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**North Road Chapel (Evangelical)
BIDEFORD**

LESSONS FROM JOHN'S GOSPEL

chapter seventeen.

Some years ago, this magazine carried a series of articles on the prayer which our Lord gave in His Sermon on the Mount, as recorded in Matthew 6: 9-13, words which are commonly referred to as '**The Lord's Prayer**'. It was the Lord's prayer in as much as He spoke the words, but it was a prayer given to His people as an example, a pattern around which they should frame their petitions and thanksgivings. The very fact that the Lord prefaced that prayer with the words, "*After this manner therefore pray ye*" (Matthew 6:9) signifies that what He was about to say was for the instruction of His followers. A careful analysis of Christ's words in those few verses, makes it abundantly clear that here were petitions which the Saviour could never offer for Himself. Petitions such as "*Forgive us our trespasses*" and "*Lead us not into temptation*" would be totally incongruous for the holy, sinless Son of God to utter.

As the prayer recorded in Matthew chapter six was not a prayer which our Lord could pray, so is it equally true that the prayer set out in John's gospel chapter seventeen is a prayer which no mortal could ever pray. None but the incarnate Son of God could pray after the manner set out in the twenty six verses of this chapter. This is the prayer which must rightly be designated '**The Lord's Prayer**'. It is peculiar to Him and Him alone.

The setting of this prayer of our Lord was the upper room; it followed immediately after that amazing discourse given by Him only hours before His arrest. It was prayed audibly in the hearing of the eleven disciples and concluded the Upper Room discourse. At the conclusion of this prayer, it is stated, "*When Jesus had spoken these words, He*

went forth with His disciples over the brook Cedron, where was a garden, into the which He entered, and His disciples" (John 18:1).

It is Christ in His role as Mediator that is one of the first things we must grasp as we commence to study this prayer. It is often spoken of as His High Priestly prayer; a designation which is an absolutely correct description.

The office of a mediator is that of a days-man, one who can lay his hand upon both (cf Job 9:33), that is treat with both parties concerned. This is the great work of the Lord Jesus. *"There is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus"* (1 Timothy 2:5). He stands between a holy God and guilty sinners.

By closely examining this amazing prayer, we shall see the intensity of the Mediator's intercession on our behalf; a work which never ceases, neither does it fluctuate, He ever appears in the presence of God for us (cf Hebrews 9:24). Although this is a prayer which is uniquely Christ's, yet as with all Scripture there are volumes of teaching contained in this section of Holy Writ; instruction which is doctrinal, devotional and practical.

The opening verse of this chapter reads, *"These words spake Jesus, and lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify Thy Son, that Thy Son also may glorify Thee"*.

Even the first four words must not be glibly passed over. *"These words spake Jesus"*. What words were these which the Lord was referring to? This opening phrase has reference to the closing verse of John chapter sixteen which reads, *"These things I have spoken unto you"*; that is the whole of the discourse in the upper room. Having completed His address to His disciples in which such a rich variety of truth had

been communicated to them, He now turns to His Father. From preaching He turns to prayer.

Here lying just beneath the surface is the first application to be made which is, after the preaching of the Word of God our task is not finished. Is there not a sad breakdown with us at this point? We gather to corporately set forth Divine truth; we revel in the truth as it is expounded, our hearts vibrate within us, causing us to respond with a glad '**Amen**' at the end, but then what? Is not the Word often forgotten almost as soon as we set foot outside of the chapel? Is it recalled on Monday? Is it meditated upon on Tuesday? Is that preached Word earnestly and fervently prayed over, that it might first be blessed to us personally and have an effect upon our individual lives, then that it may be of blessing to others?

What a precedent is set by our Lord in this brief phrase, "*These words spake Jesus, and lifted up His eyes to heaven*". No doubt as He addressed His disciples in the upper room, His eyes were upon them. We should remember that the disciples were in a sad state at this point as so much of what they had heard from the Saviour over the three years they had been with Him, they had forgotten. Much of the instruction which the Lord had just given them, they could not grasp. 'What is it that He saith unto us?' they asked among themselves, 'We cannot tell what He saith' (cf John 16:18). So dull of understanding and slow to believe were they, that our Lord had to say to them, "*I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now*" (John 16:12). As the Mediator looked upon these men who were so muddled and confused, one can almost sense an inner emotion of soul as the inspired Word states, "*Jesus lifted up His eyes to heaven*". Men of earth, even His disciples could not appreciate Him, but there was One above who **did** understand, One with whom He **could** commune. Gethsemane, Gabbatha and Golgotha were only hours away and He was so alone. Judas, His familiar friend had gone out and our Lord

knew full well the reason why. The other eleven were so bewildered that not one of them could comfort Him. *"None of you asketh me"* (John 16:5), He had so recently said to them. So the lonely Man of sorrows lifted up His eyes to heaven.

It was with eyes directed to heaven that the Lord prayed this prayer. *"These words spake Jesus"*. It was audible. This High Priestly prayer was prayed publicly; in this way the inner thoughts of His heart toward those disciples were made manifest. By hearing the Mediator's actual words, these men were made fully aware of what the purposes of God were for them and how greatly concerned their Lord and Master was for their spiritual well-being. Neither was it for the benefit of those eleven only, for by praying audibly as Christ did, John later, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit was enabled to recall that prayer and write it down so that it has been available to God's people throughout the generations. The seventeenth chapter of John's gospel is as powerful a revelation and equally as meaningful to us today, as it was when first heard by those few men in the upper room. How thankful we should be that the Lord Jesus **spake** these words and did not pray secretly.

The title of this article being '**Lessons From John's Gospel, chapter seventeen**', further observations should be made here which are of a practical nature, drawn from the audibility of Christ's prayer.

It is possible to pray in the spirit without a word passing through our lips. This is a very wonderful thing. Doubtless all of us experience this, even as we are about our daily work our minds and hearts are oftentimes momentarily in heaven. It may be in gratitude to God for some aspect of His goodness which has just come our way. It may be certain problems or difficulties press in upon us, and immediately, almost in a sub-conscious state we lift up our souls to the throne for help, asking our heavenly Father to succour us. All this is good and it

should be the attitude of life for us, the atmosphere in which we live, always aware of the nearness of our God.

Having said this however, our spiritual life would be very inadequate and deficient if that was all we knew of prayer. God has made us spirit, soul and body (cf 1 Thessalonians 5:23). It is this tripartite nature which constitutes human personality. In prayer, as in all things, the whole personality should be involved. It is perfectly correct to say that true prayer is generated in the heart and soul, yet there should be specific times when those inner sentiments and thoughts are put into words; in this way the body becomes involved as well as the soul and spirit; then it is that we function in a full and true capacity as God created us. Strong affections and emotions must never be confined to thoughts only. The Psalmist puts great emphasis on this, "*My heart was hot within me, while I was musing the fire burned: then spake I with my tongue*" (Psalm 39:3).

The sense of these words of the Psalmist must not be restricted to corporate prayer, such as in a prayer meeting or in the public worship; then it is that the brethren lead in vocal prayer. A lesson is also set out here in this verse regarding private individual prayer in which both brethren and sisters are involved. In our indispensable personal devotions it is of inestimable value and help if the body, which is such an essential part of us, is brought into action as well as our spirits, so that our thoughts are put into words and although alone with God in the closet, we pray audibly.

How many could pray mentally in private, for five minutes without the mind wandering into something entirely irrelevant and divorced from true communion? Is it not a fact that we just cannot fix our thoughts, they wander and flit into all manner of avenues. By putting our spiritual thoughts and petitions into words and praying vocally, our whole personality is brought into play. Words become a fence, a

boundary to the mind, our thoughts become hedged by the words which we are using, so preventing those thoughts from straying, thus effecting concentration.

Christian parents train their children to **say** prayers. No parent would suggest to a child that he or she knelt by their bed and secretly **thought** a prayer in their mind; such training would be worse than foolish. The wise parent trains the child to express their little prayers in words. That is to be the pattern throughout life. Did not our Lord give such salutary instruction? To His disciples He said, "*When ye pray, say*" (Luke 11:2). The true form of prayer is that the inner strivings of the soul and burdens of the heart be expressed in words by the body; in this way all the power and ability of our God-created, now redeemed personality comes into exercise. The Holy Spirit through the prophet puts this very plainly, "*Take with you words, and turn to the Lord: say unto Him*" (Hosea 14:2). In real prayer we do not turn to the Lord and **think**, we are to express those thoughts in words and **say**.

Here then is a most pertinent lesson coming to us from the very first phrase of this wonderful chapter, "*These words spake Jesus, and lifted up His eyes to heaven and said*".

To be continued

W.H.Molland

"No time for God?"

What fools we are to clutter up our lives with common things and leave without heart's gate the Lord of Life, and life itself".

Apostate Christendom

One of the major signs of demonic influence in our world is the departure from the faith of the professing Christian church. The working of Satan and demons can easily be recognized in our day by taking a careful look at the despicable state of the religious world. *"Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils"* (1 Timothy 4:1). *"Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition"* (2 Thessalonians 2:3). The 'departing from the faith' is certainly upon us! *"Seducing spirits"* are very much at work! The *"doctrines of devils"* are multiplying with every passing day! Indeed, as someone has well said, "The world's religion is as bad as the world's irreligion". The great apostasy is definitely here!

In battling demonic powers, as well as his own wicked heart and the world, the true Christian must be sure he maintains a separated life from all forms of apostate religion. We have come to a time when religious people want to work together, no matter what their differences in doctrine. According to the modern ecumenicists, "it doesn't matter what you believe, let all Christians unite". The problem with that is simply this: there is a tremendous difference between 'union' and 'unity'. The true believer in God's Word can never sacrifice **truth** upon the altar of union. We must ever be *"Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace"*, but this can only be done by also keeping *"the unity of the faith"* (Ephesians 4:3,13). There is a body of revealed truth that the true Church is always called upon to defend and declare. Jude exhorts all the people of God that we *"should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the*

saints" (Jude v.3). The true believer must always be on guard to resist false doctrine, even if it does cost him misunderstanding and even persecution from the religious world.

Big-shot evangelists have been hooking up with liberals and apostate preachers for many years, and just look at the deplorable mess the professing church is now in because of it. There has been a cutting down of straightforward preaching against sin by many of the 'evangelists' and an easy-believism 'gospel' has been substituted in the place of the one true gospel of Christ. Repentance is rarely preached by any preacher today, especially by the popular, big-time preachers. The blood of Christ is relegated to the background in most sermons, or is not even mentioned at all. Imputed righteousness is sneered at. The doctrine of election is totally denied by most modern preachers, when once it was part and parcel of the preaching of such great preachers as George Whitfield, Jonathan Edwards and Charles Spurgeon. The old truths of the faith, long cherished and proclaimed, have given way to the tricks and manipulations of big religious organizers, who in the main know nothing of the sovereignty of God, His righteous and holy character, or of His delivering grace. What a dark day it is!

Modern churches are nothing more, generally speaking, than social clubs, where people socialize and 'play church' together, but know very little of humbling themselves before God, or of studying the Bible to find out exactly who God is and the true way of salvation. Indeed many modern church folk are literally religious dupes! And blind leaders are leading them further and further from the true faith. What kind of a church you are a part of and support is not a side issue; it is a major one, so major that the souls of men are at stake. For Christ's glory, get in a church where He is truly exalted and obeyed.

Then we have these so-called 'seminaries', which for the most part are truly **cemeteries**. Did the Lord Jesus commission His Church to build seminaries? What rank infidelity and apostasy has grown out of many schools that profess to be training men for the gospel ministry. It was from a so-called Christian school and seminary that the 'God is dead' theory was proclaimed back in the 1960's! From numerous such seminaries all across the world scores of men (and now women) have emerged to take our pulpits, declaring nothing more than a graceless gospel and a Christless Christianity. No wonder the people in the pews are all mixed up and confused: look at those in the pulpit! (Thankfully, we all rejoice to know that there are a few seminaries, Christian schools and Bible colleges around that do adhere to the full authority of the Bible and stand firmly on the grand old gospel. But the numbers are small in comparison to those which are modernistic, humanistic and liberal in theology).

Bible-loving and Bible-believing Christians must never join hands with Roman Catholics and Protestant denominations that deny the Word of God. Scripture admonishes us to "*fight the good fight of faith*" (1 Timothy 6:12), and to do this there must be **no compromise** with religious falsehood. Men may ridicule such a stand, but it is the only safe one and one which truly brings glory to our God. Regarding many of our modern preachers and religious workers, let them hear these solemn words that fell from the lips of the Son of God, "*Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name? and in Thy name cast out devils? and in Thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity*" (Matthew 7:21-23). Notice our Lord did not say, "I once knew you, but lost you". He said, "*I never knew you*". These religious workers were never His people, never truly born again.

The apostate may not depart from the outward profession of Christianity, but for sure he does depart from the faith. This is a warning to be on the lookout for such 'wolves in sheep's clothing' (cf Matthew 7:15). Let us refuse to compromise one iota of the truth of God, **regardless of the cost!** How grateful we all should be for such men of God as Timothy Pietsch, missionary to Japan since 1936, (who has now entered heaven: Ed.), who wrote the following words:

"It is always wrong to be neutral when the Word of God and Satan are in conflict. Many seek to be neutral so that they will not be faced with having to make decisions in regard to these excruciating problems that divide Christians. In the days of our Lord upon earth there were those who pretended obedience by inventing the slogan, "*Corban*" (Mark 7:11), thus "*making the Word of God of none effect*". Today we find men who claim to be born again Christians, doing much the same kind of thing by inventing slogans and devices that nullify the clear commands of God's Word. We find many who say, 'We are too busy preaching the positive gospel. We do not have time to be negative'. Beware of the man who speaks of the 'positive gospel' for there is no such thing. It is the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, and of Him it is said, "*Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity*" (Hebrews 1:9). The gospel is both positive and negative. Many times a man's love of righteousness is determined by how strongly he hates evil. The true gospel preacher is a saviour of "*death unto death*" and "*life unto life*" (2 Corinthians 2:16). The man who speaks of the 'positive gospel' is trying to avoid warning of the coming of the wolves. Even a dog will bark when his master is in danger. How can these men who refuse to warn concerning the rise of the great world church of the Antichrist be considered faithful under-shepherds? It is just as foolish to speak of preaching the positive gospel as it would be to speak of turning on the positive electricity. One gets no light if he turns on the positive electricity. It is impossible to really say 'Yes' to truth, without saying 'No' to error".

"Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1). "But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not" (2 Peter 2:1-3).

Religious compromise takes on all kinds of forms and shapes. The *"damnable heresies"* of apostate religion are almost numberless. One of the *"pernicious ways"* of Bible-deniers is their compromise with pagan holidays (and here many true Christians have been caught unaware also). When the emperor Constantine was supposedly converted in 312 A.D. there immediately followed the fusion of paganism and Christianity. Only those who are wilfully blind refuse to see this. Here is the plain truth about Christmas: "There is no authoritative historical evidence as to the day or month of Christ's birth in Bethlehem. 25 December was the date of a Roman pagan festival inaugurated in 274 as the birthday of the unconquered sun which at the winter solstice begins again to show an increase in light. Sometime before 336 the church in Rome, unable to stamp out this pagan festival, spiritualized it as the Feast of the Nativity of the Sun of Righteousness in the U.S.A. (and in England during the Commonwealth) Christian celebrations were at first suppressed by the Puritans, who objected to their pagan origins. Since the nineteenth century the celebration of Christmas has become increasingly popular" (James Taylor).

Nothing else need be said! The godly Puritans "objected" to the **pagan origins** of Christmas. Indeed, the Christmas celebration has "become increasingly popular", so popular that to decry it and denounce it might

just cost someone his head! But truth is truth, and right is right. It is absolutely appalling to see the so-called educated, intelligent men and women (under the mask and disguise of remembering the birth of Jesus Christ) going around in December advocating the Santa Claus lie, making a big fuss over Christmas trees and spending loads of money in order to give people a 'good time' at Christmas. It is apostasy, it is religious compromise with the world, it is God-dishonouring and Christ-degrading. Thank God for a faithful remnant throughout the world who have not bowed their knee to paganism, and who see through this Christ-mess as nothing but a Christ-less mess!

Idolatry in the church surfaces again in the pagan celebration of Easter. While we are definitely commanded to remember Christ's death (cf Luke 22:19,20); 1 Corinthians 11:23-26), the Word of God is silent about any so-called 'Good Friday' and its current association with the Easter 'celebration'. Christ gloriously arose from the dead, and this is to be remembered all year long, but paganism would have us zero in on this event just in the Spring. We must wear certain clothes (usually only for a show), we must believe that bunny rabbits lay eggs (coloured ones at that) and we must attend a special 'Easter sunrise service'. All of this is distasteful to the true God-fearing person, for he knows it is an abomination to the God of heaven. If you have the courage, read Luke 16:15 and 1 John 5:21 especially. Then, hear the Lord's call to His remnant enveloped in Babylon: "***Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues***" (Revelation 18:4).

W.F.Bell

"Taking the line of least resistance makes rivers and men crooked"

Anon

Revival or Judgment?

Truly God is able to do the impossible, but whether this means we have a right to expect that God will act in the way many suppose when they speak of revival, is a totally different question. If our age is an age rapidly running down to judgment; if ours is an age which exhibits all the features of those historic times which immediately preceded the pouring out of the wrath of God - the age of Noah, the age of Lot, the age of Jeremiah - we have every reason to believe that the next event which lies before us is **Judgment**, not **Revival**.

Those who think they see by their prophetic interpretations a greatly lengthened future still for this world, no doubt will be complacent, but that is their responsibility. For ourselves we think all the signs are present of a complete and worldwide revolt against everything which is called God, leading directly to the consummation of all things in judgment. There are religious signs, as the professing church abdicates its role, accepts the lie of rationalism and denies its Creator, and liquidates itself on the doorstep of Mother Rome.

The world and the church face a new thing which has never been known before, no, not since the foundation of the earth. Satan is waxing bold. Not since the Garden of Eden has he been in such a paradise. He has the ear of humanity and no lie, conceit or daring blasphemy is now withheld from a generation which in other fields beside that of religion, exhibits the most alarming symptoms that humanity has lost its soul. The Age of Faith had its triumphs in every field of human culture, but for over a century the Western world has been departing from the ground of faith. What Rationalism has done for the churches, Materialism has done for science and culture. We have a creation without a Creator, and a universe without meaning, purpose or plan. Atheistic revolution reigns, and there is no iniquity,

blasphemy or vice which is not now brazenly uttered and publicly defended.

What then? If revival after the traditional pattern may no longer be feasible, but only the expectation of judgment, what is the believer to do? Is there to be no light in the prevailing darkness? The answer should thrill every true believer who is jealous for the glory of the Redeemer. Ours is the privilege in a falling age, of bearing the last witness against the Devil and all his works. In the hour of his unloosing, he is to be resisted and fought with all the weapons in the armoury of God. We will lift up our voice for Christ and truth whether the people hear or whether they forbear. Like Noah in the ancient world, like Lot in Sodom's last night, like Jeremiah in Israel's last apostasy before the judgment of the captivity, it is our privilege to bear witness against the unbelief of the present age. We are destined to be the Camp of the Saints compassed about by the heathen and atheistic multitudes of Gog and Magog, until fire falls from heaven to consume the transgressor.

Are we ready for such a testimony? Are there sufficient men who know their God and their Bibles well enough to arouse by their preaching the enmity of Satan's multitude? We doubt it. There is an appalling evangelical sickness which prevents a robust and convincing testimony to the glory of Christ. If some of the energies expended in the vain search for 'experiences' were devoted to the creation of a company of preachers adequate under God to the task, the evangelical position would be changed overnight. It might not, and in our opinion it would not spell revival in the sense in which that almost discredited word is now used, but it would mean **testimony**, and testimony would mean the opposition of Satan, suffering, persecution, loss and shame. But why should **we** escape the penalty which our fathers were called upon to pay for their devotion to **Christ's crown and covenant**?

Charles D.Alexander

***"Take fast hold of instruction: let her not go: keep her;
for she is thy life" (Proverbs 4:13)***

Professed ministers of the gospel have taught the human mind to doubt everything, and now the basis of society is shaken, and law and order are undermined. What could they expect otherwise? When men give up their Bibles, they will care but little for human laws. We see plenty of this evil leaven in England, and certain clergymen and dissenting preachers are spreading it with hideous industry. Young gentlemen whose whiskers have not yet developed, are authoritatively deciding that nothing can be decided, and dogmatically denouncing all dogmas. We meet them every day, and we notice that in proportion to their ignorance, is their confidence in sneering at every holy thing. According to them nobody is sincere, nothing is sacred. These great men, who would never have been heard of if they had not been heretical, know better by far than God Himself. As for apostles and prophets, they are just nothing at all to these infallibles; their own 'thought' is more precious than inspiration itself. This conceited scepticism is in the air; everywhere it seems to be abroad, and you cannot help encountering it; therefore let us be the more earnest to hold fast the faith.

Worse than this, **this is an age of worldliness**. Everybody wants to be rich, and nobody is rich now at the point at which his forefathers were content to stop. Our good old deacons and respected church members were content with very moderate incomes, they were satisfied and happy with thrift and prudence, and would have been deeply grieved with the extravagance which is seen on all sides at this time. They not only considered their shops and their fields, but they planned to have time for the prayer meetings which they delighted to attend. But dear me, prayer meetings, lectures, sermons, these are all despised now! We must be rich, we must cut a dash, we must spend

more than our neighbours, and for this the work of the church may go to the dogs. Oh for a few simple, earnest Christians who will judge their Lord and His cause to be worth some consideration, and will lay themselves out to serve His Church. When worldliness is so predominant, it becomes so much the harder to take fast hold of eternal things. One needs to hear the word, "*Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you*"; for unless we do hear it we shall be tempted to take fast hold on the world, and let the things of eternity slip by us.

A firm grip of the gospel will give you **strength for service**. The hand of the Church is made of the same material as its backbone. It is of no use sending poor, hesitating professors into the field of holy labour. If you hardly know what you believe, how can you teach other people? But when the truth is written upon your very soul, and graven as with the point of a diamond upon your heart, you will speak with confidence; and there will be a power about your utterances which none shall be able to withstand or gainsay. For the sake then, of your spiritual strength, I press the exhortation, "*Take fast hold of instruction*".

C.H.Spurgeon

The Scriptures

"Scripture is the rule of all truth, all other sayings are to be tried by this touchstone. It is not what sense saith, or what reason saith, or what the fathers say, or what customs say, but what Scripture saith; that is to be the rule of faith and life. Whatsoever is contrary to Scripture or beside Scripture, or not rationally deducible from Scripture, is to be rejected as spurious and adulterate".

George Swinnoek

Recollections of Spiritual Work in the County of Devon in Generations Past cont'd

"We have heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us, what work Thou didst in their days, in the times of old" (Psalm 44:1).

The main character in this reminiscence is Robert Gribble, a draper in Barnstaple in the very early years of the last century. For this glimpse into the working of God through this humble man, one is indebted to the writings of the late Mr G.H.Lang in his book "**God at Work on His Own Lines**". It is from this publication that extracts are taken. Gribble states:

"I had received no preparatory instruction for the ministry, yet was led to engage in a work so solemn and responsible; and that at a time when both Dissenters and Episcopalians were demanding a certain measure of educational training either in some college or academy. Although fully aware of this, I was led on, impelled by a power I could not resist.

Progress and Opposition

Within two years of the preaching of the first sermon, a chapel had been erected (in 1817) at East Coombe to accommodate one hundred and fifty hearers. Many who have long since departed to be with Christ were first awakened to a sense of their lost condition and led to Jesus Christ, through the Lord's blessing on the ministry in that chapel and in the cottage used previous to its erection.

Of course there arose resistance and persecution. A neighbouring farmer predicted that the newly erected chapel would in a few years be used as a barn, but after a period of forty years (by 1858) the tidings of salvation are still heard within its walls, while he has long since

been called to his account. (It should be recorded that even to the present day, 1998, there is still a witness in the above chapel - Ed.)

Within a mile of this chapel were the residences of two gentlemen of high position, claiming remote and even royal ancestry; both were magistrates and nearly related One of them, to his honour be it recorded, never interfered in any way to hinder the gospel, even when ministered almost close to the precincts of his noble mansion, and his example was followed by all the members of his large establishment. By the other we were greatly opposed, and various unworthy means were used to prevent the spread of the "new doctrine". Children were met on their way to the Sunday school and driven back; the poor were threatened with the loss of their parish pay if they came to the chapel; the churchwardens were ordered to go and report the persons who attended; and it was said from the pulpit that those who did so endangered their salvation".

Robert Gribble continued his labours from Barnstaple for fourteen years. He had prayed much that he might be freed from business so that he might devote all of his time to the gospel. This desire was granted in 1829. By this time three village churches had been established. At this point Gribble states, "It has been no small comfort to me that the Lord raised up among those who had been converted during those fourteen years, five individuals; in this way these companies of the Lord's people were not left destitute of pastoral oversight or ministry of the Word". Gradually, from now on Robert Gribble extended his territory. What is more, he was being led into an ever increasing knowledge of God's will and ways. He writes:

"It was at this time that I first began to see the necessity of testing all that I professed to believe as God's truth by God's own Word. This was a new thing to me, having been accustomed, as many I fear still

are, to receive what I had been taught without taking the pains to examine whether it was in accordance with the Scriptures, the only infallible standard of truth. "*To the law and to the testimony*" etc. (Isaiah 8:20). I now began to follow the example of the noble Bereans, who searched the Scriptures daily (cf Acts 17:11) in obedience to the precept in John 5:39; and I was led earnestly to pray for Divine light and guidance. I have ever since had cause to be thankful that from this time my chief anxiety was to know the Lord's mind concerning His truth, which I desired to follow, without regarding consequences.

My mind was for some time undecided upon the subject of baptism. Being well versed in the arguments by which infant baptism is generally defended, it was some years after the first doubts concerning it arose in my mind, ere I became fully satisfied that it was altogether erroneous. My first doubts arose from hearing three sermons delivered by a talented minister in its defence, when I was surprised at the entire lack of Scripture proof in support of his argument, while he enlarged much upon the inconvenience etc., of adult baptism. These were increasingly confirmed by his requesting me and others not to attend the one lecture to be given in reply by a Baptist minister who had heard him. I was at length delivered from my painful uncertainty by perceiving from Romans 6:3-5 and many similar passages, how strikingly our union with Christ; as being dead and risen with Him, is set forth by immersion; and also that baptism is intended only for those who **believe** (cf Acts 8:37), which infants cannot do.

The evils connected with the various denominations into which the Church of Christ is divided began also to occupy my thoughts. I had seen and heard much to convince me that many individuals who entered upon the work of the ministry - Dissenters as well as Episcopalians - were unduly anxious to increase their salaries, and too little concerned about feeding the flock or leading sinners to Christ. I was gradually led to consider the example of the apostles and the

commendation bestowed on those who "*went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles*" (3 John v.8); and was convinced that those who labour for Christ in the gospel, ought not to seek the help of the men of the world, but to rely on the care of Him who hath promised to supply His people's need (cf Philippians 4:19)."

Mr Lang reports that one summer Robert Gribble preached in about thirty villages, mostly in the open air. These places were from three to ten miles and sometimes even twenty miles from his residence, so that he frequently walked very long distances on the Lord's Day, often preaching on four occasions. Lang continues, "Robert Gribble was only a humble, uneducated man but filled with the spirit of God, spending most of his time visiting the villages of North Devon with the gospel. Souls were not only saved, but the truths of the Church were also taught, so that companies of God's people were established and a mighty work of evangelism quietly spread over the countryside.

To be continued

Preliminary Announcement

Annual Bible Convention

Saturday 6 June 1998 D.V.

Speaker: Mr W.Hughes (Glasgow)

Further details in the next edition

Editorial

Some sections of the church today appear to place an increasing emphasis on history which, if true to all the facts, is most helpful and necessary, but often the records of history are biased according to the views of the author. It is not suggested that one should be ignorant of the past, for that is an attitude to be deplored, but nationality, denominational persuasion and theological position invariably influence historians. For this reason, historical accounts have to be approached with great caution.

It is a cause for regret to see the number of Christian conferences which are arranged for the purpose of giving papers and lectures on matters of vital spiritual concern, both of doctrine and practice, where an historical approach is taken; the emphasis is upon what the Puritans taught, the truth held by the Reformers, the position of John Calvin, Luther, Zwingli and so on. Recently the editor read a lecture given on what the Reformers and Puritans taught on a particular subject, which took one and a half hours to deliver and judging by the content of the Bibliography, must have taken many weeks or months to prepare. The truth could have been far more adequately covered by a forty five minute exposition from Holy Scripture.

What is the point of trying to teach vital spiritual matters by such a method? What controversy is engendered by varying lecturers highlighting different aspects and personalities of history. This is seen in various Christian periodicals as editors take opposing views which is an inevitable consequence, because historical records vary in emphasis, and confusion rather than profit is the result. The conclusion must be that too many conferences and magazines are setting out to give a display of intellectualism, rather than to **clearly and authoritatively declare all the counsel of God.**