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Editor's Introduction

As I intimated in the February issue of YPS, we have a new series starting in this issue – Career Choices. One of the aims of this series is to give younger believers some insight into career options and how life is for Christians in various occupations. To do this we have asked a number of Christians from a cross section of backgrounds to tell us some of their experiences. This series of articles will attempt to equip the young believer with information that will help them make the best career choice in the light of scripture. The introduction has been written by Graeme Smith of Wallingford; he has also given us an overview of what a career in accountancy is like – you will need to wait for the August issue of YPS for this one.

In addition to this we have articles about 'the local church' by Clarke Logan. Another new writer, Gordon Armstrong, has written about how we distinguish truth from error.

Enjoy the read.

Stephen Baker

HOW WE GOT OUR BIBLE:

No 4 - The Canon



BY **TM SE ASIA**

The English word 'canon' is derived from a Greek word meaning **standard** or **measuring rod**. The canon of scripture is the sixty-six books which are inspired by the Holy Spirit and present the truth of God. The canon is a short way of saying 'all the books which belong in the Bible'.

But how did the sixty-six books come to be recognized as God's word? Why these sixty-six? Why not sixty-five or sixty-seven? Why not 600?

YOUNG PRECIOUS SEED is a supplement of *Precious Seed International* designed for those young in faith. Its purpose is to restate timeless truths from the word of God for a new generation of Christians and to kindle a biblical approach to current issues in the world in which we live. YPS is published by *Precious Seed International*, 34 Metcalfe Avenue, Killamarsh, Sheffield, S21 1HW, UK, and is available separately from the main magazine.



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OLD TESTAMENT

The concept of a canon starts with Moses, who wrote the first five books of the Bible, and placed them beside the ark of the covenant. They were a permanent witness of God's standards, Deut. 31. 24-26. Thus, the first canon consisted of five books.

Joshua added to Moses, Josh. 24. 26, growing the canon to six. Over time, more writings were added.¹

Whenever a prophet, poet or historian wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, his writings were included in the Hebrew canon. This continued until the writing of the 39th book, Malachi, around 400BC.

Subsequently, many notable literary works were produced, but they were not divinely inspired like the thirty-nine. We call these extra books the **Apocrypha**. In Roman Catholic Bibles, they are included between the two Testaments, but we do not include them in our Bible.

Although we do not know all the details of how authentic writings were identified, and spurious writings were disregarded, we believe the Holy Spirit overruled in the process. By the time of Christ, all the Jews agreed on the Hebrew canon. The Lord Jesus had many arguments with Jewish religious leaders, but one thing they never disputed was the canon. The Jews recognized these writings, and these writings **only**, as the word of God.

NEW TESTAMENT

Even while the New Testament was being written, other people were compiling the sayings of Jesus and writing 'Christian' epistles. Paul signed his correspondence with his own hand, knowing that fake letters were circulating, Col. 4. 18, 2 Thess. 2. 2.

In the three centuries after the resurrection, there were many such writings. How did the early Christians know which should be included in the Bible?

While the apostles and their associates were still alive, Christians began copying and collecting their works, aware that these communications were divinely inspired. From the moment they were received, Christians understood that such writings were the word of God.

The Holy Spirit guided the church in recognizing those books which were from Him and being discerning about those which were not. Jesus had promised the disciples that the Spirit would guide them into all truth, John 16. 13. As more and more copies of true scripture were made, and as non-inspired works were also being circulated, the early Christians diligently checked their sources to confirm that a communication really was from a Spirit-inspired author. Those which were not were never accepted by the church as a whole.

Over time, more and more Christians had the same collection of books, which were recognized as genuine. In AD 367, Athanasius compiled a list of the twenty-seven books we have today. Athanasius did not choose which books he liked, and which he didn't. He simply listed those books which the church **already identified** as genuine. These books had been accepted as scripture for 300 years. The formation of the canon is not so much the idea that the Church had to decide which books were inspired and which were not. Rather, it was simply the bringing together into one place all the books which the church had always known to be inspired.

Today, when we read the Bible, we find it speaks to us with the authority of God. If you read the Old Testament apocrypha, or some of the writings which the early Christians rejected (sometimes called the New Testament apocrypha, or **Gnostic** writings) you will find that though they may be interesting, God will not speak to you through them. For nearly 2,000 years, God has been speaking to Christians through just sixty-six books. Perhaps this is the most powerful testimony of all to the fact that these sixty-six books, and these alone, are the inspired word of God.

As an example of a Gnostic writing which was rejected, consider *The Gospel of Thomas* verse 114,

'Simon Peter says to them: Let Mary depart from among us, for women are not worthy of life. Jesus says: Behold, I myself shall inspire her so that I make her male, in order that she also shall become a living spirit like you males. For every female who becomes male, shall enter the Kingdom of Heaven'.

God has preserved and protected His word down through the centuries. We should 'have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths', 1 Tim. 4. 7, ESV, but 'hold fast the pattern of sound words' which we have received, 2 Tim. 1. 13.

¹ 1 Sam. 10. 25; 1 Chr. 29. 29; 2 Chr. 20. 34; 26. 22; 32. 32; Jer. 30. 2.

Chapter & Verse

BY **TM SE ASIA**

5. THE CHURCH WHICH IS HIS BODY

'And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all', Eph. 1. 22, 23 NKJV.

The Hebrew word *qahal* is usually translated 'congregation' in the KJV and 'assembly' in the NKJV. In the Septuagint (the Greek Old Testament from which New Testament writers often quoted), it is sometimes rendered *sunagoge* (brought together) and sometimes *ekklesia* (called out).

Between them, these two words convey the basic idea behind the word 'church'. In the general sense, 'church' refers to any group of people who have been called away from wherever they were, to come together for a specific purpose. The word itself does not necessarily carry any religious connotations, e.g., see the word 'assembly', Acts 19. 32.

In the Septuagint, Israel is called a church, Deut. 31. 30, and Stephen uses the term of Israel in Acts chapter 7 verse 38.

In the early chapters of the book of Acts, the word 'church' describes the Jews who identified themselves with Jesus the Messiah, Acts 2. 47; 8. 3. Later, individual congregations, whether Jewish, Gentile, or mixed, are called 'churches', Acts 9. 31; 16. 5.

But in the ministry of the apostle Paul, the word is used in a very special sense. The Lord Jesus revealed mysteries to Paul, that is, truths which had hitherto been kept secret by God. One such mystery concerns 'the church which is His body'.

The church which is Christ's body consists of Jews, who have been called out of Judaism, and Gentiles, who have been called out of the world, who, together, form one brand new entity in Christ. Membership in this body comes through faith in the gospel, Eph. 1. 13.

That Gentiles could be saved was no secret in the Old Testament. But the idea that Jews and Gentiles could be on equal terms was entirely new, and was one of the mysteries Paul revealed in Ephesians chapter 3 verses 1 to 11. So too was the idea that this new creation was designated 'His body'. Paul teaches that Christ is the head and the church is His body, Col. 1. 18. It is a unique relationship.

Ephesians chapter 1 describes many of the blessings and privileges which belong to members of this church. Paul prays particularly that we would understand the hope of God's calling, the riches of His inheritance, and the greatness of His power, all of which are ours in Christ, 1. 18, 19.

The idea is that because the body is joined to the head, it shares its life with the head. Christ, our Head, is in heaven, and so Paul emphasizes the heavenly, spiritual blessings which belong to us. This is quite different to Old Testament Israel who were promised earthly, material blessings.

The climax of Ephesians chapter 1 concerns the headship of the Lord Jesus Christ over all things, both now and in the future, 1. 21. And in Christ's exaltation, the church has a very special place. He is 'head over all things to the church', v. 22. Under Christ's headship, the church will reign with Him and share in His glory.

One of the most astounding truths Paul reveals is that the church is 'the fullness' of Christ, 1. 23. We must tread carefully, for Christ is perfect and complete in Himself, and needs nothing, yet there is a sense in which the church completes Christ. Perhaps this can be best understood by saying that the church brings out Christ's glory in a way that would not be visible otherwise.

There is an analogy of this in creation. Everything God made was perfect, yet God said, 'It is **not good** that man should be alone', Gen. 2. 18. Man is completed by woman who brings out man's glory, 1 Cor. 11. 7.

In Ephesians chapter 5 verses 23 to 32, Paul explains further the profound mystery of Christ and the church, 'For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Saviour of the body', Eph. 5. 23.

As the body of Christ, the church enjoys unique privileges, and with privileges come responsibilities. Let us endeavour to submit to Christ our Head and bring glory to Him in all things.

The young believer and career choices - introduction



BY GRAEME SMITH WALLINGFORD

As a young believer, there are, arguably, two choices that will have the greatest impact on your whole life as a Christian. The first is your choice of marriage partner and the other is your choice of career. An article in the *Truth and Tidings* magazine listed several questions that a Christian executive might face in their career. The author stated that 'the time to ask these questions is not when one is presented with the possibility of becoming an executive, but rather at the beginning of a career'.¹ This introductory article will examine various scriptures that the young believer should be familiar with when thinking about career choices and will attempt to provide information that will help them make the best career choice in the light of scripture. Subsequent articles will be written by people with personal experience of different spheres of work to show how their work has impacted on living for Christ.

General principles

At the outset, it is well to remember that work was always envisaged as part of human life² and that hard work would be essential for mankind to provide for himself.³ Adam learnt that work was not going to be easy, in all sorts of ways, but it should not be avoided, as Paul commands that if we are not willing to work then we have no right to eat.⁴ The danger comes when we become so focused on the rewards of work, e.g., the salary, that we become servants to rewards and not God Himself. Our Saviour taught bluntly that a Christian cannot faithfully serve God and money at the same time.⁵

The Bible also envisages that when we work we may be working for an earthly employer, but we should always remember that all work that we do is ultimately for our heavenly Master.⁶ This would preclude certain types of work that are

plainly contrary to God's will. There may be other careers that are not unscriptural in themselves but may have aspects that will negatively affect our ability to be obedient to God. Naturally, you may be considering a career that suits your abilities and skill sets, but do remember that these 'talents' have been given to you by God. God expects us to use our talents wisely and for His glory, not primarily for our own benefit.⁷

A young person embarking on their career has, potentially, over 90,000 hours of work ahead of them, if God wills it. Clearly, this will greatly impact on all areas of Christian life, and we will briefly consider some of these areas.

Fellowship with God

The Psalmist wrote of the blessings that flow from 'meditating on the law, day and night' and our Saviour found time to pray early in the morning and late at night.⁸ The lesson here is that your work should never hinder your routine 'quiet times' with the Lord. Fellowship with God can also be spoilt by personal sin that may be related to a work culture that could lead a believer away from the Lord.

Service for God and the local assembly

With regards to your service for God, the Christian is described as a soldier of Christ. The Christian soldier should never get so caught up in work that they are unable to effectively serve and please their heavenly Master.⁹ The Christian also has responsibilities to the local assembly, and work should not regularly prevent us from attending the Lord's Day or weeknight meetings.¹⁰

Family life

If you become a parent, then you will take on added Christian responsibilities relating to motherhood or fatherhood.¹¹ Thought should be given to the fact that some careers might negatively affect your ability to perform those duties. For instance, will you be able to spend time with young children in the morning, before they go to bed or at weekends?

Personal testimony

Finally, with respect to your testimony, you should remember the great commission of the Lord to 'go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature'.¹² This surely includes the workplace, and so you should note careers where you would not be allowed to talk about your faith.* There are also some careers which may involve practices that come into conflict with biblical teaching. An example is the case of doctors performing abortions, where the UK's 1967 Abortion Act has a 'conscience clause' that permits a doctor to refuse to perform such surgery. Evidence from the British Medical Association (BMA) in 2016, however, suggested that those who object to being involved in abortions face having their careers limited.¹³

You can see from these few comments that there are many issues to be considered when choosing a career. My prayer is that you will find this series helpful in highlighting some of the issues that need to be considered.

*Editor's note – we should be conscious that we are employed to do the work of our earthly master, Col. 3. 22-25, Eph. 6. 5-8, Titus 2. 9, 10, but that some employers are making it increasingly difficult to be honest about your faith in Christ within the workplace.

¹ <http://truthandtidings.com/1997/02/the-christian-in-the-workplace-as-an-executive>.

² Gen. 2. 15.

³ Gen. 3. 19.

⁴ 2 Thess. 3. 10.

⁵ Matt. 6. 24; 1 Tim. 6. 10.

⁶ Col. 3. 22-25.

⁷ Matt. 25. 14-30.

⁸ Ps. 1. 2; Mark 1. 5; Luke 6. 12.

⁹ 2 Tim. 2. 4.

¹⁰ Heb. 10. 25.

¹¹ Eph. 6. 4; 1 Tim. 5. 14.

¹² Mark 16. 15.

¹³ <https://www.premier.org.uk/News/UK/Doctors-who-refuse-to-perform-abortions-denied-promotions>.



The Local Church

BY CLARK LOGAN BOTSWANA

Christians are not to go solo. God expects every one of His children to be part of a local church where they can find help and support, grow and mature, get involved, and so live to bring glory to God and blessing to others. In doing this they will become more like the Lord Jesus Christ Himself,¹ this being the biggest challenge for us all.

The pattern in the book of Acts shows that those who were saved through faith in Christ were baptized before being received into the local church.² They were called out of the world to gather solely to the Lord's name. Their lives were meant to be clean, even as their doctrine was to be pure. The Bible calls them 'saints',³ as those set apart for God – they were to fulfil the meaning of that name by living holy lives before God and men.

This is the church age, the present time of grace, when the gospel is being preached and sinners can be saved. God is calling out of the nations a people for His name.⁴ **The church which is the body of Christ** includes every saint that believes in Him: some are in heaven, many are upon this earth, and others may not yet be born, therefore it is not yet complete or fully seen. Christ is the Head of this church which is His body,⁵ and we are the members. We are to obey Him and do His will.

By contrast, **local churches** can be seen here and now. They show the features of the body of Christ of which they are a part. Other people should be able to see that the believers in each local church are loyal to Christ, even as they bear witness to Him and reflect His beauties – His truth, love, and grace.

There are three main functions of the local church and each is vital:

It exists for God's glory and the honour of His Son.

God's children are thankful people and, every time they gather, the purpose is to worship God and gladly sing His praises. Each week the believers meet to honour Christ and recall His death by breaking bread and drinking the cup, in keeping with His command.⁶ These symbols remind us of His body given and His blood shed for us. The fragrance of this special meeting should be

carried out into the world and affect how we live before others day by day.

The saints willingly give of their income or possessions and offer it to the Lord.⁷ These funds are used wisely for the upkeep of the church building and to support the Lord's work at home and further afield. In the New Testament, no member of the local church received a wage or mandated payment for any service rendered.

A local church will bring its needs before God and pray often, seeking His help and blessing.⁸ They depend upon Him, and will be quick to offer their thanks when He answers those prayers. They will also follow the leading and guiding of the Holy Spirit of God as they meet together to worship and to pray.

The believers not only worship God but they also serve Him in many ways. There is no reason why each act of service should not also be an act of worship, when it is done first of all for the Master's pleasure and glory. In a local church there are the public meetings and roles, but a lot of work also goes on behind the scenes. Some people are better at the latter, and God does not forget their quiet and unseen labour of love. There is a part for all to play, whether young or old, male or female. Each saint has been given a gift by the Holy Spirit to use for the blessing of all.⁹

The headship of Christ will be upheld: brethren will set a good example by seeking to uplift Christ, keeping Him at the centre, and giving Him His rightful place; sisters will obey the scriptures as they cover their heads and remain silent in the public meetings.¹⁰ By these lovely symbols, man is hidden, and Christ is seen. The angels look down from heaven and take note.

The life of the church will affect how each member functions in the wider spheres of home, work, and in the street. Christian husbands will love their wives, and wives will honour their husbands.¹¹ Parents will love and guide their children; children will respect and obey their parents. Workers will work hard for their bosses; bosses will look after their workers. Christians should be known as good neighbours in the street where they live, and the love of Christ in their hearts should overflow.

It exists to help us grow and support each other in love.

In the New Testament, every local church had a number of mature and godly men known as elders who were to care for the Christians. They are also described as shepherds caring for sheep.¹² They love the sheep and are always found among them. They tend and watch over them day and night, guiding and guarding them, and leading and feeding them. They will seek to bring back the straying, bind up the wounded, and lift up the fallen. They help to carry the young, and also bear up the old. These true shepherds are humble and faithful men who devote their lives to the welfare of the flock. They do not look to any central body on earth to govern or to guide them, but solely to Christ their risen Head in heaven.

There are times when elders weep in private as they plead and pray for the flock and those who have erred. It is a sad matter when the church must judge sin, if found in the life of any member; this is done to preserve the purity of the church and to assist the erring saint in repenting and returning to the Lord. There should be a ready spirit to forgive those who do repent, even as Christ loved and forgave us who were guilty and needy before Him.¹³

A programme of teaching the scriptures is vital for each local church, so that those who are young in the faith receive the milk they need, and more mature saints can feed on the meat of God's word.¹⁴ The diet should be varied. In this way the whole church comes to love the Bible, reading it, searching it, learning it, living it, and preaching it. The Holy Spirit raises up those with the gift of preaching and teaching the truth of God. Elders will encourage such gift in the church and be willing to share this work with others.

Apart from the work of the elders, each saint is called upon to love his brothers and sisters in Christ. This will mean being kind and helping each other in times of need, weakness, sickness, or sadness. The warmth of love and mutual respect should pervade the church, shielding each saint from the cold and callous world outside. Older saints in their wisdom will counsel and care for the younger saints; the younger ones in their zeal will offer ready help to the older ones.¹⁵ Gossip, pride, and envy should be absent, these being some of the things the devil can use to destroy God's work and divide His people. The world, the flesh, and the devil are to be kept at bay. This is a constant battle for us all on the Christian pathway.

It exists to pray for and witness to the unsaved.

A local church will shine brightly in the darkness of this world and proclaim the gospel to all.¹⁶ It will **show** as well as **tell** the love of Christ. People will be warned of their need and guilt as sinners, and of the judgement ahead, but they will also be pointed to the loving Saviour and His finished work upon the cross. They will be urged to be in time and trust Christ without delay.

The church should not function as an island, but engage with those around it who do not know the Saviour. No one will be ignored; young children, those in their teens, adults and seniors will all be welcomed so that they hear the good news. The believers will work hard to do this, and keep praying and looking for blessing.

The patient sowing of the word of God in the minds and hearts of the young has borne much fruit in the past, and still does today. Sunday School work always looks to the future. This is not an easy work these days with so many young people coming from broken and troubled homes. Other places can also be used for the preaching of the gospel, such as schools, prisons, and old people's homes. Indeed, no place is off-limits. The gospel is for all in every place, and no one is to be left out. Our God who so loves the world desires that all men should be saved and that none should perish.¹⁷

The bright hope of the church will be kept burning as well – that Christ is coming back again soon to call His children home to heaven.¹⁸ This will add an urgent note to the preaching of the gospel, because His coming will spell the end of this present day of grace. It will also produce in the saints the desire to watch and pray as they look for the return of their Lord. They will seek to keep busy in His service so that they will not be ashamed before Him at His coming.¹⁹ Best of all, they know that when He appears they will be with Him for ever and be like Him at last,²⁰ for they will see Him as He is!

¹ Rom. 8. 29.

² Acts 2. 41.

³ 1 Cor. 1. 2.

⁴ Acts 15. 14.

⁵ Eph. 5. 23.

⁶ 1 Cor. 11. 23-25.

⁷ 1 Cor. 16. 2.

⁸ Phil. 4. 6.

⁹ 1 Cor. 12. 11.

¹⁰ 1 Cor. 11. 3, 10.

¹¹ Eph. 5. 22-25.

¹² Acts 20. 28.

¹³ Eph. 4. 32.

¹⁴ Heb. 5. 12-14.

¹⁵ Titus 2. 1-7.

¹⁶ Matt. 5. 14.

¹⁷ 2 Pet. 3. 9.

¹⁸ 1 Thess. 4. 16, 17.

¹⁹ 1 John 2. 28.

²⁰ 1 John 3. 2.

Is it really true?

BY GORDON ARMSTRONG LINWOOD, SCOTLAND

It's not uncommon to find, outside a railway station or a shopping centre, a well-presented stand offering literature. The titles immediately appeal to Christians: 'Is the Bible true?', 'What will happen in the end times?' However, it is important to make sure the answers are faithful to the Bible. Many such stands are peddling the doctrines of cults such as Jehovah's Witnesses, Christadelphians, and Mormons. The believer is privileged to possess not only the truth of God in the scriptures but also the ideal teacher in the person of the Holy Spirit. It has never been God's intention for His people to be stranded, much less so to be ignorant.

It is said that an FBI forgery team will never spend time analysing fake notes, but only ever become deeply familiar with the genuine – this is what enables them to be able to spot the counterfeit. In some regards, this is true of the Christian life. Ever since God spoke the world into being there have been enemies of His word. In the Garden of Eden, Satan undermined the authority of what God had commanded, and throughout the Bible we see people doubting, disputing, and disobeying His word. Sadly, even those of us who are His children can be guilty of this.

It is clear that false teaching is no new phenomenon; neither is it a dying trade. A great enemy of the early churches was a group known as Gnostics. These people taught that the spiritual and the physical are unrelated, meaning it doesn't matter how you live. They went on to deny that the Lord Jesus' body was real, consequently undermining His genuine manhood. These false teachers were also caught up with mysticism and emotionalism, which encouraged a subjective approach to the apostles' doctrine.

It is with this error in view that the apostle John writes, **'Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world'**, 1 John 4. 1. From the time John was writing to the present, many have continued to go down the path of false teaching. This means we need to be discerning Christians, testing everything we hear or read. Not everyone who

claims to be a Christian is to be trusted and not every group that looks as if it is Christian should be followed. On the other hand, this is no reason to assume that every teacher is a heretic until proven innocent. The word John uses for 'try' was used of metals – putting them through a test to prove that they are genuine. The goal of testing is to demonstrate that both the teaching and the teacher have their roots in God.

Just as Deuteronomy records the test of an Old Testament prophet, so John's first letter explains the criteria for testing the teacher – **'Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God'**, 1 John 4. 2. The fundamental issue is truth about the person of Christ. Many false teachers will come close in other areas, majoring on their similarities with true Christianity, yet hold serious error concerning the Lord Jesus. In his Gospel, John records the affirmations of deity made by the Lord Jesus – 'I and my Father are one', 10. 30, 'He that hath seen me hath seen the Father', 14. 9. At the same time, not only is the Lord Jesus God, but He is also fully man. Again, it is John who records the Saviour being wearied with His journey and, later, thirsting on the cross.

Someone has said, 'Discernment is not knowing the difference between right and wrong. It is knowing the difference between right and almost right'.

Knowing the truth of God, wearing the belt of truth, and testing the spirits will allow us to identify those that are of God, and give us confidence as they teach and encourage us.

Could it be said of each of us that we are diligently reading the Bible in order to know truth, as well as getting to know the Giver of it?

