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AFTER THIS MANNER PRAY YE

(A Study in the Lord's Prayer)

Part 6

In this article we are to examine the third petition: "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." (Matt.6:10), and two points immediately arise:

1. The DOING of God's will.
2. The MANNER of doing it.

The will of God is also in itself two-fold. There is God's SECRET will, which pertains to His sovereign purposes and decrees: this is not known to men, therefore cannot be done consciously by us. Then there is the REVEALED will of God: this is laid down for the believer, in the Holy Scriptures. Here we discover the mind of the Almighty in that which He would have us do, and how we are to order our lives in every detail.

The two-fold aspect of God's will - SECRET and REVEALED - by its very nature leads on to a two-fold aspect of obedience PASSIVE and ACTIVE. This will become clear as we proceed.

First let us consider the active aspect of obedience. In this pattern prayer given to us, we are bidden to pray that we shall be active in carrying out God's revealed will. All that the Scriptures teach concerning life and practice is to be OBEYED by us. Augustine said: "In this petition we pray for the cardinal grace, requesting that we subscribe to all the commands of our Lord Jesus and so live holy lives."

At this point it may be wise and helpful to be reminded of THE CONTEXT in which this example of prayer given by our Lord, was set. It is all part of His discourse on the mountain side. It is but a section of that one great sermon, THE THEME of which was the setting of God's Law within its TRUE and SPIRITUAL framework; for that Holy Law had been so terribly distorted by the Scribes and Pharisees.

What said our Lord? "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and

great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." (Matt.22:37-40). In these few words the two tables of stone are epitomized, and upon THEM hang ALL the law and the prophets. The whole of Scripture is taken up with this, says Christ. This is the sum and substance of My will; then pray AFTER THIS MANNER, that you not only get to know My will from the Scriptures of Truth, but seek grace to DO IT. Indeed, this is the petition. It is not, Thy will be KNOWN, rather is it, Thy will be DONE. To know the will of God in the head, if it does not affect the feet, is a worthless thing. Yea, the Bible states that it is better never to know, than knowing to turn from the Holy Commandment, (cf. 2 Pet.2:21). Watson, the Puritan, once said: "It is improper to call a man a tradesman who never wrought in his trade; so, to call a man a Christian who never wrought in the trade of true religion."

The Bible is not an Encyclopaedia, just a book of knowledge to be referred to in order to gain information on particular matters. Indeed not! The great design of the Word of God is to make us DOERS of HIS WILL. In this the writer is not inferring that the Bible is. not a book of knowledge, and for our learning, for it is.: but primarily it is a book of DUTY. The Holy Spirit through the apostle James says we are to be DOERS of the Word, and not hearers only. "This day the Lord thy God hath commanded thee to do these statutes and judgments: thou shalt therefore keep and do them with all thine heart, and with all thy soul." (Deut.26:16).

Further to this, it must be said that all the wondrous promises of God's Word are not made to those who just KNOW His will; it is to those who OBEY. "Behold, I set before you this day a blessing ... A blessing, if ye obey the commandments of the Lord your God." (Deut. 11:26-27). "Great peace have they which love Thy law: and nothing shall offend them. Lord, I have hoped for Thy salvation, and done Thy commandments. My soul hath kept Thy testimonies; and I love them exceedingly." (Psa.119:165-167). Our obedience, and God's blessing, go hand in hand. "He that hath My commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest Myself to Him." (John 14:21).

"When we walk with the Lord,
In the light of His Word,
What a glory He sheds on our way!
While we DO His good will,
He abides with us still,
And with all who will trust and OBEY."

It is the Christian's obedience which gives the evidence of the genuineness of profession. It is by the FRUIT that a true child of God is known. Said our Lord: "The works that I do ... bear witness of me." (John 10:25). That principle applies to all who are Christians.

Holy Writ speaks of a husband and wife who have the most wonderful testimony that could ever be recorded of mortals. Their names are Zacharias and Elizabeth - "And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless." (Luke 1:6). This does not infer a state of spiritual perfection on earth, but it does definitely tell us that they were "righteous before God." By this we learn that they were of TRUE FAITH, for only those seen "in Christ" are justified and righteous before God. However, that was not all: this couple walked in ALL the commandments and ordinances of the Lord, BLAMELESS. None could point the finger of scorn at them, none could reproach them, none could question their walk or conduct. View them from any angle, they were upright and down straight, no doubtful practices, the will of God came first in all their thinking, there was no deviation whatsoever from what God had set out in His Word.

In the early years A.D. an ancient Greek was heard to say: "The Christian religion doth much flourish by the sanctity and obedience of them that possess it." If only this could be said in a general sense of the Church to-day!

As already stated the setting of this prayer is our Lord's sermon for the restoration of the SPIRITUALITY of God's Law. This same principle of spirituality is all important regarding obedience. It is not always WHAT we do, but WHY we do it. If our chief concern is to be seen of men as paragons of virtue, then we have missed the mark completely, just as did the Pharisees. That which motivates the sincere believer is not outward, it is inward. It is an active principle WITHIN.

"Now is made manifest, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith." (Rom. 16:26). In the Scriptures the commandments of the everlasting God are made manifest. This revelation is to be preached to all nations, not to increase knowledge, but for the OBEDIENCE OF FAITH. Faith is that which is imparted within every elect soul at regeneration: it is that which enables a man or woman to ACT SPIRITUALLY. Those of true faith say, not MY will, but THINE be done. Faith causes a person to act in a manner which is the very opposite to natural thinking, and without this faith, it is impossible to please God. (cf. Heb.11:6). They that are in the flesh cannot do this (cf. Rom.8:8). Only those of faith can truly pray after this manner, "Thy will be done." For THEM the will of God is paramount because God has expressed it, therefore, the will of others, or even one's own will, does not figure. When faith is operative we never centre upon self, we always focus upon Christ. The promptings of true faith are always that we should be to the praise of the GLORY of HIS grace.

"Not I, but Christ, be honoured, loved, exalted;
Not I, but Christ, be seen, be known, be heard;
Not I, but Christ, in every look and action;
Not I, but Christ, in every thought and word."

Still continuing with the ACTIVE aspect of our subject, let us now look at the MANNER in which it is to be performed - "AS IT IS IN HEAVEN." As Christ makes this comparison with heaven, there is the inevitable involvement with Angels; for they are they who serve in that realm- "His ministers:" "ministering spirits." They excel in strength, they do His commandments, and hearken unto the voice of His Word. (cf. Psa.103:20). Nothing of God's will is left undone by them. They never neglect their duty. In heaven those beings perform the will of God flawlessly. Because our Lord teaches us to pray that our obedience to His will be after this nature, we do well to examine this more closely in order to see all that is involved.

1. ANGELS ARE SINCERE. They act out of respect to the command given, and always with a single eye to God's glory. Vilas not this also

seen in Abraham? God commanded him to sacrifice his only son Isaac. Could anything have been more contrary to that man's will? Nevertheless, because GOD WILLED IT; out of pure respect to the command, Abraham obeyed. With sincerity of heart, and determination of will, he rose early in the morning, taking all the requisites for sacrifice - wood, fire, the knife, and HIS SON. This is how the angels act in heaven; when God commands, they unquestionably obey.

The Pharisees were diligent in giving alms. In this they could have been seen to have been doing the will of God, BUT, it was NOT as it is done in heaven. The MANNER was wrong: they sounded the trumpet to call attention to their actions - it was vain-glory. The angels always obey and carry out God's will for HIS glory alone, never for their own honour.

2. ANGELS ARE WILLING. They love the service of God. David charged his son Solomon to serve the Lord with a perfect heart and with a willing mind. (cf. 1 Chron.28:9). Willingness is the spirit of heaven. The mind of God for us is found in the Holy Scriptures. Having discovered it, do we love to obey? "O how I love Thy Law." said the Psalmist (Psa. 119:97). We are to pray that such a spirit of WILLINGNESS be found in us.

3. ANGELS ARE FERVENT. The word means GLOWING, VEHEMENT, ZEALOUS. "Who maketh His angels spirits; His ministers a flaming fire." (Psa. 104:4). Those heavenly ministers are "flames of fire." Possessed of a burning zeal, they are aglow. Said Christ, you pray after this manner, that Divine help may be given unto you to serve God and do His will as it is done in heaven. "Fervent in spirit; serving the LORD." (Rom. 12:11). Filled with a burning zeal.

4. ANGELS ACT SWIFTLY. They act immediately. In some Scriptures, angels are described as having wings. This denotes speed and unhesitating action. "Yea, whiles I was speaking in prayer, even the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in a vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, touched me about the time of the evening oblation." (Dan.9:21).

This is how heaven acts. Angels do not take weeks or months, or perhaps even years, to make up their minds whether or not they will

obey God on certain issues. No! they act immediately; as soon as God's will is made known to them they respond. Isaiah was once given a glimpse into that realm. There he saw the order and procedure; and confronted with the vision of those seraphim his IMMEDIATE response was: "Here am I send me." (cf. Isa.6:1-8).

There is a very "down to earth" incident recorded of Peter in Luke's gospel: "Now when He (Christ) had left speaking, He said unto Simon, launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught. And Simon answering said unto Him, Master we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at Thy word I will let down the net." (Luke 5:4-5) "at THY word I WILL."

When through the Holy Scriptures the will of God is revealed; though to our finite thinking it may appear wrong or foolish, we are not to bring our reason to bear upon it: "The just shall live by faith." (Heb. 10:38). The PRINCIPLE implanted within us at regeneration is to GOVERN. Our attitude is ever to be, "AT THY WORD" we will DO IT - unhesitating action, "AS IT IS IN HEAVEN,"

As we examine the depth of meaning which lies beneath these short petitions, how apparent it becomes that this is a profoundly spiritual exercise, and we are cast upon the grace of God alone in these matters. For this very reason we are to pray: "AFTER THIS MANNER" to seek help.

We now leave the REVEALED will of God and our ACTIVE obedience to it, and address ourselves to PASSIVE obedience, In this, God's SECRET will figures as well as His REVEALED.

There is a sense in which we SUFFER God's will. By this it is not inferred that we suffer in the sense that we have to put up with our lot, or make the best of our circumstances. Indeed not! Rather, the meaning is that one is to ACQUIESCE or CONCUR. Whatever God's providence brings upon us according to His secret will, we are to be submissive. In this aspect as well as in the active, we still need the same petition, praying that such grace and patience be given unto us as will enable us to rest in His all wise hands and say, "THY WILL BE DONE."

Patience in the life of the believer is a great grace. Yea, it is of God. It is one of the communicable attributes. The Almighty is styled as "the God of patience." (Rom.15:5). Just as the love of God can be shed abroad in our hearts, so can a Godly patience.

This is not a stoical form of endurance, or a rigid attitude of necessity because there is no escape from the circumstance. No one in such a frame of mind could be said to be passively doing the will of God. To be patiently submissive to God's will is not a "tight upper lip," or an "I can take it" attitude: there is nothing of the MANNER OF HEAVEN in that kind of disposition. Patient acquiescence to the will of God is not metallic, or a hardness, indeed it is tender; it may well produce tears. Ofttimes in God's sovereign over-ruling, trial and great affliction is brought upon us. Sorrow can be almost overwhelming, the heart become heavy, the eyes full, and tears cannot be held back. This is no indication that a person is giving way, and not patient is suffering. Indeed, it might well be the reverse, for it is the GRACE of God which makes the heart tender. It is rebellion to His will which hardens.

Further, a Christian may even complain in affliction, yet, still be truly submissive (not the complaint of resentment or of grievance). When David was fleeing from Saul, hunted as a partridge upon the mountains; in his utter loneliness and abandonment he sheltered in a cave; from that hide-out we hear these words: "I cried unto the Lord with my voice; with my voice unto the Lord did I make my supplication. I poured out my complaint before Him: I shewed before Him my trouble." (Psa. 142:1-2). David was literally terrorized by the situation, and he poured out his troubles before God. This was not sin, neither are we to conclude that he was not submissive to the will of God.

If a child is being wronged or ill-treated, to whom can it turn if not to a father? This is the very context of this pattern prayer. When ye pray say: OUR FATHER: it is the Father and child relationship. Therefore, when we are oppressed there is nothing wrong, indeed, it is right, to come to our Father in heaven and to pour it all out in His ever loving and understanding ear. Thomas Watson says: "Holy complaint is in full agreement with patient submission." However, one must add, that whilst we might complain TO God after the manner stated, yet, NEVER must we complain OF God, or question His providential dealings with us.

There are some Christians who have a strange notion that any trouble or misfortune which befalls them is of the Devil, and only the pleasing things are from God. But what saith the Scriptures? "Affliction cometh not forth of the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the ground." (Job 5:6). "The Lord gave, and the Lord taketh away; blessed be the name of the Lord. In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly." (Job 1:21). It is a sovereign God who orders and controls every aspect and circumstance of our lives. Eli said: "It is the Lord: let Him do what seemeth Him good." (1 Sam.3:18). Paul uttered the same sentiments: "The will of the Lord be done." (Acts 21:14). In affliction and trouble these men kept their eyes upon God.

We are never to look at secondary causes, always the prime cause: this is God Himself. Ezekiel spoke of a wheel within a wheel, (cf. Ez.1:16). The outward wheel is the providence, but the inward wheel is the will and decree of Almighty God; and it is the inner wheel which causes the outer to revolve. Therefore, when we pray "Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven," we are praying that we shall be brought into harmony, or revolve in rhythm with the inner wheel, as we become geared harmoniously with His perfect will for us.

Why, some may ask should our heavenly Father so order affliction for His children? This is not for us to know, for it pertains to His SECRET will. This is why we are PASSIVE in it. Nevertheless, certain light is thrown upon the question. "Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations." (1 Pet. 1:6). "If need be ye are in heaviness." Whenever a Christian is in heaviness, then one can rest assured that there is a NEED BE. What the need be is, we do not know, but God deems it NECESSARY.

Of Manasseh, the king of Judah, we read: "And when he was in affliction he besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers." (2 Chron.33:12). Affliction has a very humbling effect, it makes us feel our utter weakness and inability, and causes us to cast ourselves in humble dependence upon God. Such an attitude is greatly to HIS GLORY, and that which is to His glory is, "AS IT IS IN HEAVEN."

Further to this, by means of affliction, an opportunity is afforded our heavenly Father of proving Himself in a way which would otherwise be unknown. How can the saints know of the wondrous comfort of their God if they never taste of sorrow? Who can experience the tender soothing of a loving Father, wiping off the tears from the face of His child, if that child never has occasion to weep?

In all that crosses our pathway, every situation into which providence brings us, God is behind it all; there is a NEED BE. What is more it all WORKS TOGETHER for our good. There is a wondrous purpose in it; a pattern is being woven: the inner wheel is turning the outer.

One of the Puritans said: "The kindness of God lies behind that which seems the most unkind." When a believer can face up to trial in this light, that person is truly in the spirit of the petition being considered.

Many of those imprisoned, and later put to death for their faith during times of fierce persecution in this country, said: "I would rather be in prison with God's presence, than be in a palace without it." This is to PASSIVELY fulfil the will of God on earth to the degree that it is in absolute HARMONY WITH HEAVEN.

"After this manner therefore pray ye ... Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven."

W.H. Molland

"The people of the Lord in humility are to lay themselves and their prayers, and all that they have, at the foot of their God, to be disposed of by Him as He in His heavenly wisdom seeth best. Yet not doubting but God will answer the desire of His people that way that shall be most for their advantage and His glory."

John Bunyan

LEADERSHIP

PART 2

In PART 1 of this subject, National Heads and Civil Authorities were considered; the tremendous responsibility which rests upon those in high places. The standard and order of a nation, in the main, is according to its laws and ruling. Influence for good or for ill stems from the top.

The Word of God gives a basic and fundamental law upon which Rulers are to base their statutes if they are to have the favour of Almighty God and the blessing of a well ordered society.

However, DIVINE TRUTH is in the hands of the people of God. The Church is the custodian of this. Just as we see wrong directives being given in society, so do we see it within Christendom. In this article we deal with LEADERS in the RELIGIOUS FIELD.

If LEADERSHIP is of such vital importance within a Nation, it is infinitely more so within the Church, for it is from the Church that the light must come. The guidelines and rulings for EVERY DEPARTMENT of life are found in the Holy Scriptures, and these lively oracles are entrusted to the people of God. THEY are called upon to tell it out in ALL its detail; coupling with its counsel and instruction the inevitable consequences of failing to pay heed to it.

The Bible does not teach that Christians should aim at getting into politics and strive to make the Church the national government. Indeed not! Quite the reverse is the case. True believers are citizens of ANOTHER KINGDOM - the Kingdom of Heaven. Said Christ: "My Kingdom is not of this world." (John 18:36).

The Christian is not of this world. "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." (John 17:16). Nevertheless Christ has sent us, His redeemed people, into the world just as God sent His Son. "As Thou hast sent Me into the world, even so have I sent them into the world." (John 17:18). And we are here as AMBASSADORS for Christ." (cf. 2 Cor.5:20).

As such we are to uphold the laws and standards of the Kingdom to which we belong. An Ambassador is in a kingdom to which he DOES NOT belong, but he is representing a kingdom to which he DOES belong.

God did not send His Son into this world to get into political or national affairs and to HEAD a nation. He came into the world as LIGHT, to give SPIRITUAL ILLUMINATION in this dark world of sin. To establish a Kingdom, yes! but not an earthly one, rather a spiritual. His Kingdom is in the hearts of men. This is clearly stated in Holy Scripture, (cf. Luke 17:21).

When Christ was upon earth He declared ALL the truth of God. Yea more, He lived it; perfectly fulfilling the law of God; in this He was "THE TRUTH." In other words He set the standard wherever He was. He never deviated in thought, word, or deed from God's Holy Law, and with the standard which He declared He linked the judgment which would ensue if men fell short. He was "THE TRUE LIGHT." (cf. John 1:9). "As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." (John 9:5). But when Christ returned to Heaven, the responsibility of diffusing spiritual light fell squarely upon the shoulders of His true followers; they are the sole custodians of Truth. They are in the midst of crooked and perverse nations, and they are to shine as LIGHTS in the world; HOLDING FORTH THE WORD OF LIFE, (cf. Phil.2:15-16). The Christian is in the world to live as Christ lived; that is, to declare and make known ALL TRUTH. Hence, the vital role of the Church in the world.

In the same manner in which God has given a basis for the formulating of laws in society, so also has He given a mandate for the Church. Because there has been appointed a constitution and a Divine order for the governing of the Church, and because of the fact already established, that influence for good or ill stems from LEADERSHIP, the grave responsibility of those who hold office in the Church becomes apparent.

The religious leaders of Israel who should have guided the flock into the paths of righteousness, ever influencing them to remain faithful to God, and to the Covenant, were by word and example leading them astray, causing them to become covenant breakers. Through the prophet the Almighty spoke plainly: "O My people, they which lead

thee cause thee to err, and destroy the way of thy paths." (Isa.3:12). "For the leaders of this people cause them to err, and they that are led of them are destroyed." (Isa.9:16).

The Scriptures clearly set out that primarily, it is the LEADERS who are responsible for spiritual declension. Part One of this subject as dealt with in the last edition, was concerned with national leadership and of the sorry state of society due to attitudes being adopted and laws being framed which are in direct conflict with the Moral Law of God? but God's Law is not known today, for the Church, which is the custodian of Divine Truth has failed to proclaim it. Hence: "Judgment is turned away backward, and justice standeth afar off: for truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter." (Isa.59:14).

If truth is fallen in the street it is consequent upon truth having fallen in the pulpit! "Like people, like priest." (Hos.4:9).

The gross evil of Sodomy is rarely mentioned, yet this is a sin for which God gives men up. (cf. Rom.1:24). Fitting punishment for crime, the death penalty for murder, is all a part of the counsel of God which THE CHURCH must declare: but does she? • As for the monogamy of marriage, and the great wrong of divorce, the Church has got herself into such a mess on these matters that now she can scarce speak, let alone give a clear directive. In this, very large numbers of Evangelicals are as remiss as many liberal sections of Christendom. Pastors and Ministers will SANCTION divorce and RE-MARRY divorcees, invoking the blessing of Almighty God upon SUCH A UNION whilst the other partner is still alive. How can rulers in the nation give a correct lead when leaders in the Church who have the TRUE GUIDELINES act as they do? Of course truth will "fall in the street!"

The tremendous responsibility which devolves upon Ministers and Elders, and the gravity of the matters entrusted to them, seems so often to be overlooked, and oftentimes, one fears, deliberately shirked. They are to: "Speak as the oracles of God." (1 Pet.4:11). "The things which become sound doctrine." (Titus 2:1): and to "Exhort and rebuke with all authority." (Titus 2:15).

How much firm, authoritative leadership do we find in Churches at the present time? Alas, it is a rarity! There is an ever increasing pandering to the wishes and desires of the carnally minded. Materialistic, worldly minded, and easy-going professors, are ever busy putting on the pressure; and sadly, many in Church leadership succumb.

How often has it been heard from those who hold office in a Church: "We have had to make changes in order to keep up our membership. We have introduced various baits to attract young people. We have altered our form of worship, etc." The argument put forward is, that this HAD TO BE DONE to come into line with other Churches, because they were drawing away many from the congregation.

If members of a congregation are attracted down the road by carnal activity and religious gimmickry, then let them go! For, if they are no more spiritually minded than to hanker after such empty novelties, what help are they in the fellowship in any case? Such will only mar, and ultimately ruin a true witness if given into by the leaders; and many Churches bear eloquent testimony to this.

The Great Head of the Church requires those in leadership amongst His people to: "Watch ... stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong." (1 Cor.16:13). "Earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints." (Jude 3). "The faith" being "all the counsel of God." (Acts 20:27). Spiritual leaders are to act like MEN, and show moral strength and spiritual virility; giving definite spiritual direction within the Church, and firm moral counsel within society. Alas! the ranks are filled with WEAKLINGS who just WILL NOT stand for ALL TRUTH. Such leaders cause God's people "TO ERR" and do put the Church on wrong lines.

The Lord said of the prophets of Judah: "They bite with their teeth, and cry, peace." (Micah 3:5). How typical of so many Ministers and Elders today! Upon touchy subjects - that which is likely to cause offence - they "bite their tongues" and keep quiet. They cry "PEACE." This is the trouble: they must have peace; but it is peace at any price; peace at the expense of TRUTH.

Soft tolerant Church leaders who give in to every whim and fancy of the people in order to keep the peace, although they may not realize it, are actually at war; but not war of the correct order. They are in OPEN CONFLICT with the HOLY SCRIPTURES, and as such are WARRING against the GREAT HEAD - Christ Himself. Let weaklings be warned: this is a LOSING BATTLE, and one of the UTMOST GRAVITY, for such will suffer inestimable loss at the great judgment day.

There is another form of faulty leadership within the Church, vastly different from that already mentioned, yet equally disastrous; and that is HIDE-BOUND TRADITIONALISM. True Biblical tradition is one thing; for this we must doggedly stand; but alas! there is much DENOMINATIONAL tradition in existence - the "tradition of the fathers" which when carefully analysed may well be found not to be Biblical at all. There are many Churches which have a tradition of ARMINIANISM, DISPENSATIONALISM, PAEDO-BAPTISM, and so on. How can these traditions really stand up in the light of Scripture?

Then there is that which is even more subtle, for it passes under the guise of pious orthodoxy: that is an unbalanced, deficient form of preaching. For example: it may be all doctrinal, all devotional, all experimental, or all evangelistic. Many a minister has fallen into this trap, perhaps unwittingly, and by so doing has created a FAULTY TRADITION which hangs on to future generations. This will develop into cold orthodoxy and dead formalism.

True Biblical preaching is thorough exposition of the Word of God in systematic fashion. Then are ALL aspects of truth covered - DOCTRINAL, DEVOTIONAL, PROPHETIC, and EVANGELISTIC, and by so doing, all receive their "meat in due season." Anything short of such a balanced spiritual menu will, long term, cause God's people to err. Once Churches become embedded in the rut of: "This is how we have always done it," and will not come afresh, with an open mind, to the Word of God to assess their position, they are in a sorry state.

Referring to the prophets of Judah again; a most solemn word is spoken: "Therefore night shall be unto you, that ye shall not have a vision; and it shall be dark unto you, that ye shall not -divine; and the sun shall go down over the prophets, and the day shall be dark over them." (Micah 3:6). This is a most tragic verse, and it is spoken to

FAULTY, DEFICIENT, SPIRITUAL LEADERS. One fears that there are many holding positions of responsibility in Churches, Chapels, and Assemblies of the Lord's people who have not a TRUE conception of their office, or of what devolves upon them. They have not a clear vision of ALL truth: they have blind spots. Although they profess to enter into the mysteries of Christ, yet certain areas are dark to them, and it will ever be so if they do not humble themselves and come back to the Scriptures and confess: "We have not got it right after all."

If spiritual leaders are so bound by tradition, and filled with self-satisfaction that they will not do this, then it will be with them as it was with the prophets of Judah: "The sun shall go down on them" Their ministry will experience a SUN-SET - no further warmth or light will issue from them. "Then shall the seers be ashamed, and the diviners confounded: they shall all cover their lips; for there is no answer of God." (Micah 3:7).

How many ministers and Church leaders are secretly ashamed and confounded. Inwardly they feel that theirs is a dying cause. They do not want to talk too much about it. They try and hatch up a few instances of what they call ENCOURAGEMENTS, but in their heart of hearts know full well that there is "nothing doing" other than the activity which is whipped up by human effort and fleshly endeavour.

It is tersely summed up by Micah's words: "THERE IS NO ANSWER FROM GOD." This is it, and it always will be so. God will NOT respond to FAULTY LEADERSHIP amongst His people.

Be it a Nation or a Church, the rot sets in from the top. Responsibility is primarily in the hands of THE LEADERS.

W. H. Molland

"THOSE WHO PREACH MUST CRY ALOUD AND SPARE NOT, AND ALLOW NO FALSE TENDERNESS TO MAKE THEM HOLD THEIR PEACE ABOUT THE HERESIES OF THE DAY."

J. C. Ryle.

FESTAL SEASONS

At creation God set apart for Himself one day in seven – The Sabbath. This day is forever to be observed throughout all generations, and kept holy.

With the bringing in of the Mosaic economy (which concerned the earthly Israel) other Holy Days and Sacred Festivals were appointed by God. These unlike the Sabbath, were not of permanent duration, but they pertained to the Ceremonial Law which was of the utmost importance at the time, in that all of the many aspects set forth in figure to some degree, various parts of New Testament truth.

However, when Christ the mediator of the New Covenant appeared, the Old Covenant was FOREVER done away; and this included ALL the Festivals, Sacred Seasons, and Holy Days, EXCEPT THE SABBATH. That day, although incorporated in the Ceremonial Law, was NOT of temporary duration; it existed from Eden, and being a creation institution, the principle of one day in seven being set apart for God continues throughout all time, as also the other nine commandments of the Decalogue.

With the first advent of Christ, the NEW COVENANT was ESTABLISHED. All the types of the Old Covenant having found their fulfilment in Him, a new order of worship came into existence, being based no longer upon the Temple ritual, with its Priests, Ceremonies, and Seasonal Calendar.

In the New Order, men and women of all nationalities are embraced. They gather in simplicity to the Name of the Lord, acknowledging the priesthood of all believers and owning no head other than Christ; each local Church being autonomous, and governed by Elders and Deacons. Within the Eldership is raised up of God one to teach and preach. The sole authority both in faith and practice being the Word of God. No form or mode of gathering other than this can be found in the New Testament, which is the mandate for the New Covenant age.

However, in early New Testament days Jewish tradition died hard. We see from the book of the Acts of the Apostles, that for some years, many Jews continued with their normal pattern. They met on their

traditional Sabbath, whereas other Jewish and Gentile Christians were observing the New Testament Sabbath - the first day of the week. Further to this, as the various Feast Days and Festal Seasons of the old Levitical system came around, some Jewish believers continued to observe them. What is more, certain Gentile Christians were also attracted to their system; and so instead of the worship of God being of the ordering of the NEW Covenant there was a maintaining of the OLD, this now having NO MEANING because all that had been portrayed under that Covenant had been fulfilled.

The introduction of a so-called Christian calendar with Feast Days, Festivals, and Sacred Seasons into the order of the NEW COVENANT was an error of the most serious nature: so God by His Holy Spirit, through the Apostle Paul spoke clearly and forcefully upon this matter. "But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage? Ye observe days and months, and times, and years." (Gal.4:9-10).

Although not linked to Judaism, nevertheless Christendom is still observing DAYS and TIMES. This is far more serious than ever was the case with the Galatians, for at least, as to the origin of the seasons which they continued to keep sacred, it was according to that which God had at one time ordained. As for the origin of the days which Christians NOW observe, it is quite a frightening matter when one looks into both origin and meaning.

It is an undeniable fact that there is no mention of Christmas, Good Friday, or Easter in the Word of God. That the word "Easter" does appear in Acts 12:4 the writer concedes, but this will be explained later in this article.

In NONE of the writings of the Apostles, be it The Acts or the Epistles, is there even a hint that such days and seasons were observed. No Christian can ever furnish the evidence that God appointed these Festivals. What is more, are the dates authentic?

One knows that arguments can be brought forward, such as: "If we do not know the date we can still set aside one day to specifically remember the birth of Christ, and another for His death: surely this is

commendable?" The answer is NO. If it had been good and acceptable to God, then He would have given instructions for such days to be observed. On the contrary, there is nothing said in Scripture as to the date of our Lord's birth, and no hint that the Apostles were to draw up a Church calendar, or to commemorate ANY DAY other than the LORD'S DAY – the NEW TESTAMENT SABBATH.

It is ironical that Churches and Chapels can be packed at Christmas and Easter, yet many who help to swell these congregations have little, if any, regard for the Sabbath which IS commanded to be kept holy. Indeed, quite a percentage openly profane that day. This is the height of mockery. What is even worse, is Christians linking up with men and women who profess nothing, and going around during December singing carols in the towns and villages. From the bars of Public Houses can be heard the same strains, as men and women who fear not the glorious person of Christ, yet, in their Yuletide wassailing will recklessly take His blessed name upon their lips in so-called praise. This is a profanity of great magnitude.

Seeing that these special seasons and their observance are completely outside the mandate of Scripture, how come that they are so woven into the very fabric of Christianity? How did it ever happen? What is the origin of it?

Christmas was introduced by Rome. It is, speaking strictly, "CHRIST'S MASS." It is a Romish term. The first recorded celebration of Christmas was by a man named Liberius, and it took place on 25th December, 345 A.D. in Rome. It was then adopted by the Roman Church.

However, long before the 4th Century, indeed before the Christian era, and going back into antiquity, a Festival was celebrated at this same time every year among the heathen in honour of the birth of the son of the BABYLONIAN QUEEN OF HEAVEN. YULE DAY too, was on December 25th. The dates of December 24th and 25th were also set apart by the ancient Arabians for the worship of the sun and moon.

In the very early centuries A.D., the tendency for Christians to compromise in order to fraternize with the prevailing society became apparent. Tertullian, even in his day (early 3rd Century A.D.), bitterly lamented the inconsistency of many who professed the name of Christ

and were happy to accommodate pagan practices. Other faithful men strove to stem the tide, but in spite of their efforts, the drift went on until the Church, with the exception of a small remnant, became engulfed in these rituals of annual pagan festivals. THIS IS THE ORIGIN OF CHRISTMAS. The very things which today are associated with this season but go to PROVE its pagan source; for these emblems have heathen connotations.

1. The Christmas Tree. Equally common in pagan Rome as in heathen Egypt. In Rome it was the fir tree, the symbol of BAAL-BERITH. In Egypt it was the palm tree, denoting their messiah BAAL-TAMAR.

2. Christmas Candles. These are the relics of the lights which were lit at this season in HONOUR of their heathen deities.

3. The Yule Log. This too has its origin in heathen mysticism and superstition; as has the Christmas goose and Yule cakes. All of these were essential in the worship of the BABYLONISH MESSIAH.

4. The Wassailing Bowl. The merry-making which accompanied the December celebration of the festival of BACCHUS, when much alcohol was consumed, turning it into a drunken orgy. The word "WASSAIL" means; A festive occasion, a carouse, a drinking bout, or to drink freely.

Is not the significance obvious, and very serious?

Lady Day (25th March) is another Festival observed by Rome, and of no little importance to the whole dogma: this was alleged to be the day of Annunciation to Mary the virgin when Christ was conceived in the womb. From this is deduced "the days accomplished" - the nine months pregnancy 25th March to 25th December. Upon this fantasy is based Christmas Day.

Nor is Easter less pagan. The underlying Greek word translated Easter in Acts 12:4 is "PASCHA" from the Hebrew "PESAH" meaning Passover. The word Easter is of ancient Saxon origin meaning "EASTRA," but it springs from Ashtoreth of old, and it was because of the fact that the Eastral celebrations coincided with the Passover season that an amalgamation took place. Eastral was a heathen Festival.

That there was a day set aside by some sections of the Church in the early centuries A.D. to celebrate the death of Christ, history records, but it was never termed Easter: it was Pasch. Whilst this celebration did not originate from heathendom, nevertheless, it WAS EXTRA-BIBLICAL. It might also be stated that the festival of Pasch was not preceded by Lent.

Easter as it has come down through the centuries, and as we know it, is little different to Christmas. Easter is of Chaldean origin - ASTARTE, one of the titles of BELTIS Queen of Heaven. The worship of Astarte was first introduced into Britain by the DRUIDS. This form of worship is but a part of BAAL worship. The forty days abstinence of Lent was directly associated with the worship of the Babylonian Goddess.

A Lent of forty days was also observed in Egypt. The HOT CROSS BUN of Good Friday, and the DYED EGGS of Easter Sunday also figured in heathen Chaldean rites. Fifteen hundred years before the Christian era, history records these things. The prophet Jeremiah in later years also refers to it (about the year 600 B.C.): "The children gather wood, and the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead the dough, to make cakes to the queen of heaven." (Jer.7:18). Whilst the cakes of Jeremiah's day were offered as a part of the ritual, today they are eaten: yet is it a RELIC OF IDOLATRY.

The Hindus, Japanese, Chinese, Egyptians, and others all have fables and superstitions in connection with the sacred egg associated with the season of Easter, or ASTARTE. It is held that an egg of "wondrous" size fell from heaven into the river Euphrates and the fishes rolled it on to the bank where the doves sat upon it, and it hatched. Out came VENUS, who afterwards was called the SYRIAN GODDESS, that is, ASTARTE. Hence the egg became the sacred symbol of that season.

These so-called Christian Festivals are NOT CHRISTIAN, they are pagan in origin and idolatrous in nature. Their observance within the Church constitutes an adding to the Word of God.

These seasons were taken from heathendom and embraced by Rome at the first. Although some Reformers and Puritans made a clean break with such observances, others did not, and a rigid adherence to a man-made Christian calendar, with its Holy Days and Sacred Seasons

came into being, and has become the normal practice of certain sections of Christendom; but what a tragedy that NON-CONFORMIST bodies followed suit. The Holy Son of God is to be remembered, preached, and worshipped, in His birth, His life, His death, His resurrection, His ascension, and His second advent EVERY LORD'S DAY, fifty-two weeks of the year.

This is a very searching matter to all who have the courage and grace to face it honestly.

Because it is part of the fabric of society, and is so firmly entrenched in the Church, it poses many questions, such as relate to greeting cards, gifts, family gatherings, and so on.

Nowhere in Scripture is the sending of greetings, the giving of gifts, family gatherings, or of providing a feast, condemned; indeed, such things carry Biblical warrant: but to establish within the Church these seasons as Christian celebrations, or to link our greetings and family gatherings with Babylon is another matter, and a very serious one.

The putting of Christ into these Festivals is, in effect, the marrying of Christianity to Paganism.

W. H. Molland

ANNOUNCEMENTS and INFORMATION

With the holiday season approaching we remind those who may be fellowshipping with us, of the REST ROOM at the Chapel. This facility is available to any visitors who may wish to make use of it on the Lord's Day for lunch and tea. China, cutlery and kitchen utensils, as well as a small electric cooker, are all provided. We trust our friends will feel free to make good use of this.

Although not listed in this issue of The Link, the cassette tapes are available. An up-to-date list will be published next quarter.

Visiting Preachers

Sunday	April	2	Mr J. Thackway	(Devizes)
"	"	9	Mr M. Watts	(Salisbury)
"	"	16	Mr F. Stanbury	(Bow)

Mr F. Stanbury will also be giving the ministry on three Thursday evenings: May 11th, June 8th, and July 6th.

Preliminary Notice

ANNUAL BIBLE CONVENTION

Saturday 15th July 1989

SPEAKER: Mr.W.J.Seaton (Inverness)

EDITORIAL

It would appear that Christians in many areas are becoming concerned at the observance of so-called SACRED SEASONS; having a vague idea that they are of questionable origin, yet not knowing the facts, are seeking positive guidance. In the past, as these Annual Festivals have come round, mention has been made from our pulpit as to their Babylonish character.

In an address given at our Annual Church Meeting in November last, the matter was dealt with in considerable detail, and this is the basis of the article under the heading of FESTAL SEASONS. C. H. Spurgeon once said: "When it can be proved that the observance of Christmas, Whitsun, and other Popish Festivals were instituted by a Divine Statute, we will attend to them, but not till then. It is as much our duty to REJECT the traditions of men as to OBSERVE the ordinances of the Lord."

This may well be a very big issue for many of God's people to face up to, and it will most certainly incur ridicule; but we are: "Not to follow a multitude to do evil." (EX.23:2).

"Does any Christian imagine that when he or she stands before a Holy God that they will regret having lived STRICTLY on earth? Is there the slightest danger of His reproving any of His own because they lived according to His mandate?"

A. W. Pink

"THUS SAITH THE LORD, LEARN NOT THE WAY OF THE HEATHEN FOR THE CUSTOMS OF THE PEOPLE ARE VAIN." (Jer.10:2-3)