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THE NECESSITY OF DOCTRINAL PREACHING

It would be true to say that for several generations doctrinal preaching has been steadily receding. In the early stages it was pushed slightly to one side by the over-simplified presentation of the gospel, which soon became a watered-down version of truth. Then came the great emphasis on experience rather than a grounding in the faith.

Today we witness the deplorable effects of this sad departure, for in large measure our generation lacks even a theoretical knowledge of 'The Truth'. Sadder still, many are now even decrying preaching of any kind as being an acceptable means of conveying the gospel; discussion, debate, drama, to mime or to sing, is a far more effective means of communication, they say. Others continually speak of, and pray for "Revival", but a revival of what? The crying need is surely a revival of true Biblical preaching, of practical godliness and a greater conformity to the image of Christ - the Christian piety of a bygone age.

Both the teaching of Scripture and the records of history testify clearly to the great importance of doctrinal preaching and what we see today is the lamentable consequences of a prolonged absence of this. Doctrinal preaching enlightens our understanding, instructs and fortifies our souls and makes us vigilant and discerning. There can be no soundness in the Faith if the fundamentals of the Faith are not known and understood. Fundamental truths are termed in Scripture "The first principles of the Oracles of God" (Heb. 5 v. 12) The basic truths of Scripture are absolutely necessary to spiritual life.

The Divine inspiration and authority of Holy Scripture (2 Tim.3 v.16). The Trinity and unity of the Godhead working in harmony (1 Pet.1 v.2). The two natures united in the one person of the Lord Jesus Christ (John 1. v.1-2 & v.14, 1 John 2.v22 ch.4 v.2-3). Man's total depravity and lost estate (Rom.5 v.12). The all-sufficient sacrifice of Christ (Heb.10 v.12, 14). Regeneration and new birth by the Spirit of God alone (John 3 v.3-6). Repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 20 V.21). Justification through faith in His blood (Rom.3 v.28 and Rom.5 v.9). All these and many more essential stones in the foundations of Christian belief and there can be no true and virile spiritual life without a knowledge and grounding in these things.

The word of God says, "My people are destroyed for lack of KNOWLEDGE" (Hosea 4 v.6). "Therefore my people are gone into captivity because they have no KNOWLEDGE; and their honourable men are famished, and their multitude dried up with thirst", (Is.5 v.13) - very apt words for our day and age. "But", says the Almighty, "I will give you pastors according to my heart, which shall feed you with KNOWLEDGE and UNDERSTANDING" (Jer.3 v.15).

This is God's pattern and this is the mandate of Holy Scripture, the gift of Christ to the church of the pastor or teacher (Cf.Eph.4 v.11); this is not itinerant ministry, but local shepherds within a local fold (1 Pet.5 v.2); such are to feed with KNOWLEDGE and UNDERSTANDING. First and foremost, such knowledge is communicated by a setting forth of the glorious DOCTRINES of Divine revelation, the declaration of ALL TRUTH. Ever should the prayer of the Psalmist be upon our lips - "O send out Thy light and Thy truth; let them lead me; let them bring me unto Thy holy hill, and to Thy tabernacles" (Ps.43 v.3).

The sound preaching of TRUTH is of vital importance to ALL men at ALL times, for it is by a knowledge of the TRUTH that men are saved (Cf John 17 v.3, 1 Tim.2 v.4) and by our faith and belief in that TRUTH (Cf. 2 Thess.2 v.13). We are also sanctified by the TRUTH (John 17 v.17). Growth in grace goes hand in hand with growth in KNOWLEDGE (2 Pet. 1 v.2,3 & 18). It is mercy and TRUTH which preserves us (Ps. 61 v.7) - "Understanding shall keep thee" (Prov. 2 v.11). Truth is essential to our salvation and throughout our Christian life. Matthew Henry writes - "The principles of religion are the foundations on which the faith and hope of the righteous are built". How relevant then is the question asked by David - "If the foundations be destroyed what shall the righteous do?" (Ps.11 v.3).

There has been over the past 150 years a gradual erosion of 'The Foundations'; 'Creeds' and 'Confessions of Faith' have been discarded, Systematic Theology discountenanced, and Doctrinal Preaching has been disparaged. The teacher has been superseded in so many places by the travelling preacher, who proclaims, "We preach a person - not a theology, it is Christ - not a doctrine". Such need to return to the scriptures and study those repeated expressions "the DOCTRINE of Christ", "the MYSTERY of Christ" and heed the solemn warning of 2 John v.9 - "whosoever transgresseth and abideth not in the DOCTRINE of Christ hath not God. He that

abideth in the DOCTRINE of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son". It is this shallow preaching that is in large measure responsible for the appalling departure of the present day; for whilst there has been a steady decaying of the foundations over the past few generations, it is alarming now to note that the development of the past 20 years is one of rapid crumbling and large sections of the church are in danger of toppling into apostacy. It has produced a race of pseudo-believers who want the blessings of justification without the grace of sanctification; they want Christ without true Biblical Christianity; such is a misnomer; indeed, it is an absurdity.

Following in the wake of this we have the latest trend of discussion and debate, where Christianity (so-called) [is held] in common with other world religions, together with science, psychology, sociology all having their place and being within the terms of reference; with drama and miming to vary the theme. Is not this tragic? Yet why is this? It is because so many today have little knowledge of the sublime and lofty truths of Holy Scripture and but a faint appreciation of the glorious mysteries of God and of Christ, which in turn stems almost wholly from the fact that doctrinal preaching has been set aside for so long.

(to be continued)

W.H.M.

Taken from the magazine of the PENZANCE BAPTIST CHURCH
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The local church is to continue steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread and in prayers (Acts 2:42). It is the plain duty of ministers, officers and members to maintain this scriptural pattern in the life and witness of the local church.

If you are a church member you have made certain promises before God in the presence of the congregation. You therefore have a responsibility to fulfil those promises. This involves much more than attendance at the services of public worship. It requires nothing other than total commitment to the life and witness of the local church. The church is a spiritual community to which you are privileged to belong.

The responsibilities of church members are numerous. There is the duty to attend the services of public worship, and to be involved in the other meetings and activities of the church. There is the duty to participate in the fellowship and to contribute to its spiritual life. There is the duty to care for the weaker members and any who may be in difficult circumstances. There is also the duty to engage in evangelistic witness and to bring non-Christians to the church.

It is the responsibility of members to maintain a consistent Christian witness in the church, and in the community in which the church is placed. It is dishonouring to the Lord when Christians live in a manner that is inconsistent with their profession.

The privileges of regular worship are equally numerous. There is the opportunity to hear the whole counsel of God declared through expository preaching. There is the opportunity to submit to the truth of God in repentance and Faith, and to respond to him in prayer and praise.

It is the privilege of regular worshippers to identify with the Lord's people in their corporate worship. This identification is, however, a futile exercise unless it is accompanied by a living faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

If you are not a church member but nevertheless attend the church regularly, there are issues which you need to consider carefully in relation to the local church. Are you a true believer in the Lord Jesus Christ? If you are a true believer should you not be baptised? If you have been baptised on profession of faith, should you not be a church member?

This church recognises the absolute necessity of maintaining a regenerate membership. To this end the church intends by God's grace to continue steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread and prayers.

HYWEL W. ROBERTS

THE CHRISTIAN SABBATH

by John P. Thackway, DEVIZES.

The literal meaning of the word 'sabbath' is 'rest'. And this is really the essence of its meaning for us. That is why it is spoken of in the scriptures as 'the rest of the holy sabbath' (EX.16:23 cf 31:15). God had an eye to the needs of the body when he commanded this. "He knoweth our frame, and he remembered that we are dust", therefore he has provided this regularly recurring period of cessation from work. This is something decreed by infinite wisdom and kindness. It is interesting to note that even secular history confirms this. Following the French Revolution at the end of the 18th century, the atheistic Government abolished Christianity and, with it, the sabbath. But before long they found that they just had to bring back a sabbath into their system or the people would never survive. So they instituted one of their own, recurring every tenth day, which they called a Decade. But in our sabbath, this rest is not to be one of inactivity or indolence. The intention is that the body should rest in order for the spiritual life to be active. We are to cease from activity in one sphere in order to give ourselves to activity in another. God had an eye to the needs of the soul here, too. Robert Leighton puts it like this: "Amongst all the visible creatures, it is man's peculiar excellency that he is capable of considering and worshipping his Maker, and was made for that purpose. Yet being composed of the dust of the earth and the breath of God, a body and a soul, the necessities of that meaner part, while we are in this life, employ us much and take up a great part of our little time. And in this regard God hath wisely and graciously set apart a day for us, one of each seven, to be appropriate to that our highest employment, the contemplating and worshipping of his majesty. This is the scope of this precept". This principle then, should operate in our observance of the sabbath, the Lord's day. It should be ease for the body, but energy for the soul. On this day we must cease from earth, that we may "set our affections on things above."

This principle of bodily rest on the sabbath, to allow spiritual activity, raises an important question at this point. It concerns the fact that we are still in the body - even on the sabbath. Therefore there are certain mundane or physical needs that have to be attended to. Also, in certain

cases there are other living creatures involved as well. How then, axe these considerations to be viewed in connection with our desire to "remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy?" Christian people have always had to grapple with this question, and it is the opinion of the best of them that two kinds of works are legitimate here; works of necessity and works of mercy. The first, would cover things which are necessary to our physical well-being. The incident already referred to in Mk.2:23-28 is instructive on this point. We read that as our Lord "went through the corn-fields on the sabbath day ... his disciples began, as they went, to pluck the ears of corn." They did this evidently because they were hungry (Matt.12:1). Having picked the ears, they rubbed them in their palms, blew away the husks and ate the raw grains (Lk.6:1). This amounted to the preparation of food. The Pharisees thought that this broke the sabbath, but our Lord defended the practice asserting, as we have seen, that "the sabbath was made for man". Here then, is the principle applied, that work in connection with preparing food, and any other thing necessary for our physical well-being is permissible (cf Matt.12:12b), This also applies to the lower creation, as even the Pharisees themselves admitted. In Lk.13:15 our Lord appeals to this: "doth not each of you on the sabbath loose his Ox or his Ass from the stall, and lead him away to watering?". Also, beasts that had gotten into difficulties on the sabbath should be rescued (Matt. 12:11; Lk.14:5). Applying all this more closely, it becomes evident that the family is to prepare food and other essential requirements, also farmers etc. may tend their livestock without profaning this holy day. But the emphasis is to be placed on the word 'necessity'. It is envisaged that all this will be pruned to the minimum, in order for the maximum to be given to spiritual things. The second, works of mercy, follow in much the same way. Those in the medical profession, and all who find themselves responsible for the essential bodily needs of others, may do their works with a good conscience. Our Lord healed the sick on the sabbath day (Jn.5.9; 9:14). But again, the supreme priority on this day will still be to keep it for the soul, and for its Beloved. Thus it can be seen that the N.T. does not provide us with rules and regulations regarding these things. Basic principles are deemed sufficient. And the spiritually-minded soul will have little difficulty in applying them to his own particular circumstances (Roms.8:14; Phil.1:9-10; 1Jn.2:18; Rev.1:10).

The sabbath day not only has implications for life in this world. As with all that God has given us, it finds its ultimate expression in the World to come: There "the spirits of just men made perfect" enjoy a perfect sabbath. This is the 'rest which remains for the people of God' (Heb.4:9).

As John Trapp has quaintly pointed out "this sabbath never comes to an end; there is no night (Rev.21i25), nor return to work (Rev.14:13). This earthly sabbath is a type of the heavenly one. Each Lord's day therefore should be a foretaste of heaven for us". As Robert Murray M'Cheyne wrote, "when a believer lays aside his pen or loom, brushes aside his worldly cares, leaving them behind with his week-day clothes, and comes up to the house of God, it is like the morning of the resurrection, the day when we shall come out of the great tribulation into the presence of God and the Lamb. When he sits under the preached word, and hears the voice of the shepherd leading and feeding his soul, it reminds him of the day when the Lamb that is in the midst of the throne shall feed him and lead him to living fountains of waters. When he joins in the hymn of praise, it reminds him of the day when his hands shall strike the harp of God:

Where congregations ne'er break up
And sabbaths have no end.

When he retires, and meets with God in secret in his closet or, like Isaac, in some favourite spot near his dwelling, it reminds him of the day when "he shall be a pillar in the house of our God, and go no more out." If this truth alone be realised for what it is, we shall need very little persuasion to "remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy." We would, in the words of Richard Baxter, "use our sabbaths as steps to glory, 'til we have passed them all, and are there arrived."

(to be continued).

If thou art ever so exact in thy morals, and not a worshipper of God, thou art an atheist.

If thou dost worship God, but not by scripture rule, thou art an idolater.

If thou worship God according to the scripture rule, but not in spirit and in truth, thou art an hypocrite.

William Gurnall 1617-1679

ANNOUNCEMENTS and INFORMATION

As once again we look back over the past three months it is with praise and gratitude to God for his goodness. The visits of so many of the Lord's servants from other parts, and their ministry, has been of great help and encouragement to us.

By the time that this is in print the "Drive-In" church services will have ended, but the operation and working of the Holy Spirit continues. Let us all be constant in prayer that the Word faithfully preached over the months to so many may, by the Spirit's power, be brought continually to their remembrance, that yet a work of grace might be wrought in their hearts.

This quarter we commence on Sunday mornings a series on 'The Life of David', and the study of the 'Prayers of the Apostle Paul' will continue on Thursday evenings. Again, we cannot stress too much the importance of our dependence upon God for His help and blessing, not forgetting our individual responsibilities as church members as pointed out so clearly elsewhere in this magazine.

To those of our members who are sick and shut-in we would remind you that you are not forgotten in our prayers and send you our love in the Lord.

THE BOOK STAND.

A lively interest continues to be shown in this section of our work.

Daniel Webster said in 1823: "If religious books are not widely circulated among the masses in this country, I do not know what is going to become of us as a nation. If truth be not diffused, error will be; If God and his Word are not known and received, the devil and his works will gain the ascendancy; if the evangelical volume does not reach every hamlet, the pages of a corrupt and licentious literature will; if the power of the Gospel is not felt throughout the length and breadth of the land, anarchy and misrule, degradation and misery, corruption and darkness, will reign without mitigation or end."

We have available a selection of books which cannot fail to be of interest to all whose chief joy is in God and His word.