

The SCRIPTURE STANDARD

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

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May 1999 be a Year of Blessing
for all our Readers.

*'The blessing of the Lord, it maketh rich, and he addeth no
sorrow therewith,' (Prov. x 22. R.V.)*

A PAUSE FOR THOUGHT

There used to be (and there may still be) an early morning radio programme which urged listeners, every day, to 'Pause For Thought,' and a few minutes were devoted to a (not always) pithy message from the network clergyman. One does not know what effect this had on the nation but the idea of pausing for thought each morning seems a good one. As we gulp down a few corn-flakes each morning and dash to work, completely pre-occupied with our thoughts and worries as we clock-in for the day's toil, it must surely be a good idea now and then to stop short, and consider what it is all about. Some of us, I suppose, are so wrapped-up in our own little private worlds that we never have time to think of the really important matters in life; and to consider where we have come from, why we are here, and where we are going to in the next world. It is unfortunate that some of us are induced to pause for serious thought only at such 'down to earth' occasions as funerals and the passing of a loved one.

If we can't be persuaded to pause for thought each day, surely we can find time to do so once in the year. We have entered a brand new year, and January is an excellent time for self-appraisal and to take stock. Indeed most businessmen close shop for a few days annually so that they might take stock, quite literally, and make appropriate plans for the better success of the business in the time to come. As individuals, and disciples of Christ, we also can profit from an annual reflection upon our spiritual growth (or lack of it) and form real proposals for an improvement in the year ahead. January is, of course, the gateway of the year and dedicated, as every schoolboy knows, by the Romans to their deity **Janus**. Janus was the keeper of doors and gates, having two faces and able to look back and look forward at the same time. Actually, it seems a most natural thing that having reached the end of one year, and the start of another, that we should look back over the last twelve months and recall its successes and failures, its sadness and joys, and look with trepidation or relish to the on-coming year. As someone has said, we are a year nearer home as we travel 'onward and upwards.' Every so often the mountaineer rests on the slopes and looks back with satisfaction over the many

dangers and obstacles he has overcome, and glances upwards at the peaks yet to be scaled with keen anticipation. On a slightly less dangerous level, the simple ploughman also looks back over the furrow he has just completed to see how straight, or otherwise, it might be. Each year is another furrow ploughed in the field of our experience, or another chapter written in the book of life. The Psalmist said that life was 'like a tale that is told' and each year is another written chapter in the unfolding tale of the lives of each one of us. Some tales are short; some are sad; some are romantic; some are heroic; some are triumphant; some are bitter; and some are hardly worth telling, but we can endeavour (even in unfavourable circumstances) to make the next chapter a bit more interesting, productive, and more well-pleasing to our Maker. January is, therefore, a good month for looking back (retrospection); looking inward (introspection) and looking forward (in prospect).

IN RETROSPECT

'Looking back' is intended to be only a brief glance, and only for the purpose of self-appraisal: a look at our mistakes and failures' so that we might not repeat them. After being rescued from slavery in Egypt, the Israelites quite often 'looked back' but not to profit from mistakes. They looked back in longing again for the 'fleshpots of Egypt' (Ex. 16:3). Is there a possibility that anyone rescued from sin and Satan would want to return thereto, and look back in longing to the 'fleshpots of Egypt?' Peter says, "For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than in the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it has happened unto them according to the true proverb (Pr. 26:11) **The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire.**" (11 Peter 2:20).

The angels rescued Lot, his wife and two daughters, from the destruction of Sodom with these words, "Escape for thy life: look not behind thee; neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain lest thou be consumed." But Lot's wife 'looked back' and was transformed into a pillar of salt. "Jesus said, **No man having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of heaven**" (Luke 9:6).

Our retrospection is not therefore a longing to return to our former enthraldom to sin and shame, but a glance back down the year to build on our successes and to avoid a repetition of our failures.

INTROSPECTION

It is always easy to see the faults in others. Instead of confessing **our own** faults to one another (James 5:16) we are more inclined to describe the faults of others to everybody and this seems to be a common human weakness. Self-examination should help to redress the balance somewhat, but only if we are honest in our self-evaluation; and that's not always easily determined. The poet Burns remarked on the unlikelihood of us ever being able to see ourselves as others see us. God has not given us such a gift, and perhaps if we could see ourselves as others do, we would try to do something about it. And how does God see us - is it a pretty sight? Paul said, (regarding the breaking of bread) "But let a man examine himself." Examine **himself**: not his neighbour. There is no deception as natural and as easy as **self-deception** and if we are incapable of seeing, and acknowledging our own failings then self-examination will not be of much benefit to us. John says that if we think we have no faults (or sins) then we certainly "**deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us**" (1 John 1:8). Accordingly, our aim in introspection should be to examine ourselves, identify our faults and resolve to eradicate all things that stunt our spiritual growth. Self-praise and 'self-appraisal' are, of course, two quite different things.

In the last words of his final epistle to the Corinthian Christians. Paul urged,

"Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?" (Cor. 13:5). Do we know our selves? Are we truly conscious of Christ in us? Is it evident to us, let alone to others? Paul says, 'Examine yourselves: prove yourselves: that ye are in the faith.' Self-deception, like any other form of deception, is incredibly subtle and the only safe course in our self-analysis is to look at ourselves in the mirror - the mirror of God's word. There are doubtless some who look in the mirror with the time honoured question, "Mirror, mirror, on the wall, who is the fairest of us all?" but those who look into the perfect law of liberty will receive an honest estimate of themselves, and will learn that there is none good, but God. It will also be helpful, not only to measure ourselves by the divine standard of God's word, but by the stature of His Son, and our Saviour. How far short do we fall when measured against the standard set by Jesus?

IN PROSPECT

Although Paul recommended self-examination, and doubtless engaged in it himself, he was continually looking to the future and planning forthcoming efforts in the service of Christ. Paul was a man of action and certainly not one given too much to a contemplation of the theological navel. Paul was totally committed to the furtherance of the gospel. All his eggs were in just one basket. He said, "**This one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth to those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God, in Christ Jesus.**" What was the one thing that he pursued - the prize of the high calling of God. He did not look back longingly at the things left behind, but launched himself forward (as a runner to the finishing tape) that he might snatch the victory. What were the things he had left behind? To the Philippians he said that he had left behind all worldly prestige and patronage; monetary gain, a very promising career; personal popularity and esteem, and considered them as loss (indeed as dung) that he might win Christ; and be found in Him; that he might truly know Christ; and the power of His resurrection; and the fellowship of Christ's sufferings; and that by any means he might attain unto the resurrection unto life everlasting in heaven. These things he had left behind, together, no doubt with the memories of any failures and the beatings, tortures and privations he had suffered in his missionary journeys. "Forgetting these things which are behind, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God."

This reluctance to dwell on the past, but to forge ahead in the future, Paul recommended to all. "Brethren" he said, "**be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so, as ye have us for an example. (For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things). For our conversation is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.**" (Phil. 3). Shall we, then, resolve to walk as Paul walked, follow his example, and not walk as the enemies of the cross of Christ and those who "mind earthly things."

A NEW YEAR BECKONS

Yes, January is the gateway to another year; to another chapter of a tale that is told. Many 'New Year Resolutions' will be lightly made and just as quickly broken. What will we resolve to do for the Master? What objectives and targets in God's service have we made and set? We must work while it is yet day for the night cometh when no man can work. Paul counselled the Christians at Rome to look at the time: for it is later than we think. He said, "... knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we first believed. The night is far spent; the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light." (Rom. 13:11).

Let us pause for thought.

Another year is dawning,
 Dear Master let it be;
 In working or in waiting,
 Another year with Thee.
 Another year of service,
 Of witness for Thy love;
 Another year of training,
 For holier work above.

EDITOR.

READING, HEARING, KEEPING

Seven blessings are pronounced upon the recipients of the book of Revelation. The first one is found in chapter one, verse three, and is directed to **the one who reads** the book to others, to **those who hear** the reading, and to **those who heed** and keep the words written in the prophecy.

The **public reading** of God's word has always been a part of the worship of His followers. From earliest times the reading of the Law in public assemblies was considered of great importance. Moses, in the last moments he had with the children of Israel, emphasised the oral reading of Scripture:

" . . . when all Israel comes to appear before the Lord your God at the place where He will choose, you shall read this law before all Israel in their hearing. assemble the people, men women and little ones, and the sojourner within your towns, that they may hear and learn to fear the Lord your God, and be careful to do all the words of the law, and that their children, who have not known it, may hear and learn to fear the Lord your God, as long as you live in the land which you are going over Jordan to possess" (Deut. 31:11-13).

THE READERS

Moses tells them to read the law, publicly, aloud, in the presence of all people, and even the "sojourner" who comes into the land. The reason is **"that they may hear and learn to fear the Lord your God."** Oral reading was one of the ways in which the Law of the Lord was to be made known to the people.

Once in the promised land, Israel forgot. Reading and keeping God's law was neglected. After many years, a young king, Josiah, renewed the practice of reading the Law when the books were found in the Temple. Josiah sent for the elders of Judah and Jerusalem, and all the people.

" . . . and he read in their hearing all the words of the book of the covenant which, had been found in the house of the Lord. And the king stood by the pillar and made a covenant before the Lord, to walk after the Lord and to keep His commandments and His testimonies, and His statutes, with all his heart and soul . . . and all the people joined the covenant" (2 Kings 23:2,3).

Much later when the Israelites are returning from Babylonian captivity, oral reading of the Law is part of a special ceremony. Nehemiah has led the people in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, and when the work is done, they are gathered before the Water Gate to hear God's word. Ezra opens the books, **"And they read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading"** (Neh. 8:8). What happened? **"For all the people wept when they heard the words of the Law"** (v. 9). The Law as read from early in the morning until midday as a memorial to God's great work in their midst.

Public reading of Scripture continued in New Testament times. Jesus Himself read from the Scriptures in the synagogue of Nazareth (Luke 4:16). The letters of the apostles were read publicly, and even sent from place to place for the benefit of fellow Christians (Col. 4:16). And so, when John blesses the **"one who reads"** in the beginning of Revelation, he does so with a long and familiar tradition behind him.

Most certainly it is good for us to read aloud the word of God in our public assemblies. Many congregations do not have scripture reading as part of their regular worship. Perhaps brethren in such places should consider what this practice would add to their worship, and begin including scripture reading in each service.

John's blessing is directed primarily upon the reader. He is the one who is interpreting the sacred Scriptures for those listening. His responsibility is to read in such a way that the message of God is made clear. He should be one who believes in the word and has given his life to following it. He must understand what he is reading, and interpret it clearly to his hearers. This requires attention and preparation.

THE HEARERS

In 1 Timothy 4:13 Paul says, "**Until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching.**" How may we follow Paul's advice and "give attention" to the reading of Scripture? For one thing, the passages to be read should be selected carefully.

We also give attention to the public reading of Scripture when we value its place in our worship. To read a passage as if it were only to fill space between the communion and sermon is to show disrespect for the word. Instead, worshippers should remember they are listening to God's word, and there is nothing more holy or sacred than what He has written for us. And the reader must know that God is speaking through His interpretation of the word. Together, reader and hearers can be taught and exhorted as the word is read in the public assembly.

John also blesses "**those who hear the words of the prophecy.**" Hearers are blessed because they are listening to the wondrous word of God. The Scriptures are designed by God to produce wonderful results in our lives if we give heed to them. David said: "**The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring for ever; the ordinances of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether . . . Moreover by them is thy servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward**" (Ps. 19:7-11).

There is so much in God's word which will bless the hearer, enabling him to rise above ordinary living, and calling him to be the kind of person God wants him to be.

Think of how God's word benefits us when it is read in the assembly. We receive knowledge of the truth. Jesus said, "**Thy word is truth**" (John 17:17). By reading the word we know His truth and how important it is in our lives. We receive wisdom for life. Solomon recorded the Proverbs "**that men may know wisdom and instruction, understand words of insight,**" (Prov. 1:2). The word of God contains all the wisdom we need to live according to His precepts. We find comfort for our fears and afflictions. We get courage to fight the battles of life, against evil and temptation, against hardship and anxiety. The word provides security in our hope and expectation of the Lord's return. These wonderful blessings are ours because God's word is read to us from the pages of Scripture.

THE KEEPERS

Last, but certainly not least, John blesses those who "heed" or "keep" the words which are written. Keeping God's word is so very important! On almost every page of Scripture God says to us "**Be doers of the word, and not hearers only.**" He pleads with those who will listen, "**I have given you My word because I love you; won't you follow My word because you love Me?**" The real test of our love for God's law is our readiness to obey it, and to willingly seek His way for our lives. He has not left us here to drift aimlessly, to wonder what His will is, or guess at how we may be saved. He has told us everything we need to know in His word, saying, "**Turn to me, and live.**"

In another letter John says, "**For this is the love of God, that we keep His**

commandments" (1 John 5:3). The love of God is seen in us when we walk in His ways, keeping His word.

Why do we need to **read and hear and keep** the word of God? John says, "For the time is near" When John wrote these words the Roman world was unleashing its terror on faithful Christians. They would need strength and courage, the kind that comes from knowing Jesus will provide the victory.

John would also say to our age, "**The time is near.**" A look at our world shows the harm that evil is doing everywhere, in movies, television, best-selling books, magazines - every part of this world is dominated by evil. The temptations which confront people today are stronger and harder to resist than ever.

In the midst of it all we are brought to these words: "The time is near." We must always remember Jesus is coming again. Those who **read and hear and keep** His word will be ready.

T. HOLCOMB.

ON "TAKING COMMUNION"

Alexander Campbell said that before it was possible to restore Biblical practice to the Church, it is necessary first to *restore Biblical vocabulary*.

By this he meant that it is important that we correctly define the words we use and that we correctly use the words we employ.

The slogan "Bible names for Bible things" a favourite of the Restoration pioneers, has relevance today. A good example is the word "baptise," originally meaning immerse. Because usage changed, it came to mean any ritual conducted as a Christian symbol of conversion - whether immersion, sprinkling, or purely symbolic; whether of an adult, a child or new-born infant.

Before we can discuss baptism, we must know what we mean by the word itself. Accordingly, we must restore Biblical vocabulary before we can restore Biblical practice.

One phrase we could well afford to eliminate from use is "taking communion." Often we hear someone say he "missed church" Sunday morning, or he wants to "take communion" Sunday night. This phrase betrays a misunderstanding of communion. It implies that communion is a physical object to be taken, much as a pill might be taken. It gives the idea that we "take communion" to be spiritually healthy just as we might "take a vitamin" to be physically healthy.

The Bible, on the other hand, speaks of "breaking bread together" and "the communion of the saints," a much different concept. The emphasis in communion should be communing. The dictionary defines "commune" as "to communicate intimately." This might be viewed as an intimate communication with God through the re-enactment of the Last Supper of Jesus with His disciples. As we eat the bread and drink of the cup, we recall the sacrifice of Jesus and "tune in our minds" to God and His love.

The dictionary defines "communion" as "an act or instance of sharing." In this sense, we share with Jesus in the sacrifice He made. Moreover, we share with one another as believers our faith in our Lord by sharing a symbolic meal.

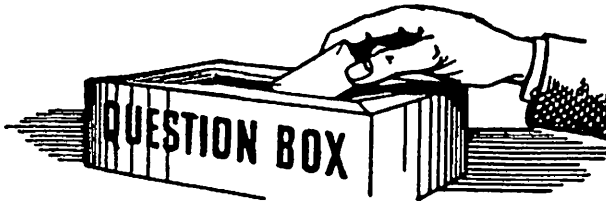
But the dictionary reflects our misuse of language as well as its correct usage. Just as it defines baptism in such a way as to include sprinkling, it defines communion as "the act of receiving the sacrament." This, of course, is from the practice of historic churches, not of Biblical examples.

The New Testament knows nothing of "receiving the sacrament" or of "taking communion." How much more meaningful, as well as more faithful to the Scriptures, is a concept of sharing with God and fellow Christians in communing, than is the concept of "taking communion" which at least subconsciously implies a mere external ritual. In

its deepest sense, communion is far more an act which occurs in the depths of the soul than in the mouth of man.

Surely restoring the concepts, as well as the practices, of the New Testament disciples to those of us who today call on the name of Jesus, can never be accomplished without first restoring to our vocabularies the sense, if not the actual words, of the Biblical record.

L. JACKSON.



Conducted by
Frank Worgan

"Acts 1:14. Does this verse authorise the audible praying of women in worship services?"

I have been given to understand that this is a question which is currently being debated in some quarters and, I have to say, it relates to a practice which is foreign to Churches of Christ in the British Isles. I, certainly, have never known it to occur in the sixty-two years during which I have been a member of the Church.

As to the passage referred to, the first thought that occurs to me is that no-one who reads the scriptures carefully, can reasonably use Acts 1:14 to authorise, or justify women praying audibly during meetings of the Church which are held for worship. The grammatical construction of the sentence alone clearly shows that those who were praying, on this occasion, in the upper room, were the apostles of Christ.

May I, yet again, point out the importance of considering the verse in question in its context?

Concerning whom is Luke writing?

1. Acts chapter 1, verses 1 to 14, reveals the Lord dealing with His remaining eleven apostles, Judas Iscariot having already died. Notice how Luke's inspired record reads, and pay particular attention to his many references to the apostles.

v.2 The Lord *'gave commandment'* to the **APOSTLES** whom He had chosen,

v.3 *To the APOSTLES He 'showed Himself alive.'*

v.4 He stayed with the **APOSTLES**.

v.5 He instructed the **APOSTLES** not to leave Jerusalem

v.5 *The APOSTLES were told to wait for "the promise of the Father," (that is, the baptism of the Holy Spirit).*

v.6 This promise was given to the **APOSTLES** (*YOU shall be baptised . . .*)

v.8 *The APOSTLES were to receive power and thus become His witnesses.*

v.9 *The APOSTLES witnessed His ascension to heaven.*

v.11 *The APOSTLES were addressed by the angels. ("Ye MEN of GALILEE")*

v.12 *"They' (the APOSTLES) then returned to JERUSALEM from the Mount of Olives," from where He ascended.*

(NOTE! This account of the Ascension is endorsed by what Luke also records in his Gospel; chap. 24:48-52, which clearly shows the Lord was dealing only with His APOSTLES).

v.13 *The APOSTLES then "went up to the upper room where 'they' - the APOSTLES - were staying."*

The names of the **APOSTLES** are then listed - all eleven.

v.14 *"ALL THESE" - the APOSTLES - "devoted themselves to prayer."*

There can be no doubt, therefore, that this is an account of a private, personal

meeting of the Lord with His apostles.

2. Notice, also, as I have already indicated, that the **grammatical construction** of verses 13 and 14 shows, without question, that the ones who *'devoted themselves to prayer'* were the *apostles of Christ*, whilst the *women* were merely *present*.

Who were these women?

This is not difficult to determine, because Luke, in **Luke 23:49** and **55**, identifies them for us as *'the women who followed . . . from Galilee.'* They are also mentioned in **Luke 8:3** and **Matt. 27:55**, as women who *'provided for them out of their means.* In other words, who provided financial support for the Lord and His apostles, so that their material needs were met.

Both of these passages tell us that there were *'many'* such women, and it is apparent that they continued to render the same invaluable service to the apostles after the Lord's crucifixion. This is why they were present in the upper room on this occasion. They were not present as members of the Lord's chosen apostolic group, but as believing women who fulfilled a needful ministry.

It is my personal view that, since at least some of the apostles were certainly married, among the women present there were, very probably, family members of the apostles. In **1st Cor. 9:4**, Paul writes: *"Do we not have the right to be accompanied by a wife, as the other apostles and brothers of the Lord, and Cephas?"*

And I expect that most of us have read, in **Mark 1:30**, the account of the illness and cure of Peter's *mother-in-law*.

Be this as it may, consider, as I have already indicated, that if we are meant to understand that these women were among those who *'devoted themselves to prayer'* - (and the question assumes that *audible* prayer is meant, although we have no way of knowing what form the prayer took) - the statement found in **Acts 1:13-14** would have read differently.

It would have stated:

"They went to the upper room where they were staying, Peter and John and James and Andrew . . . and Judas the son of James, together with the women, ALL these continued in prayer."

But that is *not* what the passage says. The precise statement is: *"All these - (i.e. the apostles whose names have just been listed) - with one accord devoted themselves to prayer, together with the women."*

The women were present, but the ones praying were the apostles. Indeed, I cannot understand why anyone should find this difficult to understand, because this is precisely what occurs in our congregations today, during a worship service in which there is a period of prayer. Sisters are *present*, but it is the brothers who engage in audible prayer.

3. This practice is followed in obedience to the command in **1 Tim. 2:8**. *"I desire (Greek: 'I will!') then, that in every place the MEN should pray . . ."*

Timothy is being given apostolic instruction as to what he is to teach the churches, as he fulfils his ministry. In **1 Tim. 6:2-3** we read: *"Teach and urge these duties. If any one teaches otherwise and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ . . ."*

(I suggest you read the passage yourself, through to the end of verse 5, for Paul is quite severe on anyone who is unwilling to hold to what the Lord has revealed through His inspired apostles.)

4. We should notice, also, that the word *'andras'*, used in ch. 2:8 and rendered 'men', means 'men'. Contrary to what has occasionally been claimed, the word does *not* mean 'men and/or women'! This instruction on prayer is given only to the men of the congregation.

That this is the divinely appointed arrangement becomes evident from the following verses in **1 Tim 2**. Commencing with v.9, we read instructions, which are given

specifically to the 'women' - the '*gunaikas*'. They are instructions, which stand in stark contrast with what has just been written concerning the men. The command which is especially relevant to this discussion states that the woman is to learn "*in silence*", and is not permitted "*to teach or to have authority over men.*"

And please note that this word for 'women' is the same as in Acts 1:14, - the verse used in our question.

Putting this as plainly as I am able; the words for 'women' and 'men' are the words for '*female*' and '*male*', so there is no room for misunderstanding or argument. Women, in the assembly, are not to teach or to have authority over the men.

If a woman were to pray in a meeting where men are present, she would be violating this instruction. She would be taking the lead. This is because, when a brother leads in prayer during a service of communal worship, he is not praying for himself alone, but for the assembled company. His prayer should be sufficiently audible, and of such character, as to enable the congregation to 'say the "Amen,"' as Paul puts it when he writes to the Corinthians. (1st Cor. 12:16).

I cannot resist pointing out that it is evident:

- a) that the early Christians joined together in saying 'Amen' at the close of a public prayer, and;
- b) that the prayer was not muttered or mumbled inaudibly but presented clearly enough for the rest of the congregation to hear and approve. Congregations and brothers, please note!

5. No one should be influenced or misled by the quite illogical assertion that '*this interpretation prevents women from praying.*' Remember that the instruction relates to conduct in the assembly; in other words in meetings consisting of males and females. It does not regulate the prayer of women in meetings arranged for, and attended only by women, or when a woman is alone.

Nor does it prevent women from praying silently in a service.

There are many *men* who never pray audibly when the Church meets for worship. But he would be a very presumptuous person indeed, who dared to assert that these men *never* pray at such times.

This teaching is not popular in some quarters and will be dismissed as contrary to the mood and thinking of the times. There are some that are more concerned about 20th century innovations than about 1st century commands!

Like it or not, it is what the Scriptures clearly teach and therefore cannot be lightly cast aside by believers - men or women - who have regard for the authority of the Word of God.

Finally: It has often been stated that the Scriptures teach by:

1. Express command.
2. Apostolic (or New Testament) Example.
3. Necessary Inference.

Concerning our current topic;

There is no express *Command* to authorise sisters praying aloud when the Church is at worship.

There is no New Testament *Example* of women praying at such times.

And there is certainly no *Necessary Inference* to be extracted from Acts 1:14.

Since, therefore, the Scriptures are silent on the subject, we should keep silent.

(Questions to Frank Worgan, 5 Gryfebank Way,
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ONE BREAD ONE BODY

A teaching document on the Eucharist with the above title was jointly issued in October, 1998 by the Roman Catholic Bishops' Conferences of England and Wales,

Ireland and Scotland. The import on those who are not Catholics on recent developments within the Church of Rome needs to be seen against the historical frame upon which it has been based.

The roots of Catholicism

During the turmoil in the Roman empire in the late 3rd century Christianity grew rapidly after their persecution had been stopped. However, there was discord between the Christians themselves. Constantine became sole Emperor in 323 and seeking to unite his empire through Christianity, resolved to end the conflict amongst the Christians, and, after a few attempts, he called all the parties together, at his expense, for a council at Nicaea in 325. The principal disagreement was that of defining the relationship between The Father and His Son. Constantine chaired the meeting, and because agreement could not be reached on what the words of Scripture meant, resolved the issue by concocting a new Greek word, to which he gave a definition. So began the history of Rome, with a creed based upon a man's word, and signalling the acceptance of departures from the Scriptures. Over time the power of the bishops assembled were concentrated into the Bishop of Rome.

In 1215 the 13th (or thereabouts) council of Lateran set out the doctrine that Jesus Christ Himself is the sacrifice whose body and blood are truly contained in the sacrament of the altar, the elements being "transubstantiated" by divine power. The bishops were summoned on a further 8 or so occasions before the Council of Trent (1545 - 1563), which was held to ensure that "the commonwealth be safe and protected against the arms and insidious designs of the infidels" because "the unity of the Christian name was well-nigh rent and torn assunder by schisms, dissensions and heresies." The latter council reaffirmed the existence of seven sacraments including transubstantiation, purgatory, the necessity of the priesthood, and justification by works as well as by faith. Clerical celibacy and monasticism were maintained, and decrees were issued in favour of the efficacy of relics, indulgencies, and the veneration of the Virgin Mary and the saints. "Tradition" was declared coequal to Scripture as a source of spiritual knowledge, and the sole right of the Church to interpret the Bible was asserted.

Vatican II

A further Council, was held in 1869, before Pope John XXIII announced in January 1959, on the last day of prayer for Christian unity, the need "for the re-composition of the whole mystical flock of Christ using *language serene and tranquil*." This council was to be "a new Pentecost" to establish "unity in diversity" using the "medicine of mercy not severity."

This was the best prepared council ever; 2,500 Bishops and clerics and 37 Universities were asked for their views and 2000 replies were received. A preparatory commission was established on the feast of Pentecost in 1960. After over 2 years of intensive discussions the first session was opened in October 1962. The group met for around 10 weeks in each of 4 years, and closed on 7th December 1965. Pope John Paul said it was "the greatest manifestation of collegiality in the history of the world." A summary of their conclusions follows, but in addition the Pope had asked them to give the title to Mary as "Mother of the Church." This they failed to do; so on 21st november, 1964 he did so himself in St. Peters.

VATICAN II

Vatican II as it is now called, is looked upon by Catholics as "providing the weightiest body of official teaching in the 20th century." Its claims include -

- 1) The Eucharist is the centre of the Church and its unity: its celebration is the culmination of the whole life of the Church.
- 2) "The Roman Pontiff, successor of Peter, is the perpetual and visible source and foundation of the unity, both of the bishops and the whole company of the faithful" and "enjoys infallibility in virtue of his office . . . for that reason his definitions are irrefrmable by their very nature and not by reason of the consent

of the Church . . . as supreme pastor of the Church he may exercise his power at any time, as he sees fit . . . in which bishops have no competence whatsoever" . . . "the college of bishops has no authority, other than the authority which it is acknowledged to have in union with the Roman Pontiff" who "as Vicar of Christ and as Pastor of the entire Church has full supreme and universal power over the whole Church, a power which he can exercise freely" . . . "With the power and authority without which such an office would be illusory, the Bishop of Rome must ensure the communion of all the churches."

- 3) "Mary far surpasses all creatures, both in heaven and earth . . . she is clearly the mother of the members of Christ" . . . "we are aware of the divergences concerning the role of Mary in the work of salvation" but "the eastern churches pay high tribute to Mary, ever virgin, holy Mother of God and Icon of the Church" . . . Let all Christians pour forth urgent supplications to the Mother of God that . . . she may be exalted, as she is above all angels and saints."
- 4) "The liturgy is rightly seen as the exercise of the priestly office of Jesus Christ" . . . "the sacred liturgy depends solely on the authority of the Church that is from the Apostolic see, therefore no other person whatsoever, not even a priest may add, remove, or change anything in the liturgy on their own authority . . . and adaptations are to be submitted to the Apostolic see"
- 5) "Priests . . . above all in the Eucharistic worship, exercise their sacred functions . . . then acting in the person of Christ they unite the prayers of the faithful to the sacrifice of Christ, and in the Mass they apply the unique sacrifice of the New Testament."
- 6) "when we celebrate the Eucharistic sacrifice we are most closely united to the worship of the heavenly church . . . we honour and remember the glorious Mary yet virgin. St. Joseph, the holy apostles and martyrs and all the saints" . . . acknowledging "the living communion which exists between us and those in heaven or who are yet being purified after their death."
- 7) The removal of historic obstacles to unity to be removed. By mid 1997 this had led to:-
 - a) Pope Paul VI writing to the Patriarch Athenagoras in 1963, the first communication since 1054: mutual excommunications dropped in 1965: dialogues have (1994) "proved most fruitful" and they have shown "they possess true sacraments, above all, by apostolic succession, the priesthood of the Eucharist"
 - b) Wrote to the Russian Patriarch in 1964 and returned relic of St. Andrew, held by Rome since 1462, in 1964
 - c) Archbishop Ramsay (UK) visited Rome in 1966 and the Pope Canterbury Cathedral in 1982, 13 discussions with C of E 1979 - 1981 at which substantial agreement reached on doctrine of the Eucharist and it being tied to the ministry, and on a universal primacy.
 - d) Discussions held with the Lutherans since 1965, met with the Primates of Sweden and Finland in St. Peters on the Canonisation of St. Birgitta.
 - e) Dialogue with the world Methodists since 1967.
 - f) Meetings held with the Disciples of Christ & Christian Church since 1967.
 - g) Several sessions held with the Pentecostal movement since 1972.
 - h) Met with several evangelical and missionary associations including the Baptists since 1977.
 - i) Jointly with the United Bible Society since 1967 and have issued several joint translations with them of which the present Pope says (in view of the debates on scriptural differences in the West) anyone "can appreciate the significant step forward these common translations represent."
 - j) Commitment with the World Council of Churches in 1984 to the goal of visible

unity in one Eucharistic fellowship.

k) Pastoral co-operation with the Syrian Patriarch.

l) Visit of the Ethiopian Patriarch to Rome in 1993 at which they declared they shared the faith rooted in apostolic succession.

Pope John Paul II

In his Encyclical on Ecumenism "Ut Unum Sint" (may there be one?) in 1995 said that in the search for unity "Serious questions must be resolved" and that "all forms of reductionism or 'facile' agreement must be avoided. Serious questions must be resolved." He then gives the essential points of reference "Sacred Scripture and the great Tradition of the Church. In which Catholics have the help of the Churches' living Magisterium."

JOHN WYCLIFFE

These issues are not new; in the mid 14th century the Papacy became split. One Pope held court in Avignon and another, chosen by the same men, held court in Rome. Each condemned the other and held they were antichrist. It was at this time that Wycliffe challenged the whole basis of the Papacy and held that scriptures were the only law of the Church, and that the whole company of the elect is the Church, and should not be centred only on the Pope and his cardinals. By 1382 Wycliffe was saying "it is surely ridiculous, or rather blasphemous, when the Roman Pontiff, without any foundation whatever, says 'It is our will, so must it be.'" He held fast that there are only deacons and priests in the Church of Christ and any other basis is just "illegitimate smuggling of secular arrangements." He attacked the Catholic Church on transubstantiation: "I maintain that among all the heresies which have ever appeared in the Church, there was never one which was more cunningly smuggled in by hypocrites than this, or which in more ways deceives the people; for it plunders them, leads them astray into idolatry, denies the teaching of Scripture." After his death in 1384 his followers, the Lollards, were stigmatised and by 1401 William Sawtrey was burnt by Royal writ for denying transubstantiation.

In 1378 Pope Urban VI sought to reconcile the differences within the Church, but after 23 years the real thrust of the Church is seen in the death of Sawtrey. Today, events are being managed on a grander but slower pace. The unity sought in Vatican II is now seen in October's 'One bread One body' to mean that even 'priests' cannot administer the sacraments to those "of the reform tradition," except on "a unique occasion" and then only if they manifest Catholic faith in the sacrament, when so approved by his bishop. In effect the 'one bread' is that which has been made Christ's body by an ordained Catholic Priest, and the 'one body' is the Church of Rome under the 'Vicar of Christ.'

IT IS TIME FOR US TO REAWAKEN THE CALL OF WYCLIFFE -

"THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLE IS THAT HOLY SCRIPTURE ALONE IS INFALLIBLY TRUE AND AN ABSOLUTE STANDARD OF TRUTH."

"Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know *these things* before, beware lest ye also, being led away with error of the wicked, fall from your own stedfastness." (2 Peter 3:17).

BRIAN J. BOLAND

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Feb. 7	Malachi 3	Luke 7:18-35
Feb. 14	Genesis 17:19 to 18:5	Luke 7:36-50
Feb. 21	Isaiah 6	Luke 8:1-21
Feb. 28	Jonah 1	Luke 8:22-39

JESUS AND JOHN THE BAPTIST

John the Baptist is one of the great men of history. He came at the conclusion of the Jewish age and his coming was, of course, the subject of prophecy (7:27). Jesus acknowledged his greatness, but compared him to those who are least in the kingdom of God (7:28).

Campbell said of him: "He remonstrated against the defection of the Jews - taught and practised a more strict righteousness and devotion than any of his contemporaries of the Jews, and commanded an entire reformation of manners."

We read of John sending his disciples to Jesus to ask: "Are you he that should come? or look we for another?" (7:19). Matthew's account reveals John was in prison at the time (11:2-19). Adam Clarke has written: "It is very probable that John now began through the length of his confinement, to entertain doubts, relative to Jesus' kingdom, which perplexed and harassed his mind; and he took the most reasonable way to get rid of them at once, viz. by applying to Christ Himself." Jesus' reply to John's disciples was: "Go your way and tell John what things you have seen and heard; how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is preached. And blessed is he, who shall not be offended in me" (7:22-23). These words should be read in the light of what Nicodemus once said: ". . . for no man can do these miracles that you do, except God be with Him" (John 3:2).

John himself performed no miracles during his ministry, but his work, in preparing the way of the Lord, was fruitful. All that he said about Jesus was true. This led many to a belief and trust in the Master (John 10:41-42).

JESUS ANOINTED BY A SINFUL WOMAN

Social customs in Jesus' day were quite different from many practised today. People greeted one another with a kiss and cool water was poured over the feet of guests to remove the dust. Also "either a pinch of sweet-smelling incense was burned or a drop of attar roses was placed on the guest's head. These things good manners demanded . . ." (Barclay). Guests did not sit, but lay on couches around a table. This explains how the woman could anoint Jesus' feet. The lesson Jesus gave to His Pharisee

host was a memorable one indeed. The Master went on to say to the sinful woman: "Your sins are forgiven" (7:48). As the Son of God He had power or authority to do this, but His words puzzled the many who heard them. They should have been led to the realisation that they were in the very presence of Almighty God in the flesh. Jesus of Nazareth was indeed Immanuel or 'God with us' (Matthew 1:23).

THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER

The teaching instrument which is above all connected with Jesus is the parable. A good definition of a parable is "an earthly story with a heavenly meaning." Parables are not unknown to the Jews. Indeed, Jewish rabbis commonly used parables to get across their teaching. One advantage of the parable is that it paints pictures for the hearer. People have difficulty in grasping abstract ideas and Jesus knew that. But, as one commentator has pointed out: "The parable does not so much tell a man the truth as it enables a man to discover the truth for himself . . . Truth which is merely told is quick to be forgotten; truth which is discovered lasts a lifetime. Truth can never be inserted into a man like a pill or an injection; truth is like a goal to which man's mind under the guidance and the stimulus of God must journey in its own seeking. The great value of the parable is that it does not impose truth on a man; it puts a man in a position in which he can go on to discover, or to realise, truth for himself."

Jesus, of course, gave us the meaning of the parable of the sower (8:11-15). He said: "The seed is the word of God" (8:11). We are reminded immediately of some other passages of Scripture: ". . . being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which lives and abides for ever" (1 Peter 1:23). ". . . of His own will begat He us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures" (James 1:18). "I have planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase" (1 Cor. 3:6). Under the parable of the

sower, Jesus clearly reveals the various fortunes of the Word and beautifully teaches the true philosophy of conversion in the fact that the good ground is the man who receives the Word of God with an honest heart.

JESUS CALMS THE STORM

I was speaking about ships and boats the other Sunday at Motherwell. I pointed out how they feature strongly in the lives of Jonah, Jesus and Paul. The boats associated with Jesus on the Sea of Galilee would be mainly small fishing vessels. When I visited Israel in 1991 I saw the hull of a wooden boat discovered on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee in 1986. It dates to Jesus' time and is a significant archaeological discovery. Experts can determine how such boats were constructed and the information gathered adds to our growing understanding of what life was really like in N.T. times. Perhaps Jesus Himself once used this particular boat to transport Him across the famous lake. In any event, Jesus performed a miracle from the boat mentioned in Luke's record (8:22-25). It was seen that the winds and waves were subject to the Master's voice. No wonder the disciples were all amazed at the event. Here again was positive proof that this man was different from everyone else. Yes, Jonah calmed the sea by being thrown into it, but Jesus calmed the storm by simply commanding it to cease. What power! What authority!

HEALING OF THE DEMON-POSSESSED MAN

In the previous verses, Jesus manifested His power over nature. Now we read of His power over the demons or evil spirits or fallen angels (8:26-39). Many of them had taken up residence in this poor individual, who had been driven virtually mad in the process. The last thing the demons wanted was to be sent back to "the deep" (8:31). The Greek word is *abussos* and W. E. Vine describes it as "an immeasurable depth, the underworld, the lower regions, the abyss of Shoel . . . the abode of demons, out of which they can be let loose." So

they were cast out of the man and into a herd of pigs. The inevitable happened: ". . . the herd ran violently down a steep place into the lake and were choked" (8:33). Demons had a bad effect on everybody, including animals.

I believe that all demons are back in "the deep" today, awaiting the final judgement. Then, with Satan, they will be cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, which is the second death (Revelation 20:10,14). Jesus Himself once said that hell or everlasting fire was "prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matthew 25:41). Paul once spoke of "the doctrine of demons" (1 Timothy 4:1), as opposed to the demons themselves. Such is their influence today. I believe they were freed from *tartarus* (2 Peter 2:4) in Jesus' day because they were to be a part of the great showdown between God and Satan during the time of His Son's sojourn on earth. I hardly need mention who won that battle and who will eventually win the great spiritual war, which is truly the war of all wars.

IAN S. DAVIDSON,
Motherwell.

TEST YOUR BIBLICAL KNOWLEDGE

1. In which O.T. book do we read: "The just shall live by His faith?"
2. How many chariots did Zechariah see in his vision.
3. What did king Ahab want that was owned by Naboth?
4. Who was Haman's wife?
5. Who made a bronze snake?
6. What was the ninth plague on Egypt?
7. Who was Timothy's grandmother?
8. Whom did Paul strike with blindness?
9. Who was Paul's teacher in Jerusalem?
10. In whose home was Jesus anointed with expensive perfume?

NEWS FROM THE CHURCHES

Kirkcaldy: This has been quite a year for Kirkcaldy, and after long planning, the church held its 200th Anniversary celebration weekend on 14th and 15th November, 1998. The Saturday meeting was held in Kirkcaldy High School, when approximately 380 members and friends from the British Isles, Malta, Canada and USA gathered in an afternoon of fellowship. The singing was both congregational and by singing groups. Albert Winstanley, who has been associated with the church in Kirkcaldy for 55 years, was the principal speaker and Robert Hughes gave a brief account of the history of the church in the town. After the meeting a fellowship meal (school dinner!) was consumed. Sunday, (Anniversary day) began with Bible classes, the adult class being conducted by Bill Pirie from the church in Buckie. The Breaking of Bread service was attended by about 50% more than our normal weekly meeting due to the attendance of visitors and this meeting was addressed by John Sharp, who in the 1980's worked with the church as an evangelist. After this service most people stayed and enjoyed a fellowship lunch and remained to help prepare for the afternoon service at 3.00 p.m. This was a special thanksgiving service for the 200 years of the Restoration Movement in the town, at which Albert Winstanley again gave a wonderful exhortation. Over 80 members and friends attended this act of worship.

The church has published a book titled "Churches of Christ in the County of Fife, Scotland" to commemorate the anniversary. The book was researched and written by Robert Hughes.

A video (£7) and tape recording (£4) will be available by early 1999.

(Sec.)

Newtongrange: The church here is delighted to announce that Isobel Craik

(aged 77 years) was added to the Church on Saturday, 28th November, 1998. Isobel has been attending the Ladies Meeting, and also attending Lord's Day meetings for some time, and, finally overcoming her fear of immersion, was baptised into Christ on the Saturday evening. We welcome her into our midst and look forward to many years of fellowship together.

MARGARET HUNTER (Sec.)

Slammanan: The Quarterly Mutual Benefit Meeting of the Slammanan and District took place at the Tranent Meetinghouse on Saturday, 5th December, 1998, when the subject for discussion was "What is the 'Blessing' of 1 Cor. 10:16 and what kind of blessing do we expect." The speakers were Bro. Graham Scobbie, Dennyloanhead, and Bro. Ian Davidson, Motherwell, and the meeting was chaired by Bro. John Kneller, Tranent. As usual an interesting time was spent; much emerged from the discussion and a very enjoyable time of fellowship was had. God willing, our next meeting will be on March 4th at Dennyloanhead, when the subject will be "What was the Kingdom of Heaven and when did it come?" The speakers will be Bro. Niall Scobbie, Dennyloanhead, and Bro. Mark Plain, Tranent; the Chairman will be Bill Cook, Dunfermline. Again we would like to thank the sisters at Tranent for the excellent refreshments.

HARRY MCGINN, Sec.

GHANA REPORT

As many of you know Graeme and I were in Ghana a few weeks ago during the month of November. It was my first visit to Ghana and I enjoyed it very much, although it was much too hot. The brethren gave us a warm welcome and showed us a lot of kindness. We very much appreciated all their efforts to make our trip as comfortable and refreshing (all the Coca-Colas, Fantas and Tanpicos they provided) as possible.

We were greatly encouraged and spiritually strengthened by the faith, love and witness of the Church in that land. Our brothers and sisters work tirelessly to spread the Word of God and there is still a demand for hymn books and Bibles in the Ghanaian languages. Congregations continue to grow and new churches are still being established.

We visited 24 congregations and spoke to representatives from another 14 and almost everyone was enthusiastic about the health books we sent out. Most of the congregations lay aside a time to study the book. The ten ladies who got a copy of "Where Women have no Doctor" thought it was a very good book and that every congregation should have a copy of it. They too study the book with the other sisters and, at Huhunya, Mercy Dautey, Kwao's wife, has set up a health group with some ladies from the village and they put into practice what they learn from the book.

We need to purchase another 53 "Where Women have no Doctor" books to give every congregation a copy.

Another request is for toys for a Day-Care Centre at Bodwesango which a sister in the church there has set up. The children's ages range from babies to 4 years old and any toys which are not too heavy (because of the cost of postage) would be gratefully received.

If anyone would like to help with

any of these projects, toys or cheques made out to "Graeme Pearson (Ghana Appeal)" can be sent to Graeme Pearson, 13 Fairways, Dunfermline, Fife, KY12 0DU. Thank you.

LORRAINE PEARSON.

CHANGE OF ADDRESS

Please note :

*Bill and Eleanor Pirie's
New Address.*

Bill is Treasurer for the Buckie congregation.

'Elsinore,' Aradoul, Buckie,
Banffshire. AB56 5BB.
Tel.: 01542 834734

- 10. Simon the Leper (Matthew 26:6-7).
- 9. Gamaliel (Acts 22:3).
- 8. Elymas (Acts 13:11).
- 7. Lois (2 Timothy 1:5).
- 6. Darkness (Exodus 10:21).
- 5. Moses (Numbers 21:9).
- 4. Zareph (Esther 5:10).
- 3. A vineyard (1 Kings 21:2).
- 2. Four (Zechariah 6:1).
- 1. Habakkuk (2:4).

ANSWERS

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