

EXCERPTS FROM

APRIL/JUNE 1981.

THE LINK

North Road Chapel (Evangelical)

BIDEFORD

Internet Edition

SACRAMENTS?

It is becoming increasingly apparent that religious ceremonial and pious platitude is fast becoming the staple diet of church going people throughout Christendom.

Sacraments, particularly the Lord's Supper are given undue and unwarranted emphasis as against forthright preaching of Divine Truth. What has been most marked over the past few years is the prominence given to Holy Communion in radio services, conferences, conventions, prayer fellowships, charismatic rallies and revival meetings. These are invariably 'rounded off' in this way, and Christmas, Easter and other festivals see a spate of communion services at all hours of the day and night. The great prominence which is thus given to sacraments is a most unhealthy sign.

The sacrament without the Word is an empty and meaningless thing which, not only leads to ritualism, but also to superstition. The preaching of the Word of God in its entirety by men, gifted of the Holy Spirit so to do, must ever be the central and dominant feature in the life of a church. To give undue prominence to sacraments and to allow the communion table to take precedence over the pulpit, will only create an unsound situation which will in turn have the most serious consequences. That sacraments are ALL important, is one of the major errors of Borne.

The element of PROTEST seems to have disappeared from Protestantism and sacramentalism has crept in. As the minds of people become thus conditioned, the church of Rome sees this and her efforts to gain the upper hand gets considerable impetus, and ecumenism and apostasy abound. The almost virtual disappearance of sound doctrinal preaching renders the people blind to the awful inroads of such error.

Consequently, it is said, even by men who claim to be evangelical (they are not), that the Romish Mass is but a slight variation of the Protestant concept of the Lord's Supper. Have we not witnessed over the past few years, the Roman Catholic Mass being celebrated in leading places of Protestant worship? Buildings which are legally set apart for the upholding of true Reformation biblical doctrine are used from time to time for this Christ dishonouring rite and people of many denominations become involved.

One has only to read Romish publications to see with what satisfaction it is viewed by those whose sole purpose is to subjugate all peoples to the dogma of the Romish Church, the end product of which is spiritual slavery. The secular press also, gives it a good spillage.

On Saturday 7th June 1986, the Express and Echo had a news item- "THE MASS, A BRIDGE OF TIME AND FAITHS". It went on to say, "for the first time since the Reformation a Roman Catholic Sunday Mass will be heard tomorrow in the Exeter Anglican Cathedral of St. Peter." At this service several thousand people attended. Would this have been the case had it been a service for the faithful exposition of the Word of God?

More recently, on the 24th January 1981, the same paper stated, "...MAKES HISTORY WITH A SERVICE". "The first Roman Catholic Mass for more than four centuries was celebrated at ...Parish Church as part of the week of prayer for Christian unity." The report then goes on to state that a Roman Catholic priest was invited by the local Anglican vicar to conduct the service. The R.C. priest, bringing his own altar, placed it in the nave and took the service from the westward facing position. The account continued - "members of other churches agreed that it would be a gesture of goodwill to make this invitation for this special week. Besides the Roman Catholic and Anglican, congregations, members of the ... Baptist Church and ... Gospel Hall were present at the service, as were residents from the Salvation Army Old Peoples' Home." This truly makes history, but it is tragic history.

Why are we witnessing such calamitous happenings? The main reason is that for several generations the sacraments (particularly the Lord's Supper) have been allowed to take precedence over the Pulpit and given undue prominence, certain sections of evangelicalism, also, being very guilty of this reversal. Divorced from the sound preaching of the Word the sacraments lose their true significance and become, in effect, an idolatrous practice and a situation arises when the Almighty has to say "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I also will forget thy children." (Hosea 4:6).

The Mass is far removed from the sacrament of the Lord's Supper; indeed, it is TOTALLY CONTRARY to the Word of God. As is so rightly stated in the Thirty-nine articles of the Church, of England: "Transubstantiation...is repugnant to the plain words of Holy Scripture, overthroweth the nature of the sacrament and hath given occasion to many superstitions." (Article 28) - "...the sacrifices of Masses... are blasphemous fables and dangerous deceits" (Article 31).

The truth is that Rome presents the Mass as a sacrifice, whereas the New Testament presents the Lord's Supper as a sacrament: but sad to say, very few know this today and both are looked upon as one and the same, with slight variations.

Due to a long neglect of thorough preaching, foolish Protestants (so called) are now become so gullible, the people are "destroyed through lack of knowledge" and sacramentalism is fast taking over. It should also be borne in mind that the purveyors of error depend on the ignorance of the masses of ordinary people. That the sacraments have a place, no one would deny, but the ministry of Holy Scripture takes priority.

The true observance of the Lord's Supper is far removed from so much of what can be seen today (even by those who would claim to be champions of orthodoxy). This sacred ordinance was instituted by the Lord for His true followers, to be observed within the context of a local church by truly regenerate men and women, and them ORLY if their hearts are pure and right before God AMD each other, (1 Cor.11:27-29) - Cf. Matt.5:23-24.

The Lord's Supper is not to be confused with the term •Breaking of Bread' which in the New Testament invariably means a common meal. By the accounts given to us in the Word of God as to its institution - Matt.26:26-29 - Mark 14:22-25 - Luke 22:19-22 - The Lord's Supper was for HIS OWN ONLY: it was not a public demonstration, neither was it a long-drawn-out thing: rather was it short, terse and very meaningful. In no way was it intended to oust or take precedence over the ministry of the Word of God. It is THIS which is of paramount importance and MEYER must the ministry take second place to the Communion Service.

W.H.M.

CALVIN'S DOCTRINE & PRACTICE OF PREACHING

(Continued)

Running Exposition

Calvin's method of preaching was to give a series of consecutive expositions through whole books of the Bible. Throughout his ministry in Geneva, Calvin preached twice on Sundays. Early in his ministry the City Council decreed that there should be a morning service on each weekday. Calvin also took these on alternate weeks. So, in the course of a fortnight Calvin preached ten sermons. The weekday sermons were always on the Old Testament and the Sunday ones on the New Testament except that occasionally in the afternoon he broke into the sequence to expound a Psalm. He hardly ever interrupted his series for the Church year.

The length of his text varied: those from the Old Testament histories and the Gospel narratives were usually between ten and twenty verses. Those on the New Testament epistles and other didactic passages were ordinarily two or three verses. Sermons on a single verse were by no means uncommon and occasionally there was more than one sermon on a passage.

In his ministry Calvin preached 200 sermons on Deuteronomy, 159 on Job, 343 on Isaiah, 189 on Acts, 65 on the Harmony of the Gospels and 54 on 1 Timothy. Other books he preached on were; Genesis, Judges, 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, all the prophets, most of the minor prophets, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, 2 Timothy, Titus and Hebrews.

The value of this method was that, primarily, it connected the preaching with Scripture. It kept him bound to expound the text. It kept him from any tendency to favourite subjects or from presenting a deficient view of Christianity. The people were led into the Scriptures and helped to a complete view of the Faith.

The Form of the Sermon.

A typical sermon had the following form:

1. Prayer.
2. Summary of the Preceding Sermon.
3. (a) Exegesis and Exposition of the First Section.
(b) Application and Exhortation to Obedience.
4. (a) & (b) as above for the second section and so on to the end of the text.
5. Bidding to Prayer including a Summary of the Sermon.

Calvin never used a sermon outline. There were no headings in his sermons. He expounded each section in the order it came in the text, applying it as he went along, then he came to the end of his treatment of a section in his text, he used stock phrases to make the break. A typical one is: "so that is what we have to gather from this passage. St. Paul goes on to say...."

He did not necessarily expound every point in the text slavishly but on occasion he selected the points which were of particular relevance to his congregation.

His sermons take, on average, about forty minutes to read aloud at a moderate pace. They may possibly have taken him a little longer to deliver since he was seriously afflicted with asthma.

Sermon Preparation.

Some have suggested that Calvin did not prepare for the pulpit. This is probably not so much a statement of fact (indeed, it is contradicted by the facts) as the expression of incredulity that he could have had time to do it. Ten sermons a fortnight is a lot to prepare year in year out. On top of this he saw to the publication of his commentaries» supervised new editions, revisions and translations of his Institutes; was involved in the affairs of the city council; produced numerous tracts and treatises; and sustained a voluminous correspondence. Add to this the fact that he had very poor health and it can be seen whence the conjecture arises.

But what are the facts? Let me quote one of his sermons on Deuteronomy: "If I enter the pulpit without deigning to glance at a hook and frivolously imagine to myself, 'Oh well, when I preach, God will give me enough to say' and come without troubling to study or thinking what I ought to declare and do not carefully consider how I must apply Holy Scripture to the edification of the people, then I should be an arrogant upstart!" And he says in the same place "God has promised that his blessing shall be upon the hands of those who work."

Badius tells us that Calvin's sermons "are not mealy-mouthed commonplaces, or sermons which he had up his sleeves to make them serve all. passages of Scripture like a shoe for all feet; but expositions - true, pure, plain and proper for the text he had to explain" (Preface to the 1558 edition of Sermons on the Deity of Christ etc.).

Calvin made a threefold preparation. First, he read what others had said on the text. There were actually very few commentaries available to him but he is known to have used Bucer's Commentary. Then he considered the teaching and how best it could be presented in a clear and easily remembered manner. Finally, he considered its application to the lives of the people and how to drive it home to their consciences.

He never made notes, but stored it in his memory - and he had an extremely good memory.

(To be continued)

"The moment the Church of God shall despise the pulpit, God will despise her. It has been through the ministry that the Lord has always been pleased to revive and bless His Churches".

C.H. Spurgeon.

"Moreover, because the preacher was wise he still taught the people knowledge; yea, he gave good heed and sought out, and set in order many proverbs." (Ecc.12:9).

THE BIBLICAL CASE FOR CHURCH MEMBERSHIP (Part 2)

By Malcolm H. Watts - Salisbury

(7) There must be an acknowledged subjection to the ways of the Lord and a submission to one another if Christians are to walk together as a church in all the ways of the Lord Jesus Christ. This neglected but important truth is found in the exhortation addressed to the Corinthian church. "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers." (2 Cor.6:14). The words, because they are written in warning, are in a negative form but the positive implication is that Christians should be 'yoked' with other Christians.

Although the injunction can legitimately be applied to marriage, it refers particularly to church membership. The context shows that Paul is speaking collectively: "For ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them..." (v.16); and the use of such words as 'fellowship' and 'communion' (v.14), so often used with reference to church life, makes clear that the apostle has in view here local church connections. The whole passage should be compared with 1 Cor.5:9-13 where Paul is quite definitely dealing with membership.

What he is saying in 2 Cor.6:14 is simply this: Christians must join themselves together by mutual agreement if they are to walk together in the ways of Christ. "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" (Amos 3:3).

(8) Every Christian ought to be formally and definitely related to one particular church. Writing to the Colossian, church, Paul refers to two people in an interesting way: "Onesimus...who is one of you" and "Epaphras, who is one of you." (Col.4:9, 12). Matthew Henry's comments on this are worth noting: "He (Onesimus) had been servant to Philemon, and was a member, if not a minister of their church:" "He (Epaphras) is one of you, one of your church." In those times every Christian belonged to a church. Further confirmation, is to be found in the Book of Acts. There we read that Peter and John, after appearing before the Jewish Council, returned to "their own company" (Acts 4:23). The church at Jerusalem was their church.

(9) God's pattern for the local church has been given to us. The tabernacle, so rich in symbolism, was intended to prefigure the church (2 Cor.6:16 cf. Lev.26:11,12). Bearing this in mind, it is significant that the curtains of the tabernacle were linked together by loops and taches (Exodus 26:1-14). This was designed to show us how, in a church, Christians ought to be joined together in an orderly way - a point brought out by the apostle in his description of the church as a «building fitly framed together." (Eph.2:21 cf. 4:16). We ought, therefore, to join together properly, in the closest of connections, so that the church might manifest biblical "order" (Col. 2:5 - 1 Cor.14:40).

(10) The Jews used to keep registers in which were written the names of all citizens. This explains Isaiah's reference to "every one that is written among the living in Jerusalem." (Isaiah 4:3 cf Ezra 2:62 - Nehemiah 7:5 - Ezek.13:9). These lists proved extremely useful and they had no scruples about keeping them, since support for the practice could be found in the writings of Moses (Exod.30:12 - Num.1:2;26:2). The evidence would seem to indicate that the early Christians kept similar records. Luke's mention of the fact that "the number of names together were about an hundred and twenty." Acts 1:15), suggests that a membership roll of some kind was even then in existence. Some words of the Lord Jesus, addressed to one of the churches in Asia Minor, tend to confirm that this was the case. "Thou hast a few names even in Sardis," He said, "which have not defiled their garments." (Rev.3:4). On this last verse, Adam Clarke comments: "As members of the church were all enrolled or their names entered in a book, when admitted into the church or when baptized, 'names' are here put for the 'people' themselves."

Why should any find this practice hard to accept? Every believer has his name already "written in Heaven" (Luke 10:20 - Philippians 4:3) and should not therefore hesitate to have it written in a list of local church members on earth.

(11) Baptism and the Lord's Supper are local church ordinances and they add considerable weight to the case for church membership. Designed as they are to express the oneness which believers enjoy (1 Cor.10:1-4 "Our fathers ... were all baptized ... and did all eat the same spiritual meat;

and did all drink the same spiritual drink..."), they impress upon us the necessity for real commitment to a local church.

Baptism witnesses to an entrance into the visible company of God's people: "Then they that gladly received the Word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls." (Acts 2:41 Cf. Matt. 28:19,20). Furthermore, as an act of immersion, it speaks not only for voluntary and entire consecration to the church, but also of the obliteration of differences and merging into one spirit: "As many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ ... ye are all one (i.e. one man, or one body, referring to the local church - 1 Cor.12:27) in Christ Jesus." (Gal.3:27,28).

In the Lord's Supper, expression is given to the close fellowship all church members enjoy. Paul writes: "For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread." (1 Cor.10:17). He evidently would have us see in the loaf of bread, not only a picture of Christ, but also a picture of the local church, His body. Just as there are many grains tightly compacted together in one loaf, so Christians ought to be closely joined together in a church. Paul develops this further. He draws attention to the fact that "we are all partakers of that one bread." The significance of this would seem to be that anciently covenants were ratified by solemn feasts. There are several biblical examples of this. Abimelech and his companions said to Isaac: "Let there be now an oath betwixt us, even betwixt us and thee, and let us make a covenant with thee... And he (Isaac) made them a feast, and they did eat and drink." (Gen.26:28,30. See also Gen.31:44,54; 2 Sam.3:12,20). Christians, then ought to join together in a sacred covenant. This will involve a solemn acceptance one of another and definite promises to both live and serve together as a church of Christ, observing all His ordinances. This done, the Lord's Supper will take on new meaning. It will be a covenant feast enjoyed by those who want to confirm their commitment to the church.

(12) The churches formed in the New Testament days had two kinds of officers: Elders (teaching and ruling Elders), sometimes called Bishops or Presbyters, and Deacons, (Philippians 1:1 - 1Tim.3). Each church had the right to choose and appoint its own officers. Paul and Barnabas are

said to have "ordained them elders in every church." (Acts 14:23). Such were set apart by the church and given recognition. The same procedure was adopted with the Deacons. The apostles left the choice to the church: "Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said ... brethren, look ye out among you seven men ... whom we may appoint over this business." (Acts 6:2,3). In both cases the voice of the whole church was considered (see also: Acts 1:23-26; 13:1-3). Such important responsibilities would never have been given to mixed companies but only to those who had shown, that they were fully committed to the Lord and the church. Thus, the biblical method for appointing church officers necessitates a membership.

(13) Church offices have been, ordained by God to meet particular and definite needs. The office of Elder is concerned with the teaching of God's Word, the administration of the sacraments and the spiritual oversight of the flock (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2-4 - the word 'feed' would be better translated 'tend', as it includes all the duties of the shepherd). The fact that Elders are to be 'shepherds' implies that there should be a specific people for whom they are to care. Shepherds look after one particular flock: "And there were in the same country shepherds abiding, in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night." (Luke 2:8; cf. 15:4). they do not take care of sheep generally, nor of such sheep as happen to be around, at the time. The analogy demands a membership. This also applies to the office of Deacon. Those appointed to the Diaconate are to "serve tables" (Acts 6:2). This means responsibility for the distribution of food to the poor of the church and it came to include, as a natural development from that, 'serving' at the 'Lord's table'. However understood, the phrase denotes providing for the local church family (1 Tim.3:12,15). Note: A man. who cannot look after his own household proves himself quite unable to do the work of a Deacon, since that work involves providing for another household).

Both 'flock and 'family' are words indicating fixed and abiding relationships and a set number of Christians, all known to each other, forming one distinct and complete company - "the whole lump", "the whole body" or "the whole church, ." (1 Cor.5:6 - 12:7 - 14:23).

(14) A church sometimes has to deal with serious moral and doctrinal faults. The Elders have important responsibility here, admonishing privately and, when that fails, publicly (1 Thess.5:12 - 1 Tim.5:20 - Titus 3:10). That in itself is an argument for membership, since such officers could only have authority over those formally joined to the church. Just as an employer has control only of those who have committed themselves in some contract of employment, and just as a headmaster can expect obedience only from those who really belong to the school.

Let us now develop this argument a little further. If all warnings and exhortations from the Eldership prove to be of no avail, effecting no change of heart in the person (or persons) concerned, it is sadly necessary to proceed to the point of removing such people from fellowship. This very solemn action on the part of the church is alluded to several times in the New Testament and is variously described - (1 Cor.5:2 - Gal.5:12 - 2 John 10 cf. John. 9:34,35). Needless to say, it ought never to be done lightly and should only be considered when sin or error is stubbornly continued in - (Matt.18:15-20). When someone has to be removed, the whole church has to meet and the church's decision must be formally and publicly declared. The apostle writes: "In the name of the Lord Jesus, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." (1 Cor 5:3,4 - Note: This means that he is no longer to be reckoned a member of Christ's visible church but as one belonging to the world - that sphere over which Satan holds peculiar sway. 2 Cor.4:4). No since this is the biblical way of rejecting a professing believer, it follows that the church ought to receive members with the same degree of carefulness and seriousness. This will mean a meeting with the Elders, after which the gathered church will be able to declare its willingness to admit those duly recommended for membership.

(15) There are certain very obvious similarities between the assembly of God's people in Old Testament times and an assembly of God's people in New Testament times. The word 'church' is applied to both (Acts 7:36 - 1 Thess.1:1). Now the Israelites had certain rules concerning whom they should admit into their society (Deut.23:1-3). and for certain sins

and crimes, a man. could be excluded from the privileges of the Jewish people (Lev.17:3:4 - Num.12:15). In this way, the holiness of the community was safeguarded and, under the leadership of godly men, they could continue in their obedience to the laws of God. If a local church today is to maintain its standards and preserve its order, like care must be taken. Only those who give satisfying evidence of being truly Christ's should be admitted to full Christian communion with attendant privileges, otherwise there will be a terrible defiling of sacred things. To secure its own purity, therefore, the church must judge the credibility of every profession of faith, and a professing believer ought only to be admitted to full fellowship when the gathered church gives its consent. The church as a whole has the God-given right to decide the question of its own membership (Rom.14:1 - 1 Cor.5:12).

Are you in an unbiblical position? You are, I fear, if as a truly born-again Christian you are a mere 'church attender'. Far too many reckon that sufficient. The Word of God teaches that it is your duty as a Christian to become a member of the local church. To disobey God in such a matter is inexcusable.

The scriptures considered above will combine to minister a rebuke to some church members. Those who have made a covenant to meet together for the purpose of observing Christ's commandments and ordinances ought to be both diligent and regular in attending the Prayer Meeting and the worship of God's House. Although there will be times when, for one reason or another, we have to worship elsewhere, the Bible nowhere gives countenance to the practice some adopt of periodically visiting other churches in the area in order to have 'a change'. That may suit their temperament, but it is certainly not according to God's revealed Will. As members we should have a commitment to our church. We owe it loyalty and support. Let us see to it that the promises we have made before God are kept.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Thursday 4th June 1981 - 7.45 pm.

Speaker - MR.F. STANBURY of Bow.

Sunday 21st June 1981 - 3.30 pm.

Speaker - MR. B. WERNER of Smeatharpe,

Sunday 28th June 1981.

Mr. H. ROBERTS, of Penzance will preach at 10.45 am
and 6.30 pm.

Preliminary Announcement:

Our ANNUAL BIBLE CONVENTION has been arranged to take place on Saturday 25th July 1981.

Our guest speaker is Mr. PETER HALLIHAN of Shrewsbury.

We have ever in mind that there are some of our number who are unable to gather with us due to illness or infirmity due to advancing years. To such we have a special concern and you are ever in our prayers. "...Wherefore also we pray always for you..." 2 Thess. 1:11.