

January – March 2000

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**North Road Chapel (Evangelical)
BIDEFORD**

Lessons from John's Gospel

chapter seventeen

"I have manifested Thy name unto the men which Thou gavest Me out of the world: Thine they were, and Thou gavest them Me; and they have kept Thy word" (John 17:6).

This verse was considered to some extent in the last edition of this magazine and we return to it, in order to deal with the latter half: *"Thine they were, and Thou gavest them Me; and they have kept Thy word"*.

How are these words, *"Thine they were"*, to be understood? In the Old Testament, God stated, *"All souls are mine"* (Ezekiel 18:4). This is by virtue of creation. All things and all creatures in all realms were made by God and for God; *"Without Him was not anything made that was made"* (John 1:3). This is universal and it is one sense in which those words in Ezekiel are to be understood, but there is another meaning which is more specific. In the Word of God, there is a select company spoken of, *"Ye are a chosen generation a peculiar people"* (1 Peter 2:9); these are a remnant elected and chosen by God in grace (cf Romans 11:5). They were always in His eternal mind before creation was effected. Each one of this *"peculiar"* company which God has chosen for Himself will, in their respective generations, be effectually called by the Holy Spirit **out** of the world and their natural *"dead in sins"* position and will become visibly distinguished from others; they are elected by God the Father, sprinkled (cleansed) by the blood of Christ and sanctified (called out and set apart) by the Holy Spirit (cf 1 Peter 1:2).

It is in this specific sense that we are to understand the words of our text. Here is a company given to Christ **out** of the masses of the

human race. They are God's in a peculiar way, He has selected them; they are the object of Divine favour; to them in His absolute sovereignty He acts in amazing grace, having chosen them out of every nation covering the whole period of human history. They are a few in each generation compared with the masses of those generations, but when all are finally resurrected and assembled together at the last great day, they will be such a multitude that no man can number them. The apostle John was given a vision of this vast congregation; *"After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands"* (Revelation 7:9). These words focus upon the end of time, when all those who through wondrous grace will form a part of that number, to embark upon an everlasting existence in a glorified state of endless bliss. This order is often spoken of as '**Eternity future**' by which is meant, after time has ceased to exist. That which is under consideration in John 17:6 concerns '**Eternity past**', which focuses upon pre-creation and the everlasting God, *"the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy"* (Isaiah 57:15); He whose goings forth have been from everlasting (cf Micah 5:2); the uncreated God who has ever existed in an uncreated realm, namely the heaven of heavens (cf 1 Kings 8:27). Before ever the world was, or the universe existed, **God dwelt in high heaven**. This is the realm of Deity, it has no beginning, it knows no end.

Time came into being with creation and will end at the last day. Whatever the duration of time, it is but a speck which is enveloped by eternity. These endless ages have no beginning and they forever roll on, never passing, perpetual, everlasting continuity. How can words describe it? They cannot! '**Eternity future**' is the eternal state when creation and time as we know it will have forever passed away, being absorbed in eternity.

The words of the verse now under consideration concerning those people given to Christ out of the world pertain to '**Eternity past**'. In the solitary majesty of pre-creation, dwelt the eternal God, the Trinity in unity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, three Persons, to be distinguished but not divided, **one God**. It pleased the Almighty God to create and so was brought into being the universe. Included in this vast creation was planet Earth with its solar system; this brought into existence **time**. Incorporated in this plan were seasons, days and years (cf Genesis 1:14), together with creatures to inhabit the earth, including man whom God created in His own image (cf Genesis 1:26). This creature, man, comprised spirit, soul and body (cf 1 Thessalonians 5:23) and in his primal state of holy perfection, God could intimately commune with him and he with God. As a help-meet for man, God brought into being a woman to be his wife (cf Genesis 2:18-24).

Man and woman were so created by God, that through conjugal love they could propagate life after their kind. Adam, the first created, was the federal head of the human race. He stood as the legal representative of all the race who would succeed him. What he did and how he acted would affect every man in all future generations. Despite the exalted position which Adam held at the beginning, he sinned, bringing tragic consequences to all humanity. This however was no surprise to the Creator, neither was His plan and purpose thwarted, for all creation and every aspect of it were for the manifestation of His glory in His many attributes.

In the secret purposes of the eternal counsels, the fall of man was occasioned in order to display God's grace, which in a scene of sinless perfection, could never have been exercised, therefore it would never have been demonstrated. It is because of the fall of man that God can show the exceeding riches of His grace to us through Christ Jesus (cf Ephesians 2:7). Who are the "**us**" to whom the exceeding riches of

God's grace is manifested? It is that chosen generation, that peculiar people, the remnant, the election of grace.

Reformed theologians speak of 'common grace'. They might correctly speak of 'common mercy' for Holy Writ warrants this: "*The earth is full of Thy mercy*" (Psalm 119:64); "*His tender mercies are over all His works*" (Psalm 145:9). Mercy in Scripture is general, but this is not so with grace; grace is not common, it is specific. The grace of God pertains to salvation; God's salvation is not universal, it is particular. Who then are the favoured recipients of this grace in salvation? Those mentioned in John 17:6, the men given to Christ "*out of the world*"; that vast number seen by John in his revelation. The everlasting God always had this election of grace in His mind in '**Eternity past**', before they had an existence. They were seen as a company selected out of Adam's fallen race 'in time' and destined for eternal glory 'after time', but they would **all** be sinners; these chosen ones out of the race would be "*children of wrath, even as others*" (Ephesians 2:3). Herein lay no difficulty, for God had determined to make known the riches of His glory on vessels of mercy, which He had afore prepared unto glory (cf Romans 9:23). These vessels of mercy are the heirs of promise covered by the immutable counsel of God (cf Hebrews 6:17). This immutable counsel is termed in Scripture "*the everlasting Covenant*"; that covenant is ordered in all things and sure (cf 2 Samuel 23:5).

Incorporated in that covenant was the Lamb's Book of Life in which was inscribed, before the foundation of the world, the names of all those chosen by God of every generation of human history (cf Revelation 17:8 & Philippians 4:3). These were given to Christ. God did not give to His Son a company of unknown individuals, each one was known by name. This gives meaning to our Lord's words "*He calleth His own sheep by name*" (John 10:3); I "*know my sheep and I lay down my life for the sheep*" (John 10:14,15). Another analogy is

portrayed by the exquisite breastplate worn by the high priest of Old Testament times, upon which was inscribed all the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. The high priest knew exactly who he was representing and on whose behalf he was acting and thus it was with Christ the Mediator. There could be no mistaking who was given to Him, all was meticulously worded and absolutely watertight. No further names could be added neither could any be erased.

To what end was this great company given to Christ, seeing that they were all fallen sinners? Firstly they were given to Him as a charge; for every individual named in the covenant, atonement had to be made. Their sins had to be purged and the wrath of a holy God against those sins, propitiated. The Son of God, the second Person within the Godhead, must come to this Earth, take to Himself a human nature and be made in the likeness of sinful flesh (cf Romans 8:3), in order that He might live a substitutionary life, fulfilling to its last jot and tittle the Law of God; then die a vicarious death in which the wrath of a sin-avenging God was to be poured out upon Him in the stead of every one whose names were in the Book of Life. In this way both the preceptive and penal aspects of the Law of God would be satisfied and made honourable. In consequence, God could be just and the justifier of all who believe in Jesus (cf Romans 3:26).

This work of atonement was the charge of the Father. He gave this great number to His Son to redeem; it was a commandment given to Christ by His Father (cf John 10:18). This again reverts to '**Eternity past**'. In that everlasting covenant was a clause relating to suretyship, and the only begotten Son of the Father engaged Himself to that office, agreeing to become the Surety for the Father's election of grace. This was not only the Father's will, it was a binding treaty. When a person can grasp this, the prophetic words of the Psalmist begin to take on a more definite meaning, "*Then said I, Lo, I come: in*

the volume of the Book it is written of me, I delight to do Thy will, O my God: yea, Thy Law is within my heart" (Psalm 40:7,8). The Mediator could not deviate from that charge, it was the Law and commandment which had been agreed within the Trinity in '**Eternity past**'. God's elect people were given to Christ for Him in due time to redeem; that was binding, it was "*ordered in all things and sure*".

There is also another aspect; not only were the elect given to Christ to ransom and reconcile, they were given to Him by God as a bride. By the cleansing efficacy of His atoning blood shed upon Calvary, He would purify unto **Himself** a chaste virgin. Through the substitutionary death of the Saviour, the sins of all the elect are dealt with and blotted out. By virtue of His holy, flawless life, a robe of spotless righteousness clothes them eternally. Hence, because of Christ's mediatorial work, once unclean, adulterous sinners become chaste virgins. Just as a father giveth his daughter whom he hath begotten, to another as bride and spouse, so does the Father give to Christ His elect whom He hath chosen out of the world. When this bride is manifested in '**Eternity future**', resplendent in the garments of righteousness which Christ the Bridegroom has woven for her, what a bride she will be! "*Not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing holy and without blemish*" (Ephesians 5:27); "*Thou art all fair, my love: there is no spot in thee*" (Song of Solomon 4:7).

The concluding words of our verse must not be left out: "*They have kept Thy Word*". Keeping this within the context of the elect, the primary meaning of this last phrase can be none other than the word of the gospel - the reception of the message of salvation. This is best explained by our Lord's parable of 'The Sower'. Concerning the good ground hearer, Christ said, "*But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the Word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience*" (Luke 8:15). Under the Holy Spirit's influence and invincible power, elect sinners not only hear

God's Word, they "*keep it*"; they do not ignore or dismiss it. In an honest and good heart, having heard the message of God's wondrous grace in salvation, they embrace it, they make it their very own.

So, in verse six of John chapter seventeen is seen the profound teaching of sovereign election and the absolute certainty of the outworking of the Everlasting Covenant, proving the veracity of Christ's words when He said, "*All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out*" (John 6:37).

W.H.Molland

Covetousness / Contentment

"Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" (Hebrews 13:5).

The above title may appear at first an antithesis, which it is, yet these two subjects are often co-related, as this Scripture portrays.

Part One : Covetousness

Covetousness is frequently associated with a love of money which indeed is true, but only in part. The words 'covet' and 'covetousness' appear several times in the New Testament. In the above verse, it is linked with the word 'conversation'. The word 'conversation' in everyday terms, pertains to the tongue and to the ear: one person speaking and another listening, but its Biblical meaning is much more comprehensive as the following Scriptures reveal: "*But as He which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of **conversation***" (1 Peter 1:15); "*While they behold your chaste **conversation** coupled*

with fear" (1 Peter 3:2); *"Only let your **conversation** be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel"* (Philippians 1:27). In these verses conversation is presented as being ocular, pertaining to sight, something in us which others behold and observe in behaviour, deportment, our affairs and manner of life. This brief explanation should help us to understand the emphasis which is being put on this matter.

Covetousness is the opposite to contentment. It is a craving after that which the providence of God has withheld from us; a dissatisfaction with our lot, an over-eager desire for those things we do not have, an inordinate passion for advancement. Many professing Christians look upon these matters as being of no account. They hide behind such terms as business acumen, prudence, ambition, all of which can be quite legitimate. A man is to be diligent in business; ambition, if it is directed aright, should not be stifled; it is incumbent upon all to act prudently, but if the underlying motivation is a passion for social advancement, a craving for more of this or that, whatever the heart is set upon, then it is not legitimate; it is **covetousness**. If this is the case, then our 'conversation', our 'affairs' - that is, the principles which govern and motivate us - are not according to 'holiness' as the Scriptures already referred to make clear.

It was because of this very strong tendency which is in us all, that our Lord warned His followers by saying, *"Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth"* (Luke 12:15); *"Take heed beware"*, it means be on the look out, be wary, cautious. It conveys the thought that we could be ensnared, inadvertently caught in a trap. Something very subtle, even sinister is suggested by the word **"beware"**. The

reason for such warnings as this, is that covetousness is a major sin. What is more, it is one of the more popular temptations employed by Satan. Why? Because men, women and young people are easily led down this path. Covetousness has been termed a 'mother sin', implying that from it many other sins issue. Some people have a passion for one thing, whilst with others it is something totally different, yet all are equally sinful.

The tenth commandment reads, "*Thou shalt not covet*" and then continues to list a number of objects: "*thy neighbour's house*", "*thy neighbour's wife*", "*his manservant*", "*his maidservant*", "*his ox*", "*his ass*", "*anything that is thy neighbour's*" (Exodus 20:17). Covetousness lies behind the daily spate of break-ins and robberies; men wanting more than is lawfully theirs. The coveting of another man's wife, or another woman's husband greatly contributes toward the ever spiralling break-up of marriages and destruction of family units. Because covetousness is a mother sin it has far reaching consequences, in whatever form it takes and invariably brings more grief than joy.

This eager desire for more, or for something different, is because the person concerned is not finding satisfaction in the providence of God. God is not their supreme object and delight, they want **more**. Basically it is as stated in Holy Scripture, they are worshipping the creature more than the Creator (cf Romans 1:25); creature satisfaction is their quest. Men's ambitions vary tremendously; it can be wealth, honour, knowledge, academic attainment, leisure, pleasure, travel; the list is great, but they are all subject to our Lord's word "**Beware**"! These things can be a snare. Even in the realm of education, we are not only warned against the lust of the flesh, the mind is also included in this warning (cf Ephesians 2:3). If the mind is set merely upon obtaining knowledge and academic qualifications for knowledge sake, then that person's conversation, their governing principles are at

fault. Their 'affairs' are not such as becometh the mind of Christ, not chaste (cf 1 Peter 3:2), meaning the motivation is not pure, not holy (cf 1 Peter 1:15). What need there is for us all to pray, *"Incline mine heart unto Thy testimonies, and not to covetousness"* (Psalm 119:36).

Covetousness is not only manifested by a craving to **get**, it can also be evidenced by a strong determination to **keep**, leading to miserliness and no concern for others. Some people work very long hours in order to earn large sums of money, they spend very little, never giving a thought for the needy. What drives such people on? Covetousness!

Strange as it may sound, another aspect of covetousness is manifested by wastefulness in reckless spending. Resources which should be saved for a rainy day are used to gratify a passing whim. A desire to possess some object, or to embark upon some project which, when examined in the light of common sense, let alone assessed by Biblical principle, is totally unnecessary and a complete squandering of the increase which God has entrusted to them, and over which they are to exercise wise and Godly stewardship.

The Word of God has much to say on these practical matters; neither idleness nor extravagance is countenanced by the Almighty. There is a prayer recorded in the Book of Proverbs and it is appropriate for us all, *"Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: lest I be full, and deny Thee, and say, Who is the Lord? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain"* (Proverbs 30:8,9). This subject under consideration is certainly not just a Sabbath Day Christianity, it concerns every day of the week. It is only as the Word of God is searched and Scripture compared with Scripture, so that this matter is viewed from the many angles in which God's holy Law sets it forth, that we get the full impact. The apostle Paul states, *"I had not known*

sin, but by the Law: for I had not known lust, except the Law had said, Thou shalt not covet" (Romans 7:7). Thus it is with us; we shall never know the extent and far reaching effects of this mother sin of covetousness, if we do not thoroughly study what the Law of God says about it; this prompts deeper examination.

To Almighty God, the heinousness of this sin is further emphasized in the writings of Job, "*If I have made gold my hope, or have said to the fine gold, Thou art my confidence; if I rejoiced because my wealth was great, and because mine hand had gotten much this also were an iniquity to be punished by the Judge; for I should have denied the God that is above" (Job 31:24,25,28). Covetousness in its many aspects is viewed as "iniquity", a denial of our God which He cannot overlook and which He will punish. Covetousness caused Ahab to trample beneath his feet every principle of law and justice and seize the property of Naboth. Covetousness robbed David of his morality, driving him to take another man's wife. Covetousness led to the telling of most fearful lies by Ananias and Sapphira. Covetousness prompted Iscariot to sell the Christ of God into the hands of wicked men. Little wonder our Lord said, "**Beware**"!*

The tenth commandment, "*Thou shalt not covet*", should have a solemn impact upon us all, for it deals with a matter extending into many areas of our lives and can bring devastation to our spiritual well being and spoil our testimony.

Part Two: Contentment

It is no coincidence that these two subjects are included in the same verse in Hebrews chapter thirteen, because the one has a very definite bearing on the other. A contented person is far less susceptible to covetousness than a **discontented** person. Contentment is the great antidote to that 'mother sin' of covetousness.

In this second section, it is necessary to first deal with the negative aspect; discontent. Discontent is not a desirable trait in a person, yet not many would view it as the sin it really is. Discontent is a grievous offence against the God of heaven. It is to call into question His infinite wisdom; it is a denial of His goodness. To murmur at our lot is to take issue with God's sovereignty. Since it is Almighty God who orders all the circumstances of human life, who are we to quarrel at His overruling? Like Jacob, we should always remember that we are not worthy of the least of God's mercies (cf Genesis 32:10). It ill becomes a child of Adam to show the slightest spirit of discontent. Discontent is often the great distinguishing mark of the unconverted. There is a sense in which this is understandable, for they have no treasure in heaven; everything which they possess pertains to earth, therefore they have an insatiable desire to supplement their earthly comforts and to improve their lifestyle; anything which will add to their enjoyment. This in itself produces a restless spirit within, with a consequent lack of peace and lasting satisfaction. *"The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked"* (Isaiah 57:20,21). The people of God are, or should be, the very opposite to this.

The exhortation in Hebrews 13:5 is, *"Be content with such things as ye have"*. A spirit of discontent should never be in evidence in a child of God. There are good reasons for this. Dissatisfaction with our lot is a serious affront to God's dealings with us, it evidences a lack of submission to His all wise providence; this is a very dangerous attitude to adopt.

Israel, in the Old Testament, constantly complained about their circumstances, with the result that God brought chastisement upon them. Chastisement can take many forms, but when it is the sin of discontent and God's people want something which He in His wisdom

has withheld, He might well grant their craving, but with unexpected consequences. The Word of God makes it clear, Israel *"lusted exceedingly in the wilderness, and tempted God in the desert. And He gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul"* (Psalm 106:14,15). Carnal enjoyment at the expense of spiritual blessing is bad business for a Christian. Another example of discontentment is shown by Rachel's fretfulness because her sister Leah had children whereas she had none (cf Genesis 30:1,2). God intervened, she was made fruitful, but the outcome was very poignant; she died in childbirth (cf Genesis 35:16-18).

These incidents are recorded in Holy Writ for *"our learning"*, warning us that God takes note of any spirit of discontent which lurks in our hearts. Our attitude should be *"giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ"* (Ephesians 5:20). Discontent will always stifle the voice of thanksgiving. It is temporal matters which are usually the object of discontent; rarely do we meet Christians who murmur about the spiritual aspect of their lives. This of itself, indicates the seriousness of the question, for it immediately reveals where their priorities lie.

Many excuses are made by people for their discontent. Some plead temperament, they say they are born worriers; others speak of troubles which have overtaken them; others will argue that they have always been disadvantaged. This has a human side but it is not spiritual, for God is over all, even in these matters. Whatever our circumstances, this injunction holds, *"Be content with such things as ye have"*. Harboursing a spirit of discontent not only warps the soul, it is greatly dishonouring to God.

Turning from the negative to the positive, just as discontent dishonours God, so does contentment glorify Him; what is more, it is greatly beneficial to ourselves, for a discontented person is never

really happy. There are guidelines given us in Scripture which will help us in the cultivation of a contented spirit. **Firstly**, there must be a firm realization of God's goodness. Although frequently quoted, do we really believe that as Christians, all things work together for our good (cf Romans 8:28)? If we do know and believe this, then whatever the situation, we should be contented. **Secondly**, we must always be mindful of God's wisdom. When life seems to be a tangle and unsuspected happenings shatter and turn upside down our preconceived hopes for the future, where should our confidence lie? Is not our God a God of infinite wisdom? He makes no mistakes, He always promotes our ultimate interests; there is nothing unexpected to Him. **Thirdly**, we must never forget the absolute supremacy of the Almighty. This means that He has the indisputable right to do as He pleases with our affairs. *"The Lord maketh poor, and maketh rich: He bringeth low, and lifteth up. He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of His glory"* (1 Samuel 2:7,8). **Fourthly**, we need to be weaned from the world. The believer's treasure is in heaven and it is there that he is to lay up more and more riches. To do this he is to forego much that this world has to offer and be content with that which God, in His wise providence, has given, for He alone knows what is right.

Are there not those who profess the name of Christ, who have allowed material things to take hold of them? Worldly prosperity and material gain is the consuming quest; their affections are on things on the earth (cf Colossians 3:2); they labour for the meat that perisheth, rather than that which endureth unto everlasting life (cf John 6:27); the kingdom of God and His righteousness does not come first (cf Matthew 6:33). Many have gone this way. That which they had set their hearts upon, God frequently has given, but sent leanness into their souls, often bringing trouble and distress, proving the truth of Scripture, *"Better is little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure and trouble*

therewith" (Proverbs 15:16). Let Hebrews 13:5 sink deep into the hearts of us all, "*Be content with such things as ye have*". There is always a reason for a spirit of discontent when it is found in a believer; invariably it can be attributed to a lack of vital communion with God and of meditating upon His word. The Psalmist was aware of this and took precautionary measures, praying that the Lord would establish His Law unto him (cf Psalm 119:38); he went on to say, "*O how I love Thy Law! it is my meditation all the day Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage for ever: for they are the rejoicing of my heart Great peace have they which love Thy Law: and nothing shall offend them*" (Psalm 119:97, 111, 165). The Christian who is in close fellowship with his God has such an "*heritage*" that nothing on earth can rival. He is not "*offended*" or ever disappointed at the prosperity of the wicked, nor envious at what others may have achieved, what they have seen or where they have been. His heart ever rejoices in the Lord and His Word, consequently he has "*great peace*". He dwells in "*green pastures*", his spirit is relaxed by the "*still waters*", all summed up in one word - contentment.

Paul, writing to the young man Timothy, stressed this fact very forcibly when he stated, "*Godliness with contentment is great gain*" (1 Timothy 6:6), meaning that through the cultivating of a spirit of contentment, treasure would be built up in heaven. This is achieved through submission to the perfect will of God. The exact wording of Paul concerning this must be noted, "*Godliness **with** contentment*", not **apart from** contentment. A professed Godliness, if it is marked by a spirit of discontent, is no Godliness at all. Paul was not making rash statements, neither was he speaking out of his depth, or being hypocritical. When in prison for nothing other than the Word and testimony of Jesus Christ, he wrote, "*I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: everywhere and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need*" (Philippians 4:12). Nevertheless despite these varying

and ofttimes extreme situations he says, "*I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content*" (Philippians 4:11). True Godliness and contentment go together and it touches the Christian at every point in life and in every circumstance.

In conclusion, reference must be made to the last phrase of the verse being considered, for it provides the very foundation for the believer's contentment. "*I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee*". Discontent invariably proceeds from a failure to really appreciate God, for **who** and **what** He is. He is the eternal, almighty and omnipotent One. By grace He is our Father, the all powerful, limitless, majestic God of heaven and earth. All His designs for us, His children, are for our good. Therefore, whether His providence be joyous or painful, in whatsoever state we are, therewith we are to be content, for our God will never leave us nor forsake us. He will see us safely through and bring us to glory. Then why should we, His children, ever be restless? "*We may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me*" (Hebrews 13:6).

W.H.Molland

Notices

Mr & Mrs David Barrett, who have been meeting with us regularly for many months, were received into the membership of the church on Lord's Day, 19 September 1999. This is a great joy and encouragement, as the witness is further strengthened by this addition to the spiritual family at North Road.

Annual Bible Convention D.V.

Saturday 3 June 2000 Speaker: Mr A. McNabb (Dudley)

BATTLE *for the* **CHURCH**

An account of the epic struggle to recover the
New Testament pattern of church life in England
1517 – 1644

by

David Gay

In this excellent work, the author writes in his introduction:

"Where God has spoken in His Word, where He has made His mind known through revelation, there can be no dispute in such matters. God's commands must be obeyed; God's promises must be believed; God's declarations are the last word in all things. There can be no question about it. The whole structure of Christianity, its whole fabric, will tumble to the ground if this is not the case. If this argument is not true, if it is not granted, there can be no Christian religion at all - at least, none which is worth the name" (p.xiv-xv).

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Extract from: *Battle for the Church*

"In the pages of my book, how many times have I recorded this one simple and unanswerable argument, an argument put forward by so many faithful men and women time and time again when challenged about their doctrine and practice. It is the only argument for Christians; all other claims are worth less than a brass farthing between them. The Scriptures, and the Scriptures only, are our guide in all things, they said; and some of them went on to seal their testimony with their blood. *"To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them"* (Isaiah 8:20). Whenever men go outside of Scripture to invent their own schemes, or whenever they speak contrary to God's Word - however good they may be in other areas, on that issue they are at fault. They have no light in them at that juncture

One last point. In the New Testament, they needed more than a cupful or basinful of water in order to baptise. They needed *"much water"* (John 3:23). Our attention is expressly drawn to this. Why? If they wanted to sprinkle, a cupful would have been sufficient. Do those who practise sprinkling or affusion need *"much water"*? Clearly the apostolic church did. Why? Listen to Calvin who said, "From these words, we may infer that John and Christ administered baptism by plunging the whole body beneath the water". In spite of this, A.A.Hodge tried to argue, "In all probability" - please note, "in all probability" - "the original manner of applying water in Christian baptism was by pouring the water out of the hollow of the hand, or out of a shell or small vessel". Reader, this statement is completely unjustified; it flies in the face of all the facts and is utterly false.

Did the eunuch not have a supply of water with him when he was passing through the desert? Even allowing the unthinkable - that he did not - why did he point out an oasis when he raised the issue of baptism (cf Acts 8:36), following which both he and Philip went down into the water (cf Acts 8:38)? Do those who sprinkle or pour go down into the water with those they baptise? On this verse Calvin said: "Here we see the rite used among the men of old time in baptism; for they put all the body into the water". But

for all that he was prepared to state that in his opinion, sprinkling is perfectly acceptable and that "we ought not to stand so much about such a small difference of a ceremony the church did grant liberty to herself to change the rites somewhat".

This hypothesis enjoys the merit of honesty; but that is all that can be said for it. Christians have no right or authority to change the least of God's commands and ordinances. None whatsoever. Not even the great John Calvin can sanction it. The Particular Baptists, amongst others, saw this principle very clearly, and despite massive opposition, they had the grace and the courage to take the necessary steps back to the New Testament in order to adopt the practice of the early church in every respect. In every respect! All honour to them. Would that Calvin had done the same" (p.431,432).

Editorial

In the very early days of the Christian Church, men began adding to and subtracting from the plain teaching of the Word of God; this manifested itself in a divergence of both thought and action from the one and only standard. With the passage of time this departure from the truth has escalated, resulting in the multiplicity of denominations, societies and fellowships evident in Christendom today, each one claiming to have some kind of Biblical authority for their existence. Some hold only to a fragment of Scripture and that often fearfully misinterpreted. Others are stalwarts in contending for much of truth, yet are woefully content to conveniently overlook other sections. Between these two, lie numerous others.

The result of all this is a medley of voices, each crying their own particular brand of that which is broadly termed 'Christianity', much of which when examined in the light of Holy Scripture, is not Christianity at all.

Even in circles claiming to be orthodox, it is not uncommon to hear preachers using such phrases in the pulpit as "I believe" or "This is my conviction". By this we are led to think it is the preacher's point of view. Such clichés are ill advised and should be rigorously guarded against, for who wants to hear a mere man's belief or view? If a preacher has not got a "*Thus saith the Lord*" for what he has to say, then it is better not said.

Periodicals and magazines carry articles in profusion expressing humanistic views, atheistic views, evolutionary views, political views, financial views and so on; how long is the list? The Christian press also can rival it with its copious columns; Calvinistic views, Arminian views, Dispensational views, Amillennial views, paedobaptist views, Pentecostal views, Reformed views, Antinomian views and a host of others. All these many points of view can be very impressive, indeed quite convincing if read and studied in isolation, but at the end of it all, what is the point? It is the **Truth** we must arrive at, not **views**. What is more, one writer's 'view' is invariably quickly countered by another writer's 'view'. The burning question amidst all these 'views' and expressed 'beliefs' is the question put to Christ by Pilate, "*What is truth?*" (John 18:38). The Lord Himself answered this question, "*Thy Word is truth*" (John 17:17). Outside of the Word of God, there is no real, absolute truth. The Scriptures are holy (cf Romans 1:2; 2 Timothy 3:15), 'holy' meaning 'absolutely pure', frequently styled as '**The Word of Truth**' (cf 2 Corinthians 6:7; Ephesians 1:13; Colossians 1:5; 2 Timothy 2:15; James 1:18).

The Bible is not a compendium **containing** truth, it is a volume which, in its entirety, **is** truth. It is the Book of God. He, the God of Truth, who cannot lie, deceive or mislead, has given this authoritative, unadulterated Word of Truth. By it everything is to be tested, man's thoughts formulated, his beliefs founded and his conduct regulated.

In consideration of these awesome facts, it is incumbent upon every man before he opens his lips or takes his pen to write upon spiritual matters, to be verily assured that He is speaking the truth in Christ and not giving a false 'view' (cf Romans 1:18 & 9:1), for it is solemnly possible to change the truth of God into a lie (cf Romans 1:25). The apostle Peter frankly admitted that there were some things in Scripture hard to be understood, upon which some put an erroneous interpretation (cf 2 Peter 3:16). Such Scriptures should be left alone until one is enlightened as to their true meaning before attempting any exposition.

This leads on to that timeless injunction to the teaching elder or minister. He is "*to labour in the Word and in doctrine*" (1 Timothy 5:17); studying to show himself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of Truth (cf 2 Timothy 2:15). The word "*dividing*" in this verse does not mean the departmentalizing of Holy Writ which is the 'view' of some. It is defined by both Strong and Young in their lexicons as "To make a straight cut", "to correctly dissect". This is to expound all aspects of doctrine and practice correctly, in so doing, to be decisive, clean cut, without accommodating other 'views', which when carefully examined, however conscientiously held, are patently at variance with Holy Scripture. In this way and this way only, can a minister of God approve himself - by the Word of Truth (cf 2 Corinthians 6:4,7).

It is truth alone which will separate from error, whereas error, if countenanced, will always lead to further compromise. Those who cause divisions by teaching that which is contrary to the doctrine of **the Lord and His apostles**, as set out in the New Testament, we are to avoid (cf Romans 16:17). Such avoidance is not sectarianism, it is obedience to the Truth.