

The SCRIPTURE STANDARD

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

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IT'S LATER THAN WE THINK

From time to time in these columns I make a few observations upon the discussions and transactions of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland (Presbyterian). Some members might think it strange that such gatherings should receive notice but I believe that we can learn lessons anywhere and everywhere if we have a mind to. Hundreds of Ministers and Elders of the Church of Scotland (C. of S.) come together in Edinburgh for the annual General Assembly and spend a week or so deliberating all the vexed questions of their church, and thrashing out the world's ills. They are all highly educated men (with University degrees in Divinity) and so what they say should be of interest. One rarely sees a Bible being carried at these gatherings, and has less chance of hearing it quoted. (Then again, I suppose it is not impossible for members of our own congregations to assemble without Bibles: and in some segments of our brotherhood it is not impossible to hear talk of "Ministers and Elders." So we must not be too critical).

This year's Assembly has just closed and its proceedings widely reported by the media. One of the opening speeches was made by the Prime Minister, who spoke to a quizzical Assembly upon the moral issues involved in the production (and distribution) of wealth. The speech caused such a flutter that its effect lingered over the entire week's proceedings. Mrs Thatcher certainly quoted more scripture than is usually heard in that building and produced quite a sermon for the "Fathers and Brethren" to chew on. Money and the production of wealth certainly looms large in most religions and Mrs. Thatcher's audience were certainly used to the tight principle: no collections — no stipends. By the way, some of the members of the C. of S. have been raising funds by sponsored Bible Readings and sponsored Hymn Singing (there's a thought for those in the churches looking for novel ways of acquiring cash).

EVERY MEMBER A MINISTER

At least **two items** in connection with this year's Assembly are, I think, worthy of mention, and even deserve a word of praise.

The first refers to a most remarkable call made to the Assembly by the Panel on Doctrine to the effect that "**All church members should be Ministers.**" This is a truly amazing turn-around by the C. of S., nurtured for centuries (since the 16th century) on a very sharp distinction between clergy and laity. The report goes on to advocate that the 'un-ordained' should be allowed to participate fully in the responsibility for worship, witness and action in the church, and that "**for too long, in too many settings, the practice (in the C. of S.) has been to identify 'Ministry' with the words and actions of one person, surrounded by a team of a few, with many (often willingly) confined to**

the 'passive' subordinate roles of observation, reception and support." This, of course, has been entirely true of the C. of S. They have always regarded 'Ministry' as being associated with the words and actions of one person (the Minister) surrounded by a team of a few, and all other members occupying 'positions of observation' (i.e. spectators, or to use a rather nasty expression: 'pew fillers'). This is **not** how things should be, and it is singular that the C. of S. is waking up to the fact that all members of the church should be involved in the ministry. I'm sure this is quite revolutionary doctrine to the General Assembly (after four centuries) and is therefore worthy of a mention.

I am not naive enough to think that this decision was reached on scriptural grounds but rather, I believe, on the basis of a grim reality that a clergy/laity concept is no longer acceptable to a more perceptive average member. The C. of S. is, in fact, haemorrhaging to death and losing about 300 members **per week**. All churches lose members, but they at a dreadful rate. It seems that many of their members realise that they should not be passive spectators (seat-warmers) but should be up and doing: and are moving out to other places of worship which encourage their activity. I know too, that the Panel on Doctrine are not contemplating, as yet, the disbanding of their full-time Ministers, and are really only saying that all members should be 'ministers' with a small 'm', but nevertheless it is a start, and a very interesting change in their general philosophy. Thus we have one of the main-stream denominational bodies acknowledging that they are now dissatisfied with the concept of ministry involving only one man (even when surrounded by a team of a few) and favouring a mutuality of ministry — i.e. All Members Must Be Ministers. Is it not strange that this denominational body is saying that 'one man ministry' isn't working and that a mutuality of ministry should be adopted, while at the same time there are some in our brotherhood saying the very opposite: i.e. that mutual ministry does not work and that we should hire one man (and even surround him with a team of a few)? There must be some food for thought here, for thinkers.

Those who say that mutuality of ministry 'does not work' really mean that there are faster ways to achieve progress. In this regard we would need a definition of what is regarded as 'progress'. A visiting evangelist told me (just fairly recently) that his congregation in his country make members fast, but lose them just as speedily. That would be regarded as 'progress' by some. I know that many get bored with 'reminiscing men' who refer to the past, but surely past history must be a guide (at least). The history of the churches in Britain shows that progress (true progress) was real and steady until our troubles started with some (like T. Coup) wanting progress to go even faster. Those who say that a mutuality of the ministry does not work really mean **what often passes in this country for mutuality of ministry, does not work**. If mutuality of ministry means every church member doing the very best he, or she can (**and it does**) how can any sane person say that such a scheme would not work? The truth is that we **preach** mutuality of ministry but do not quite **practice** it. That is the real trouble. Unfortunately every member does not always do his, or her, best and much talent is not utilised. As often happens, one or two accept the responsibilities, and the duties, and the others are pleased to let them; occasionally offering them a little criticism. This is not a real mutuality of ministry and certainly will not work. One of the first families that Paul baptised in Achaia was the House of Stephanas which was later described as having "addicted themselves to the ministry." There are many terrible addictions these days. May God help us all to be hopeless addicts in the ministry of Christ. As the C. of S. suggests "Let Every Member Be A Minister."

EVANGELISE OR EXPIRE

The second item worthy of notice came not so much from the Assembly itself but from the Rev. Jim Martin who offered this remedy to the failing fortunes of the C. of S. The Rev. Martin was a minister with the C. of S. for 14 years but has now

opted for a 'wider ministry'. I think his advice is worth a quote. He said, "The simple truth is that the Kirk (C. of S.) is totally out of touch, and I am sorry to say it, but this alienation is personified in the present Moderator, who, when asked what should be done to reverse the church's decline, gave the answer any academic would give, i.e. 'We need more research'. It's not more research we need. It's more evangelism. Yet evangelism is not a popular concept. There is no more research needed to prove that. 'Research' shows that almost half of the Kirk's membership do not believe in the resurrection; that less than 1 in 10 members read the Bible; and that 400,000 members could not be bothered attending communion service even once during 1987. The Kirk can no longer enjoy the indulgence of yet more research. . . . the people of Scotland are sick of pretentious ecclesiastical posturing. Perhaps we are witnessing one of the very last opportunities for the Church to address the nation in absolute terms of Repentance, Righteousness and Faith: and hang the research. World-wide the church of Jesus Christ is growing faster today than at any other time in human history. The question has to be asked why the Church of Scotland is losing more than 300 members per week." Strong stuff indeed from Mr. Martin and not at all the usual rhetoric from the C. of S. Although our brotherhood has been saying similar things for a long time, nevertheless much of what he says we can surely apply to ourselves. He says the C. of S. are out of touch with reality. Are we out of touch with the real world? Are we showing the kind of urgency in the Lord's vineyard that indicates we are in touch with reality? As some of our congregations shrink in numbers, and teeter on the brink of expiry, are we taking the **right** steps (or **any** steps) to remedy the situation.? Are we complacent? Are we like the captain, in the song, who played his ukulele as the ship went down? Are we like the academics in the C. of S. who are calling for research into the matter, and who want to spend a few more years talking about it? Surely, as the minister says, the time is long past for discussions; and it's time now for action. A few years ago I had the honour of being asked to speak at the opening of the new Meeting-house at Tranent, and this was the theme of my remarks: i.e. that we must evangelise or perish. Time is running out.

LIGHT-HOUSE OR MONASTERY

I suppose a lot depends on how we view the church. Do we see it as some kind of fortress which we have to defend? Certainly we sometimes think of it in this light: as a kind of castle which we must defend from the howling infidels outside. Indeed it seems that the world (at Satan's behest) is constantly trying to destroy and pull down the Lord's church and we must constantly be repairing the breaches in the walls. Others may see the church as rather like a monastery to which we can retreat for quiet contemplation. A place where inmates whisper in case anyone should be upset and where we can rest up from the fevers of life; and even on occasions debate a few of the finer points of scriptural interpretation. When we read of Christ's triumphant assurance that "the gates of hell would not prevail against it (the church)" I suppose we do probably get the idea that the church was to be a fortress under constant siege. But surely Jesus did not mean to suggest that the church was to be a static fortress under attack, but rather as a foraging army of front-line troops storming the very bastions of hell. Paul could say "(For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong-holds); Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ . ." (2 Cor. 10:4). Thus Paul did not envisage a church entrenched on the defensive but rather as very aggressive and upon a great offensive against every bulwark of evil: pulling down the strong-holds of the Devil, and taking prisoners. In short an attacking army on the move. Thus the church is not a place of retreat: where we can pull up the drawbridge and rest safe behind a moat of water, but rather a launching pad for aggressive forays into the lands

beyond. (Besides; there are many problems inside a fortress with drawbridge drawn and the gates all shut; it is then that the troops fight amongst themselves and listen to the generals disagree on strategy.) Our energies should be concentrated fully on the common enemy. Even when Paul talks of the spiritual armour of God (Eph. 6) he enumerates many items of **defensive** armour, but this is only to protect the soldier as he advances and attacks the enemy with the sword of the Spirit. As brother Ian Davidson pointed out recently there is no provision in these articles of armour for the protection of the rear of the body. How then do we see the church? Is it a fortress or is it a lighthouse? Is it a rest centre or a vineyard? Is it a place of action or a talking-shop? Whatever our views might be, one thing is certain — if we do not evangelise we shall fade away. Posturing is not enough, and time is fast running out. More research is not the answer: the seed must reach the soil. We must evangelise, or else !

EDITOR.

GLEANINGS

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

OBEDIENCE

"OBEDIENCE has a place in the Bible. It always had a place there. Laws may and have changed; but obedience always has been, is, and, as far as we know, always will be required by God from man. Holiness and happiness have always been found along the line of obedience. And sin and misery have always followed the track of disobedience. The lower animals and inanimate objects are sometimes said to obey; but in the sense in which we are using it, obedience and disobedience can only be thought of in connection with responsible beings. Where there is no freedom of choice there can be no obedience or disobedience. The region of obedience is circumscribed by ability and opportunity. It is sometimes denied that we have any liberty of choice. But this is only thoughtless denial; at bottom no sane person can doubt it.

OBEDIENCE TO GOD

Obedience to God implies revelation. Where there are no instructions there can be no disobedience. Where the instructions stop, obedience must end. Obedience, then, presupposes instructions given, understood and believed. Obedience, like faith and love, must characterise the whole life of the Christian. It begins before he can claim the name Christian, and must go with him all through the journey of life. Vengeance must at last come upon those who do not obey the Gospel."

JAMES ANDERSON

NOT BY BREAD ALONE

"In making man, it was not God's plan that he should live by bread, or physical food, alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord" (Deut. 8.3). The manna was given to His people in the wilderness to teach them this lesson, and that they might learn their dependence upon God . . .

BY EVERY WORD OF GOD

To be a good and effective minister of Christ, it is necessary that one be well nourished through partaking largely of the abundant spiritual food which the living Word supplies. Thus Paul admonished his child in the faith, Timothy, to whom he wrote: "If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ. **NOURISHED UP IN THE WORDS OF FAITH AND OF GOOD DOCTRINE**" (1 Tim. 4:6).

PHILLIP MAURO.

WE QUOTE — WILLIAM JAMES

"Faith is one of the forces by which men live, and the total absence of it means collapse."

THINK HAPPY THOUGHTS

“Yes, if we think happy thoughts, we will be happy. If we think miserable thoughts, we will be miserable. If we think fearful thoughts, we will be fearful. If we think sickly thoughts we will probably be ill. If we think failure, we will certainly fail. If we wallow in self-pity, everyone will want to shun us and avoid us. “You are not,” said Norman Vincent Peale, “you are not what you think you are; but what you **think** you are.”

DALE CARNEGIE.

A CHANNEL OF BLESSING

Make me a channel of blessing today !
 Make me a channel of blessing, I pray !
 My life possessing, my service blessing.
 Make me a channel of blessing today !

Selected by LEONARD MORGAN.

IF ANY MAN SPEAKETH (1 Peter 4.11)

First I must apologise to brother editor and the readers for having taken so long submitting this article. Somehow it was overlooked and left unposted.

TRADITIONS :

In considering the question of traditions we are venturing into an aspect of hermeneutics (well lads, did you get your dictionary out?) to which there is no easy answer and this is hard to accept. It is so nice to have everything cut and dried, to be able to refer to precisely-worded legal statements and say, there it is, take it or leave it. Has the Holy Spirit let us down by not supplying sufficient information or have we got hold of the wrong end of the stick? Our reluctance to admit that the New Covenant Scriptures are not phrased in a legislative manner has driven us to take one or two legalistic stands. Either, matters on which the scriptures do not legislate are matters of opinion, or, matters not authorised by scriptural command or precedent are sinful. Am I being too brash in suggesting that perhaps we ought to get back to the drawing board and have a re-think?

For example, had you noticed that in Matthew chapter 15, verses 1 to 20 (and in verses 4 and 8 of the parallel passage in Mark chapter 7) the word “tradition” is not confined to matters of “public worship”? Hand-washing, immersing cups, cooking utensils and honouring parents have nothing to do with corporate acts of church worship. Also the tradition Paul enforces in 2 Thessalonians chapter 3, verses 6 to 15, that idle busybodies should work and eat their own bread, has nothing to do with worship. Even so those who refused to take notice of this teaching were to be withdrawn from.

So the scope of the subject of “tradition” encompasses the whole spectrum of our daily living, not just issues like “Shall we use an instrument?” but also “Shall we smoke or take drugs?” The scriptures say nothing specific about smoking and taking drugs. Do we remain silent? Are we unable to give any sound spiritual advice or utter words of caution and warning? Even in the scriptures there are matters that are not clear cut. At what point do we decide that a brother has crossed the line that divides the covetous from the non-covetous? Yet we are required “not to keep company” with such a one, which I take to be another way of saying “to deliver such a one to Satan” 1 Corinthians 5. 10 and 5. Evidently there are situations where spiritual discernment is required and we have to resort to involving the wise men amongst us 1 Corinthians 6.5 whose decisions we must respect Hebrews 13.17 hence the severe qualifications for elders.

The word “tradition” (greek paradosis) means handing down. It is from the verb paradidomi which means to hand over (individuals, etc.) or to deliver (information,

customs). Both the noun and the verb are used in 1 Corinthians 11.2 where Paul talks of "traditions" which he had "delivered" and in verse 23 we have "I received of the Lord that which I delivered unto you". Traditions then, are ideas and practices to do with every aspect of daily living, which are passed from one to another.

HUMAN TRADITIONS :

In our study of Matthew 15, 1-9 we saw that human traditions carry no authoritative weight and anyone who thinks he is being devout in teaching human traditions is just wasting his time as far as God is concerned. Also human traditions that make "void the word of God" (i.e. concept of God the greek for 'word' being logos) are sinful (Mark 7.14). A significant example is the practice of infant sprinkling which leads people to think that they do not need to submit to God's requirement for believers to be baptised.

On the other hand, although such practices as religious wedding ceremonies and funeral services do not have any scriptural authority or precedence, they do not come into direct conflict with the word of God. So we should not judge brethren and sisters who wish to perform "unto the Lord" such rituals (even so, any aspect which is spiritually doubtful should be examined and dealt with). Conversely no one has the right to insist that wedding or funeral services are necessary or that the candidates are more spiritually blest or in the case of weddings, that the couples' marriage is more valid.

In the previous article we saw that even though we must not pass sentence on a person for exercising liberty, such as in observing one day more than another, liberty must never be pursued where it is a stumbling block to others. Romans 14. However, Paul does not stop there, in the last chapter of Romans, referring to the teaching they had been given, Paul instructs them to "mark" and "turn away from" those who were "causing the divisions and occasions of stumbling, contrary to the doctrine" they had learned. Evidently then, if a brother or sister is insisting on a "liberty" at the expense of another's spiritual well-being, he or she is to be noted and turned away from.

The danger of human traditions is that their influence can "spoil" Christians. "Take heed lest there shall be anyone that maketh spoil of you through his philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ." Col. 2.8. Because external observances and disciplines are thought to impart holy piety, the need to be a new creature in Christ is overlooked. An extreme example is the eastern ascetic who is no use to anyone, and yet is looked on as an ethereal being because of the self-inflicted tortures he bears with no apparent concern for discomfort. This type of philosophy is anti-Christ in principle. For this basic fundamental reason, traditions based on such a philosophy must be strongly opposed.

Before someone succumbs to the desire to innovate a tradition, whether it be stained-glass windows, flowers on the table or graduation ceremonies, prizes, special days, acts of penance, think, can one healthy spiritual reason be given why it should be practised? In 2 Peter 1, verse 3 we are told that "his divine power has granted unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that called us by his own glory and virtue". Surely it can't be possible that someone has thought of something that the Holy Spirit in the Word of God has overlooked.

We are required to have in us the mind of the Lord's Anointed. He who emptied himself, actively became our servant and suffered for us, because he loves us. That is why Paul said to Timothy, concerning the falseness of asceticism, "If thou put the brethren in mind of these things, thou shalt be a good servant of Christ Jesus" and instructed him to "These things command and teach" 1 Timothy 4.6 and 11. Never mind those who shout "liberty." "don't make laws where there are none", don't be deterred from taking heed to yourself and to your teaching on these matters "for in doing this thou shalt save both thyself and them that hear thee" 1 Timothy 4.16.

TRADITIONS OF GOD :

Who would deny that divinely ordained traditions, carried out in the right spirit, are bound to be beneficial? Under the old covenant Jesus said "The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath" Mark 2.27. God did not decide that a sabbath is a good idea, so he must invent a being to observe it. He knew man's needs and formulated the sabbath for man's well-being. It is not intended that we follow divine traditions like robots as though man was made so that rituals could be performed. The all-wise God had our spiritual well-being in mind when He formulated the traditions. So it would be to our own disadvantage for us to neglect or modify them. Before we decide we can dispense with, or alter a divinely inspired tradition, think, do we know better than God what is good for our spiritual and eternal well-being?

To "hold fast the traditions" exactly as Paul has "delivered them" is praiseworthy. 1 Corinthians 11.2. It is evidence of spiritual healthiness. It goes without saying that the teaching in the subsequent verses on head-coverings was not an exercise in futile devoutness on Paul's part.

Deviation from charges "delivered" by him is certainly not "praise"-worthy (see 1 Cor. 11.17 and 23), it is symptomatic of serious spiritual soul-destroying sickness (1 Cor. 11.30.).

Has it become apparent that it is a spiritual approach to these matters that is advisable, and not a legal approach? The spiritual approach will ensure a correct disposition which will also engender the desire to follow carefully the principles evinced in the scriptures as well as the injunctions. Also one would observe scriptural traditions exactly as delivered for spiritual reasons. This will be evidence of spiritual healthiness.

2 Thessalonians 2.15 "So then, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye were taught, whether by word, or by epistle of ours."

Let us take care to ensure that what we practice or teach is spiritually tenable, not only matters of corporate worship but also in every aspect of daily living.

Next time I would like to deal with "not of the letter, but of the spirit" 2 Corinthians 3.6.

ALLAN ASHURST, Manchester.

KNOWING GOD

Many people today are blaming God for the misery, pain, and sorrow which really are due to themselves. 'If thou hadst known in this day, even thou, the things which belong unto peace,' said Jesus. He came to seek and save the lost; He gave forth his invitations to come; but He had to say, 'Ye will not come unto Me that ye might have life.' Again, 'I came that they may have life, and might have it abundantly.' 'We will not have this man to reign over us.'

Many seem to forget that God has made us free agents, with privileges and capabilities to be happy and prosperous and an honour to our God, this has been neglected or abused so that disasters have overtaken us.

Upon the eve of the crucifixion of Jesus, a crisis in the history of the world, when men would glorify or dishonour the Christ — Jesus said: "This is life eternal that they might know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent."

From this point and on to now, and on to eternity, nations, churches, families, men, women, and children, have found eternal life or otherwise according to their acceptance of God and allegiance to the Lord Jesus Christ.

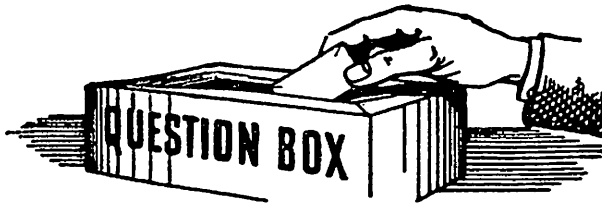
Knowing God is not merely an acquaintance or acknowledging that a Creator exists; it includes love, faith, reverence, gratitude, allegiance, and obedience. To know God is to own His power, reverence His name, receive His grace, and obey His will. If the nations of the earth had done this there would have been no war, with its deluge

of blood and tears and the pitiful tale of human woe. Nations in which military tyranny, injustice, and cruelty have been manifested rather than integrity to God have fallen and will yet fall. The wise man says, 'Righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.' What is true of nations is true of individuals. God sends His sun and rain on the evil and the good, but the farmer has to plough his field, clear his ground of weeds and vermin, sow the right seed in the right way, at the right time, tend his crops and gather in the harvest.

Co-operating with God, we can praise Him for His goodness. Sometimes we unjustly blame God for afflictions when perhaps our homes have not been so clean as they might have been; we have neglected the cleanliness of our bodies, out-of-door exercises and the provision of proper food, while we have shut out God's pure air by closing our windows and excluding the sunshine by drawn blinds, and eating and drinking that which is not wholesome.

Spiritually, God has given us a common Sympathiser and Helper; a Prophet to teach us the will of the Lord; a Priest to atone for our sins, and a King to lead us forth to victory. He has died, the righteous, for us, the unrighteous — dying for our sins and rising again for our justification, and 'whosoever will, may come.' We have not to ascend into heaven, that is, to bring Christ down; or to descend into the abyss, that is, to bring Christ up from the dead; but praise be to God, 'the word is nigh thee; in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that is the word of faith which we preach.' Yet it is sadly true today as Jesus said, 'ye will not come unto me that ye might have life.' When the world knows more of God, owns His authority, gives its allegiance to the King of kings, loves and serves the Prince of Peace, then reconstruction will have taken place and we may look for a new world with no more war.

R. J. STILL.



Conducted by
Alf Marsden

“I belong to a church where we seem to have baptised quite a few people but the church does not seem to grow numerically very much because we also lose people. Why can we not hold on to those who come into the Church?”

This is a very interesting question and one which has exercised the minds of many Christians both in the past and now, although I believe that inter-faith movement was not quite so volatile in the past as it is now. It seems to me that there will always be those who, as Paul wrote to Timothy, “have a form of godliness, but deny the power thereof”; they are “ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (2 Tim. 3:5,7). So they move about from group to group, seemingly searching for something of which they have no clear ideas and consequently never taking root anywhere; we must always beware of these because they can have an unstabling effect on the rest of the group. But having said that, I firmly believe that there are pertinent reasons why some who are normally stable do leave groups of Christians for, seemingly, no apparent reason. I would like to discuss some of the reasons I have pondered on relative to this question.

Non-Conversion

There is always the possibility that the person who ostensibly comes to Christ has not really been converted to Christ. We are so keen to get someone immersed in

water that we seem to have accepted the notion that a brief statement of belief before baptism is indicative of a radical change in the person seeking baptism; I believe that this is a dangerous assumption to make.

Conversion means, basically, 'to turn'. On one occasion Jesus said, "Verily I say unto you. Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 18:3). The idea of conversion is of turning from something to something else; in the Christian sense it means turning to someone else, and that person is the Lord Jesus Christ. It seems according to Matt. 18:3, that Jesus is saying that a person who is converted to Him must turn from the non-sustaining food of the world, and as a new-born child begin taking the life-giving food of Christ. As Peter puts it. "As new-born babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby; if so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious" (1 Pet. 2:2,3). In one of those 'hard' sayings of the Lord, Jesus said to His disciples, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you" (John 6: Read 51-60). What Jesus is saying here is that a person converted to Him must feed on Him, not in a cannibalistic sense, but that the person must fully appropriate the Lord into his or her life, living for Him and living in Him. Even Peter had to get this straight because the Lord had to say to him, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not; and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren" (Luke 22:31,32). We owe it to the Christ of God, and also to the person who wants to come to Him, that the one coming to Him understands all the implications of conversion.

Disenchantment

The fires of 'mission' have burned brightly; the heat, enthusiasm, and vocal expressions of love and commitment to Christ have washed over the listener, and he or she has become so 'on fire' for Christ that a response to the Gospel has been made. The mission has ended; the ones who have 'stoked the fires' have become tired, and the Christian community, which has been proclaiming Christ with such vocal erudition for a few days, has returned to its normal role of classic inactivity.

You will, of course, have heard of the sloth. This is an animal which has become so inactive that it sleeps for much of the time, and only wakes for sufficient time to eat, and even that is not very exerting. The Book of Proverbs has something to say about this when comparing the work-rate of the ant with that of the sluggard, "How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? when wilt thou arise out of .hy sleep? Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep, so shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth, and thy want as an armed man" (Prov. 6:6-11).

Maybe it is into such an environment that the newly-born child of God comes. With eager steps he hurries to the meeting on the Lord's Day, hoping to bask again in the glow of the Gospel. But where has the warmth gone; has the fire gone out? Perhaps it will be re-kindled in the messages from God's Word. But are these pointless, opinionated meanderings remotely connected with the thrilling message which called me out of the darkness of sin and into the glorious light of Christ? If what I see in those so-called dedicated Christians is the outcome of their prolonged experiences in Christ, then perhaps I have made a mistake after all. So might the reasonings of a new convert to Christ be when he is in the the first stages of disenchantment. He begins to think that what 'fired' him in the first instance was only an illusion, and so the reality of Christ is stifled at birth in his case.

Is it possible for Christians to live lives of self-deception? I believe that it is. Perhaps this is the work of Satan to make us believe that the 'crumbs' from the rich fare of the Master's table are the reality of it all that He has to offer. The tragic thought is that the realisation of this might lead some to disenchantment.

Non-integration

To 'integrate' means to make something complete by the addition of parts. In the religious sense it would seem to mean 'to combine within a group as equals'. In the church this is called 'fellowship', and is God and Christ related. "That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me"; so prayed Christ to His Father (John 17: 21). If this means anything, it means that all Christians should be integrated in Christ and God, and as there is unity of life and purpose in Christ and God, so there should be unity in all the saints of God, no matter in what geographical location they may be found. The fact of the matter is that we find it difficult to have unity in **one group** of Christians. Why is this?

One reason, I believe, is the influence of Christians long-dead on those who remain at the present time, especially if they are near relatives. It is as if they speak from the grave and thereby cloud our minds to the appreciation of present day realities. It is good to have loyalty to those who have brought us up and have taught us by word and deed, provided that the words spoken and the examples given are as relevant today as they were in their days. For example, if our grandmothers returned and tried to re-introduce the dolly tub and 'dolly' to washing days now, they would be laughed to scorn. This is not to say that I would wish to introduce so-called 'modernism' into the church, but it must be apparent that situations change and people change, and that methods and attitudes which were once successful are now non-effective. The fundamental message can be stated without changing it fundamentally, but changed methods and attitudes may be vital. New converts to Christ may be victims of this unbending and unyielding attitude and decide that, after all, the Church of Christ is not for them; and so we lose someone else; furthermore, they may spread the ideas of a rigid group of Christians, and so we become isolated in the community we are trying to serve. If we want to keep converts then we had better tell them very soon what we believe is expected of them, possibly **before** they are immersed, but we had better be very sure that we tell them what **God** requires of them and not what we require of them; the two may not necessarily be the same.

Then there is what some Christians call 'the curse of intellectualism'; this may be applied to anyone who can string two or three coherent sentences together, and have the audacity to try to reason from the Scriptures; but did not God say, "come, let us reason together"? Take our new convert again: he may as Peter said, have desired the milk of the Word, and he may have grown thereby, and so he becomes ready for the 'strong meat' of the Word. But what is served up to him on many occasions? Regurgitated platitudes or homilies from the pens of writers whom we would not consider to be Christians anyway. Is it not reasonable to think that they may say, "I asked for bread, and you give me a stone." So they leave, searching for the meat which has been denied them, and leave behind those who have given up searching for it.

These, then, are a few of the reasons why I believe some have become frustrated and have left the Church, and I have not yet discussed such issues as leadership, cliques, and such like which may act as barriers to continued fellowship and steady progress in the Lord. I for one would dearly love to see the Church grow; the thought that troubles me is that we ourselves may have stunted that growth.

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

Dying churches do not proclaim the Gospel. Growing churches plant the seed and reap the harvest. Dying churches are reaping what they have sown — *nothing!*

SOME APPROACHES TO BIBLE STUDY

AVOID THESE WRONG APPROACHES

- A. Casual :** reading without intending to understand.
1. From a sense of duty only. Like a useless pilgrimage.
 2. Irregularly, here a verse, there a chapter. Patchy.
 3. Only favourite passages. Selected, "one-track,"
- B. Sinister :** Interpreting from ulterior motives.
1. Pleasing the world. Tickling itching ears (2 Tim. 4:3).
 2. Selfishly, indulging sin, e.g. slavery or polygamy.
 3. To preserve sectarian creeds.
 4. Craving distinction, e.g. Sabbath-keeping, etc.
- C. Dogmatic :** using the Bible to prove doctrine. It is doctrine.
- D. Mystic :** spiritualising every text. A kind of Samson's riddle.
- E. Fantastic :** like a box of curiosities. Numerology.
- F. Priestly :** relying on clerical monopoly. Removes restraint.
 "Protestant" creeds and catechisms little better.
 Reverence for reformers encourages prejudice.

THE RIGHT APPROACH

- A. Cherish the love of truth.** (2 Thess. 2:10, John 4:23).
- B. Have Right Motives. :** Contrast Matt 13:23 with John 5:42; 6:26.
- C. Rightly Divide the Word of Truth :** (2 Tim. 2:15) particularly the three dispensations.
 Patriarchal (Melchizedek), Jewish (Aaron) and Christian (Jesus).
- D. Some Suggestions :**
1. Consider the historical circumstances of each passage, its order, title, author, date, place and occasion.
 2. On precepts, promises or exhortations consider who speaks and in which dispensation. Consider who is addressed, Jews or Christians, believers or not, approved or not.
 3. Consider each text in its context. Beware chapter divisions.
 4. Use normal philological principles. Accept literal meaning unless impossible; figurative if scope, context allow.
 5. In figures, symbols, types and parables ascertain points of resemblance and keep to them.
 6. Come within understanding distance. God is the centre of a circle of which humility is the circumference (James 4:6).

WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Today, there is renewed interest in the work of the Holy Spirit. Many are discovering Bible truths about the Holy Spirit which were formerly unknown. Some, quite naturally, are unable to put together a coherent view of the Spirit's work, and this is creating confusion on the subject. Thus, it is fitting for us to ask about the Spirit's work.

When Jesus told his disciples about the coming Spirit, he said, "I have yet many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it

to you" (John 16:12-15). There are other scriptures which speak of the Spirit as our Comforter, Sustainer and Sanctifier. But in the above passage Jesus reveals the fundamental work of the Spirit: "He will glorify me." The Spirit will magnify the life and ministry of Jesus both in the world and in the church.

The Spirit is even unnamed in the Bible, except as he reveals functions which he fulfils. But he has no formal name by which we praise him. He is called the "Spirit of Christ," the "Spirit of God," the "Spirit of Holiness" (i.e. the Holy Spirit) and "The Spirit." He is unnamed, not because he is unworthy of praise, but because he does not wish to call attention to himself. His sole purpose is to glorify Jesus: he exalts Jesus in the world through the gospel; he exalts Jesus in the church by magnifying his life in our bodies. Praise God for the Spirit's work in exalting Jesus, our Lord and Saviour.

It is improper to draw attention to the Spirit and his work in our lives when he refuses to draw attention to himself. Whenever we boast of having the Spirit, or pride ourselves because of our spiritual experiences, we have already forgotten the reason for which God gave us the Spirit. In 2 Corinthians 11-12, we read of those who doubted Paul's apostleship because he did not boast of his spiritual experiences. Paul said, "If I must boast I will boast only of what I've suffered for Christ" (2 Cor. 11:16-29). The Spirit's work is to glorify Christ. Let that be our work too!

J.A. Riley.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Aug. 7	Psalm 1	Phil. 4: 8-23
Aug. 14	Psalm 98	Col. 1: 1-20
Aug. 21	Isa. 42: 1-17	Col. 1: 21 to 2:7
Aug. 28	Lev. 23: 1-14	Col. 2: 8-23

The Duty of Right Thinking.

One of the best little books I have ever read is *Teach Yourself To Think* by R. W. Jepson. It helped me a lot on right thinking. So also did W. J. Dawson's essay *The Duty of Right Thinking*. He wrote: "We are what our intention is; our life is what our dominant thought is. Tell me what your daily, habitual, and unconscious thought is, and I will tell you what your life is. If you will fix your thoughts on things that are true and just, you will become true and just; this is the controlling law of the science of character, which, like all other sciences, is not magical, but profoundly reasonable."

William Paley in his book *The Evidences of Christianity* pointed out the stress which is laid by our Saviour upon the regulation of the thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: these are the things

which defile a man..." (Matthew 15:19-20). Truly, to change the world for the better, the heart of every individual has to be changed. That is what Jesus is all about.

We have all probably seen the statue of *The Thinker*. He sits stockstill with chin in hand. A lot of people are like that. They never get up and do anything. They forget that the purpose of thinking is to inspire proper action. Note Paul's words: "Those things, which you have both learned, and received, and heard and seen in me, **do**: and the God of peace shall be with you" (Philippians 4:9).

Paul's Letter to the Colossians

WRITER: Apostle Paul.

PLACE and DATE: Probably written from Rome between 60 and 64 A.D.

To WHOM ADDRESSED: "...to the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are at Colossae" (1:2).

PURPOSE: "Epaphras, one of the Colossians, had come to Rome with the word that dangerous heresy (probably a form of Gnosticism) was making headway in the church... Then Paul wrote this letter and sent it by Tychicus and Onesimus (4: 7-9), who also bore the letter to the Ephesians and the one to Philemon" (Halley's Bible Handbook).

COLOSSAE: was a city of Phrygia, from which country some were present at Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:10), and through which country Paul had gone on both his second and third missionary journeys (Act 16:6; 18:23).

We have no certain information as to when and by whom Christianity was planted at Colossae. Its near neighbours were Laodicea and Hierapolis, which, by Roman times, were more important towns. Saints were found in all three.

Gnosticism

The challenge of Gnosticism is clearly seen in this epistle. This philosophy was Pagan in origin and combined elements of Western intellectualism and Eastern mysticism. Alolph von Harnack described Gnosticism as "the acute Hellenization of Christianity", and C.H. Dodd said that it was "thoroughly syncretistic in its genius, a theosophical hotchpotch." It was arguably the most monstrous system of philosophy the human brain ever conceived.

Gnosticism led to either strict asceticism or licence to sin. These views originated from the Gnostic belief that all matter, including the body, was essentially evil. (Gnosticism really demands its own series of articles). Once familiar with it, no student of the New Testament could read the epistles, especially of John, without a greater awareness of the Gnostic problem. (I personally studied Gnosticism for a whole year and owe a great debt to Prof. Robert McLachlan Wilson of St. Andrews, Scotland and Prof. Kurt Rudolph of Leipzig, East Germany, whose writings on this subject are second to none.)

The Kingdom of Jesus.

One of the most important studies of the Bible is "The Kingdom of God". In this portion, Paul talks of the Father, "who has delivered us from the power of darkness and has translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son..." (1:13). "Translated" in the Greek was a word often used in the sense of removing a

people from one country to another. I think of the Jews who were taken from Egypt, the land of bondage, to Canaan, the land of promise. All Christians have experienced something similar.

Christ the Firstborn

Paul, in chapter 1, had many great things to say about Jesus. For example, he talked of Christ being "the firstborn of every creature". The Greek for firstborn is *prototokos*. Donald Guthrie wrote: "In this case the word firstborn must be understood in the sense of 'supreme' rather than in the temporal sense of 'born before'. Edward Robinson commented: "The firstborn means the first, the chief, one highly distinguished and pre-eminent". William Barclay said: "Clearly firstborn is not used in a time sense at all, but in the sense of special honour. So when Paul says of the Son that he is the 'firstborn of all creation,' he means that the highest honour which creation holds belongs to Him."

Jesus created everything. "Without Him was not anything made that was made" (John 1:3). He even created the angels. The Jews spoke of archangels, angels, seraphim and cherubim. Greeks spoke of "thrones, dominions, principalities and powers" (1:16). The emphasis on creation was a bold attack on the teaching of the Gnostics.

Christ In You, The Hope Of Glory (1:27).

When I was a much younger man, I used to correspond with the late brother Tom Nisbet on difficult passages of scripture. He was a great help to me. For example, I used to wonder about the phrases "in Christ" and "Christ in you". It took me a long time to grasp their meaning. Tom guided me by writing: "I have heard 'in Christ Jesus' explained this way: When I put on my jacket, I am in my jacket. But something more than that requires to be said. Galatians 3:27 reads: 'For as many of you as have been baptised into Christ have put on Christ'. Macknight translated thus: 'Besides, as many of you as have

been baptised into Christ have thereby professed that ye have put on the very temper and virtues of Christ'. In other words, in our baptism we put off all the old garments of sinful corrupted nature and we come up clothed in the clean raiment of righteousness of Christ. We have put on Christ, therefore, we are 'in Christ'. So we have the expressions of 'putting off the old man' and 'putting on the new' (Ephesians 4:22-24). (See also Colossians 2:11-12.) I rejoice that this mystery has now been made manifest to the saints of God (1:26).

Triumphant Forgiveness

"He...Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to the cross..." (2:14). In other words, Jesus sponged our catalogue of sins just as in ancient times writing on papyrus was sponged or wiped off and left absolutely clean.

"Handwriting" is the Greek word *cheirographos*. It came to mean, technically, a written agreement acknowledging a debt, certificate of a debt, a bond.

"Nailing" is an allusion to the ancient method by which a bond or obligation was cancelled by driving a nail through it and affixing it to a post. The Colossians would have deeply appreciated these words.

Warnings Against Strange Practices

Chapter 2:16-23 contains a clear warning by Paul to the Colossians not to adopt certain Gnostic practices. Behind this passage lie four of them: asceticism (verses 16, 21 and 23), observation of days (verse 16), special visions (verse 18), and worship of angels (verse 18).

Ian S. Davidson, Motherwell.

OBTUARY

R. B. SCOTT — Since going to press we regret to report the sad passing of Bro. R. B. Scott on 22/6/88. More details next issue.

"SINGLES RETREAT"

Are you young, free and single? Or are you not quite so young, maybe not quite free, but definitely single? Then we invite you join us at the annual "Singles' Retreat" at the Broomlee Centre, near West Linton. Enjoy a relaxing, spiritual, fun-packed weekend from Friday 26th August to Sunday 28th August.

The theme for the weekend will be "The Abundant Life — Following Jesus." As usual, a full programme is planned, and will include discussion time, a quiz, some entertainment (!), and also some free time to enjoy the local countryside or visit Scotland's wonderful capital, Edinburgh.

We have managed to keep the price to £26.50, which is only a small increase over last year. The cost includes accommodation in twin-bedded rooms, and meals from supper on the Friday evening to lunch on the Sunday afternoon.

A deposit of £10.00 is required before the 15th July in order to secure your place. This year we request that the balance be paid in advance of the weekend, and should be paid no later than 10th August. Cheques should be made out to the "Church of Christ," and sent, along with your details, to me at the address given below.

This weekend is open to over 18-year-olds. We hope you can join us.

David Ferguson,
2D Keir Hardie Drive,
Mayfield, Dalkeith,
Midlothian EH22 5QX.

HISTORY OF THE BRITISH CHURCHES OF CHRIST

Brother Ian Davidson proposes, God Willing, to give a series of talks (illustrated by slides) on the above subject in the Meeting-house at Motherwell on the following dates:-

Sat. Aug. 20th and 27th; and Sept. 3rd. On all three occasions the meetings will commence at 6.30 p.m.

ALL WELCOME

COMPENDIUM ON ISLAM

Steven Masood and Allan Ashurst have now completed the preliminary issue of their Compendium on Islam, a handbook designed to help those wanting to know about Mohammed's religion, especially those interested in reaching muslims with the gospel. Those desiring a copy please write to Allan Ashurst and if you can afford it, kindly enclose a donation of £3.00 for each copy to cover the cost of raw materials and postage. For those lucky enough to have CPCs, PCWs or IBM compatibles, it is available on 3 inch, 3½ inch and 5¼ inch discs. Please enclose a formatted disk stating which machine it is for.

Allan Ashurst,
60 Kenwood Road, Stretford,
Manchester. M32 8PT
Tel. 061-865-4242

WHAT THE ARTIST LEFT OUT

Many readers may be familiar with the tract with the above, as its theme. The church at Haddington had 30,000 copies of this tract printed about ten years ago. I sent the last of them to Canada a few days ago. Several brethren have expressed a desire for further copies and I have established an estimate as follows:-

20,000 copies	£584
30,000 copies	£710
40,000 copies	£818
50,000 copies	£949

Obviously it would be best to get 50,000 copies printed (as this represents 1.8 penny each) but the cost is high. I would be happy to administer a fund to this end and so if interested brethren, or churches, want to subscribe and place an order for so many copies, I shall see what can be done, if they contact me.

Editor.

Do not permit your zeal to get ahead of your knowledge.

THE DEATH OF MRS. PRAYER MEETING

MRS Prayer Meeting died at First Neglected Church, Worldly Avenue. Born many years ago in the midst of great revivals, she was a strong, healthy child, fed largely on testimony and Bible study, soon growing into worldwide prominence and was one of the most influential members of the church family.

For the past several years Sister Prayer Meeting has been failing in health, gradually wasting away until rendered helpless by stiffness of knees, coldness of heart, inactivity and weakness of purpose and will-power.

At the last she was but a shadow of her former happy self. Her last whispered words were enquiries concerning the strange absence of her loved ones now busy in the marts of trade and the places of worldly amusement.

Experts including Dr. Works, Dr. Reform and Dr. Joiner, disagree as to the cause of her fatal illness, administering large doses of organisation, socials, contests and drives, but to no avail. A post mortem showed that a deficiency of spiritual food coupled with the lack of faith, heartfelt religion and general support, were contributing causes.

Only a few were present at her death, sobbing over memories of her past beauty and power.

In honour of her going, the church doors will be closed on Wednesday nights, save on the third Wednesday of each month when the ladies Pink Lemonade Society serves refreshments to the men's handball team.

R. L. McKINLEY

THE Lord's purpose for coming to dwell in your heart is to enable you to do His work. There are those who think only in terms of the joy of sitting at His feet and hearing His Word, and becoming Pietists or Quietists, without a thought of the activity which should result from dwelling in the King's presence.

A. T. HOUGHTON.

CHRISTIAN VIDEO

The church at Haddington are interested in the possibilities of using 'Christian' video. The Editor would like to hear from anyone, at home or abroad, who can give any information or advice on the subject e.g. size of screen and recommended tapes etc. we shall be grateful for any assistance you can give.

THANKS

Slamannan: Sister Jean Neilson would like to thank all those who sent cards and expressed their sympathies to her in her recent great loss, in the passing of her sister Mary. The task is beyond her to acknowledge each individual card and letter but she was greatly uplifted by them all and would like to say 'Thank You' to everybody concerned.

WISE WORDS FOR CHRISTIANS

1. When a church member rests he rusts
2. Get the church into the world without getting the world into the church.
3. The biggest liar is the christian who gives excuses for not doing his duty.
4. Rip Van Winkle is the only man who became famous by sleeping.
5. The devil is an artist: he paints sin in very attractive colours.
6. Do what you should do and you will have no time to do what you should not.
7. The Bible needs no defence; it needs investigation and study.
8. If you can't tell whether a person is a Christian, he isn't.
9. He who stops being better stops being good.

Sunday School Chronicle

SEEN THROUGH

The anniversary speaker, long advertised, was taken ill and had to send a deputy, who began his address by explaining that he was only a substitute and then felt it necessary to define the word.

"If you break a window," he said, "and put a piece of cardboard in place of the broken pane, that is a substitute."

At the close of the service one of the deacons thanked him for stepping into the breach at such short notice and added: "You were no substitute, you were a real pane."

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