

EXCERPTS FROM

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THE LINK

North Road Chapel (Evangelical)

BIDEFORD

Internet Edition

STAND FAST

"Time and tide wait for no man", so says the proverb. Another year has gone and we now enter 1981. As we look back, we recall the joys and the sorrows, the encouragements as well as the disappointments; the experiences which must inevitably cross our path as creatures of time. All these things, in some way or another, affect our individual lives, our family life and our church life: but as His redeemed children we know that "He worketh all things after the counsel of His own will" (Ephesians 1:11) - "As for God his way is perfect" (Psalm 18:30) - "All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28).

Let us never forget that all things move with divine precision to their appointed end. "The counsel of the Lord standeth forever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations" (Psalm 33:11). Our God is sovereign - "He doeth according to his will in the army of Heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?" (Daniel 4:35) - "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure:" (Isaiah 46:10). Well might the writer to the Hebrews speak of "the immutability of his counsel" (Hebrews 6:17).

It is in the sure knowledge of these things and the amazing fact that through His grace we have been brought into living and vital relationship with "The Eternal", that we have thus persevered, going now into the future, we do so in full assurance of faith knowing that we are members of "a kingdom which cannot be moved" (Hebrews 12:28). Whilst this is all gloriously true, that we are, through the sovereign favour of God, citizens of heaven, nevertheless, we are still upon earth, and on earth for a very real and specific purpose, "come to the kingdom for such a time as this..." (Esther 4:14) - "ye shall be witnesses unto me" (Acts 1:8) - "Ambassadors for Christ" (2 Corinthians 5:20). As citizens of "That better country", we find this world alien, indifferent, and indeed it can be hostile: so we are commanded to "STAND FAST".

This is an exhortation which we find several times in the scriptures, but more particularly is it used by the apostle Paul. As the true New Testament church was

established and began to develop, so it became increasingly apparent that there was a great and subtle power continually at work, both in the church and in the individual, endeavouring to move the soul away from the great fundamental realities of the Christian faith.

Our natural tendency is to stray and drift from what is of God: hence the Holy Spirit is constantly saying through the Word, "STAND FAST".

During his ministry, Paul spent some three or four weeks preaching in Thessalonica (Acts 17:2): a church was established there, and from a letter which he wrote to them later, it is obvious that the great doctrines of scripture had been thoroughly unfolded to them, for he writes confirming his teaching on many things - The Trinity, The Nature of Man, The work of the Holy Spirit, Election, Conversion, The second advent, and much more. As he reminds them in his epistle of these fundamental articles of the faith he says, in his second letter, "Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle." (2 Thess.2.15)

The great apostle writes in similar vein to Corinth. However, this company of believers were altogether different to those of Thessalonica, and although the whole counsel of God had been declared here as elsewhere, declension and departure from that true standard had taken place as in no other New Testament assembly.

The lax and loose practices of the inhabitants of Corinth had been reflected in the church; there was moral decline and pollution within the fellowship. There was sectarianism and many were carried away in their admiration of Greek wisdom and eloquence. Others were so obsessed with the sign gifts as to distort their whole meaning and purpose. They sought after light, excitable and sensational experiences rather than sober solid instruction, as had been ministered to them. Their church order was a shambles; an any man, free-for-all ministry was practised, no discipline was exercised and there was general disorder. They were not even giving visible expression to headship in their assemblies, as instructed by the apostle. The church at Corinth was a company of carnal and infantile believers, unruly and immature. Writes Paul to them - "Watch ye, STAND

FAST in the faith, quit you like men, be strong." (1 Cor. 16:13).

Later in life the apostle - he is now in prison - writes to the church at Philippi. The situation here was vastly different to that at Corinth. There was no unsound doctrine to correct, no church disorder, but there was great opposition to the gospel both from the Jews and Gentiles. The church was being persecuted and Paul was in bonds, but he says, "I am set for the defence of the gospel." (Philippians 1:17); further, he states that they at Philippi were all partakers of that same grace which had made him willing to go to prison for the confirmation of the gospel. (Cf. Phil.1:7).

I want you to understand, he says, that all these things will result in "the furtherance of the gospel" (Phil.1:12). Then, he declares, that he is prepared either to live or to die for this "Holy Cause". (Cf. Phil.1:22-24). Which ever way it is, he says, "whether I come and see you, or else be absent... STAND FAST in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel" (Phil.1:27).

He reminds them, that at the moment, things may look black: I could be taken - such is the hint which the beloved apostle gave - but we must be "set" for these things: God will be glorified in it all: His work will not suffer but will only be furthered. There must be no fear concerning the work of God, so "STAND FAST", "striving together", every man to his duty.

The maintenance of Christian testimony depends upon each individual being true to his or her commitment and all within a local church must stand together. There must be no drifting in this. Thus, did the great apostle Paul exhort, rebuke and encourage the early believers.

So, the Word of God comes to us His people as we embark upon a new year. There have been changes, setbacks and disappointments which have had to be faced up to, and some have experienced ostracism. But what of these things? We must press on, we must continue and STAND FAST and hold the traditions, not of men, but of "The faith", for this we are earnestly to contend. (Cf. Jude 3).

In our generation in Great Britain, we are not faced with a Philippian situation of hostile opposition and open persecution, but we are very much confronted with a Corinthian one. Spiritual democracies abound - every man doing that which is right in his own eyes. There is an ever-increasing swing from the pulpit to pew communication, and thus, the gifts of the great Head to his church are set aside for an any and every man ministry.

A claim too is made by many to a possession of the "sign gifts" of the apostles, which gifts, the Holy Spirit has himself told us shall cease and vanish away (1 Cor. 13:8).

Others are caught up with intellectualism and who must reconcile science (falsely so-called - 1 Timothy 6:20). with the Bible. Then, there are those who parade as great "apostles of love", who strive to reconcile Modernist, Liberals, Pseudo-Evangelicals, Romanist and any others who can be beguiled to join hands in the name of unity. Such may succeed in creating such an organisation but this will NOT be the church of the scriptures - The Bride of the Lamb.

As we observe all this activity going on around us, and on a world-wide scale, when confusion abounds and no discipline is exercised, the Word of God spoken to the church at Corinth is relevant and comes through to us in power, "Watch ye, STAND FAST in the faith, quit you LIKE MEN, BE STRONG", (1 Cor.16:13).

W.H.M.

Paul saith he did not dash the generous wine of God's word with the water of man's conceit (see 2 Cor.2:17.) No, he gave them pure gospel.

William Gurnall

CALVIN'S DOCTRINE & PRACTICE OF PREACHING

(Continued)

Preaching and the Spirit of God.

"It is indeed certain" says Calvin "that those who plant and those who water are nothing, but whenever God is pleased to bless their labour he makes their preaching efficacious by the power of his Spirit, and the voice which is in itself mortal is made an instrument to communicate eternal life" (Comm, on 1 Pet.1:25). In Calvin's thinking the preached word becomes effective when it is powerfully applied to the hearts of those who hear by the Spirit of God. The power of preaching is not found in subtle rhetoric or emotionalism but in the working of God's Spirit through it.

In the commentary on Ezekiel 2:2 Calvin says "The work of the Spirit then is joined to the Word of God. But a distinction is made that we may know that the external word is of no avail by itself unless animated by the power of the Spirit". He says on Romans 10:17 (Faith cometh by hearing): "This is a remarkable passage with regard to the efficacy of preaching, for he testifies that by it faith is produced. He had indeed before declared that by itself it is of no avail; but when it pleases the Lord to work, it becomes the instrument of his power. And indeed, the voice of man can by no means penetrate into the soul ... the light also of faith is something sublimer than what can be conveyed by man. But all these things are no hindrances, that God should not work effectually through the voice of man so as to, create faith through his preaching".

But Calvin did not identify the Spirit with the preached Word. The Spirit is not tied to the preaching. Preaching is a human activity, with no more of the divine in it than any other ordinary human action: the ministry of the Spirit is a sovereign work. But preaching becomes effective by God's adding his Spirit to it. It consists in the enlightening of the mind to understand and receive the Gospel. This is demonstrated in the following two passages: "When Paul calls himself a minister of the Spirit, he does not mean by this that the grace of the Spirit and His influence were tied to his preaching so that he could,

whenever he pleased, breathe out the Spirit along with the utterance of his voice ... We are then ministers of the Spirit, not as if we hold him enclosed within us or as it were captive ... but because Christ through our instrumentality illuminates the minds of men, renews their hearts, and regenerates them wholly". (Comm, on 2 Cor.3:16). "See how God works through the Word preached that it is not a voice which sounds only in the air and then vanishes; but God adds to it the power of the Spirit". (Sermons on 2 Timothy).

Whilst acknowledging that the Spirit of God is not necessarily to be found working through the preaching, yet it is something to be expected. "No preacher should despair at the thought of his own insufficiency, for if God has really called him it will not be in vain, but he will guide him and use his feebleness in his service. When the preacher has done all that he can, there remains to him only to cry in helplessness 'Come, Holy Spirit!'" (Sermons on 1 Timothy).

The Art of Preaching

If the preacher is dependent on the Spirit to convince his hearers of the truth, is there then no art in preaching? The preacher is powerless of himself to turn men to salvation; this is God's work alone - but how does God do it? He works through preaching. But God does not work through the preacher as through a passive oracle - but through the words he speaks. It is purely human speech and is therefore governed by the laws of human speech (vocabulary, grammar and syntax etc.).

We have seen that the *kerugma*, the public proclamation of the herald, involves the shunning of "words of wisdom" and "persuasive words of man's wisdom". But does that exclude all eloquence? Not necessarily. To quote Calvin's commentary on 1 Cor.1:17: "Eloquence is not at all at variance with the simplicity of the Gospel, when it does not only disdain to give way to it and be in subjection to it, but also yields service to it as a handmaid to her mistress ... That eloquence is not to be despised in which there is no tendency to lead Christians to be taken up with the outward glitter of words, or intoxicate them with empty delight, or tickle their ears with its empty sound, or cover the cross of Christ with its empty show as with a curtain, but on the

contrary tends to lead us back to the native simplicity of the Gospel, tends to exalt the simple preaching of the cross by voluntarily abasing itself and, in fine, acts the part of the herald”.

In other words, eloquence for its own sake, eloquence for the sake of effect, art for art's sake, has no place in preaching; but where it is strictly subjected to the primary nature of preaching, i.e. proclamation, then it is not to be shunned. Eloquence, rhetoric, oratory, must be kept firmly in place - that of a servant.

You can look at it from another point of view. Preaching is a branch of oratory and shares many qualities in common. There is however a very important difference: oratory on the one hand is concerned with what can be logically and rationally proved and so its purpose is to persuade and it uses all means at its disposal to that end; preaching, however, is dealing with supernatural things. with things which by their very nature cannot be rationally proved, and so it does disservice to the Gospel if such an attempt is made. It is the Spirit's work to bring a soul to the persuasion of the Truth and the preaching must remain a declaration of the Truth.

The art of preaching therefore, is the pursuit of clarity of style and simplicity of speech. The skill called for is careful exegesis in preparation, faithful explanation of the meaning and thorough application to the hearers.

(to be continued)

“Christians are like the several flowers in a garden, that have upon each of them the dew of heaven, which, being shaken with the wind, they let fall their dew at each other's roots, whereby they are jointly nourished, and become nourishers of each other.”

John Bunyan.

THE BIBLICAL CASE FOR CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

By Malcolm H. Watts, Salisbury

Scripture plainly teaches that the Church of God may be viewed from two standpoints. It may be seen as the whole company of God's people in every age and in every place (e.g. Eph.5:25-27; Col. 1:18), or as the smaller company of believers meeting in one particular place, (e.g. Matt.18:17 Acts 14:23). A distinction is often made by referring to the one as "the universal church" and to the other as "the local church."

All who have been redeemed by the blood of Christ and called by the Spirit of God are members of the great universal church, but it is God's will that our membership of the universal church should be expressed by membership in a local church. The need for this is questioned by some, but God has made it quite clear in His Word that there is such a thing as church membership and that every true Christian ought to be a member in a local church.

Careful consideration must be given to the Bible's teaching on this subject.

(1) The local church and church membership were obviously important in early Christianity. When the Lord Jesus gave His great commission, He implied there would be, throughout the Gospel age, churches with members. He said: "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." (Matt.28:18-20). To obey that missionary command, they had to "teach (literally: 'make disciples of') all nations." Then they had to baptize all true disciples. After that, it was their duty to gather the converts together so that regular instruction could be given in the doctrine and precepts of Christianity. This meant the establishment of Christian churches, with Christians as committed to those churches as scholars to their schools.

(2) The preaching of the Gospel on the day of Pentecost was singularly blessed by God and the record tells us that "they that gladly received his word were baptized, and the

and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls." (Acts 2:41). The blessing was continued and we read that "the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." (Acts 2:47). The word "added" means "put to" or "placed beside." Its use in the first instance (v.41) deserves attention. The fact that such a statement concerning the numbers added to the Church was made, in addition to what had been said about their conversion, indicates that this adding is not to be equated with the unseen response of the heart to the Gospel, but rather with the visible act of the incorporation into the community following faith and baptism.

(3) A rather distinctive expression is used to describe entrance into the fellowship of a church. After God's judgement had fallen on Ananias and Sapphira, the Bible tells us that insincere and hypocritical people no longer tried to attach themselves to the church: "And of the rest durst no man join himself to them." (Acts 5:13). That, however, is exactly what true converts did do. They "joined" the church. The meaning of the word used here is "to cement together" or "to unite." Elsewhere it is used to describe an entering into service of employment (Luke 15:15) and even of a coming together by way of marriage (Matt.19:5 - "Cleave" of Eph.5:31). In both these instances it not only has the idea of a close personal relationship but also the thought of consent and agreement. A contract or covenant is implied. This is precisely how a person becomes a member of a church. No one has the right to assume that they automatically belong. There has to be a deliberate act of commitment by the Christian and by the church, and mutual acceptance.

(4) There is a particularly significant incident in the early history of the church. After his conversion to Christ at Damascus, Paul made his way to Jerusalem and wanted to "join himself to the disciples" Acts 9:26 - the same word as that used in 5:13). The Jerusalem church would not receive him into fellowship: at least, not until Barnabas had supported his application (Acts 9:27,28). There would have been no objection to his entering the congregation. Unbelievers were often present when the church assembled (1 Cor.14.24). This believer was seeking more than a place among the worshippers. He desired the full rights of Christian fellowship and for the church at Jerusalem that was quite another matter. There was certainly a difference

in those days between being a member of the 'congregation' and a member of 'the church'.

(5) It is of fundamental importance accurately to define the nature of a properly constituted church. Christians living in the same locality do not necessarily make a church in the New Testament sense. When Paul visited Ephesus there was no church there, although there was in that city "certain disciples" (Acts 19:2). Neither is it correct to say that a church exists only when Christians gather for public worship. That would be to contradict the apostle who tells us that there was a church at Corinth even when local Christians were not met together. He writes: "If therefore the whole church be come together..." (1 Cor.14:23). What then makes a properly instituted church? A church is formed when a company of believing people agree to join together (by giving and yielding themselves to one another - Eph.5:21; 1 Pet.5:5), so that they might keep the commandments and ordinances of the Gospel. When this is solemnly and publicly done, there is what the Bible calls "professed subjection unto the Gospel of Christ." (2 Cor.9:13).

(6) According to apostolic teaching, a church is a company of God's people who, having solemnly surrendered themselves to the Lord, unite together in a special covenant or agreement. Churches in the early days of Christianity were made up of those who "first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God." (2 Cor.8:5). In rededicating themselves like this, the believers of Macedonia showed the nature of their original commitment: it was to the Lord and to His people. This is how it should be today. When people, who give good evidence of being truly converted, want to belong to a church, they must be willing to 'give' themselves, and the church must be willing, to 'receive' them (Acts 18:27; Rom.16:1,2). By mutual consent and engagement to one another, Christians form themselves into a church and by this same means the church increases its membership.

(To be continued).

ANNOUNCEMENTS and INFORMATION

The Annual Church Meeting was held on Thursday 16th October 1980.

After singing the hymn "Head of the church and Lord of all", Mr. Bridge led in prayer, followed by a reading from the Word of God - Ephesians chapter 4 verses 1 to 16.

Recognition was given to Mr. Gee being 'set apart' to Eldership by the church and also his appointment as Secretary and accordingly he was commended to the Lord in prayer.

The main item on the Agenda, after the various reports etc. had been considered, was that relating to the Trusteeship of the Church. It has been necessary to appoint new Trustees in order to bring the number up to legal requirements. At the same time the whole position has been carefully examined, both in regard to the legal aspect and also the spiritual basis, as governed by the Trust Deed.

We were concerned, that, as far as is humanly possible, the doctrinal stance of the church should be preserved for future generations, in the will of the Lord. With this in mind the names of certain brethren, who were in full agreement with our position were put before the meeting, and each was duly elected and unanimously approved in a constitutional way. One felt a sense of the deeply spiritual atmosphere which marked this occasion.

When the legal formalities had been completed and the Deed of Appointment had been prepared by the Solicitors, a further meeting was held, all the Trustees being present and the signing of the documents took place in the presence of the church. The names of the continuing Trustees are Messrs. W. Bennett and W. H. Molland. The newly elected Trustees are, Messrs. L. Potter, F. W. Bridge, and L. W. Gee (Members and Officers of the Church), and Messrs. H. B. Molland of Tiverton, K. Dix of Dunstable, K. F. T. Matruncola of Portsmouth, J. P. Thackway of Devizes and M. H. Watts of Salisbury. (The date of this meeting was the 11th December)

In addition we were pleased to have with us some who are like minded in the faith, to share this important and historic event in the life of the church at North Road.

The proceedings commenced at 11am. with the singing of the Hymn "We come unto our fathers' God"; Mr. Kenneth Dix then led in prayer and Mr. Malcolm Watts read from the scriptures, Chapter 1 verses 9-20 and Chapter 2 verses 1-6 of the Book of The Revelation. This was followed with an address by Mr. K. F. T. Matruncola who ministered the Word with authority and great profit.

At 12.30 pm. a buffet luncheon was served and this was followed at 1.30 pm. by a meeting which was occupied initially with the signing of the documents by the Trustees. After the singing of the Hymn "O God our help in ages past" Mr. W. H. Molland gave a brief historical survey of the events which had marked the formation and development of the Church over the years and which had led up to the proceedings of this particular day. In all this we perceived the guiding and preserving hand of our God.

Each Trustee was then introduced prior to their signature being given, following which all stood to sing the Hymn "Facing a task unfinished". We then engaged in a time of prayer and thanksgiving; this was concluded with the Hymn "Thy hand O God has guided, thy flock in every age".

Tea was then served and before we dispersed all joined again in praise, singing "How good is the God we adore". Altogether it was a day to be remembered, a unique occasion, when we were able to share with our friends our joy in confirming that the foundation of the church at North Road had been well and truly laid.

On Sunday the 7th December 1980 it was our joy and privilege to receive into the fellowship of the church our sister Mrs. Elsie Smith who has worshipped with us for some time. She is a dear sister whom we all love and esteem in the Lord.

Please note the following special dates.

Thursday 1st January 1981 - A Prayer meeting will be held in the main Chapel - 7.30 pm. in accordance with our usual practice at the commencement of a new year.

Thursday 5th February 1981 - The annual visit and report of the LONDON CITY MISSION.

Sunday 22nd March 1981 - This will be conducted by Mr. J. Cudmore of the Soldiers and Airmen Scripture Readers Association.

Thursday 2nd April 1981 - Mr. S. Ashdown of The Protestant Alliance will give an illustrated lecture, the subject being "OUR PROTESTANT THRONE".

1 Thessalonians 5.19, bids us 'quench not the Spirit'; and in the next words 'Despise not prophesyings'. Surely, he would have us know that the Spirit is dangerously quenched when prophesying, or preaching of the gospel is despised. Now the most notorious way of despising prophesying, is to turn our back on the ordinance and not attend it. When God sets up the ministry of the Word in a place, his Spirit then opens his school, and expects that all who would be taught for heaven should come hither. O take heed of playing truant, and absenting thyself from the ordinance upon any unnecessary occasion much less of casting off the ordinance..

(From 'The Christian in Complete Armour' - William Gurnall).