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THE NECESSITY OF DOCTRINAL PREACHING

The marked difference between the preaching of recent generations and that of a century or so ago is its lack of doctrinal content. Whilst there has been much preaching of a type over the past 100 years there has been a sad lack of teaching.

A considerable part of present-day preaching revolves around a certain few verses which are alleged to be a formula for salvation. Such as engage in this type of thing may select many and varied portions of scripture from which to read, but when commencing to preach return to the thumbing of one string, as one has perhaps rather sarcastically put it, yet nevertheless true:

"Ten thousand thousand are their texts,
But all their sermons one."

Preaching in the true biblical sense is to expound the scriptures, to present the whole range of truth. The Spirit of God places on record for us the manner of preaching in apostolic days. Of Paul we read: he "REASONED" with them out of the scriptures "OPENING" and "ALLEGING" (Acts 17:2-3). He "REASONED" and "PERSUADED" (Acts 18:4, 19). He "Reasoned of righteousness, temperance and judgment to come" (Acts 24:25). Paul did not just assert a truth, but sought to explain and establish that which he asserted, furnishing proof of what he taught, opening up the scriptures, showing the relation of one truth to another and thus, as he puts it in another place, "Declaring the whole counsel of God". Preaching of this kind is rare today. The solid exposition of doctrine with its solemn application has been superseded by what is known as 'Experience'; and what deplorable effects of this are seen. Ecumenism is advancing, popery is making great headway, yea, apostacy is on the rampage and nothing but sound doctrinal preaching will stem this rising tide.

Many argue, doctrine is cold and formal and produces legalism. This, however, is a travesty of biblical fact. If there is no DOCTRINE OF FAITH, then how can there be OBEDIENCE OF FAITH? The dear teaching of the Word of God is that one precedes the other. "All scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable (first) for DOCTRINE (then) for reproof, for correction, for instruction in

righteousness" (2Tim. 3:16). Again Paul exhorts Timothy "Take heed to thyself and unto the doctrine, continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself and them that hear thee" (1Tim. 4:16). Titus was to "affirm constantly" to the end that he "might be careful to maintain good works" (cf Titus 3:8). Our walk will largely be determined by our doctrinal belief and concept, (Rom. 6:17).

What was it that produced such dogged and unswerving allegiance during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries? It was the doctrinal preaching of the Reformers and Puritans which under God produced in men's hearts such a love and reverence for Truth that in their thousands they were willing to suffer persecution, privation, and even to hazard their lives rather than repudiate the Truths of Holy Scripture. Yet today one constantly hears doctrine decried, as it is said that it does not matter so much what a man believes so long as his practice is good. This is erroneous. Indifference to Truth betrays a heart that is not right before God.

However, having stated this, it is also equally erroneous to conclude that if one's creed is right and one has a good knowledge of doctrine, that it matters little how one acts. It is possible to deny the Faith by conduct as well by neglect of Truth. Looseness in our living is as much a repudiation of the Truth as is an open renunciation of doctrine. Hence, the true preacher must not only declare ALL Truth but apply ALL Truth, and bring it to bear forcibly on his hearers. The setting forth of the doctrines of scripture is not just to fill the head with biblical knowledge and spiritual facts, it is much more than this, it is for the yarning of the heart and the regulating of the life. This gives meaning to a phrase found in 1Tim. 6:3, "The doctrine which is according to Godliness". This statement rightly defines the nature and the design of doctrine; its end is ever to mould the mind and steer the life; Godliness is always the goal.

When the great truths of the Word of God are ministered to us and revealed to our understanding by the Holy Spirit's enabling, we are not to accept them as being abstract or even just to admire them because of their sublime and lofty concept, rather are they to have a powerful effect upon our lives. There is no doctrine in Holy Scripture which is there for mere speculative knowledge. God's design in His great revelation to us in the Scriptures is the purifying of our lives and the transforming of our characters.

Does not the great doctrine of the "Grace of God" which has brought us salvation teach us that we are to deny ungodliness, and worldly lusts, and live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world, cf Titus 2:11-12. The doctrines of Holy Scripture have in view our advancement and progress in the path of holiness. Said John Gill, "Doctrine and practise must go together and in order both to know and to do the will of God, instruction in doctrine and practice is necessary; and the one bringing first light will lead to the other". If Gill saw the need of this in his generation how much more should we.

The pressing need of the Churches today is surely for preachers to get down to an in-depth study of the Word and return to doctrinal preaching.

W.H.M.

The following article appeared in WATCHING AND WAITING and is reprinted by kind permission of the Editor

THE REVISED STANDARD VERSION

The Revised Standard Version is the copyright of the National Council of Churches in the U.S.A. The 25th anniversary of its publication was celebrated across the U.S.A. on the 24th and 25th November last and in the report in the NEW YORK TIMES of the 26th it was stated that 'it has become the first 'ecumenical' Bible since the Reformation, endorsed by most Protestant leaders, the Vatican and Eastern Orthodoxy. When it was first issued it was accused of being an ecumenical Bible but this was emphatically denied. Now, however, after 25 years it is blandly admitted

Now a Committee of 100 'scholars' is continuing revision of the Book for the National Council of Churches; and the committee has agreed that it is imperative to eliminate all sexist language. The Committee therefore has before it for serious consideration the amendment of the opening sentence of the Lord's Prayer to 'Our parent who art in heaven'. The Chairman of the Committee headed a panel of about 100 persons to discuss 'sexism and the Bible' and one speaker urged the panellists to pray to 'Our Mother which art in heaven'. The Chairman of the Committee has told the N.C.C. that 'we must purge it (the Bible) of masculine-biased language introduced by the King James translators.'

So it is proposed in Rom.5:7, instead of the present R.S.V. phrase 'one will hardly die for a righteous man' that the words 'a righteous man' be altered to 'someone who is righteous', and in the first Psalm, 'Blessed is the man who walks not, etc' be changed to 'Blessed are those who walk not, etc'. Many similar amendments are proposed. Because the Bible condemns the modern legislation making men and women equal in all things, the Bible must be amended to accommodate the modern notions.

Surely now the fundamentalist churches and individuals who have foolishly used the R.S.V. will see where its translators are really leading them and avoid entirely all references to it in their public ministry. The R.S.V. has been all along the work of the Devil to lead the minds of the people of God away from certain vital truths and it may now be clearly seen so to be.

(We are indebted to the 'CHRISTIAN BEACON' for some of the foregoing facts).

THE CHRISTIAN SABBATH - 5
by John P. Thackway, DEVIZES.

For the true Christian, the commandments of God are not legal but spiritual and vital. This is because he enjoys the blessings of the covenant of grace, one of which is that the Lord has put his law in the inward parts and written it upon the heart (Jer.31:33 Heb.8:10). Therefore, like Paul, he 'delights in the law of God after the inward man' (Roms.7:22). The law by which he is ruled is as dear to him now as the gospel by which he is saved. The motive too, from which he obeys this law follows in a similar way. Love for his Lord and his neighbour prompts the keeping of the commandments (Psa.119:10; Jn.14:15; Matt.22:37-40; Rom.13:8-10; 1Tim.1:5). And in this way they do not seem at all burdensome (1Jn.5:3; 2Jn.6). By this means, the righteousness of the law (ie conformity to its requirements Deut.6:25; Lk.1:6) is fulfilled in him, as he walks, not after the flesh but after the Spirit (Roms.8:4; Gal.5:22-25).

Now all this is true of us in regard to the sabbath, or Lord's Day. We are commanded to "remember it, to keep it holy". Our obedience, therefore, will not spring from a sense of duty or legalistic necessity. It will simply be part and parcel of our being true Christians. If our souls are full of love to God, we shall long to yield full obedience and work true righteousness here. We will say, in the words of the psalmist "with my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments ... make me to go in the path of thy commandments; for therein do I delight". (Psa.119:10,35). Thus, because this day is the sabbath of the Lord we love, keeping it for him is envisaged as being "a delight" (Isa.58:13).

Last time we began to consider something of what it should mean for us to "remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy". This time we conclude the series on this subject with some closer application of these biblical principles. Here, we seek to apply the word of God to more particular duties regarding the Lord's day. At this point it is necessary to note that believers have differed among themselves. There has not always been agreement as to what the biblical relationship is between the Sabbath and the Lord's day for this purpose. Is the Old Testament sabbath our pattern for how the New Testament sabbath should be kept? Or does the New Testament sabbath modify and relax

the stringency of the Old Testament one? Who is our principal guide here - Moses or Christ? The Old Testament or New Testament Church? In answer to this, the words of J.C. Ryle are full of wisdom and should be weighed well: "I must plainly say, that I cannot entirely agree with those who tell us that they do not want a Jewish sabbath, but a Christian one. I doubt whether such persons dearly know what they mean. If they object to a Pharisaic sabbath, I agree with them; if they object to a Mosaic sabbath, I would have them consider well what they say. I can find no dear evidence that the Old Testament sabbath was intended by Moses to be more strictly kept than the Christian Sunday. The case of the man stoned for gathering sticks on the sabbath (Num.15:32-36) is dearly not a case in point; it was a special offence, committed under specially heinous aggravations, in the very face of Mount Horeb and just after the giving of the law. It is no more a precedent than the striking dead of Ananias and Sapphira, in the Acts, for lying; and there is no proof that the punishment was ever repeated. My own belief is, that the explanations of the law of the sabbath given by our Lord are the very explanations which Moses himself would have given. I have a very strong suspicion that, allowing for the difference of the two dispensations, David, Samuel and Isaiah would not have kept their sabbath very differently from St John and St Paul."

We are reminded again here, that in our consideration of this subject, appeal must be made to "all the counsel of God". We must not drive a wedge between the Testaments. One does not modify, far less cancel out, the other. Both contain the people of God, and the God of that people. Although the revelation is progressive and cumulative, it is all one. The scriptures are a unity, and to that unity we now look as we consider further how we must "remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy". As we do, some words of the Puritan George Swinnock are apposite: "reader, if I were to counsel thee how to spend a market-day, so that thou mightest gain much wealth and treasure, I doubt not but thou wouldst hearken to me. I am now to advise thee how to spend the Lord's day, the market-day for thy soul, so that thou mayest get the true measure, durable riches and righteousness; I pray thee to hear and obey the directions which I have to deliver to thee from the Lord for that end".

Because of the peculiar nature of this day, our keeping it must really begin before it arrives. That is, there must be a

certain amount of preparation for it on our part. This seems to be implied in the very wording of the fourth commandment: The word 'remember' has the idea of provident foresight, making ready, a due anticipation. The Jews of old realised this. In Mk.15:42 we read, "And now when the evening was come ... it was the preparation, that is, the day before the sabbath". For them, this preparation took place the day before, beginning at 6 pm, which they called the sabbath eve. Among other things, it took the form of attending to all the domestic and mundane matters that could possibly be done before the sabbath arrived. They would, in the words of one authority, "Chop herbs, sweep the house, cleave wood, kindle the fire and such like things". This reduced the number of chores that had to be done on this holy day to an absolute minimum and left it almost completely free for the worship of God. The meaning of the words in Isa. 58:13-14 was then realised: "If thou shalt keep thy foot from my sabbath (i.e. from treading on it with unnecessary earthly preoccupations) then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord". Now this is an excellent principle for us to follow. If we love our Lord and his day as we ought, then we shall want it to be given over to him as fully as possible. Due preparation will be diligently made in order for this to be so. We shall then reap the benefit. Come the Lord's day, we shall not be found like Martha 'cumbered about with much serving ... careful and troubled about many things', but be free like Mary to 'sit at Jesus' feet, and hear his word' (Lk.10:39-42). Other kinds of preparation should be made too. It is a mistake to stay up very late Saturday night - or Sunday morning! This makes being refreshed for the Lord's day difficult. If we find ourselves among those who habitually feel sleepy during the services, then this point is all the more important. It is a good policy also, to rise early on Sunday morning (Jn.20:11 Psa.63:1). This will allow time to prepare for the activities of the day. May we thus "prepare to meet our God" on his holy sabbath, and thereby keep it for his glory and our good.

to be continued.

"You may go to heaven without health, without wealth, without pleasure, without friends, without learning, but you can never go to heaven without Christ".

William Dyer (1665)

"Spiritual peace and sloth will never dwell together in the same soul and conscience".

John Owen

ANNOUNCEMENTS & INFORMATION

The Annual Church Meeting was held on Thursday 16th. November. This was a most happy occasion and marked by a sense of deep spirituality. After the singing of the hymn "We who would lead Thy flock must be, Shepherd of Israel, led by Thee", Mr. Bennett led us in prayer and thanksgiving. Mr. Molland then read the 15th Chapter of Hebrews and gave a short message on verses 7-9.

The Treasurer gave a statement of the accounts for the year ending 30th September 1978: a year of quite heavy expenditure; for, in addition to our regular expenses, over one thousand pounds had to be spent on structural repairs, yet our needs have been met in a truly wonderful way.

Mr. Bridge, reporting on the literature distribution work, told us that somewhere in the region of 3,500 booklets had been systematically given out over the past two to three years. An account was also given on the Bookstall which was commenced at the end of April 1978. During the 6 months to date sales have amounted to £141. These two sections of literary work which are both under the supervision of elders and deacons are very valuable and encouraging aspects of our church life.

This quarter is also to see the commencement of visitation and distribution of attractive coloured folders containing a Christian message and an invitation to the services at North Road Chapel. Such folders are to be published and regularly circulated every two months in the immediate vicinity.

The secretary then spoke on behalf of the elders and deacons regarding certain matters which had been before them for some considerable time. The church fully entered into these things and shared the concern: a spirit of love and unity was most marked. As will be seen elsewhere in this magazine, a change has been made in the order of service on Sunday mornings, as was outlined and discussed at this meeting.

We are just getting into our study of 'The Life of David' which is proving to be of great interest and profit to us all. On Sunday evenings we shall be returning to refresh our minds with that subject of all subjects "The Attributes of God", which was such a blessing to us some

years ago. The series on 'The prayers of the Apostle Paul' will continue on Thursday evenings.

In addition to this, ministry will also be given by the following brethren:

Thursday evening	25 th Jan	Mr D.J.Hayman - Bow
"	"	8 th Feb
		Missioner from The London City Mission
Sunday evening	11 th Feb	Mr W.Bennett - Bideford
Thursday evening	22 nd Feb	Mr D.J.Hayman - Bow
"	"	1 st Mar
		Mr W.Bennett - Bideford
Sunday morning & evening	4 th Mar	Mr J.Birmingham - Tiverton
Thursday evening	22 nd Mar	Mr D.J.Hayman - Bow
Sunday morning & afternoon	25 th Mar	Mr H.G.Bedford
Thursday evening	29 th Mar	Mr Alex Luther - London

PLEASE NOTE: As is our usual practice, on the first Thursday in the New Year (4th January), the whole of the service will be devoted to prayer, and held in the main chapel.

Let us be much in prayer to our Head for His enabling and blessing in all these matters, not forgetting to be ever thankful for all His help and goodness to us in the past.

"What will you do, if you begin to die naturally, before you live spiritually? If the tabernacle of nature be taken down before the temple of God be raised up; if your paradise be laid waste before the tree of life be set up in it; if you give up the ghost, before you ever receive the Holy Ghost; if the sun of your life set within you, before the Sun of Righteousness shines upon you; if the body be fit to be turned into the earth, before the soul be fit to be taken to heaven. If the second birth have no place in you, the second death shall have power over you".

William Dyer (1665)