

EXCERPTS FROM

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THE LINK

North Road Chapel (Evangelical)

BIDEFORD

Internet Edition

THE LOCAL CHURCH - A SPIRITUAL FAMILY

There can be no doubt that a well-ordered home and family is one of the most valuable and precious of all material blessings.

It is the place of security and protection, where food and nourishment is provided and hungry appetites are satisfied where rest and relaxation from toil are regular features, where there is happy and helpful conversation« an environment in which the young are both reared and trained the sick and aged are nursed, where warmth and affection are generated and joy and happiness reigns.

Such was the kindness and wisdom of our God to ordain such an institution in His good providence. God has not only made such happy and wonderful provision for us in our natural family life, but has also provided for us in our spiritual life.

He has ordained local churches, companies of true believers who gather in a corporate way according to the ordering of the Head, and it is the will of God that all his children should have such a home.

In the sovereign purposes of God every individual elect soul is called by the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit and born of God, but it is not his will that such shall live in isolation, for they are 'born of God' and "receive the adoption of sons" (Gal.4:5). These individuals are not to remain alone, but, "He setteth the solitary in families" (Psalm 68:6). They are to be added to the church - local as well as universal.

There are, however, in our day and age many companies of men and women who meet in a corporate way and would claim to be churches, to offer a spiritual home, but where the set up and practice is far removed from the pattern which God has laid down for the running of a stable home for his family. His children are to live, to feed, to behave and to manage the spiritual home and family in an orderly way, according to his mandate and direction.

For this reason a local church should always make very clear its doctrinal position and declare its form of administration it is not sufficient for a local company to say "we have the Bible". What is important is how the Scriptures are applied, therefore, there must be a clear statement of belief and code of practice. If this be truly Biblically based and rightly interpreted, than a person joining such a church should do so, only, on condition that they are prepared to accept the position as set out.

This, in effect, is taking up one's place in a home and a family circle: a very intimate and tender area and it is a realm in which the vital ingredient is love. Indeed, this is the ROYAL COMMANDMENT enjoined by our King upon all his subjects - "A NEW COMMANDMENT I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another". (John 13:34).

Following regeneration our relationship^ to Christ and to each other demands this - "In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother." (1 John 5:10). - "Beloved let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God: for God is love. (1 John 4:7-8).

Mutual love to each other within the family is the very evidence of being regenerate, and it is the love for each other within a fellowship which engenders warmth and a sense of belonging. As a natural home without love degenerates into a cold formal institution, so will a church. Love is the VITAL INGREDIENT. Thus, a local church becomes a place of joy and delight. - "Behold, how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" (Psalm 155:1).

It is incumbent upon EVERY MEMBER to foster and to demonstrate this. - "Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind." (Phil.2:2). - "Now I beseech you brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all. speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment." (1 Cor. 1:10). This love of which the

Scriptures speak is not sentimental, it is a love founded upon truth.

A Christian is not to love regardless of truth. This is why church membership is such a tender and vital area. Unity upon truth is the basis of our love. - "That ye may with ONE MIND and ONE MOUTH glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." (Rom.15:6). - "...that they may ALL call upon the name of the Lord, to serve him with one consent." (Zeph.3:9). - "and this is love that we walk after his commandments." (2 John 6).

It is in the measure in which church members observe and thus act that the head is known and is present within the family. - "Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you." (2 Cor.13:11).

But there is yet more to this. It is the duty of members within the family to sympathize with each other, and never to be hard or indifferent: - "Rejoice with them that do rejoice and weep with them that weep." (Rom.12:15). - "And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it." (1 Cor.12:26).

This sympathy and concern is not in spiritual matters only, it pertains to every sector of life. - "Now when Job's three friends heard of all this evil that was come upon him, they came every one from his own place; ... for they had made an appointment together to come to mourn with him and to comfort him." (Job 2:11) - "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ." (Gal.6:2). These things were not written to pastors, elders or deacons in particular, they were written to the church - THE MEMBERS.

As in the family, so in the church, prayer is a vital part. We are to pray for all men; we are to pray for the whole household of faith, but very specially for the local flock with which we are so intimately connected - "The holy hill of Zion" to which we belong, that "peace may be within her walls and prosperity (spiritual) in her dwelling".

Members of a well-ordered household will not stoop to gossip or to slander. Such behaviour is never to be known within the local spiritual family. - "...idle, wandering about from house to house; and not only idle, but tattlers also and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not." (1 Tim.5:13). - "The words of a talebearer are as wounds..." (Prov.18:18). - "Where no wood is, there the fire goeth out: so where there is no talebearer, the strife ceaseth." (Prov.26:20).

Members of the local family must ever separate themselves from the world, for such has a defiling influence« a member is no longer an isolationist, he is in a church state - a part of a body - therefore, his actions and conduct affect the whole. The church is "A GARDEN ENCLOSED" and his or her activities are within that enclosure. We are a separate people, not reckoned among the nations and not to be entangled in any way or be unequally yoked.

It is recorded to the honour of the early church that - "...they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers." (Acts 2:42). They were diligent and constant in public assembly for worship. However, some thirty years later the keen edge had worn off with some, and the Spirit of God speaks in clear tones of rebuke - "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching." (Heb.10:25). This is one of the most vital aspects of family life. God in his gracious providence gives us a home, raises up men - gifts within the church - and furnishes a table whereby our spiritual needs are met. Neglecting to be present at the times appointed is a serious matter and is injurious to our own souls: it also disturbs the harmony of the family.

As in our temporal families, so in the spiritual; if any member is not present it casts a cloud. It is as every place is occupied at the meal table and every chair round the hearth, that the family spirit is maintained and love and affection engendered.

Order and dignified conduct are the hallmarks of a well-conducted home; so in the church of God, and reverence should always be characteristic of an assembly of God's

people. It is the dwelling place of God. "...holiness becometh thine house, O Lord, for ever." (Psalm 93:5). This has reference not to bricks and mortar but to the spiritual temple of which the MEMBERS are a part. "... be ye holy; for I am holy", (1 Peter 1:16). It is a glorious privilege to be a member of a local church but it is also entails a solemn responsibility, and is not a matter to be lightly undertaken.

W.H.M.

"Some persons love the doctrine of universal atonement because they say, 'It is beautiful: it is a lovely idea that Christ should have died for all men...' If the doctrine be true, that He died for all men, then He died for some who were in hell before He came into this world. Once again, if it was Christ's intention to save all men, how deplorably has He been disappointed ... for the very persons who, according to the theory of universal redemption were actually bought with His blood, yet are cast into the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone. That seems to me a conception a thousand times more repulsive than those consequences which are said to be associated with the Calvinistic and Christian Doctrine of special and particular redemption. To think that my Saviour died for men who are in hell, seems a supposition too horrible for me to entertain. To imagine for a moment that He was the Substitute for all the sons of men, and that God, having first punished the Substitute, afterwards punishes the sinners themselves seems to conflict with all ideas of Divine justice. That Christ should offer an atonement and satisfaction for the sins of all men, and that afterwards some of those very men should be punished for the sins for which Christ has already atoned, appears to be the most monstrous iniquity that could ever have been imputed to Saturn, to Janus, to the goddess of the thugs, or the most diabolical heathen deities. God forbid that we should ever think thus of Jehovah, the just and wise and good".

C. H. Spurgeon

The following are notes of a lecture given by Mr.P.M.Rowell - Editor of Gospel Tidings: Magazine - and are reprinted with his kind permission.

DOCTRINE

Moses evidently had a most gracious conception of the vital necessity and refreshing power of true doctrine when he declared: "My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as showers upon, the grass: Because I will publish the name of the LORD: ascribe ye greatness unto our God: (Deut. 32:2-3). For him, doctrine was the essential foundation of his personal testimony to the glory of God and a motivating influence in deep spiritual worship of the God he had come to know so well.

It is nothing new but nonetheless sad that in many religious circles today the very word 'doctrine' is treated with suspicion or downright hostility. It is argued that doctrine is unnecessarily divisive and sadly stifling to spiritual life; that those who are concerned about doctrine are narrow, bigoted and scholastic in their attitudes and that what we need today is "life not doctrine"!

Very often connected with such attitudes to doctrine there is a weak view of the inspiration, infallibility and authority of the Scriptures. With some there is a complete denial of scripture authority and with others a ready acceptance of such translations and paraphrases as tend to undermine the confidence of many in the verbal trustworthiness of God's written word.

What is Doctrine? In both Old and New Testaments, the word doctrine simply means teaching or the truths being taught. It carries with it the sense that the truths being taught are truths which have been received. How vital it is then that what is taught should be the truth; true, God-given doctrine taught by those who speak 'the truth in love'.

The use of the word in scripture and amongst believers today has this scriptural sense of that body of truth received from God and believed by His people as it has been delivered

to them by God-appointed and inspired teachers. In the New Testament we read of the apostles' doctrine and of the faith. It is evident that the earliest Christian believers who formed the first Christian churches were carefully instructed as to the 'truth', and that this was in direct fulfilment of the Saviour's command to the disciples to 'teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you'. This could be expressed as 'disciplining' all nations, baptizing them, then [instructing] them.

It follows from the way in which the Bible speaks of doctrine, teaching, and the faith that this is something which can be clearly expressed and plainly taught. This inevitably means that there is going to be difference and disagreement with those who do not accept the teaching. Indeed, this separation for the truth's sake is an essential part of the life and discipline of a truly Christian church which seeks to 'contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints' and which believes with John that 'no lie is of the truth' (1 John 2:21).

A distinction must be drawn between the wholly inspired and completely infallible teachings of the written word of God and the continuing preaching and teaching which has been a means of such rich blessing in the church ever since the days of the Apostles. Preaching and teaching today is not verbally inspired and infallible but, under the blessing of the Holy Spirit it will be consistent with scripture and will carry with it a ring of authority and sense of unction to the hearts of gracious hearers. It will be used by God for the conviction and instruction of His children who will increasingly be able to discern that which is according to Scripture and that which is not.

The need of this emphasis today. We live in a period of history when any dogmatic statement of the difference between truth and error in religion is looked upon with deep suspicion as being so divisive. The ecumenical spirit is very strong in its attempt to obtain a visible unity amongst professing 'Christians' at almost any cost to truth, and there is a strong tendency to move away from definitive statements of doctrine. The suggestion is made that such concerns only give rise to bitterness and division with each

side using their favourite texts of scripture rather like ammunition in a verbal battle, whilst what are considered to be the really important aspects of Christianity are lost in the dust of conflict

There is today a flood of books concerned with person and work of the Holy Spirit: Where such literature is faithful to scripture there is reason for deep thankfulness, for there is so evidently a distressing lack of evidence of the blessed Spirit's influence. We deeply need the outpoured blessing of the Holy Spirit who teaches of Jesus Christ} who is truth and who powerfully uses the truth in the sanctification of Cod's people, now sad then, to find in some of this literature, attempts to disparage the proper place of the written and infallible word of cod. There is a very real danger in exalting emotional experiences and religious feelings so as to lose sight of the absolutely necessary influence of scripture truth to guide and guard us in the way of faith. The work of the Holy Spirit in a believer can never be inconsistent with Holy Scripture since it was He who controlled and directed the writing of the scriptures. Some are claiming to be 'led by the Lord' to do things which on examination prove to be quite contrary to the teaching and spirit of the gospel and, what is even more serious, there are those who claim to speak tinder the direct influence of the Spirit in such a way as to supersede the use of the written word, effectively claiming a divine authority for their utterances. The origin of many heretical sects can be quickly traced to such claims of a revelation and an authority for writings apart from the scriptures, it is essential to retain the strongest conviction as to the unique authority of the written word of God by which all other utterances and experiences are to be tested.

Looking at this question from another direction, it is important to emphasize that the written word of God and the doctrines expressed therein are not to be accepted in a merely intellectual way so that a person's religious position is rather like that of a mathematician who works out his answer arid writes Q.E.D. at the end. No! there is a vital need for the blessed Spirit to open the understanding, to quicken the soul into spiritual life, to convince of sin, to reveal God's Son in us, to fill us with true joy and peace in believing, to lead us into all truth and to feed our souls with the spiritual food of truth right down to the

end of our days. There is nothing cold, unemotional and merely academic in real religion, though there may well be in some who have professed the Christian name.

Let us consider now a few of the areas of fundamental Biblical doctrine and attempt to see the way this doctrine is emphasized and stressed.

The Doctrine of Christ. All Christians would agree that this is the central and glorious theme of scripture, and the vital point in anyone's religion. To be wrong here is to be altogether wrong.

It was evidently not sufficient in New Testament days, and certainly not today, for a person to be accepted as a Christian simply because he says he believes in Jesus Christ. Many have done that who, on examination, have shown that the Jesus Christ they profess is certainly not the Jesus Christ of scripture. In 2 John 7-11 it is clear that the reception of such a person professing Christianity is made to depend most specifically on what he actually believes about Jesus Christ, in other words, his doctrine is to be compared with the Apostles' doctrine and if it fails that test the person is not to be received as a Christian.

Impressive claims have been made in the past about visions of Jesus Christ together with audible messages from Him, but it must be said quite categorically that this is no infallible proof of a person's Christianity. Nor, indeed, does this mean that such a person's experience is more significant than that of a simple believer who is quietly yet graciously taught the truth of Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul had a necessary and remarkable revelation of Jesus Christ and even heard the voice of the ascended Saviour, but he says "Though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more." what could be more emphatic or solemn than the words of John: "Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God", Or the words of Paul, in perfect agreement, "If any man love not the LORD Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha."

The Gospel. Since gospel means good news there must needs be a most significant meaning and content to the gospel.

There is a wonderful fulness of doctrine in the gospel, and preaching the gospel is simply to proclaim truth or doctrine. If anyone should come to us purporting to preach the gospel and even claim that he had received his message from an angel, it may sound very impressive; but hear what Paul had to say to the Galatians, "I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you unto the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed" (Gal.1:6-8). Would not some be inclined to say of the Galatian heresy, "Oh, it is not so important, we only want to avoid offending the Jews, so we teach circumcision for the sake of peace". But we do well to take heed to Paul's strong words and be sure that what we hear or preach is consistent with the gospel Paul preached, this is comparing doctrine with doctrine, and using truth as our guide.

Justification. In the great matter of the soul's standing before God, Paul makes it abundantly clear that it is entirely by grace that we are saved through faith which is God's gift (Eph.2). In Romans 5 he declares that we are justified by faith. But who or what is to be believed? Is it just some vague idea about a possible salvation through some kind of general feeling of the mercy of a God of love? Not It is a God-given faith which is sincere and heartfelt in the Lord Jesus Christ of scripture, the Jesus of scripture doctrine, the Jesus who is indeed the Son of God and truly the Son of man, whose death on Calvary was a real atonement for sin (Rom.5:21); the Jesus who is risen, ascended and glorified and who will come again to this earth, according to the scriptures.

The Apostles' tradition. The word tradition is used to signify the teaching and practice of the Apostles, as in 2 Thess.3:6-14. Here he is dealing with what might at first be considered a minor question. Some had misunderstood Paul's teaching regarding the second coming of Christ and had decided that there was no point in working since He might return at any time. However, so serious is Paul's view of the matter that a person who persisted in such laziness was to be rejected from the company of believers until he was penitent. Again in Titus 3:10 a man who would not submit to

apostolic doctrine after the first and second admonition was to be rejected. We cannot say that apostolic doctrine is of little importance.

Personal Behaviour. The Holy Spirit of truth has not left us in ignorance as to the principles which are to govern our way of life. There are clear standards of personal conduct laid down in the word of God. Wrong doctrine is so often linked with a wrong way of life. For instance, the doctrine of the believer's liberty so clearly taught by Paul was, very early in church history, sadly abused. "Shall we sin that grace may abound?" is the most blatant example of this. Peter sounds a note of warning. "As free, and not using your liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God" (1 Peter 2:16). In the second epistle, Peter reminds believers of the "words which were spoken before by the Holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord, and Saviour" (3:2). He goes on to exhort them to a holy life (4:11-14), and warns them against being led away with the error of the wicked (v.17). We see in this chapter the startling contrast of true and false doctrine with their consequent effects.

Conclusion. Over and again the Bible warns of the dangers of the last days, especially in regard to false teaching. The spiritual conflict is to be fought with "the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God" (Eph.6:17). Satan is going about transforming himself into an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14) and his influence is seen in "false apostles; deceitful workers transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ." The true apostles were teachers of true doctrines. Peter warns of the need to beware of false prophets, and says "there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction" (2 Peter 2:1).

We need to ask some old-fashioned questions again in these days, especially regarding the uniqueness and divine dignity of Jesus Christ. Can it be a small error, for instance, to say that Mary shares with Jesus the work of redemption? Has an organization which claims that the Pope i.e. Christ's vicar on earth, that the real body and blood of Jesus Christ is actually present in the repeated sacrifice of the mass, and that the priest stands between a man's soul and the

Saviour, the right to call itself a Christian church, or not?

Can it be an insignificant departure from truth to say that a man's salvation depends upon some decision of his own fallen will rather than upon the eternal choice of God and the sovereign intervention of the Holy Spirit to change the heart and renew the will?

Does the Holy Spirit work in one person's life to make him believe in and love the holy doctrines of Scripture, drawing him to real and deep devotion to the eternal Son of God, and then in another person to encourage a deeper devotion to Mary, a more frequent attendance at the confessional and a deeper sense of worship in the mass?

These are a few of many questions vital to a person's spiritual life but, even more important, vital for the honour and glory of God. The word of God is timeless, its authority divine and unalterable, its contents divinely determined for the good of every generation of believers. The same blessed Spirit who inspired the writers still leads poor ignorant sinful men into knowledge of the truth, that they might have the comfort of the exceeding great and precious promises and at last be found in that new Jerusalem where the living Word is the light thereof.

We have received a supply of a book by J.F.MacArthur (Jnr.) entitled "The Charismatics". This work is extremely well produced and well documented. In view of trends at the present time this book is highly recommended.

One is saddened by the drift of the Evangelical Times, particularly of late, and the articles written by Peter Lewis, much of which can only be viewed as an aggressive appeal for the charismatic position.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

THURSDAY 7th January 1982 - A Prayer Meeting will be held in the main Chapel at 7 pm in accordance with our usual practice at the commencement of a new year.

THURSDAY 4th February 1982 - Annual visit and report of THE LONDON CITY MISSION

Our current ministry embraces the following subjects:-

Sunday Mornings -	THE LIFE OF DAVID
Sunday Evenings -	THE BOOK OF GENESIS
Thursday Evenings -	THE HOLY SPIRIT

We are encouraged by the interest which has been shown in the tape recordings, and the cassettes continue to have a good circulation. The series available are as follows:-

THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD	- Sermons 1 to 19
SPIRITUAL UNION	- Sermons 1 to 31
THE ATONEMENT	- Sermons 1 to 72
DEACONS and ELDERS	- Sermons 1 to 8

The following are not yet completed but cassettes for the addresses given to date are available:-

THE LIFE OF DAVID

THE HOLY SPIRIT

This includes an examination of the Charismatic movement, Revelations, Tongues and Healing.

THE BOOK OF GENESIS

This includes a section on Creation.

All cassettes are available on loan, free of charge, or may be purchased at £1.25 each cassette covering two addresses.