

January – March 1999

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**North Road Chapel (Evangelical)
BIDEFORD**

Lessons from John's Gospel *chapter seventeen*

"And this is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent" (John 17:3).

In this statement which Christ made to His Father in prayer, we learn the way and means whereby He gives eternal life to His elect. By the words, *"That they might know"*, it immediately becomes apparent that in the communication of grace and spiritual blessing to mortals, there must be a degree of knowledge. Men and women do not unconsciously drift into the possession of eternal life. By nature, man is in abysmal ignorance concerning spiritual matters; his mind is blinded (cf 2 Corinthians 4:4), *"defiled"* (Titus 1:15), *"is enmity against God"* (Romans 8:7) and his understanding is darkened (cf Ephesians 4:18). Unless the mind is enlightened and renewed by the operation of the Holy Spirit, no spiritual good will ever come. Men must be made aware of their state by nature and come to know and understand this, otherwise they are *"like the beasts that perish"* (Psalm 49:12).

Knowledge and life are the essential points being set forth in this third verse of John chapter seventeen. The diffusion of light was the first creative act of Almighty God recorded in Genesis. So in the act of creating new life in the sinner, his sin-darkened mind must be illuminated and this vital part of human personality enlivened; in this way man is no longer as a beast that knows nothing of spiritual values or eternal issues. This is the first work of the Holy Spirit upon the sinner; he is made to **think, reason and contemplate** spiritual matters and by so doing he becomes aware of his sinnership. This in turn causes him to think of judgment to come, and consider vital matters of which he was previously ignorant.

However, the **knowledge** which the Holy Spirit imparts, having once enlightened the blinded mind, goes much further. The object of the Spirit's initial enlightening is to give eternal life and that the person might come to **know** the true God, and Jesus Christ whom God hath sent. Without a true knowledge of God and His Son, no man will ever experience eternal life. This must be taken a stage further; apart from Jesus Christ no man can ever have a true knowledge of God. It is clearly stated by the incarnate Son, "*No man cometh unto the Father, but by me*" (John 14:6). There is no access to the eternal God apart from Christ, neither is there salvation apart from Him, for the Scriptures clearly state, "*Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved*" (Acts 4:12).

Man in his fallen condition had to have a Mediator, one who could stand between an offended God and the offending sinner and reconcile the two; this Christ did by His vicarious life and substitutionary death, His holy, spotless life being the preceptive aspect of His work. In this He perfectly fulfilled the Law to its minutest detail, so working out a spotless righteousness which is by grace imputed to the repentant, believing sinner. This flawless robe of righteousness fits him for heaven, it is the wedding garment (cf Matthew 22:11,12).

Inseparably connected with this is the penal aspect of Christ's work of atonement, that which pertains to punishment and wrath. In His death Christ, as Mediator, became the substitutionary victim. In this capacity of suretyship, the sins of all God's elect people were imputed to Him; He became chargeable for the full amount. By thus becoming the spiritual guarantor for all that vast number, their debt became His; though He Himself was personally innocent, He became officially guilty. In consequence the wrath of God due to the sinner fell upon Him, "*Who His own self bare our sins in His own*

body on the tree" (1 Peter 2:24). "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:5,6).

Every sin of every elect person of every generation of human history, from Abel to the end of time was borne by Him; not only borne, those sins were **put away** by Him. He "*put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself*" (Hebrews 9:26).

"All our sin was laid upon Him,
Jesus bore them on the tree;
God who knew them laid them on Him,
And believing we are free".

This is the penal aspect of atonement, this is what saves men from hell. Because of the absolute perfection and finality of the work of Christ, both in His life (preceptive) and in His death (penal), God can be just and the justifier of all who believe in Jesus (cf Romans 3:26). These are glorious truths, they are **fundamental** truths; without the **knowledge** of them, none will ever **know** eternal life; they are the basic facts pertaining to God and His Son, Jesus Christ, and this is life eternal when a sinner **knows** and **believes** them to the salvation of the soul.

There are those who seek to draw together all branches of christendom, regardless of their beliefs and practices; some would even go further and include all religions thus endeavouring to create a multi-faith union. The thinking behind this is that every one will be saved by their own beliefs. Heathen rites, pagan rituals, superstitious observances are all valid means, and can be effectual in securing eternal life; this is a great delusion. In such a false attempt to make the heathen into christians, these pseudo-christians are making themselves heathen.

The Word of God is clear and authoritative, that it is those who call upon the name of the Lord who are saved; they alone obtain eternal life and they only will come to know the true God and be brought into a right relationship with Him. There can be no affiliation with other religions in this.

The question which we must all ask ourselves is, What is the extent of our **knowledge** of these all-important matters? There are many who have a hazy belief in the existence of a Supreme Being somewhere in the universe. They may go as far as to say that He could, in some mysterious way, be the great Creator and Controller of all things, but their thoughts are obscure and indistinct. Possession of eternal life will never be obtained by such an abstruse belief of God held by any person. Men and women must **know** the only true God in a much more intimate way than this. What is more, they must come to **know** Jesus Christ whom God hath sent (cf John 17:3).

This aspect of Jesus Christ being **sent** by the almighty, eternal God is often not realized to the degree which it should be; yet upon it the Scriptures lay great emphasis. Not only that He was **sent**, but the purpose for which He was sent. *"When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons"* (Galatians 4:4,5). The Son of God was sent by the Father to redeem sinners and to reconcile them to God, and God to them, bringing them into a position of sonship, even *"heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ"* (Romans 8:17).

It is possible for people to have a knowledge of the Truth, even as outlined in these pages, concerning Christ the Mediator and His vicarious life and death, that God sent Him into the world for the express purpose of rendering satisfaction to Divine justice on behalf of every believing sinner. Although such folk are highly favoured

to be so enlightened as to **know** these truths, yet they have never entered into the wondrous experience of this actual reconciliation of God and man, with the accompanying adoption as sons. Why is this? How can it be that some people can have a knowledge of salvation and an appreciation of the blessings which accompany it, yet never enter in to the reality of it all?. To claim a full assurance on such a matter they would regard as presumptuous. How can this hesitancy be explained? The Holy Scriptures answer this in a most explicit manner: *"Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into His rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it. For we which have believed do enter into rest"* (Hebrews 4:1-3).

It is extremely sad when people have a good understanding of the Truth yet it has not profited them; they have not entered into the rest and peace which the gospel alone can give, though the gospel is preached unto them. The Holy Spirit gives the reason; the Word was not mixed with faith. In other words they do not **really** believe and act upon that spiritual knowledge which God in His goodness has imparted to them. In sharp contrast the Scripture states, *"We which **have believed do enter into rest"*** (Hebrews 4:3).

It is inexcusable for any man or woman who has the knowledge of salvation in their head not to act upon it, mixing that knowledge with faith by believing implicitly what God has said. The true and living God does not lie or deceive when He says that those who call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved (cf Acts 2:21); that word is **truth**. Such a word as, *"Whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life"* (John 3:15), is to be relied upon; not to do so is a failing to mix faith with the infallible Word of the eternal God; it is a mistrust of the Almighty. To claim by faith that which God by

grace has promised, is far removed from presumption; it is greatly to His glory as in penitence and humility, men and women come to Him in absolute trust, confident that He is faithful that promised (cf Hebrews 10:23).

In the verses quoted from the Hebrew epistle, a solemn warning is issued, "*Let us therefore fear*" (Hebrews 4:1). Men, women and young people who are constantly hearing the gospel preached, yet not acting upon the enlightenment given and the **knowledge** imparted, are in a dangerous position lest a promise being left them of entering into His rest, they come short of it (Hebrews 4:1). Can anything be more tragic than to come so near to the kingdom, yet never to enter into it?

It is only those who believe who do enter into rest (cf Hebrews 4:3). A faith and a heart belief must be mixed with the **knowledge** imparted. May none who read these pages ever come short of eternal life and the rest which comes through **knowing** the only true God and Jesus Christ whom He hath sent.

W.H.Molland

"So near to the kingdom, yet what dost thou lack?
So near to the kingdom, what keepest thee back?
So near that thou hearest the songs which resound
From those who believing, a pardon have found.

To die with no hope, hast thou counted the cost?
To die out of Christ and thy soul to be lost?
So near to the kingdom! O come, we implore,
Whilst mercy's extended, come enter the door".

Faith

AS EVIDENCED BY THE FALL OF JERICHO

Faith is a vital factor in true Christianity. *"Without faith it is impossible to please God"* (Hebrews 11:6). It is defined in the dictionary as, 'a firm and earnest belief', 'complete reliance', 'spiritual apprehension and acceptance of Divine revelation apart from absolute proof'. To this must be added the meaning of the underlying Greek, 'constancy in profession', 'fidelity'.

By faith great difficulties are overcome which to mere nature would be impossible. By faith we are brought through trials which, if left to ourselves, would overwhelm us. Impossible situations have been resolved through faith. Nowhere in Scripture is this principle better illustrated than by the fall of Jericho; *"by faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days"* (Hebrews 11:30).

The setting of this incident is, the children of Israel had crossed the river Jordan and were now on Canaanitish soil, but no further progress could be made because this frontier city stood at the very entrance to the country. It was a renowned stronghold; one of the cities which put fear into the men who had previously been sent to spy out the land. Their report was, *"The people is greater and taller than we; the cities are great and walled up to heaven"* (Deuteronomy 1:28). The Israelites were now encamped in Gilgal which was on the eastern outskirts of this formidable township (cf Joshua 4:19) and the inhabitants were adequately prepared and equipped to stand against them. The Scriptures tersely state, *"Now Jericho was straitly shut up because of the children of Israel: none went out, and none came in"* (Joshua 6:1). To all intents and purposes as far as the Israelites were concerned this city was impregnable, for they (the

children of Israel) had no artillery, weapons of war or equipment of any description, neither were they a people trained for military action. Yet under God through **obedience** to Him, the walls of Jericho would fall flat and all the inhabitants be utterly destroyed.

It is a fascinating study to go through the Scriptures noting the mysterious ways in which God works and the strange methods invariably used. When God determined the safety of a babe who was to become the great lawgiver to His earthly people, He simply hid him in a little ark made of bulrushes. That mighty giant of the Anakims who so terrorized the Israelites, was brought down by a smooth stone slung by a shepherd boy. A faithful prophet was fed by ravens in a time of dire famine. John the Baptist dwelt in the wilderness, but was adequately sustained by locusts and wild honey. The mighty, eternal Son of the true and living God was born of a virgin in a stable. The Lord of life and glory, in selecting men who would be His ambassadors, chose in the main humble, unlettered men who had no earthly credentials or qualifications.

Mortal man must ever be aware of the fact that the God of heaven is independent of natural means. He is superior to the finite reasoning of puny man; He does not operate according to human conventions or accepted practice. One has only to think of Isaac, who was born to such an aged couple as Abraham and Sarah, or of the young man Daniel who survived quite safely in a den of hungry lions, or of Jonah the prophet preserved in the belly of a whale for seventy two hours, to realize that these things pertain to omnipotence. When our limited minds appreciate the reality of such incidents, that they are genuine historic facts, then faith is enlarged and we begin to know our God as He really is; the God of infinite power whose ways are past finding out. Faith is 'a complete reliance and acceptance of Divine revelation apart from absolute proof'.

It is quite clear that the fall of Jericho was brought about by God through faith (cf Hebrews 11:30). It is through the faith of His people that the God of heaven so often works. The historic account of the fall of Jericho is an outstanding example of complete reliance upon the Almighty in a hopeless situation. These people had crossed over Jordan and were now on enemy territory; if they did not conquer the Canaanites then their extinction was almost certain. Jericho was their first encounter. At this critical juncture, God gave His instructions, *"And ye shall compass the city, all ye men of war, and go round about the city once. Thus shalt thou do six days. And seven priests shall bear before the ark seven trumpets of rams' horns: and the seventh day ye shall compass the city seven times, and the priests shall blow with the trumpets. And it shall come to pass, that when they make a long blast with the ram's horn, and when ye hear the sound of the trumpet, all the people shall shout with a great shout; and the wall of the city shall fall down flat, and the people shall ascend up every man straight before him"* (Joshua 6:3-5). For the men of Israel to calmly march around this city every day after this manner for six days was a perilous undertaking, for it would most certainly provoke the inhabitants who, from the high city walls, could shoot arrows and throw missiles. Nevertheless God had given His instructions and the Israelites acted accordingly. It cannot be too strongly emphasized that **obedience** and **faith** go together. Faith is absolutely dependent upon obedience, and obedience is dependent upon a true faith. These Israelites would never have obeyed such a simplistic command if they had not believed what God had said concerning the end result. What could appear more ridiculous than to march peacefully around a fortified city once a day for six days, then on the seventh day do it seven times and blow trumpets and shout? Humanly speaking it was laughable, but Almighty God had commanded and through obedience, Jericho's walls would fall flat. The instructions were simple, it did not require extensive training, not even a rehearsal. A given number of circuits was specified, they

were told when to be silent and when to shout. They were not asked for their opinion on the matter, or if they had any helpful suggestions to make; all that was required of Israel was to **obey**, then God would work.

In this a Divine principle is set forth which is operative today just as it was three and a half thousand years ago, yet how slow are the people of God to learn the lesson that faith demands obedience. What **disobedience** is evident among many professing Christians today, both in their walk and so-called worship, by the intrusion of their ideas which are considered to be advantageous. To suggest that such things be abandoned, for God requires nothing of man's customs, ideas, science, wisdom or academic capabilities, is to be branded unreasonable and completely out of touch. Nevertheless the truth of Holy Writ will ever stand: *"But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are; that no flesh should glory in his presence"* (1 Corinthians 1:27-29). It is the full proclamation of the Word of God and the ordering of all worship and service according to the simplicity of the New Testament mandate, which is obligatory upon all believers. We are to listen to the instruction of the Great Head and act accordingly. Indeed if there is a **true** faith it will be manifested in this way, for our Lord Himself said, *"If a man love me he **will** keep my words"* (John 14:23). Discipline will be evident through conformity to the pattern laid down.

Discipline was wonderfully evidenced in the faith and conduct of the Israelites at Jericho. The instructions were, *"Ye shall not shout, nor make any noise with your voice, neither shall any word proceed out of your mouth, until the day I bid you shout: then shall ye shout"*

(Joshua 6:10). *"Ye shall not shout, nor make any noise"*; this was a work of God, therefore instructions must be rigorously carried out. What mischief would have ensued if men (and women perhaps) had come to Joshua with their ideas, giving advice and making suggestions. This however was not the case because there was **true** faith, discipline was exercised, they were **obedient**. For six days they marched in solemn silence. None became exuberant or ecstatic, shouting, 'Hallelujah, Hallelujah, God is going to flatten your walls, He has told us so, Hallelujah, praise the Lord'. No! every man and woman acted with propriety in submission to the Word of God. There was order, no straggling, no loitering, no laughing, no talking; an ordered, dignified walk giving the evidence that their march was purposeful. Doubtless the inhabitants of Jericho must have been perplexed by these actions, for they considered the Israelites who had come out of the wilderness to be a foolish, unintelligent people, not to be taken seriously. Nevertheless the marches continued, marked by solidarity and resolve, despite the Canaanites not being able to fathom the reason.

The seventh day came, the day of action; every Israelite rose early, about the dawning of the day, in order to march around the city seven times and on the seventh, the final time, the blast of the trumpets and a great shout was to be made (cf Joshua 6:15,16). At this point in time the walls of Jericho fell flat. Too late did the people of Jericho realize that these Israelites were not as foolish as they had thought them to be. The faith and obedience of the people of God had brought them absolute and total victory, for they entered the city and utterly destroyed all life (cf Joshua 6:20,21). What lessons there are in this Old Testament narrative recorded in the first twenty one verses of Joshua chapter six. How it bears out the truth, there is *"a time to keep silence, and a time to speak"* (Ecclesiastes 3:7). John also writes in his epistle that we are to walk after His commandments (cf 2 John 6).

That which is of prime importance in the Christian life is steady marching, not talking and shouting but quiet, consistent living. Undoubtedly the hardest part for the Israelites was the six days march in silence which must have been tedious and no doubt tiring, but it was God's command. Thus it is for the believer, we are to quietly and consistently march the circuit in which God, in His providence, has placed us; in the home, place of work or the community in general. The objective of the believer is to unobtrusively let others see we have a purpose in life, without button-holing or constantly shouting gospel texts at them. We are not to drift aimlessly, our life is ordered by the Word of God. Although this appears odd, uninteresting and out of touch, nevertheless it will be noted that there is a difference. Then when an opportunity does come for action and the door is opened and God says 'Speak', our words will come with devastating, Divine power and men and women will realize who are the fools and who are the wise.

In this account of the faith and obedience of the Israelites concerning the conquest of Jericho, it is important to register the ratio of time and effort spent in the silent, faithful marching compared to the shouting and trumpet blowing. It was not the tremendous vibration caused by the blast of many trumpets, coupled with the thunderous volume of thousands of voices shouting in unison, that brought down the walls of Jericho. The Word of God says it was "*By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, **after** they were compassed about seven days*" (Hebrews 11:30). Six days out of the seven were spent in silent marching.

Faith is measured, not so much by the glamour of one day's shouting, but by the steadfast continuance of quiet, consistent, daily walking in **obedience** to the Word and will of God.

W.H.Molland

Recollections of Spiritual Work in the County of Devon in Generations Past

"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).

Extracts taken from "**A Book of Remembrance**", a brief history of early Baptists in the towns and villages of North Devon.

Ashwater and District

In the early years of the nineteenth century there came up from Cornwall to north-west Devon, Mr. William O'Brien and Mr. Thomas Perkins, who were two of the founders of the Bible Christian Society. The preaching of the gospel in the Ashwater area by these two evangelists, was attended with remarkable power and blessing. It was through their ministry that the Facey family at Muckworthy were converted. The family consisted of father, mother, two sons and two daughters. The change was great, for they had been a very worldly, pleasure-loving family, fond of the rough sports common in those days.

Mr Alexander Martin Facey, the younger of the two sons, became a preacher with the Bible Christians. He was a man of pleasing countenance with a sweet silvery voice, fluent of speech and zealous for the spread of the gospel. Through the influence of a Mr James Hunken of Black Torrington, (a one-time champion wrestler, but now a converted and baptized believer), the subject of believers' baptism by immersion was brought to the attention of the Facey family, who being convinced on this matter, submitted to the ordinance.

After a time Mr Facey senior had a chapel built on his farm at his own cost, and his youngest son became the minister. This was the

commencement of a Baptist work in the Ashwater district. After a week night service in the year 1838, Mrs Facey called two of the brethren aside saying she was much distressed at the sad spiritual state of the area, and suggested that as individuals, they three should privately set aside a portion of time every day for special prayer that God would do a work in their midst. This the three consistently did. After some time of earnest, persistent prayer, great blessing came as men and women repented and turned to Christ in believing faith. On one occasion, Mr.Facey baptized forty nine who had professed faith in the Saviour. During the year 1840, about one hundred were born of God's Holy Spirit, baptized and added to the church. These were times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord. Considering the sparse population of the neighbourhood, it was said to be like a tidal wave of saving mercy. News of these happenings created an interest with the press and in the year 1839 the following account appeared in the Exeter Gazette:

"DIPPING EXTRAORDINARY - On Sunday last (April 28th), about ten o'clock in the morning, near three thousand people assembled at Muckworthy, in the parish of Ashwater, to witness the ceremony of immersing fifty two persons of the Baptist persuasion. This was conducted with great order and propriety in a large pool of water about four feet deep, having a wooden bottom fixed. Amongst the number baptized were persons of all ages, from twelve to nearly ninety years of age. The minister dressed in black with a leather girdle about his loins, stood in the middle of the water, an assistant also stood in the water and received them at the foot of the steps as they came in and presented them to the baptist, who on receiving each said, "According to your faith, I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost". They then, resting on his arm, were gently lowered backward into the water till the whole person was immersed, they were then raised again, and passed over the other side. The ceremony concluded with singing and prayer".

A Mr. Thomas Bray was also long connected with the believers at Ashwater and was actively engaged in preaching in the area. For fifty years he was a most earnest and devoted worker in the Master's vineyard. He walked hundreds of miles to preach the good news and to make known the Saviour whom he loved. This good brother was a staunch teetotaller. By some he would be called a 'character'. He had his distinctive marks, and although not so extreme in his oddities as Billy Bray, yet there were certain resemblances. He was a man of great wit, gifted with a powerful voice which would carry a considerable distance, also a good singer. He possessed a remarkable gift in prayer, and in the conduct of worship was most reverential. This man also, was much used of God in the area. Three other Baptist fellowships were founded and chapels built in the Ashwater district during the latter half of the eighteenth century: Halwill, Germansweek and Halwill Junction.

A Spiritual Observation

Nineteenth Century

Twentieth Century

Great numbers of chapels built.

Great numbers of chapels closed.

Emphasis on prayer and preaching.

Emphasis on gimmicks and entertainment.

A fear of God and marks of true piety.

Worldliness and light-hearted quasi Christianity.

Truth upheld in the pulpit.

Truth fallen in the street.

"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge" (Hosea 4:6)

Spiritual Sluggards

It is true that perfection has never been found among the Lord's people, yet a relative healthiness and vigour **have** frequently marked them. But during the past century there has been a steady and noticeable deterioration in spirituality and a sad decline in practical godliness. Power has diminished, love has cooled, less and less of the fruit of the Spirit and works of righteousness has been produced. Instead of 'always abounding in the work of the Lord' (rendering universal obedience to Him), the majority of those bearing the name of Christ were 'at ease in Zion'. Instead of going forth to meet the Bridegroom with lamps trimmed and burning, the wise virgins, equally with the foolish ones, slumbered and slept. Instead of running the way of God's commandments (cf Psalm 119:32), too many sat still; waiting for God to apply the promises to their hearts. Instead of engaging in aggressive evangelism, most of the churches petted and pampered their own members. Instead of contending earnestly in the world for the faith, other churches turned aside to bitter wrangling and profitless contentions among themselves. The Lord's cause languished, and Satan was well pleased.

Among the contributing causes which have produced and promoted a generation of spiritual sluggards may be mentioned the following. First, the slackness of preachers. An ever-increasing number of men who sought a soft and easy job were attracted to the ministry, and few indeed burned the midnight oil in their studies and spent themselves in the service of Christ. Second, unfaithful preaching, where there was an entirely one-sided emphasis: a concentrating upon blessings and privileges and a neglecting of duties and obligations, a magnifying of the gifts of Divine grace, but a minimizing of the requirements of God's holiness. Third, the inculcation and encouragement of a spirit of fatalism, through failing to preserve the balance of truth between God's sovereignty and man's responsibility, between human ability and accountability, with the

result that a race of do-nothings was produced - waiting for God to give them more grace, instead of using what He had already bestowed. Fourth, being too readily discouraged by the difficulties in the tasks assigned by God, walking too much by sight rather than faith, their zeal abating because they could perceive so little fruit produced. It is not without good reason that the Holy Spirit repeated in 2 Thessalonians 3:13 the exhortation of Galatians 6:9, "*Let us not be weary in well doing*"!

A.W.Pink

ORIGINAL CHRISTIAN BAPTISM

Its History and Conflicts
Its Relation to a State or National Church and
Its Significance for the Present Time

by

Johannes Warns

translated from the German by G.H.Lang

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Editorial

Much ministry today, both spoken and written, appears very stereotype, repetitive, according to a hackneyed convention. This is good if it embraces "*all the counsel of God*", but often this is not the case; rather is it an effort to further a particular theological line or standardize a denominational tradition.

There is a pressing need for preachers and editors to be observant, not only noting light and popular trends, but also faulty and deficient doctrine and church practice. Great caution needs to be exercised when calls are made for a return to historic traditions for many of these traditions are not as Biblical as some would have us to believe. Hence the urgency for those who handle the "*lively oracles of God*" to be on the watch-tower, observing the best of certain teachers, then alerting the people by word and pen as to whether that which is being propounded is Biblical or mere traditions of man.

One of the great matters needing to be addressed, is the manner in which the gospel of salvation is preached. There are two extremes, both of which in isolation do not accord with the Word of God. To assist understanding, theological tags which one deplores, are necessary; one extreme is hyper-Calvinism, the other Arminianism.

There are those who believe they have discharged their responsibility if they have set forth in an impersonal and abstract way that which is termed 'The Doctrines of Grace', thinking that their doctrinal homily has covered "*all the counsel of God*" concerning the matter of man's salvation, and that results must be left to the Holy Spirit. This may sound very pious, but it needs to be scripturally examined. It is true that regeneration is the work of the Holy Spirit and that God "*giveth the increase*" (1 Corinthians 3:7), but is "*all the counsel of God*" set forth by simply expounding the so-called 'Five

points of Calvinism"? In this way the preacher appears to be reduced to some kind of audio-recorder, repetitively giving the same message. This approach to the message of salvation to lost sinners is far removed from that found in Holy Writ. John the Baptist was described as "*a **burning** and a shining light*" (John 5:35) - **on fire!** He was "*the voice of one **crying** in the wilderness*" (Matthew 3:3) - **passionate!** This man was no cold formalist. It is written of the Saviour that He **wept** over Jerusalem because the inhabitants would not come to Him (cf Luke 13:34,35 & 19:41,42). No fatalistic spirit is manifest in Him. Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, wrote, "*Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we **persuade** men*" (2 Corinthians 5:11). He also said, "*Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did **beseech** you by us: we **pray** (**plead/beg**) you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God*" (2 Corinthians 5:20). In all these instances there was earnestness, concern and fervour in evidence. Those of Arminian persuasion, although sadly deficient on certain points of doctrine pertaining to salvation, generally speaking do show a far greater zeal and concern for the lost than the hyper-Calvinist does.

What a tangle many get into over the question of Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility! Realizing they cannot reconcile the two, they major upon one or the other and invariably by so doing, fall into one of the two afore-mentioned camps. Mortal man will never reconcile these two aspects of doctrine, and what is more he has not been asked to do so, but he is **commanded** to preach them both as part of "*all things*" which pertain to the gospel of the kingdom of God. The fact that God is sovereign in **all** things, including man's salvation, does not rule out human accountability or responsibility. The glorious truth of election unto salvation does not mean that man is reduced to an inanimate puppet. Man is a responsible being and every preacher of the gospel is to treat him as such. If the preacher is faithful to his charge, he will call men and women to repentance

and faith. It is the express **command** of the Great Head of the Church that *"repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations"* (Luke 24:47). *"Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ"* (Acts 20:21).

Sinners are to be authoritatively called upon to repent. Did not our Lord commence His ministry in this way? *"Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying Repent ye, and believe the gospel"* (Mark 1:14,15). In this way He continued (cf Luke 13:3,5) and after this manner He commissioned all future preachers (cf Luke 24:47), categorically assuring them that whosoever will call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved (cf Acts 2:21). To abruptly tell men and women that they are dead in trespasses and sins and that they are totally unable to do anything, is to give a disproportionate presentation of truth; it can only cause sinners to feel that they are to be pitied rather than blamed. It is true that they are in the grip of Satan and of death, but it is equally true that they must be urged to seek the Lord while He may be found and to call upon Him while He is near (cf Isaiah 55:6); *"And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart"* (Jeremiah 29:13). Is it not incumbent upon every faithful preacher to warn sinners to *"flee from the wrath to come"* (Matthew 3:7) and to command *"all men every where to repent"* (Acts 17:30)? We are to preach the unconditional election of sinners unto salvation; we are to preach the universal call of the gospel; the one refers to Divine sovereignty, the other to human responsibility. To reconcile the two is impossible. To preach one in isolation is to fall into one of the two **traditional** camps which have bedevilled and confused the church for centuries. Neither line of teaching, if isolated, can be true to the Scriptures.

This editorial has highlighted extremes in presenting the message of salvation, each of which in isolation, must be eschewed. Equally

must the Christian be very guarded against the constant appeal to historic creeds. Not all creeds, confessions and practices are free of defects, although in some parts they are right and good, in others either by commission or omission they are faulty. All the counsel of God for His people in **every** age is found in one 'Confession of Faith' only, namely the New Testament, in which there is no slant, bias, error or omission. This complete handbook, published by the Great Head of the Church Himself, is perfect in **every** detail, and is binding upon all men, in all parts of the world, at all times.

Why is it that there is such a craze to highlight and eulogize certain ecclesiastical figures (according to one's theological persuasion)? It is not unusual today to see meetings advertised as a 'Bible Convention' when the subject will be the life of some Protestant Reformer, Puritan or other religious leader of his day. Such a gathering might be convened for an 'Historical Lecture' but how inappropriate, even disparaging to the Holy Scriptures, to style such as a 'Bible Convention'. On many points, the men eulogized might have been great stalwarts; on others, like all humans, they were abysmal failures. Does not Almighty God say most definitely, "*Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils*" (Isaiah 2:22). It is an affront to the **Divine Author** of the Scriptures when calls are made for a return to historic creeds and confessions, compiled by mere mortals. The rules for belief, practice and corporate worship are contained in the Scriptures, "*a more sure Word of prophecy*" (2 Peter 1:19).

Preliminary Announcement

Annual Bible Convention

Saturday, 5 June 1999 D.V. Speaker: Mr J.Thackway (Holywell)