabernacle shall He hide me; He shall set me upon a rock". Jesus came to share our troubles, temptations, afflictions and woes, enduring upon the cross the greatest trial of all. His resurrection from the dead declares His victory over them all. Because He overcame we also shall overcome through active faith in Him.

"God is our refuge and our strength,
A present help is He;
To share our troubles He endured
The cross of Calvary."

God promises strength in the time of trouble. Note, we are not exempted from trouble, but we have one with us whose strength will not only help us to endure, but also to overcome our troubles. How wretched is the one who has none to help, to confide in, to trust. How happy the child of God who has been promised strength for the time of adversity, of sickness, grief, pain and death. Paul affirms "My God shall supply all your needs through His riches in glory, by Christ Jesus."

What a wonderful example Jesus is to us. He did not give in when trouble came, but committed Himself to the task His Father had given Him to perform, and received

from God the Father strength, and glory and honour. Jesus conquered Satan, and in Him we shall achieve our victory.

“His perfect strength He will supply
To meet my every need
E'en though temptation I endure
The victory's His indeed.”

How often the happenings of our daily lives cause us to doubt. To ask the inevitable question “Why”. Should we really claim immunity from all the woes of life simply because we are God's children? Is it not because we are His that Satan hurls his fiery dart at us. David knew this. He was the Lord's anointed, and yet was constantly in fear of his life from Saul. Over and over again his confidence in God shines through. “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble; Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea.” The things of earth may be shaken and removed, but the things of God cannot. “He is my fortress, I fly to Him and I am safe. He is my rock; with Him as my foundation I cannot be moved. If this was the confidence of one who lived in a world of promise, what should be our state when God has visited us in the person of Jesus Christ His Son? The things of earth may perplex, disturb and annoy us, cause us grief, anxiety and distress, but active faith in Jesus through the application of His word will help us to overcome and strengthen our resolve to serve Him in sincerity and truth.

“The earth may move, the mountains shake,
Yet I will faithful be;
For He's my fortress and my rock,
And He will watch O'er me.”

What then should be our objective? To allow the abiding spirit of Jesus to reign in our hearts, to govern, control and sustain us through all the changing scenes of life. To look no longer upon the visible things of earth which one day will pass away with a great noise; but upon the unseen things of God, for these work out for us a far more exceeding weight of glory, for these are the lasting things.

Let us rejoice in the day of trouble, that we have an ever present Saviour to help us in the hour of need. One who has by Himself been tested and tried in all points, like we are, and yet has successfully overcome all trials, troubles and temptations and is thus able to help, strengthen, encourage and support those who put their trust in Him .

“So on I'll go till life shall end
Depending on His grace;
Troubles may come and cares arise
But I shall see His face.”

“In time of trouble He will be
Close by my side to encourage me,
Whether my troubles be large or small,
He'll stay with me through them all.”

Tom Kemp, Wigan.

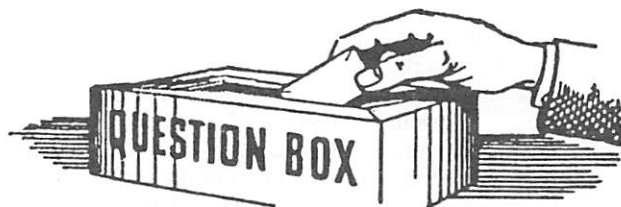
Jesus bears witness to the scriptures, and the scriptures bear witness to Christ.

Life with Christ is an endless hope: Without Him, a hopeless end.

Your Sermon? – well, it must be said, (And you'll forgive the honest mood),
I'd liked it better half as long, and twice as good.

Beware of a half-truth: you may have – the wrong half.

Some people are so heavenly-minded that – they are no earthly use.



Conducted by
Alf Marsden

“Recently Bro. Marsden said that he considered “that the arguments used for the non-use of musical instruments in worship among the weakest to sustain”. Does he, then, believe that we can use musical instruments in worship? Does it matter?”

I have received this question, and one or two others in similar vein, following my comments on instrumental music in the August issue of the S.S. I have also received quite a number of letters and telephone calls appreciating the spiritual thoughts inherent in the answer I gave. In view of the fact that some concern has been expressed that I might be influencing the minds of young Christians in a **wrong** way, I feel that I must explain myself further. It is not, and was not, my intention to stir up a controversy which I abhor, but it seems that the passion engendered by some of these ‘issues’ is never too far below the surface.

Why mention?

One or two have said, “Why mention instrumental music at all: it was irrelevant to the question”. If you recall, part of the original question said, “and what lessons did you learn from your experiences”? As I explained, it was purely coincidental that when I was attending Gospel meetings prior to my conversion to Christ, the burning ‘issue’ was the ‘Instrumental Music Issue’. Being relatively uninitiated in the teaching of the Church of Christ, and observing the depth of the passion engendered, I naturally thought that this ‘issue’ **must** be fundamental to salvation, but I was puzzled because I never heard it preached in Gospel messages. However, the fact which disturbed me most was the unloving attitude of Christians when discussing this teaching; I couldn’t relate this with the Saviour I was hearing about, and being exhorted to obey. Since then I have asked myself many times, “Why do we find it so difficult to discuss scriptural problems in a Christian manner”? Sad to relate, I am still asking that question some forty years on, and I am still looking at a world in which rivers of blood have flowed, and all in the name of God. Someone has missed the message somewhere. Anyway, suffice it to say that it was the unwholesome attitudes of Christians which was the main thrust of what I said. My comments could have been about any other ‘issue’, but the music problem happened to be the problem of the day when I first came to the Lord. Therefore, I plead ‘not guilty’ to the charge of irrelevancy, but I acknowledge that I could have been a little more explicit.

Confusion and Doubt

There has been a suggestion that what I wrote could cause confusion and doubt in the minds of young Christians. If I ever thought that I set out deliberately to cause confusion and doubt, particularly among young Christians, I would not speak or write another word. But I happen to believe that much doubt and confusion exist because of the extremes of religious fundamentalism; I believe this was well illustrated by the Lord in His scathing denunciation of the scribes and Pharisees. Is it possible that those who **believe** that they speak **absolute truth** on all occasions cause doubt and uncertainty in people’s minds? I believe it is possible. I always exhort people, Christian or otherwise, to be like the Bereans of old; to search the scriptures in order to check the truth of what is said. Personally, I **will not** chain my mind similar to Jehovah’s Witnesses and Mormons to a set doctrine which I can learn and repeat parrot-fashion; the word is more important to me than that. If we are not careful we shall foster groups of

Christians who do just what they are told to do by their so-called leaders without thinking for themselves; we have seen this in the past, and we may see it again.

To Sustain

This means 'to uphold or allow validity of'. You will no doubt remember that I wrote, "among the weakest scripturally to sustain". Giving words their ordinary grammatical meaning, and according to the definition, I personally have always 'upheld and allowed' the validity of the non-use of musical instruments in the worship of the Church, even though I may have considered the argument weak. I have served as Elder, preacher and teacher, and you will not find on record any suggestion of my allowing instrumental music in worship. Why? Not because I find the scriptural evidence conclusive, but because I try to live my life in 'the Spirit of the Lord', realising "that where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty". Liberty for **each one of us** to read and interpret the word according to our knowledge and ability; liberty for anyone to criticise what I say or write if they believe it is not according to truth; even liberty for congregations to practise things for which there is no scriptural warrant, a liberty which many exercise in the use of individual containers, Bible schools, organised youth week-ends, women's meetings, etc.; liberty for me to say, which I do, "if the playing of musical instruments in worship causes my brother to stumble, I will not allow it as long as I live". I consider **that** to be true spirituality. Was it not Peter who said that there were many things which his brother Paul said which were difficult to understand? Perhaps we find ourselves in good company when we have to wrestle with the scriptures.

Worship

I have never really understood what constitutes 'an act of worship'. I can well understand a corporate body of Christians meeting together to worship God, but are we to conclude that Christians **have** to meet **corporately** before they can worship God? Is not the Christian's whole life one of worship and adoration of God and His Christ? I have listened to the Hallelujah Chorus from Handel's Messiah, and as the voices and music have soared higher and higher so my soul has been transported, as it were, into Heaven itself; I have echoed the words "King of kings, and Lord of lords", and I have thanked my Father for expressing His love in His Son; is that not worship? Many times in the quietness of my home I have read about the scene in the Garden of Gethsemane and I have wept with my Saviour in His suffering, and I have been strengthened by His resolve; is **that** worship?

Some have said that it is perfectly permissible to play a musical instrument, say an organ, in the home because that would not constitute 'an act of worship' (unless, of course, the church was meeting in that home). But if a Christian, or a group of Christians, were singing hymns with rapture and adoration to God, and they were accompanied by someone playing a musical instrument, it is difficult to believe that they wouldn't be offering worship to God and His Christ. I worship God whenever my mind turns to Him, and I believe many other Christians do the same.

Rightly or Wrongly

It must be very satisfying and soul-warming to believe that when you comment on the scriptures your words convey **absolute truth**; perhaps our self-analysis has confirmed to us our intellectual prowess and interpretational skill; we believe ourselves to be strong and sound. If so, we should spare a moment for reflection to king Uzziah of Judah; the Chronicler says of him, "he was marvellously helped (by God), till he was strong. But when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction" (2 Chron. 26:15,16). There is little doubt that the Holy Spirit **assists** us in our understanding of the word of God, but it is the humble soul who prays with the Psalmist, "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law" (Ps. 119:18); this, of course, with a sincere and dedicated study of the word.

Opinions about the scriptures have always proliferated; I suppose that's why there

are so many denominations expressing the Christian religion. An opinion is “a judgement or belief based on grounds short of proof” (Ox. Dict.). Everybody has an opinion about something; the trouble arises when a person becomes **opinionated**. Opinions can only be validated by proof, and proof consists of establishing truth by evidence or argument. The very fact that **appeals** are allowed in law seems to suggest that when **someone else** looks at the evidence, that person (or those persons) may consider that the original evidence and arguments adduced as proof might have rendered the initial judgement ‘unsafe’ (as per some recent well-known cases). So proof itself, even though based seemingly on strong evidence and argument, may have some weak points; that is why it should always be subjected to the closest scrutiny. I mention these things so that we shall not be too hasty in rushing in with our proofs.

So far as Christians are concerned, the truth we can take as unshakeable is that concerning God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit. The facts of the Gospel are clear and unambiguous, “that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures” (1 Cor. 15:1-5). If the Holy Spirit (through inspiration) is the Author of the scriptures, then we can say with certainty that the truth is in the word, **but it has to be unravelled**; it is then that **opinions** come to the fore.

When the Gospel was preached by Paul and others in its truth and simplicity, it was received eagerly and spread rapidly. It was when the social, moral, and cultural problems impinged on Christian living that the difficulties for the Church really started. These sorts of problems never go away and they are with us today, but they change somewhat due to prevailing moral standards and variations in cultural habits; I believe we all appreciate that. Leaders down the ages have adopted various stances in resolving such problems; they have tried autocratic, democratic, and laissez-faire methods, but the problems still remain. What should we Christians do? I believe we should go on searching for the truth, and teaching it when we think we find it. In the meantime, we should not grow too impatient with those who seem to find it less easily than we do, or maybe arrive at different conclusions.

I think that I have answered the part of the question which asks if I would allow instrumental music in worship. As regards ‘does it matter’, I believe it does for the spiritual reason I have given you.

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

ADOPTION

Romans 8:15 – “For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of ADOPTION by whom we cry out, ‘Abba, Father’.”

Romans 8:23 – “And not only they, but we also who have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the ADOPTION, the redemption of our body.”

Romans 9:4 – “...who are the Israelites, to whom pertain the ADOPTION, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises ...”

Galatians 4:4-5 – “But when the fulness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the ADOPTION as sons.”

Ephesians 1:5 – “...having predestined us to ADOPTION as sons by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will ...”

The Greek word for ADOPTION is HUIOTHESIA from HUIOS, a son THESIS, a placing, and signifies the place and condition of a son given to one to whom it does

not naturally belong. The word is used by the Apostle Paul only.

“ADOPTION – We find that it was a term used in Roman legal practice. It referred to a legal action by which a person takes into his family a child not his own, with the purpose of treating him as and giving him all the privileges of an own son. The custom was not common among the Jews but was so among the Romans, with whom an adopted child is legally entitled to all rights and privileges of a natural born child.

Kenneth S. Wurst.

“There was no more dramatic and far-reaching legal ceremony in any law than Roman adoption. The seriousness and the finality of Roman adoption was due to the fact of the Roman PATRIA POTESTAS, the law of the father’s power. Under Roman law a Roman father had absolute power over his children ... (in adoption) the child had to pass from one PATRIA POTESTAS to another. It was carried out by a symbolic sale; the process was called MANICIPATIO. Scales and copper weights were used. Twice the father sold his son, and twice he bought him back again. Then he sold him for a third and last time, and the sale was complete. After that, the three parties, the adopted son, his father and the adopter, all appeared before the Roman magistrate called the PRAETOR, and a symbolic lawsuit was carried out, in which the legal claim for the son to be brought into the new PATRIA POTESTAS was fully argued, and only when that case was settled was adoption complete. ... The consequences of Roman adoption were far-reaching. The adopted son completely lost all rights in his old family and completely gained all rights in his new family. In the most literal sense he gained a new father. He became as fully heir to his new father’s estate as any normal son. According to the law all the debts and obligations of his former life were cancelled. He was a new person entering upon a new life. If the adopted person had children of his own, as he well might have, these children also became the children of the adopting father. The family was affected by the adoption just as much as the father was. In Roman law, the adopted person became in the most literal sense the child of the adopting father ... It was this that Paul was thinking when he spoke of the adoption of the Christian into the family of God. The Christian received a new father—even God ... All his past life was cancelled and there was given to him a new beginning and a new start, clean from the cancelled sins of the past. He became a full inheritor of the grace and the wealth of the riches of God. He became the kinsman of all the saints of God.”

William Barclay.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Nov. 4	1 Sam. 1:20-28	Luke 1:57-80
Nov. 11	1 Sam. 2:1-11	Luke 2:1-21
Nov. 18	1 Sam. 2:12-21	Luke 2:22-40
Nov. 25	1 Sam. 3	Luke 2:41-52

ZECHARIAH’S SONG

This song (1:68-79) was the song of Zechariah’s joy on the birth of his son John. Luke tells us that prior to delivering it he “**was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied**” (1:67).

Zechariah revealed that John was to be a prophet of the Most High (1:76). In other words, he was to be a spokesman for God. He would tell forth the Divine commandments and foretell events, many of which were shortly to come to pass in the person of Christ Jesus.

He was to prepare the way of the Lord (1:76). This would show that the coming of the Messiah was not by accident, but the result of careful planning by Jehovah in heaven. There is an old saying: “Plan your work, and work your

plan." God did exactly this, even before the foundation of the world (I Peter 1:20).

He was to bring knowledge of salvation (1:77). Some people claim that "ignorance is bliss," but John showed that knowledge of God is bliss. At the heart of God's message is salvation — forgiveness of sins, eventually achieved for mankind by the sacrificial death of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of the Living God.

He was to tell about the feet being guided into the path of peace. William Barclay has written: "Peace in Hebrew does not merely mean freedom from trouble; it means all that makes for a man's highest good; and through Christ a man is enabled to walk in the ways that lead to everything that means life and no longer to all that means death."

Augustus Caesar and the Birth of Jesus

John Buchan is one of my favourite writers. This talented Scotsman, who ended his days as Governor-General of Canada, is best known for the adventure story *The Thirty Nine Steps*. But he wrote a lot of other books as well. One of them was a biography entitled *Augustus*. I read it a number of years ago in Bournemouth when I was studying background material for Paul's Philippian letter. Buchan opened my eyes to the world of Augustus Caesar. For example he wrote: "The career of Augustus maybe likened to a high plateau by a long, steep and perilous ascent. For fifteen years his feet were on the crags and for forty-three he surveyed the world from the table land. In the first stage his problems was how to win supreme power, and in the second how best to use it. His character remained the same throughout his life, in the sense that the qualities which enabled him to outstrip his rivals were those which made it possible to remould the world — iron self-command, infinite patience, and an infallible judgement of facts and men."

One of the titles of Augustus was **Son of God**. So when Jesus was born into the world there were two "Sons of God". (Little did Augustus realise when he issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world he pulled a switch that set the whole world in motion. He moved a young pregnant peasant girl from Nazareth to Bethlehem from where a future world ruler was to come — a ruler without comparison.) One writer said: "The goals of the 'Sons of God' were identical. One was created by the Roman senate and one by the Holy Spirit. Each was dedicated to the task of bringing about universal peace, and each believed that it should come only through acknowledgement of his sovereignty." Who would triumph? History has provided the answer. Augustus ruled an empire that long ago declined and fell. Jesus is at the head of a kingdom which has endured and "**will endure for ever**" (Daniel 2:44). Personally, I am glad that I am a citizen of this very kingdom.

Humble shepherds visited the newborn Jesus after his birth. They themselves had been visited at night by angels, who had broken the joyous news to them. I like what it says in chapter 2 verse 20: "**And the shepherds returned, glorifying God and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.**"

Circumcision of Jesus

Circumcision is the cutting of part of the foreskin of the male organ of procreation. It was instituted in the days of Abraham. In Genesis we read: "**And God said unto Abraham, you shall keep my covenant therefore, you and your seed after you in their generations. This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your seed after you; Every man child among you shall be circumcised, and you shall circumcise the flesh of the foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant between me and you. And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you, every**

man child in your generations, he that is born in the house, or bought with money of any stranger which is not of your seed. He that is born in your house, and he that is bought with your money, must needs be circumcised: and my covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant..” (17:9-13). Alexander Campbell has written: “This ‘covenant in the flesh’ marked out and defined the natural descendants of Abraham and gave to the world a full proof of the faithfulness of God, putting it in power with all people. This gave the descendants of Abraham the title of ‘the circumcision’ and beautifully represented the separation of God’s people from the children of this world.”

Circumcision of the flesh, is not part of the Christian system. Paul wrote to the Galatians: “Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is required to obey the whole law. You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ: you have fallen away from grace. But by faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love” (5:2-6, N.I.V.).

JESUS AGED TWELVE

I understand that a Jewish boy became a man when he was twelve years of age. There was a ceremony commemorating the event which was known as Bar Mitzvah (“son of the commandment”) — a ceremony still held in Jewish circles today. So at twelve, Jesus for the first time went to the Passover. The story of His going missing is familiar to all. Eventually Mary and Joseph found Him in the temple (probably the last place they thought of looking), hearing and asking questions of the Sanhedrin. Jesus’ response to His mother was a very revealing one: “How is it that you sought me? Did you not know that I must be

about my Father’s business?” I think I agree with one writer when he said: “See how very gently but very definitely Jesus takes the name Father from Joseph and gives it to God. At some time Jesus must have discovered His own unique relationship to God. He cannot have known it when He was a child in the manger and a baby at His mother’s breast, or He would be a monstrosity. As the years went on He must have had thoughts: and then at His first Passover, with manhood dawning, there came a sudden blaze a realization the consciousness that He was in a unique sense the Son of God.”

Ian S. Davidson, Motherwell.

NEWS FROM THE CHURCHES

Slammanan District: The quarterly Mutual Benefit was held at Motherwell Meeting House, on 8th September, 1990, when the question “Did Jesus Eat The Bread At The Institution Of The Lord’s Supper, or Simply Break It?” was dealt with. In the Chair was brother Graeme Pearson, Dunfermline, and the Speakers were brothers Harry McGinn, New Cumnock, and James R. Gardiner, Haddington.

A very pleasant time was had and much was discussed during the hour’s free discussion after the speakers. As usual a great deal more came out of the subject than was, at first, expected. God willing our next Meeting will be on 1st December, 1990, at New Cumnock, when the subject will be, “John 17: Unity – Why has this not been achieved among the churches? Can it ever be achieved?” and the speakers will be James Moncrieff, Haddington, and Graeme Pearson, Dunfermline: Chairman Ian Davidson, Motherwell.

Harry McGinn,
(Sec.)

OBITUARY

Buckie: It is with deep sorrow and regret we report the sudden death of our sister in Christ, Barbara Harper, on Wednesday, 15th August 1990. Sister Barbara had been ill for many years but the suddenness of her call home was still a great shock to all of us. She was a faithful member of the Church for many years and will be greatly missed. We commend our Bro. Alex and his two daughters and their families to our Lord in prayer. Bro. Bill Mair officiated at the funeral.

Hunter Pirie.

Slamannan: The church here regrets to report the passing of another faithful member and attender: Sister Helen Sneddon, who died peacefully on 14/8/90, aged 85 years. Sister 'Nellie', as she was affectionately known, was a faithful follower of Jesus for over sixty years. For the past year she had been cared for in Southfield Nursing Home in Slammanan and we thank the staff there for their care and concern. Nellie will be remembered for her rendering of solos at all church functions, and even in her latter days she loved to sing praises to God. We rejoice that she has gone to a better place and we commend all those who mourn to our Heavenly Father's care. The funeral service was conducted by Bro. Peter Wilson, Slammanan, and Bro. John Wilson officiated at the grave side.

The family of Nellie wish to thank all those who attended the funeral, and all those who phoned and sent letters and cards.

Grace Sneddon (Sec.)

COMING EVENTS

SATURDAY EVENING MEETING

Hindley: Argyle Street Meeting House, Saturday, 13th October, 1990, at 6.30 p.m. Subject: The O.T. Scriptures and their Background. Speaker: Ian Davidson, Motherwell.

ANNUAL SOCIAL

Newtongrange: Saturday, 6th October, 1990 at 4.00 p.m. Speakers: Bro. J. B. Wilson, (Livingstone), Bro. S. Farrow, (Manchester). Chairman: John Wilson.

A rich time of fellowship awaits all.

ANNIVERSARY MEETING

Kentish Town, London: Saturday, 6th October, 1990. Meeting 3.00 p.m. Tea at 4.45 p.m. Evening Meeting 6.30 p.m. Speaker: Philip Partington.

THANKS

"Frank and Jessie Longden are happy to report that they have now moved into their bungalow home at 44 Bourne Avenue, Kirkby-in-Ashfield, Nottingham NG17 7FD, which had been set on fire by an intruder in October last year. We greatly appreciate all the work which has gone into its complete restoration; and to thank everyone again for their kindness and support to us during these past trying ten months."

F. Longden.

GHANA REPORT

In the past month (August) £806.98 was collected for Ghana. One parcel of clothes was sent to Odumasi. The money in the bank on 3rd September, is £876.02.

With the knowledge that brother Bill Cook is considering returning to Ghana to work among the brethren for one year, God Willing, I have decided not to send this month's collection of money, glasses, etc., to Ghana. Bill has agreed to take this with him and distribute it on arrival in Ghana.

I have received a number of enquiries concerning progress reports in Ghana. I have written many letters to Ghana on this subject but the response is disappointing, to say the least. With Bill Cook in Ghana I am convinced the communication problem will be resolved.

ved. I am well aware of the responsibility of sending 'collected money' and the need to clearly report on how it was used.

Once again may I express my thanks for the gifts sent in last month and I acknowledge the receiving of two anonymous gifts of £35 on 22/8/90 and £100 on 1/9/90.

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

Ghana Appeal — Medical Aid

I would wish to appeal once again for money for medical aid for Ghana. Only today I heard of a brother who applied to the church for money to obtain treatment and was informed it was not possible as the funds have been used.

Since the 1st January, 1990 £450 has been sent to Ghana for medical aid. (There is £510 in the bank as I write for medical purposes, received in the past week). Dividing this among the churches does not amount to very much. (12 congregations and growing).

Anyone wishing to help in this aid please send cheques payable to "Graeme Pearson (Ghana Appeal)" to the above address.

KEEPERS OF THE LIGHT

The keeper of the lighthouse does not launch any ships, it is true, but he keeps many a good ship from going to wreck. The light shines farther than the keeper can see, and brightest when he cannot see at all. Two things he must remember — to keep the light burning, and never to get between the light and the darkness he is set to lighten.

So it is with a Christian. The light must be kept burning. However, this is not our greatest difficulty. It is our constant task to keep our own selfish ego in check lest as we magnify our abilities and goodness, we hide the light and the cross instead of hiding behind them.

ARE THESE YOUR EXCUSES?

I never go to the cinema nowadays because my mother and father made me go too often when I was a child.

I dislike the cinema because no-one ever speaks to me.

Every time I go someone asks me for money.

The manager never visits me at home even when I am sick.

People who go don't live up to the things the films teach them.

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