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**North Road Chapel (Evangelical)
BIDEFORD**

RECONCILIATION

In the days in which we live, there seems to be within the Church an ever increasing misunderstanding of theological terms and a confusing of words used by the Holy Spirit in the Scriptures to define certain very important aspects of doctrine.

For many years there has been a tendency for preachers to over simplify the gospel, with the result that there are now large numbers in membership in the Churches who have little, if any appreciation of the deep doctrinal content of the message of salvation. It is proposed to examine some of these key words with their specific emphasis. This edition will see the commencement of an examination of the term RECONCILIATION.

The apostle Paul, writing to the Church at Corinth said "All things are of God, who hath reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; to wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:18,19). In these verses Paul is speaking of "the ministry" and drawing attention to the tremendous responsibility of the minister. He emphasises that God hath given or hath committed to us the word of RECONCILIATION! This at once infers that it is of the utmost importance that the minister must have a clear and a Biblical grasp of his subject.

This matter pertains to a thrice Holy God and rebel sinners, and the reconciling of the two. It is a most complex matter, a mighty subject which is committed to us, says the apostle; it is so involved, so intricate that if a man is not thoroughly grounded in sound doctrine or is

muddled in his theology, then how greatly is God going to be dishonoured by his ministry and men led astray.

Preaching is a solemn business, it is the most responsible work upon God's earth. The minister of the Word of God must be diligent and scrupulous in his study of the Scriptures lest he set forth a perverted interpretation of God's sacred truth. People, whether they are believers or unbelievers, will only be edified and blessed by WHOLESOME DOCTRINE. The realization of this should bow every preacher before God in deep reverence and humility, that he be ever sure of his ground before he puts the trumpet to his lips lest it give forth an uncertain sound. Far better never to preach than to utter that which is dishonouring to God and injurious to souls. Paul felt the weight of this tremendously; the expounding of all the detail of these eternal matters is committed to us, he says - EARTHEN VESSELS. "Who is sufficient for these things?" (2 Corinthians 2:16). Of ourselves, none are; only by thorough study of the Word and the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit can they be discerned, and only in His power can they be declared with authority and conviction.

How then is this subject of reconciliation to be understood in a Biblical sense? The word RECONCILE means 'to bring together those who are alienated', 'to reunite those at variance', 'to restore to concord'. A.W.Pink in his book on Reconciliation makes a very important point; "Reconciliation is objective, it terminates upon the object, not the subject. It is not the reconciliation itself which is of such significance, but the persons reconciled". The persons under consideration of course are the eternal God and sinners of the human race. Writing to the Colossian Christians, Paul said "You that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath He reconciled" (Colossians 1:21).

As we approach this subject of a holy God and guilty sinners being reconciled, it must be stated at the outset that the whole matter is to be kept within the framework

of the Divine law. There must never lurk in our minds the thought that God exercises leniency towards certain people upon whom He lavishes special favours. God is immutable, eternally so. No change is ever seen in His will, His nature or His actions.

When men of earth who have been at variance are reconciled, there is an inward change, ill feeling is forgotten, goodwill is proffered and a kindly disposition is established. Never must spiritual reconciliation be reduced to this level. The eternal God possesses nothing which corresponds to human passions. He does not suddenly change from an angry disposition to friendly affection, indeed not; reconciliation between a holy God and sinful man, could only be brought about by all His righteous claims against the sinner being met, therefore it must be viewed as FORENSIC or LEGAL. God never acts outside of His law.

Reconciliation presupposes alienation, discord and hostility. There is no need for reconciliation where there is harmony and peace. It also implies that before the discord there WAS harmony. Peace existed before it was broken by strife and enmity. There was a time when God and man were in perfect accord. The Creator expressed more favour to man than to any other created being. Man was made in God's image (cf Genesis 1:26). He was God's viceroy on earth, entrusted with the care, the charge and the dominion of all created things on this planet. Adam was fitted to live in perpetual communion with his Maker, having the capacity of knowing God, and loving and enjoying Him to the full. He was so constituted as to be able to glorify God actively, whilst all other aspects of creation were capable of manifesting God's glory only in a passive way. In his primal state Adam was sinless, he was upright (cf Ecclesiastes 7:29), he was in perfect and happy concord with his Maker. However he was mutable, capable of change and of falling; how quickly did it happen! God placed upon him one prohibition, one test of allegiance; to fail in this single test of loyalty and

obedience would mean that Adam would "surely die" (Genesis 2:17). Adam heeded not the command of God, he disobeyed, he apostatised and by so doing, as federal head of the race and the legal representative, he dragged all his posterity down with him. "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (Romans 5:12).

By Adam's fall all spiritual privileges were forfeited. Man lost the image of God, the favour of God and the fellowship of God, for at that point God DROVE MAW OUT. Acting in the attributes of His holiness and wrath, God went into action according to His holy law. "He drove out the man" (Genesis 3:24) and in driving out Adam, He drove out all his seed. It was even more than this, for a flaming sword which turned every way barred the return of man. There was no returning to God even if man chose to, as long as that sword was drawn. As stated earlier in this article this is a highly legal matter; it pertains to law and to justice.

Mankind is now "alienated from the life of God" (Ephesians 4:18), "Enemies in your mind by wicked works" (Colossians 1:21), "Children of wrath" (Ephesians 2:3). Sin placed God and man apart so that the harmony which did exist between them was completely destroyed; yea, not only was the harmony destroyed but wrath was incurred, for Almighty God is the offended party. "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men" (Romans 1:18).

It must be clearly understood that God is as much alienated from the sinner as the sinner is from God. That God is antagonistic to the sinner is as clear in Holy Scripture as is the enmity of the sinner to God. "Thou hatest all workers of iniquity" (Psalm 5:5), "God is angry with the wicked every day" (Psalm 7:11), "They rebelled, and vexed His holy Spirit: therefore He was turned to be their enemy" (Isaiah 63:10).

It is when men come to fully realize these solemn facts that they will begin to appreciate the need of reconciliation. A breach has been caused through sin, this must be healed. Righteous wrath has been incurred, the holy anger of God must be appeased; peace and concord must be restored.

Because the alienation is mutual, God's anger is upon the sinner and the sinner is at enmity with God, so must the reconciliation be mutual. Sin had placed both God and men at JUDICIAL VARIANCE. We are the offending party, God the offended. Before there could be any reconciliation, the wrath of God had to be placated. There is much teaching today which leaves one with the impression that it is man who has to be reconciled to God; this is true but it is only part of the truth. There can be no reconciliation on either side until Divine justice is satisfied. A holy God will never withdraw the flaming sword and be reconciled to the sinner unless His claims are met in full; so the Godward aspect of reconciliation comes first - it must.

The Old Testament sacrifices were specifically designed to set forth that God should be propitiated and His wrath diverted from man, not the enmity of man diverted from God.

When Israel sinned so grievously in making the molten calf, Jehovah said unto Moses "Let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them" (Exodus 32:10). In that situation, Moses stepped in as a mediator interposing between a righteous God and a sinning people, and by so doing God's wrath was turned from them.

At the rebellion of the sons of Korah, God said "Get you up from among this congregation, that I may consume them as in a moment" (Numbers 16:45). Again Moses stepped in saying to Aaron "Take a censer, and put fire therein from off the altar, and put on incense, and go quickly unto the congregation, and make an atonement for them: for there is wrath gone out from the Lord; the plague is begun"

(Numbers 16:46). This Aaron did "and he stood between the dead and the living; and the plague was stayed" (Numbers 16:48). These are but two instances taken from the old economy to illustrate how the wrath of God was placated. The effect of such appeasement by mediation and sacrifice is expressly termed RECONCILIATION (cf Leviticus 16:20, 2 Chronicles 29:24). Sacrifices were made, not to divert man's enmity from God, but primarily to divert God's enmity from man.

Only by God's law being vindicated, its holy demands met and in consequence His holy wrath appeased, can the sword of Divine justice be withdrawn and He come out in reconciling grace to the sinner.

TO BE CONTINUED

W.H. MOLLAND

Men are not only enemies internally and externally to God but there is an enmity on the part of God to them ... an enmity declared in the law against them.

JOHN GILL

God and man were set at a distance, at enmity and variance by sin, man was the party offending, God the offended, and the alienation was mutual on every side.

JOHN OWEN

How little is it realized that there is an immeasurable gulf between God and the sinner... With but rare exceptions, present day Christendom is but a studied effort to hide the awful truth that man has forfeited the favour of God and is barred from His holy presence, yea that "the Lord is far from the wicked" (Proverbs 15:29).

A. W.PINK

HIM HATH GOD EXALTED

Jesus our Lord, once crucified, dead and buried, now sits upon the throne of glory. The highest place that heaven affords is His by undisputed right. It is sweet to remember that the exaltation of Christ in heaven is a REPRESENTATIVE EXALTATION. He is exalted at His Father's right hand, and though as Jehovah He has many eminent glories in which finite creatures cannot share, yet, as the "Mediator", the honours which the Head wears in heaven are the heritage of all His saints. It is delightful to reflect how close and real is the union of Christ with His people - His saved ones. We are actually one with Him; we are members of His body; and His exaltation is OUR exaltation also. He will soon give us to sit upon His throne, even as He has overcome and has set down with His Father on His throne. He has a crown, and He will give us crowns too. He has a throne, but He is not content with having a throne by Himself; on His right hand there must be His queen, arrayed in gold of Ophir (cf Psalm 45:9). He cannot be glorified without His bride. Look up believer, to the Lord now. Let the eye of your faith behold Him with many crowns on His head; and remember that one day you will be like Him, when you shall see Him as He is. You shall not be as great as He is; you shall not be divine; but shall in a measure share the same honour, enjoy the same happiness and the same dignity which He possesses as the Father's glorified Servant. Be content to live unknown for a little while, and to walk the path of affliction; for soon you shall reign with Christ, for He has "made us a kingdom of priests unto God, and we shall reign for ever and ever". Oh, wonderful thought for the children of God! We have Christ for our glorious representative in heaven's courts now, and soon He will come to receive us to Himself, to be with Him there, to behold His glory and to share His joy. Hallelujah! Amen.

C.H.SPURGEON

SODOM

ITS SIN, ITS JUDGEMENT AND ITS RELEVANCE TODAY

Going back in human history almost four thousand years to a very fertile area of land in Palestine at the south of the Jordan valley, there existed four or five prosperous cities; the two chief centres being Sodom and Gomorrah. Both historical and archaeological records reveal much of these ancient communities, but what is most important is that which is revealed in the Bible; the Holy Scriptures have a great deal to say concerning this tract of land, the cities and the society.

This territory is described as "well watered everywhere", comparable to the Nile delta of Egypt, extremely fertile, indeed the Bible states it was "even as the garden of the Lord" (Genesis 13:10); - a miniature paradise as to its fruitfulness. The cities are featured as extremely affluent, having "fulness of bread and abundance of idleness" (Ezekiel 16:49). The wealth was such that in the main their people lived in luxury, enjoying a very high standard of living. It is further stated of this society that they were haughty, proud and had little concern for others. Although they had such abundance, plus the fact that they were a leisure and pleasure seeking people, yet they never spared a thought for, or put out their hand to help those who were less fortunate. The Sodomites were completely self-centred (cf Ezekiel 16:49,50), but that was not all; the Almighty God said "they ... committed abomination before Me" (Ezekiel 16:50); further to this it is stated "The men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the Lord exceedingly" (Genesis 13:13).

SINNERS, WICKED, HAUGHTY, PROUD AND COMMITTING ABOMINATION
BEFORE THE LORD.

What lay behind this description? What was actually going on, that a society could have such language used of them?

The Bible tells us in understandable terms; nothing is glossed over, or spoken of in a veiled or indistinct manner.

Sodom and Gomorrah were cesspits of degradation, so much so that they were an ABOMINATION to the God of heaven. There was moral filth of every kind, perversions and debauchery of the lowest level. Shameless and undisguised immorality was common place, not only between men and women, but between men and men. Homosexuality was rampant; practices which sink far, far lower than the animal creation, the very dregs of debauchery. "Where are the men?" said they, "... bring them out unto us, that we may know them" (Genesis 19:5). Sexual relationships between males was the norm in Sodom - a gross violation of the Divine order of creation which the Creator will not tolerate; it is one sin for which God will give men up. "Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves" (Romans 1:24).

The first twenty-eight verses of Genesis chapter nineteen tell the sad story of Sodom and Gomorrah, with their total destruction at the hand of Almighty God on account of their gross sin and abomination. "Then the Lord rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven; and He overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and ALL THE INHABITANTS of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground" (Genesis 19:24,25).

Those people who lived in comparative ease and luxury, yet wallowed unashamedly in sin, were in a moment of time swept away by a devastating stroke of Divine judgment and assigned to everlasting judgment. The fertile plain and those affluent cities were completely destroyed by the action of the great Creator, and now forms the Dead Sea and its surrounding area. The barrenness and desolation of that locality bears lasting testimony to the fact that God is not mocked. Sodomy is an abomination unto Him and Divine judgment will always follow in its wake. The waste

and volcanic mass of the lower Jordan area is a permanent memorial to the judgment of God upon a depraved society.

HAS THIS HISTORICAL EVENT ANY RELEVANCE TO THE AGE IN WHICH WE LIVE?

The answer is Yes, it has great relevance! "All these things happened unto them for ensamples; and they are written for our admonition" (1 Corinthians 10:11). Such matters are not to be hushed up, they are to be boldly spoken of, for they are the warnings of a Holy God to society in all ages. Let no one be so foolish as to harbour the thought that God is more tolerant today in the New Testament age, than He was in the Old Testament; that is a lie of the Devil. It may be the teaching of some of the smooth talking pulpiteers of modern churchianity, but let none be deceived by these false prophets; the God of heaven is unchanging and immutable, His law and holy requirements forever stand, His judgment lingereth not and their damnation slumbereth not (cf 2 Peter 2:3). The eternal God will not keep silence for ever, He hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world, and when He does, His judgment will not be restricted to one little area, it will be UNIVERSAL.

It is no exaggeration to say that society is fast becoming a morass of moral corruption. It is not that standards are breaking down, they have to a very large degree been completely swept aside. The apostle Paul writing to Timothy gives a long list of traits which will be prevalent in the human race in the last days, and among them is "without natural affection" (2 Timothy 3:3); it does not say "without affection", rather "without NATURAL affection". How common place it is today for mothers or fathers to walk out, leave their husbands or wives, forsake their children and pair up with another. This is not natural, wild animals do not forsake their offspring until they are reared; yet so-called civilised humans now do it

with scarce a second thought and appear to have no sense of shame. What is happening to NATURAL AFFECTION?

Not only does the Bible speak of those "without NATURAL affection", it has a lot to say about VILE affection. "Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen. For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change their natural use into that which is against nature: and likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet. And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient" (Romans 1: 24-28).

1. Changing the natural use of the woman into that which is against nature - LESBIANISM.
2. Men leaving the natural use of the woman, burning in lust one toward another, men with men - HOMOSEXUALITY.

The Almighty God describes this as VILE AFFECTION. Are not these practices rampant in the world today? Yea more, they are shamelessly spoken of and enacted blatantly before others. The filth and pollution is spread by literature, media, drama, film and video. This debased mode of life is now accepted in the community; indeed such have official recognition, being styled the GAY SOCIETY. Not only are these received by society generally, but also into the Church. Some leading heads of Christendom would even go further, and put them into the pulpits. Such is the spiritual blindness and apostacy of our generation.

These unnatural acts of men and women are an abomination unto the Lord, it is 'Sodomish', it is VILE AFFECTION and

God will no more tolerate this in the twentieth century than He did two thousand years B.C.

Into ancient Sodom God sent two messengers to warn of coming judgment (cf Genesis 19). Their message was told out in clear terms, no one could misunderstand, yet only three persons heeded the warning and escaped. Alas in our generation very few are preaching the exceeding sinfulness of the present day. Modern preaching has become polite, soft and sugary. Nevertheless the gravity of today's situation cannot be overstressed. As it was in times past when the unerring Word of Truth states "God gave them up to their vile affection", so is it in this generation. Restraint is removed, barriers are broken down, any sense of shame is almost non-existent, consciences are seared as with a hot iron. When men and women will not retain God in their knowledge and in consequence He gives them over to a reprobate mind (cf Romans 1:28), it is a sure sign that Divine judgment is approaching.

There is no doubt whatsoever, but that the conditions of Sodom are right in OUR MIDST NOW in the late twentieth century. Because of this undeniable fact, this grave Old Testament incident is not only relevant, but its lessons are of tremendous, yea VITAL importance to this generation.

"As it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; but the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed" (Luke 17:28-30). These verses have reference to the second advent of Christ, His coming back to this world, not in a humble and lowly form as at His first advent. Then He came as a servant to do God's will and to obey the law in all its detail, so that His perfect obedience and righteousness might be imputed to all His believing people. He came also as the Lamb of God to be offered as a sacrifice upon Calvary. By that is meant, that the

penalty of sin due to the sinner was inflicted upon Christ and there He "put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself" (Hebrews 9:26). Through this great work of Atonement which was both preceptive and penal, He brought salvation. Forgiveness of sins through faith in His blood has been preached among all nations since that first advent. Countless multitudes have believed the message to their eternal salvation. Alas, vast millions too have continued in sin, paying no heed to spiritual matters; hardening their hearts, they leave God out of their thoughts, with the result that large sections of civilisation sink lower and lower in GODLESSNESS and DEPRAVITY, till we view a scene such as it is today.

The average person however, is not unduly concerned; they will admit to a measure of moral decline and falling standards, but then will add - things will go full circle eventually; the world will continue, the seasons, the generations, business, industry, commerce, none of these things can stop, and society will pull around again, it is but a cycle in the process of evolution. This is blatant nonsense for there is no such thing as evolution, and as for going full circle that may be, but the full circle will be to revolve into judgment. True it is that many things continue and this will be the case right up to the moment that Christ returns, then cometh the end. His second coming is not to bring words of glad tidings, but to summon the world to unmitigated judgment. The spectacle will be awesome, so much so that even the great figures of earth will tremble. "The kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, will hide themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; and say to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of His wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand? (cf Revelation 6:15).

The Bible which is the inspired Word of God and authentic in its every detail, draws a great parallel between the ancient judgment upon Sodom and the great judgment of the last day.

The inhabitants of Sodom were visited by messengers who warned of imminent judgment: with what result? They seemed as those that mocked (cf Genesis 19:14). Is not this typical of the contemporary age? Faithful preachers are generally regarded as sadly outdated and not to be taken seriously; they are hell-fire scaremongers, a race that has almost died out. These predictions from the Bible will never come to pass, the world will continue. Such is the deluded thinking of the average person. This is a corresponding attitude to the Sodomites. Their commercial and social life was continuing as it always had, everything was progressing; "But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all" (Luke 17:29). THE SAME DAY. There was no opportunity for repentance, no second chance; with devastating swiftness, judgment fell and not one escaped at the last. "The sun was risen upon the earth when Lot entered into Zoar. Then the Lord rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven; and He overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground" (Genesis 19:23-25).

It was so unexpected, everything was going on as usual, the sun was shining that morning, people were going about their normal business, AT THIS TIME, says the Scripture, God rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. "Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed" (Luke 17:30) is the authoritative word of Christ Himself.

The conditions which will prevail immediately prior to the second advent of Christ will be just as it was with Sodom. Are they not now apparent? This world is fast ripening for judgment. Let none be fooled by the masses who say that

it will never happen - IT WILL. "Be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Saviour: knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of His coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation. For this they willingly are ignorant" (2 Peter 3:2-5). "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up" (2 Peter 3:10).

To unsaved ones the message is "Behold NOW is the accepted time; behold NOW is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2). The second advent of the Son of God will close forever the door of salvation. "Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and He shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are" (Luke 13:24,25).

This then is the RELEVANCE of Sodom to the contemporary scene. "Ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief" (1 Thessalonians 5:4). "Be ye therefore ready ... for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not" (Luke 12:40).

W.H.MOLLAND

Behold! He comes to one and all;
And soon we'll hear the trumpet call;
To judgment called at His command,
From every clime, from every land,
Before His throne we all must stand:
BE READY WHEN HE COMES!

ESPECIALLY FOR YOUNG CHRISTIANS

COURTSHIP

In the present day marriage is under attack. Increasingly it is becoming accepted practice for two people to live together without entering into marriage, sadly evidenced by the fact that 'partner' has taken the place of 'husband' or 'wife' in the vocabulary of the media and even in the wording of many of the forms and documents issued by the authorities. The young believer is faced with a society where casual, short term relationships are the order of the day, and where even among those who do marry, divorce is reaching epidemic proportions.

Care must be taken that the attitudes of the world do not enter into your thinking on courtship and marriage. The choosing of a husband or wife is one of the most important decisions which you will make and must not be influenced by the practices which surround you in the world.

Remember, firstly, that courtship is always with a view to marriage. Young men must not make up their mind to marry and then embark on a course of courting as many girls as possible until a suitable one is found. Young ladies must not seek to become the girlfriend of one young man after another until this selection process is exhausted. This behaviour is not worthy of a Christian and often leads to unnecessary heartbreak when one party is seen to be insincere. Do not form attachments lightly.

With this in mind, resist the pressure felt when your friends begin to pair off and you feel that something must be done because all those who are eligible will soon be unavailable; rather make prayer the starting point. Pray that you will be led to find the husband or wife planned for you by God, and consult the Scriptures to ensure that no mistakes are made. Here are some helpful guidelines.

Never consider entering into courtship with an unbeliever. This would lead to a marriage which is contrary to the Scriptures "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers" (2 Corinthians 6:14), and to do so is a deliberate act of disobedience. You may think that such a friendship is but harmless fun from which you can withdraw at any time, but beware, for attachments become very strong. You may be young, never having mixed much outside your circle of Christian friends, and then you meet someone, perhaps at work or college, and feel an attraction grow. Possibly you are a little older and are disappointed that you have never married, so that when someone comes into your life, you are a little flattered that your feelings are being returned. No matter the circumstances, life seems to brighten, and when this attraction becomes so strong that you cannot see how it is wrong, you allow your emotions to take over completely. Feelings, however, are a bad barometer of what is right and wrong - the Scriptures are the only sound guide. Before long you find that this friendship has developed to the point where it is more important to you than spiritual things.

If you are in this position presently, please step back and break off a relationship not sanctioned by Scripture. The object of your affections may have great personality and be kind and considerate, with many other commendable features. You may even find an excitement about them because their way of life is so different from that which you know. However, all these are more than outweighed by the fact that he or she is an unbeliever. For that nothing compensates.

In view of this, is it sufficient to consider courting anyone who is a believer? The answer to this is emphatically No! It is not enough to enter courtship with any believer, nor even with any believer in local church fellowship. There are other issues which must be the subject of careful and prayerful consideration. The scriptural condition for marriage is that it should be "in the Lord". This means that this step, with the courtship

which precedes it, must be taken with a clear conviction that it is the will of the Lord. When you meet someone, and find that a mutual attraction is developing, consider whether you both have a similar interest in spiritual things and that there is an agreement between you on the fundamental issues of Scripture. Have you hopes and plans for life which are compatible and which are based on a desire to know and practise the will of God? Do you both have an interest in attending local church gatherings, or is there reluctance on the part of one to become too involved? As you gradually get to know each other better, and as you pray, you will find whether there is a basis for the friendship blossoming into courtship. This is not reducing love and courtship to a series of questions and answers where, if there are enough plus points, the answer is "Yes" - it is simply pointing out the issues which should be in the mind of any believer facing a friendship developing along these lines. There is no formula, but there is the need for great care.

Courting is a time of great happiness, getting to know each other better and finding your love grow, eventually leading to engagement. Remember that engagement is not just an opportunity to obtain a fine-looking ring. To be engaged is to be promised to another and must only be entered into when a firm decision to marry has been taken before the Lord.

At this time the conduct of the believer must be carefully guarded. The world treats chastity before marriage as an unimportant thing. If two people plan to marry, they argue, what difference does a few weeks or months make? What difference does a marriage licence make? Is it really important if you anticipate marriage before the ceremony? It most certainly is, the Word of God is quite clear that a physical relationship is only allowable within marriage. Two young believers desirous of pleasing God, will remain chaste until after the marriage ceremony, as anything else is designated 'fornication' in Scripture.

This may seem strong language but if we believe Scripture to be the Word of God we accept this as His verdict. To engage in an illicit relationship, even with one whom you plan to marry will leave a blight over your future life - something that you will never forget. It is conduct that would demand action by the church and although you may seek to hide it from others, remember that it is known to God. Far better to exercise self control and look forward to the day of marriage, with all the anticipation of entering fully into the joys, the privileges and the responsibilities of married life, knowing that you kept yourself pure.

The marriage which you plan is much more than a physical relationship. The vows made are a public declaration of your intention to share your life together, to love each other in the dark days and in the bright days, and in that love to create a home where the Lord Jesus is honoured, providing for each other the spiritual, emotional and physical support and comfort which is so necessary for a happy and godly family life.

Enjoy your courtship, respect the purity of each other, give the Lord the first place, commit your future to Him, and thus lay a good foundation for your life together.

J. GRANT

TAKEN FROM THE BELIEVERS MAGAZINE BY KIND PERMISSION

"The Lord's authority is above our reason and will, we should deny ourselves and submit to Him, yea, obey His law, though our will should be against it; and believe His word though reason should oppose it".

FRANCIS BACON

**"By faith Abraham, when he was called
to go outobeyed; and he went out,
NOT KNOWING WHITHER..."**

(Hebrews 11:8)

A call from God, a dim and untried way,
A faith that does not reason or delay,
A soul that in the darkness can obey -
"NOT KNOWING WHITHER".

No guiding star to shed it's silv'ry light,
Revealing if the way be left or right;
A step into the cold and cheerless night -
"NOT KNOWING WHITHER".

Ah, for a heart that does not ask to know Or
question why God's hand is leading so;
Content to hear the call, Arise, and go -
"NOT KNOWING WHITHER".

A path we cannot see or understand;
Yet hope can sing "My times are in Thy hand"
And tread the barren waste or sand -
"NOT KNOWING WHITHER".

No parting sigh, no tear of sad regret,
No thought of what has been, or may be yet;
But just to follow on, our faces set -
"NOT KNOWING WHITHER".

No murmur if the way be rough or drear,
No wonder if the end be far or near;
A step that journeys on, without a fear -
"NOT KNOWING WHITHER".

God give us faith, that evermore shall fill
Our hearts with sweet obedience to Thy will,
That we may follow, hoping, trusting still -
"NOT KNOWING WHITHER".

FLORENCE M. TAYLOR

EDITORIAL

A new philosophy is fast creeping in upon our generation, it is that of "SET ASIDE". This is now a definite policy in the agricultural world as productive farming land is being set aside. In the mining industry too, large numbers of coal pits are being shut down, thus setting aside one of the few natural resources which this country has. We also see a setting aside in the fishing industry as the fisherman's activities are curtailed. Then that which is the most serious of all - the setting aside of manpower. However much politicians may argue as to the inevitableness of this, or even its necessity, to the average person it appears a most strange policy.

However, not only is this principle of "SET ASIDE" to be seen in the world, it is also common place in the Church, and its progress is ongoing and unrestrained. How many are the things once held by true evangelicals to be the authoritative ruling of Holy Scripture, yet now they are set aside, if not completely, to a very large degree; the following are but a few. Sound doctrinal preaching - in some places, preaching of any kind has been discounted and the pulpit removed; a reverent approach, and the sober ordering of Divine worship; the observance of the head covering of women in all Church assemblings; the sanctity of the marriage bond and its lifelong tie, and Church discipline.

These are just a few matters which a couple of generations ago were held to be Biblically mandatory, but now to a very great extent SET ASIDE.

As to the rights and wrongs of a "set aside" policy in the world, it is not the purpose of this magazine to embark upon; but as far as the Church is concerned, to set aside the clear ruling of the Word of God is to incur the sore displeasure of Almighty God, which in His time will bring its due reward.