

JULY - SEPT 1992

**T
H
E

L
I
N
K**

North Road Chapel (Evangelical)
BIDEFORD

PURITY OF HEART

When upon earth, the incarnate Son of God said "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:8). The eternal, thrice holy God is of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look upon iniquity (cf Habakkuk 1:13). It is because of this that the title of this article is of the utmost importance.

The dictionary definition of the word PURITY is - 'free from all pollution', 'a total absence of contamination'. In a true Biblical sense it means 'a sacred and holy refinement which stands diametrically opposed to everything which would defile or cause blemish'. There are three kinds of purity in the Holy Scriptures which must be distinguished.

THE PURITY OF THE GODHEAD

This is a holy perfection, a state of intrinsic purity. The eternal God is "glorious in holiness" (Exodus 15:11). Holiness enshrines all the Divine attributes. The Almighty is the personification of purity. His is a purity uncreated, it is inherent in the immutable unchanging God, a purity which is absolute.

CREATED PURITY

There is a created purity - that which is possessed by unfallen angels and was also the state of Adam before he fell. But this was CREATED for it issued from the Divine Creator.

GOSPEL PURITY

That which is theologically termed Evangelical or Gospel Purity will be the substance of this article.

Under the sovereign action of the Holy Spirit a sinner is brought to realize his lost condition, that his "heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked" (Jeremiah 17:9). Then to him is revealed the atoning work of Christ and the cleansing efficacy of His most precious blood. True faith appropriates this, and by it the sinner is cleansed from sin and justified before God. Grace is immediately wrought in the heart, nevertheless evil is still present, for whilst a new nature has been implanted, the old nature has not been destroyed and this is the case with all regenerate men and women. None ever attain unto sinless perfection as some erroneously teach. There is always the evil to contend with even in the choicest of saints. Did not the great apostle Paul say "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Romans 7:18-24).

When there has been a true work of grace in the heart of a person, there will be a constant struggle. A loathing of sin and a striving after genuine purity of heart. This is an ongoing work in the life of the Christian; putting off the old man - a mortification of the flesh (cf Ephesians 4:22, Colossians 3:5). Although this purity will never be absolute in this life, yet will it be evidenced by rectitude of mind. There will be a determination and a resolute seeking to conform to the mandate of Scripture.

Speaking generally, it is correct to say that the professing Church in Britain today is in disarray and riddled with impurities. Why is this? The answer is simple, for on the part of large numbers within her ranks there is no true striving after holiness. There is not a determined resolve to be obedient to all the commands of God and to mould one's life upon the sacred principles set out in His word. That which has occasioned this is very subtle.

For many years there has been a gospel preached which is not the true gospel, indeed it is ANOTHER GOSPEL. Its pedlars have called for decisions of the will of man. This in turn has passed for faith. Upon such decisions, words of assurance are immediately given, words which in so many instances just do not belong to the ones to whom they are spoken. Ere long these folk are in Church membership. In all probability they have been enlisted to teach in the Sunday school, or help to run a youth work. They may even be in the pulpit, yet in their life there is obvious pollution, there is not the absence of defilement. There is no evidence of a holy determination to stand opposed to anything which would cause blemish. In one short terse sentence, there has never been a true work of grace in the heart at all. "Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?" (Matthew 7:16). It is to be feared that great numbers are in the professing Church who are like Simon the sorcerer; they have neither part nor lot in this matter, for their hearts are not right in the sight of God (cf Acts 8:21). Purity of heart and purity of life are never seen apart in the Word of God. Profession and conduct go hand in hand. As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he (cf Proverbs 23:7). If a person's heart is truly regenerate, it will be seen in the life. If there is no striving after holiness, if there is still an appetite for the world, if a person is still perfectly at home in the company of unregenerate people and finds the company of faithful Christians irksome, then it is all too obvious that something is wrong. When a man or woman who has

professed the name of Christ does not feed upon the truth of Holy Scripture, is indifferent to its teachings, cares little for the paths of righteousness and is not diligent in attendance at the means of grace, that person is but bearing their natural fruit.

Where a genuine work of the Holy Spirit has taken place, there will be an earnest endeavour to comply with the will of God and to "cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Corinthians 7:1). The will of God for His children is "even your sanctification" (1 Thessalonians 4:3); becoming more and more conformed unto His image (cf Romans 8:29). Every man who has the true hope through grace purifieth himself (cf 1 John 3:3). This is an ongoing experience, it is an ever ascending scale of heart purity, and as always the Holy Scriptures instruct us how we can attain unto this.

CONTINUAL STUDY OF GOD'S WORD

The Psalmist states "Thy word is very pure" (Psalm 119:140). This priceless volume, the Bible, which God has given and preserved to us is VERY PURE, indeed it is the personification of purity. As we read it and its truth passes into our minds it has the effect of washing. Paul speaks of it as "the washing of water by the word" (Ephesians 5:26). John uses similar language "Now ye are clean through the word" (John 15:3). Our Lord in His prayer said "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth" (John 17:17). By constantly reading the Scriptures and meditating upon them, we are filling our minds and hearts with that which is pure; it sheds light and understanding into the mind and it consecrates and sanctifies the heart. Like a mirror it will also show up our defects. If we are to know purity of heart and to discover our blemishes, then we must come often to the pages of Holy Writ and fill our minds with its sacred truth.

CONSTANT REPENTANCE

It is to be feared that many Christians think that repentance is for the sinner, and that it is a once and for all experience which ends when we are converted. That repentance is a vital element in conversion no one would deny, but it does not finish there. In fact the word 'repent' is probably used more in Scripture concerning the Christian than the worldling.

Thomas Watson, the Puritan, writing on the matter of purity says "BATH OFTEN", and in quaint puritanical fashion goes on to say "There are two baths into which a Christian must constantly plunge, firstly THE BATH OF TEARS". He then cites Peter the disciple who so failed and defiled himself with sin and upon realizing his shameful failure, he went out and wept bitterly. Mary too, an unclean impure woman stood at Jesu's feet, weeping. Watson continues - "Oh let our eyes be a fountain of tears to weep for those sins which are so many as to be beyond all arithmetic. This water of repentance and contrition is wonderfully healing and purifying". Those godly Puritans could write in this manner, but what do we know of experiences such as this today? Do we not all need to become more sensitive to sin? Secondly, Watson goes on to speak of another bath - "A FOUNTAIN OPENED FOR SIN AND FOR UNCLEANNESS" (Zechariah 13:1). "Let a soul be steeped in the brinish tears of repentance and then plunge into this bath, such will be laundered whiter than snow" says he. This fountain which is Christ and His perfect work in redemption, covers every aspect of the sin of His elect, past, present and future. But as at the first, when made aware of our sinner ship and lost condition under the Holy Spirit's convicting power, we came in repentance to the Saviour for forgiveness, so now as believers when conscious of failure, are we to do the same. "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:8,9).

This is not the judicial aspect of sin, that was dealt with initially at conversion; this aspect before us now does not affect the believer's eternal security, but it does affect heart purity and our communion with God, and provision was made in the wondrous work of atonement to cover every stage in life. The blood of Christ cleanses from ALL sin, expressed so beautifully in the lines of William Cowper -

"There is a fountain filled with blood
Drawn from Immanuel's veins;
And sinners plunged beneath that flood
Lose all their guilty stains.

Dear dying Lamb, Thy precious blood
Shall never lose its power
Till all the ransomed Church of God
Be saved to sin no more".

FAITH

Peter the apostle, speaks of the purifying of the heart by faith (cf Acts 15:9). Where there is a true faith there will be a turning from sin and a departure from the world. Faith and the love of sin is inconsistent. The path of faith and the ways of the world are incompatible. A Divinely imparted faith and work of grace in the soul will be evidenced. A person genuinely born of the Holy Spirit will be aware of his undone condition by nature, but that now he is a new creature. Henceforth he says "For me to live is Christ" (Philippians 1:21). Constantly will such a person be praying that his faith be increased, that he might not only know the Word of God and be acquainted with His will, but that he might so believe and appreciate it, as to act accordingly. This is the principle by which the believer is to live, "The just shall live by faith" (Galatians 3:11). In this way there is an ever growing assurance, and by it the heart is being purified.

THE HOLY SPIRIT

In this matter of heart purity it is the blessed Holy Spirit of God who empowers. He is called the HOLY Spirit. All His actions and operations in us and for us tend, or are directed to our sanctification and holiness. In order that we might learn of the purifying virtue of the third person of the Godhead, the Scriptures give three illustrations, or present Him under three figures.

FIRE (Acts 2:3). This is probably the most forceful picture given to us, for nothing has a greater purifying effect than fire. The heat it generates will destroy all germs and consume all waste. It is the element which is used in refining metals; it separates dross from gold. In this way is fire illustrative of the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart, He refines, sanctifies and burns up the dross of sin.

WIND (Acts 2:2). In order to get the strength of this analogy, it is necessary to go in thought to the big industrial areas in the damp, dank days of November, when the clouds are low and the atmosphere is still; when there is no movement, the air is full of moisture, the fog dense, and from the factories the smoke and fumes billow out but cannot get away, and so build up and up until the very air becomes so thick that not only is visibility practically nil, but breathing also is extremely difficult. To exist in such an environment long term would be impossible. After a time there is movement in the air, a breeze springs up and the result is soon manifest as the fog and unhealthy vapours vanish. This is how the Holy Spirit works upon God's elect. In our natural state as born of Adam's race, we were in the dense fog of sin and unbelief, our spiritual vision was NIL, but when He first came to us as the wind, what smog and pollution was swept away; then did we see the truth and wonder of God's salvation, and since that initial experience of regeneration what further mists have been blown away! With some of us it has taken almost a gale to

disperse many of the crazy notions which we held when we dwelt in the thick build-up of doctrinal and theological ignorance. Even now do we need to constantly pray "Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out" (Song of Solomon 4:16). It is a very blessed, yea necessary thing for the Spirit of God to blow through us, for it airs us out and prevents that unhealthy stuffiness. The hymn writer put it well:

"O Breath of Life, come sweeping through us,
Revive thy Church with life and power.
O Breath of Life, come cleanse, renew us,
And fit thy Church to meet this hour.

O Wind of God, come, bend us, break us,
Till humbly we confess our need;
Then in Thy tenderness remake us,
Revive, restore; for this we plead".

WATER "He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But this spake he of the Spirit...)" (John 7:38,39). The Holy Spirit is as rivers of water bringing limitless refreshment as it irrigates the soul. How barren and waste were we before the Spirit of God flowed in upon us! "Until the Spirit be poured upon us from on high, and the wilderness be a fruitful field, and the fruitful field be counted for a forest" (Isaiah 32:15). "The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose" (Isaiah 35:1).

Apart from the Holy Spirit we can produce nothing; our lives are but empty and solitary, but through Him we can become fruitful fields, even to blossom as the rose. It is to the degree that His Spirit is upon us that rivers of living water will flow out from us.

THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS

We borrow this heading from the ancient Apostles Creed, and it is absolutely Biblical. This is yet another essential aspect to the question of being pure in heart. No man liveth to himself (cf Romans 14:7). Every man and woman has an influence upon others either for good or for ill. Day by day we leave an impression and have an effect upon them, and they also have an effect upon us; we may not be conscious of it, nevertheless it is a fact. Therefore in the matter of heart purity it is absolutely essential that our friends and close associates be those of "like precious faith" (2 Peter 1:1). Only in this way can there be a right and healthy influence. "He that walketh with wise men shall be wise" (Proverbs 13:20).

This does not mean that the Christian is to become totally withdrawn from the world, and that we develop a monastic type of existence. We are in the world and have to associate and work with those of the world, but our links with them should be loose, forming no close bond. Separation from the world is a line of truth rarely preached upon in this day and age, yet it is one of the fundamentals in the life of the child of God. "For what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?" (2 Corinthians 6:14). The society and association of the true believer is to be THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS. God's children should form their friendships with those who think right and who seek to order their lives according to the Word of God.

Another of the great tragedies of our generation is that so many of God's people are content to fellowship within liberal congregations where many of the members are shallow, and their belief and practice is not sound, in that it does not line up with the Word of God. This has an effect; it works like leaven, for it permeates into the lives of others, it "leaveneth the whole lump" (Galatians 5:9). To commune in such circles is far from conducive to heart purity.

PRAYER

This is yet another essential element to our becoming pure in heart. Ever upon our lips should be the prayer of David "Create in me a clean heart, O God" (Psalm 51:10). Of Hannah it was said she poured out her heart before the Lord (cf 1 Samuel 1:15). The Christian who has a concern for holiness of life and purity of heart will constantly be thus engaged - pouring out his soul.

SUMMARY

The essentials for heart purity then, are:-

1. THE WORD OF GOD
2. ONGOING REPENTANCE AND CONTRITION
3. FAITH
4. THE HOLY SPIRIT
5. THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS
6. PRAYER

When these are present and operative in the life, there will be an ongoing and progressive purification of the heart and "A conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men" (Acts 24:16).

W.H.MOLLAND

"Blest are the souls that thirst for grace,
Hunger and thirst for righteousness;
They shall be well supplied and fed,
With living streams and living bread.

Blest are the pure, whose hearts are clean
From the defiling powers of sin;
With endless pleasure they shall see
A God of spotless purity".

ISAAC WATTS

FEEDING SHEEP OR AMUSING GOATS?

An evil is in the professed camp of the Lord, so gross in its impudence, that the most short-sighted can hardly fail to notice it. During the past few years it has developed at an abnormal rate, even for evil. It has worked like leaven until the whole lump ferments. The devil has seldom done a cleverer thing than hinting to the Church that part of their mission is to provide entertainment for the people, with a view to winning them. From speaking out as the Puritans did, the Church has gradually toned down her testimony, then winked at and excused the frivolities of the day. Then she tolerated them in her borders. Now she has adopted them under the plea of reaching the masses.

My first contention is that providing amusement for the people is nowhere spoken of in the Scriptures as a function of the Church. If it is a Christian work, why did not Christ speak of it? "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature". That is clear enough. So it would have been if He had added, "and provide amusement for those who do not relish the gospel". No such words however, are to be found. It did not seem to occur to Him. Then again "He gave some apostles, some prophets, some pastors and teachers, for the work of the ministry". Where do entertainers come in? The Holy Spirit is silent concerning them. Were the prophets persecuted because they amused the people or because they refused? The concert has no martyr roll.

Again, providing amusement is in direct antagonism to the teaching and life of Christ and all His apostles. What was the attitude of the Church to the world? "Ye are the salt", not the sugar candy - something the world will spit out,

not swallow. Short and sharp was the utterance: "Let the dead bury their dead". He was in awful earnestness!

Had Christ introduced more of the bright and pleasant elements into His mission, He would have been more popular when He and His disciples went back, because of the searching nature of His teaching. I do not hear Him say, "Run after these people, Peter, and tell them we will have a different style of service tomorrow, something short and attractive with little preaching. We will have a pleasant evening for the people. Tell them they will be sure to enjoy it. Be quick, Peter, we must get the people somehow!" Jesus pitied sinners, sighed and wept over them, but never sought to amuse them. In vain will the epistles be searched to find any trace of the gospel of amusement. Their message is "Come out, keep out, keep clean out!" Anything approaching fooling is conspicuous by its absence. They had boundless confidence in the gospel and employed no other weapon. After Peter and John were locked up for preaching, the Church had a prayer meeting, but they did not pray "Lord, grant unto thy servants that by a wise and discriminating use of innocent recreation we may show these people how happy we are". If they ceased not for preaching Christ, they had not time for arranging entertainments. Scattered by persecution, they went everywhere preaching the gospel. They "turned the world upside down". That is the only difference! Lord, clear the Church of all the rot and rubbish the devil has imposed on her, and bring us back to apostolic methods.

Lastly, the mission of amusement fails to effect the end desired. It works havoc among young converts. Let the careless and scoffers, who thank God because the Church met them half-way, speak and testify. Let the heavy-laden who found peace through the concert not keep silent! Let the drunkard to whom the dramatic entertainment had been God's link in the chain of their conversion, stand up! There are none to answer. The mission of amusement produces no converts. The need of the hour for today's

ministry is believing scholarship joined with earnest spirituality, the one springing from the other as fruit from the root. The need is BIBLICAL DOCTRINE, so understood and felt, that it sets men on fire.

C.H.SPURGEON

If this is how Spurgeon viewed the situation in his day, then what of ours!

AN ALARM TO THE EVANGELICAL

As the age approaches its inevitable doom the evangelical finds himself increasingly involved in a downward spiral of false remedies and dubious experiments.

These spring inevitably from the haziness with which we evangelicals view our own history. We fail to see how much of our evangelicalism has lost touch with its own roots in the great Reformation.

The Reformation came about through the recovery and the radical restatement of the Bible teaching on God, man, grace, redemption and faith: our evangelical world today however, no longer speaks (for the most part) quite the same language as the Reformers or their great successors in the following two centuries.

A growing emphasis on the Sovereignty of Man has developed in our preaching, with a consequent obscuring of the idea of a sovereign and all-wise Creator, and (the very latest phase) there is a subtle swing towards a critical view of Holy Scripture. Evangelicalism is at last becoming infected by the very thing it has fought against for several generations - the modifying of the doctrine of a fully-inspired Bible. The rot is detected in our evangelical press, in its tolerant reviews of dangerous

and subversive books, and the increasing tendency to tamper with the ecumenical heresy. We are living, in fact, in the days of EVANGELICAL REVISIONISM, and even many of the Bible Colleges have contracted the contagion.

The Man-centred evangelism which is now the vogue, exalts the salvation of the sinner to a place of primacy in the scale of values in such a manner as to cloud over the glory of God, in His divine prerogatives and authority, and His all-wise unchangeable and unchallengeable purposes. These recede into the wings, while the stage is increasingly dominated by an evangelism which has little use for solid exposition. In the Race for Results, everything else is jettisoned.

All methods are bent to the one great end of accumulating decisions. Hence there is a rising tide of new and ever more daring techniques - the dazzling lights, the spotlight on personality, the "delayed entrance" as the great man comes on last of all, the high-powered, streamlined organisation geared up behind the facade at enormous expense. Then there is the last and latest development, the dawning of the age of "Pop-evangelism," of "Beat-session decisionism," and the avalanche of erotic religious lyrics setting out the Most Holy in sensual language scarcely distinguishable from the suggestive lines of the latest disc - set to music which is steadily growing wilder and more savage, in deliberate imitation of the rhythms which are cossetting whole generations of young people to the confines of hell.

The situation is getting out of hand, and it is time for someone to call a halt, and for evangelicals everywhere to stop, think and consider.

Not unexpectedly there has been induced by these conditions an appetite for the sensational and the pseudo-natural. The recrudescence of so-called "Charismatic" gifts, is not the least of the alarming portents.

With the decline in the sense of the divine, a cult of revivalism has become endemic, even amongst the more staid of evangelicals. In a word evangelism is sick.

In the search for a solution, let us begin by discarding false remedies.

EVANGELICAL CAMPAIGNISM IS NO REMEDY

Since the end of the last war this form of evangelical enterprise has been developed enormously and has earned the support of very many excellent men who sincerely expect that by this means the evangelical problem will best be met.

There has, however, been time enough during the last forty years and particularly during the last twenty years, to determine the value of this method. No one can honestly say that it has ever begun to touch our real problems. Whatever good may incidentally have been done, the great glacier of spiritual death continues to slither down the slope of the English-speaking world, with gathering momentum. Even in the United States, the tide of Church attendance, so high some years ago, has begun to recede rapidly, despite the sweeping (numerical) successes of campaigns organised by different individuals, on various lines, some of which are claimed to have had a million or more conversions. These efforts are offering only barriers of sand to the modernistic, rationalistic and agnostic tides.

It is to be feared that so far from arresting the process of doubt and intellectual revisionism, now gnawing at the vitals of the evangelical body itself, campaignism is having a diversionary tendency, by creating a false hope and turning attention away from the real remedy.

The position, it is to be feared, is now growing worse than that. The latest phase of these efforts is the mobilisation of immature youngsters in a sort of combined

operation. Untried and untaught in the saving doctrines of God's Word, they disperse on a semi-holiday basis for the evangelisation of the continent! Celluloid evangelism has also come to stay. The talkie film, with its dramatic plot, its "stars", its heroes and heroines, and its thrilling situations, has made its appearance. We now have the era of the Conversion-thriller, the power-packed drama of cine-camera salvation, calculated to throw into the shade all the one-track methods which the Holy Spirit has been pleased to use during the last two thousand years of the church's history.

THE CHARISMATIC REVIVAL IS NO REMEDY

The idea is spreading that gifts of tongues, miracle healings, and even hints of raising the dead, are going to transform the scene and give us the answer.

This movement, however sincerely based, is really the consequence of the decline of Reformation doctrine, and the rise of superficial Bible teaching. It should be clearly observed that the supernatural manifestations of New Testament times were the Holy Spirit's endorsement of the apostolic testimony to the Resurrection of Christ. They demonstrated the passing of the Old Covenant and the inauguration of the New. Charismatic gifts were transmitted only through direct apostolic agency. There is nothing in Holy Scripture to suggest that these gifts were to be transmitted and nothing in history to show that they were in fact transmitted to the successors of the apostles. There can be no resuscitation of apostolic gifts apart from apostolic hands. There are no apostles therefore there are no supernatural gifts.

The appetite for the recovery and exercise of these gifts today is, to put it at its mildest, unhealthy. It may well prove a snare and an obstruction to real progress. The world was never conquered, and never will be, by the miraculous. The miracles performed by the Saviour led to His rejection and crucifixion. The miraculous element

which pervaded the apostolic days, did not conquer the world. It was part of the establishment of the Kingdom of God; the conquering power lay in the spoken word of truth. "It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe". The enthusiasm of good people who look for the transformation of the evangelical scene by recourse to supernatural gifts is a pathetic clutching at straws. The result will be bitter disillusionment - if not something worse.

REVIVALISM IS NO REMEDY

All our lifetime the accent has been on a great Revival. A flurry here and there send many earnest people hurrying to see or to spread the excitement. The all-night prayer meeting reappears, in the belief that this is the grand specific for revival. The centenary of some 19th century movement is duly and enthusiastically observed, as though the Holy Spirit has a special regard for the calendar. All in vain! There is no revival.

Unfortunately what most people have in mind in this much overworked word 'revival' is a period of evangelical excitement and success on the grand scale, comparable with the great evangelical experiences of the "Revival century" - that period of exactly one hundred years which extended, curiously enough, from the termination of the Napoleonic wars AT Waterloo in 1815, to the expiry of the old world in the mud and blood of Flanders in 1914. The spontaneous evangelical awakenings which were common in that long century of world peace were the last flowering of the Reformation, Puritan and Methodist period when the evangelical cause was still living on the unexpended capital of the 16th and 17th centuries. After that the bank broke. The mistake most of us evangelicals have been making is in thinking that there can be a revival of a like order today, regardless of the fact that the comparative soundness of the churches upon which the 'revival century' fed, now no longer exists. Christendom at large has moved over to unbelief on the one hand, and

papal superstition on the other, and the evangelical voice has become dumb between the two extremes. The conditions no longer exist for revival after the expected pattern, hence all the well meant and earnest strivings of good people for a recurrence of the experience have ended disappointingly in shoal water. There has been no depth to float the ship - mighty preaching founded upon faithfulness to the inspired Word, and wedded to an exegetical knowledge adequate to the presentation of divine truth, no longer exists on a sufficient scale.

THE REMEDY LIES IN THE FORGOTTEN FACTOR

The forgotten factor is the treasure of deep evangelical truth bequeathed at the Reformation, but now more or less overlaid by an evangelicalism given more and more to an emphasis on man rather than upon God. No one strove for revival or planned it in the 16th century. The Reformation was prepared by God over at least two earlier centuries. It was preceded by the awakening of the human mind at the time of the Italian Renaissance. Science, art and religion prepared themselves to throw off the shackles of a thousand years of darkness. The Reformation itself came, not as the work of one man or any group of men, but as the consummation of God's purpose through generations of movement in the human mind. The invention of printing shortly before the birth of Luther was a factor of incalculable importance in the divine plan for the emancipation of the soul of man.

Now, the very fires which fed the Reformation, have devoured its child. Infidel philosophy, art and science have flourished with the emancipation of man, and have at last succeeded in well-nigh overthrowing organised Christianity, by polluting the streams from which the church's intellectual and spiritual life proceed. The Holy Scriptures have been discredited. An infidel scientific theory has banished God from Creation. The way is opened up for the last Satanic assault upon the soul of man. Only the evangelical holds the key to the present

disaster. But the one weapon he seems incapable of drawing from the scabbard, or having drawn it, being skilled to wield the same, is the very weapon without which he cannot win - the weapon of the Word of God.

It was by this Word alone that in the days of Luther kings were overthrown, history changed, and the world filled with light. But with the Reformers the Word was something more than a message about conversion, slickly presented and garnished with entertaining story and humour. The Reformers laboured year by year, sometimes with the assassin at the door, to understand the Word and grapple with its mysteries. They brought up from the deepest depths, water from the well of Bethlehem. They saw God in His Word as the sovereign Creator who in awful majesty and unsearchable wisdom, laid the foundations of His redemptive work in the eternal counsels of His Godhead, to be worked out in time according to the incomprehensible pattern of His own foreknowledge and foreordination. "God foreknows because He predestinates" thundered Luther when destroying the sophistries of Erasmus, the greatest scholar of the age. "The doctrine of God's predestination is so necessary to the church of God that without the same faith can neither be truly taught nor surely established", declared John Knox, the greatest figure in Scottish history.

As God is sovereign, so is His grace, these men declared. Their evangelical exhortations, just as free and far more searching and effective than anything heard nowadays in the evangelical pulpit, took a sombre hue. Men knew themselves to be but men, under this sort of preaching. Conversion was a solemn and awful thing, not to be lightly and easily professed. Sinners found themselves in the hand of an angry God and fled for refuge to Christ. The Holy Spirit was His own Counsellor and the wind of grace blew where He listed. Sanctification became the outcome of earnest and patient discipline under the hand of God, not a sudden bound over the altar of consecration, bypassing the problems oftentimes within.

In a word, God used, as He always has used, mighty preaching based on adequate knowledge of His Word, and commensurate skill in the presentation of the fulness of Divine Truth.

Where do those conditions obtain today? How may they be recovered? Have these ancient skills gone for ever, or is there a means for their restoration? What must the earnest young man do about entering on such a ministry as this? Is there hope in the present situation, and has God a special message for today?

These are questions which are fundamental to the present situation.

All talk of revival is irrelevant unless these issues are faced and given the priority. The situation is far more serious than most of us suppose - and already it is later than most of us think.

C.D.ALEXANDER

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND INFORMATION

ANNUAL BIBLE CONVENTION

SATURDAY 1 AUGUST 1992

Afternoon Service 3.30 pm

Tea 5.00 pm

Evening Service 6.00 pm

SPEAKER: MR W.H.MOLLAND (Abbotsham)

VISITING PREACHER

Lord's Day 6 September 1992 MR D.J.WILLIAMS (Rhymney)

EDITORIAL

Reference is made elsewhere in this magazine to THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS. This is a very important aspect of the Christian life. The Westminster Confession and the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith both state "Saints by profession are bound to maintain an holy fellowship and communion in the worship of God, and in performing such other spiritual services as tend to their mutual edification". This statement is confirmed by Scripture - "Let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: 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" (Hebrews 10:24,25). Happy indeed and greatly privileged are those Christians who can gather in holy fellowship with those of "like precious faith". However the professing Church has sunk to such low levels today that many of the Lord's dear children find themselves in a situation where there is no true fellowship. When attending the services, far from being fed and their souls uplifted, they return hungry and spiritually depressed, having been confronted with Babylonish gimmickry, or at best a shallow sermon greatly overbalanced by much music and exuberant singing. What communion is this for those desiring to "worship in the beauty of holiness"? Indeed what are they to do in such circumstances? If a situation becomes intolerable, then there is but one answer. God's people in all ages have always been commanded to leave Babylon (false religious practices) cf Jeremiah 50:8, Zechariah 2:7, 2 Corinthians 6:16,17, Revelation 18:4. At the close of the Old Testament age, true communion was reduced to speaking one to another, but the Lord heard and commended them (cf Malachi 3:16,17). The New Testament age could well end in the same manner. However where it is humanly possible, such should seek out a company of believers truly gathered to the name of the Lord and so "STRENGTHEN THE THINGS WHICH REMAIN" (Revelation 3:2).