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**North Road Chapel (Evangelical)
BIDEFORD**

Lessons from John's Gospel

chapter seventeen

"Now they have known that all things whatsoever Thou hast given Me are of Thee. For I have given unto them the words which Thou gavest Me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from Thee, and they have believed that Thou didst send Me" (John 17:7,8).

The wonder of many of the utterances of the Lord in this prayer will be more fully appreciated if we consider the character of the eleven men present when these words were spoken, the shallowness of their grasp of truth and the weakness of their faith at this particular time. These disciples were soon to be so overcome with fear that they would forsake Him. The events surrounding the death, burial, and resurrection of their Master would prove to be so traumatic to them that, for fear of the Jews, they would gather together in a room behind locked doors.

The Lord knew this would happen, yet He speaks to His Father of them in such commendatory terms. In order to appreciate this, it is necessary to fully understand the scene of the upper room. The disciples had been in that room many hours with the Lord; tremendous teaching had been imparted, the Passover observed and the Lord's Supper instituted. There is no doubt that these disciples were bewildered by all that they had heard and seen. Now, with His eyes toward heaven, their Lord and Master is praying after this manner; they must have been staggered at what they heard, for His prayer pertained to **them**. *"Now they (His disciples) have known that all things whatsoever Thou hast given Me are of Thee. For I have given unto them the words which Thou gavest Me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from Thee, and they have*

believed that Thou didst send Me". It is quite obvious that the Lord is not viewing these men in their present state, rather is He taking an **overall view**. He had their whole life before Him, hence His words, *"They have known surely and they have believed that Thou didst send Me"*.

These men had believed; there was true faith, though that faith be no larger than a grain of mustard seed it was very precious to Christ, for such seed is of heavenly origin and it has immense potential. Thus it would be with these disciples, the words which had been communicated to them would, under the Holy Spirit's power and enabling, so flourish as to become a tree whose branches would extend far (cf Mark 4:31,32). Has not this been the case? These men **did** keep Christ's words (cf John 17:6).

Later, under Divine inspiration, they wrote it all down in perfect and absolute detail, a flawless record of all that Jesus both taught and did (cf Acts 1:1,2). So came into being the **written Word of Truth** and that Word has gone into every part of the world at some time over the generations. This was the comprehensive view which the Lord was taking of these disciples in His prayer. They may have been weak and faltering at that moment, but *"I pray for them"*, are His words in the opening clause of verse nine. They were earthen vessels, but vessels which Christ had chosen.

In all this, the mediatorial character of Christ shines forth in all its splendour. It is a prayer coming from the lips of our great High Priest; the One who is *"touched with the feeling of our infirmities in all points tempted like as we are"* (Hebrews 4:15). The Devil is the great **Accuser** of the brethren (cf Revelation 12:9,10), but the Christian has *"an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous"* (1 John 2:1). He *"ever liveth to make intercession for them"* (Hebrews 7:25). That which is set out by this prayer in the upper room is a picture of that

which is going on all the time in heaven on our behalf. Christ, the Daysman, is ever there; He is the eternal link between a holy God and the elect and this link can never be broken; He has His hands upon us both (cf Job 9:33).

"What from Christ the soul can sever,
Bound by everlasting bands?
Once in Him, in Him forever,
Thus the eternal cov'nant stands:
None shall pluck thee
From the strength of Israel's hands". (John Kent)

Every Christian knows what it is to have moments of spiritual weakness when the reality of Paul's words become very meaningful, "*O wretched man that I am!*" (Romans 7:24). It is at such times that the Devil approaches the eternal throne to point the finger in accusation, but our High Priest never dwells upon the believer's sin, that is Satan's occupation. Our glorious Mediator, in full understanding of our frailty, points to **His** atoning work and says, 'My blood cleanseth them from all sin' (cf 1 John 1:7). Little wonder the writer to the Hebrews says, "*We have **such** an High Priest*" (Hebrews 8:1).

"With joy we meditate the grace
Of our High Priest above;
His heart is filled with tenderness
And overflows with love.

He'll never quench the smoking flax,
But raise it to a flame;
The bruised reed He never breaks,
Nor scorns the meanest name". (Isaac Watts)

This is what is being portrayed in the upper room. The disciples may have been poor specimens at that moment, but their Lord took the overall view. He knew that at one time they were ignorant of spiritual truth, although no doubt they would have had a degree of religious knowledge; in an abstract way they probably believed in a God who had done wondrous things for their forefathers in centuries past. It is most likely that they attended the temple or synagogue on the Sabbath and heard the Jewish rabbis read from the Old Testament parchments, but their knowledge of the true and living God was vague. However over the past three years they had companied with this Man, Jesus of Nazareth; they had heard *"the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth"* (Luke 4:22); *"He taught them as One having authority"* (Matthew 7:29). Repeatedly they had heard from His lips such words as, *"Whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto Me, so I speak"* (John 12:50): *"I have not spoken of Myself; but the Father which sent Me"* (John 12:49).

What these men saw and heard had a profound effect upon them, as is evidenced by their own words. Andrew is heard to say, *"We have found the Messiah, which is, being interpreted, the Christ"* (John 1:41). Peter gives an even fuller testimony and in it he is speaking for himself and the other disciples, *"We believe and are sure that Thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God"* (John 6:69). The Lord had not forgotten those affirmations which came from their lips; He also appreciated that they were finite and fallible. Nevertheless, He says to His Father, *"They have known"* (v.7). They recognize that all that I say and do is of Thee, they accept My words as being authoritative and final; they know that I have come out from Thee, and they have believed that Thou didst send Me (cf v.8).

*"They have **believed**"*. This is an aspect of truth which is vital to maintaining the balance of Holy Writ. It is perfectly true that these men were **chosen** by Christ. Not one of them thought that it would be

a good idea to be a follower of this Nazarene, for He was despised and rejected of the people. Such sections of Scripture as Mark 1:16-20, Matthew 9:9 and others, give examples as to how it came about. The followers of Jesus Christ were not a press gang, they were not conscripts pressed into service, they were **called** and they **responded**. Throughout the ministry of Christ, they heard His words and they "**received them**" (v.8). Although there may have been much which they did not understand, yet they did not reject the teaching, neither did they ignore it.

Christ, who knows the hearts of all, could come to His Father in prayer concerning these men and say with certainty and in absolute honesty, "*I have given unto them the words which Thou gavest Me; and they have **received them***"; this of course, is why they were disciples of Jesus Christ. If there had been no **response** to His call, then they would never have figured in His prayer. It is men and women who have **believed** the truth of the gospel and **received** the Saviour of the gospel who come under the eternal protection and ministry of the great High Priest whose prayer is recorded in John chapter seventeen.

Belief and faith go hand in hand; spiritually a person cannot believe without faith. To this must be added what may appear a paradox, yet it is true that they cannot be possessed of a true faith if they do not believe; faith and **unbelief** are the two opposites. Faith believes the gospel, unbelief rejects it. The preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ according to the commandment of the everlasting God is made known for the **obedience** of faith (cf Romans 1:1-5). "*He that **believeth** and is baptized shall be saved; but he that **believeth not** shall be damned*" (Mark 16:16).

W.H.Molland

The Christian Race and How it is to be Run

Part One

The title of this article directs us to the first two verses of the Hebrew epistle, chapter twelve. *"Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God" .*

The overall focus of these words is that of determination and resolve in the Christian life. The same truth is set out in many other Scriptures; *"Then said Jesus unto His disciples, If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me"* (Matthew 16:24); *"Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God"* (2 Corinthians 7:1); *"Denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and Godly, in this present world"* (Titus 2:12). The Christian is to live his life in a circumspect and cautious manner, exercising rigid discipline.

Verses one and two of Hebrews chapter twelve are set against the background of the Old Testament worthies of the faith that are listed in the previous chapter. They are described as a great cloud of witnesses; their faith and fortitude should inspire the true people of God to live sanctified lives in total devotion to Godliness, separated

from the world unto God. Hence the words in the middle of the first verse, "*let us*", takes in every true born-again man or woman of all time, thus including those of the present generation.

True Christianity is living by faith. Faith in its fullest meaning is obedience to the Word of God, simply defined as '**God has said it, therefore I believe it and act upon it**'. When a child of God really appreciates how demanding this is, then they will fully realize the necessity of discipline. This is an intensely practical matter; it is not day dreaming, it is not drifting along with one's head in the clouds, it is not floating on a mill pond of joyous emotion, neither is it even resting complacently upon orthodox views of Scripture.

The life of faith is active, it calls for resolve. The faith of Noah required one hundred and twenty years of perseverance building the ark. With Abraham, it demanded separation from his idolatrous associations and embarking upon a pilgrimage for life. Moses had to forsake Egypt. Joshua had to unswervingly obey the instructions given him by God. None of these men drifted into a life of faith; they had to determine, they had to act and set their course accordingly into a pathway which would not be easy; indeed it would be arduous.

The introduction to this chapter continues, "*Let us run with patience the race that is set before us*". The picture is that of an athlete, the Christian, running a race. This metaphor depicts vigorous exertion and endurance. In contrast, the general spirit of this present age is pleasure-loving and work-hating; holidays and leisure are the most important part in the life of many, who are happier in this than at work.

Sadly this spirit, in no small degree, has crept into the Church . One of the great complaints which God made against His Old Testament people was their dilatory and listless approach to spiritual matters. His

words to them were, "*Woe to them that are at ease in Zion*" (Amos 6:1). How appropriate are these words to a great number of professing Christians today! "*At ease*" is the very opposite to running a race. Athletics are strenuous, demanding self-sacrifice, hard training and the vigorous exercising of energy. This is how the Christian life is depicted. The race is the life of faith, it is obedience, the pursuit of personal holiness.

Turning to the Lord in repentance and faith is not the 'be all' and 'end all' of the Christian life; it is only the starting point, the commencement of the life of faith. This race starts at new birth, the finishing tape is reached when we are called home to the Father's House; the ground we cover is our journey through life, but it is not to be run according to our thoughts, taking short cuts or by-passing obvious difficulties. No! the race is "*set before us*", meaning the course is marked out in the Word of God. The path we are to take through this world, the difficulties we encounter, the dangers to be avoided and the rules to be observed are all plainly set out in Holy Scripture; none are deceived or hoodwinked as they enlist. It is as stated, the race is "*set before us*"; it could be styled an obstacle race!

The Holy Scriptures make it abundantly clear that this race necessitates the denying of worldly lusts, and the living of a sober, righteous and Godly life in this present world (cf Titus 2:12); what is more, great patience and dedication is required. The Christian race cannot be likened to a 100 yard sprint which is straightforward, nothing to tax the runner's patience; he has only one concern and that is the speed with which he can cover the ground. The spiritual athlete's race is totally different. His great concern is not speed, it is self-discipline and personal holiness. He has a constant head wind and often driving rain; the world, the flesh and the Devil are relentlessly blowing at gale force right in his face. This is where patience, perseverance and determination are vital virtues.

Concerning this race the Scripture adds, "*Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us*". What athlete would enter a race in a tweed suit and wearing a warm winter overcoat? He might appear very smart in the market place, but he would look a fool to enter a race in such attire.

There are many things in our natural state which afforded us much pleasure and brought a measure of satisfaction, but now as Christians they are not suited to us. They are not compatible to the life of faith; they are needless encumbrances in the race set before us, therefore they should be discarded. This is the denying of ourselves, as Christ stated, apart from which no man can be His disciple. Former indulgences which at the time brought pleasure, are now totally out of character for a spiritual athlete.

This laying aside of every weight calls for ruthless action and grim determination. What then is entailed?

- 1) Material and earthly possessions which so absorb the mind that spiritual affections are dulled.
- 2) Anything which can pollute one's thoughts, that which is low, base, impure or suggestive; radio, television, literature, films and videos are the Devil's main channels in this connection. (How selective a believer needs to be in the use of these!).
- 3) Ungodly associations, the forming of close friendships with worldlings can be a very heavy weight which will greatly impede a Christian in the race which he is to run.
- 4) Involvement in the affairs of this world and a lack of separation from it. Such involvement may advance a person in his **earthly path** but invariably will retard him in his **spiritual race**. These are very common weights to which many Christians are shackled today.

Some believers think that the running of the race is greatly affected by their circumstances; for example, trials at work or opposition from ungodly relatives. If only their situation could be altered, what progress they would make, but their circumstances hold them back! They would say these are their weights, but such matters cannot be cast off. Those who reason after this manner have missed the whole point. They murmur against God's providential dealings with them. Christians cannot cast off their means of livelihood, (that is, if it is legitimate), just because work associates give them a rough time; neither can they opt out of family responsibilities because of problems with some members who are unbelievers. These matters are **not** weights, they are circumstances which God has placed them in. Difficult they may be, but this is all a section of the course set out which, as stated earlier, can be styled an 'obstacle race'; it is in such situations that the race is to be run **with patience**.

There are other considerations, perhaps not regarded as weights, which could weigh so heavily as to drag a person completely down; nevertheless they entangle the runner, restricting his freedom to concentrate on the race. In this generation, many appear to be ensnared by social status; money is spent in a variety of ways in order to keep abreast with worldly neighbours or acquaintances. Such Christians ignore the words of Holy Scripture, "*Let your conversation (manner of life) 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). Weights such as sport, travel, and socialising also, if not guarded against and held within very strict bounds, will hinder the runner, sapping his energy, enthusiasm and devotion to the race. To summarize, anything which encumbers, entangles or diverts the Christian is not of faith, indeed it is sin because it is disobedience to the One who has set the course and its rules before us.

Every weight is to be laid aside, whether it is heavy or comparatively light. Anything which retards progress or shackles us in true spiritual duty, which blunts the conscience, dulls the spiritual appetite or chokes one's prayer life, must be discarded.

One of the surest indications of true regeneration is, that weights **are** laid aside. Things which previously were looked upon as perfectly legitimate, even necessary and much enjoyed are dropped. Indeed the spiritual athlete who is set upon winning the race, will be determined to cast off every entanglement. Sadly however, there are many who have made some kind of profession to the name of Christ, yet have never cast off anything, their life is just as it ever was. How can this be accounted for? The answer surely must be that they have never really entered the race, therefore the weights do not worry them. When a Christian can concur with Paul in saying, "*I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ*" (Philippians 3:8); that Christian is running well!

In addition to the weights, the first verse of Hebrews chapter twelve mentions, "*the sin which doth so easily beset us*". From time to time one hears the expression 'besetting sin'; this is usually meant to indicate a particular sin to which a person is especially prone or vulnerable. There is much truth in this, for each of us have our own peculiar weakness which the Devil knows, and will concentrate upon. Such an interpretation is perfectly valid. However, by keeping the previous eleven chapters of the Hebrew epistle as the back-cloth, there is a more comprehensive and specific meaning to this; it is the firm emphasis which has been laid upon **faith**. This gathers to a great crescendo in chapter eleven, where the faith of so many of the Old Testament characters is focused upon; how they accepted what God had said and acted accordingly. This necessitated them laying aside

so much of that, which at one time, they counted dear, but having "*respect unto the recompence of the reward*" (Hebrews 11:26), they did it. Obedience was their password, the finishing post their target.

However, despite all that had been written to these Hebrews, very few would accept the truth which had been so clearly set out concerning the superiority of the New Covenant and its Mediator. Again and again did the writer warn them against hardening their hearts (cf Hebrews 3:8); "*Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief*" (Hebrews 3:12); "*Be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises*" (Hebrews 6:12); "*The just shall live by faith*" (Hebrews 10:38); without faith it is impossible to please God (cf Hebrews 11:6). Although **faith** was the recurring theme, these Jews would not accept that which was being carefully explained to them. They would not **believe** and **act** upon the Word of God. This was the great sin to which they were so prone. **Unbelief** was the sin which did **beset them**. Unbelief is the all-condemning sin of the unrepentant sinner (cf John 3:18). It is also the sad failure of many Christians who are struggling in the spiritual race. They are lagging far behind in progress, simply because they are encumbered with things which should be laid aside. The Word of God clearly sets out the path of righteousness, it is a separated path, all the things which are incompatible to the life of a child of God have been defined. To accept this and act upon it is **faith**. To ignore or dismiss the Divine rules for the race is **unbelief**. This is not the manner of life for the just (the justified sinner). To be slothful in matters of faith and obedience is the great besetting sin of many today who profess the name of Christ. They lag so far behind and are so unaffected by the authoritative principles laid down that they can hardly be recognized as entrants at all.

Part Two

"Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God".

The cloud of witnesses of Hebrews chapter eleven described in Part One of this article might inspire, motivate and encourage, but that cloud is not the object upon which the heart and mind of the spiritual athlete is to be fixed. Great as those warriors of the faith may have been, they all had lapses of faith. The Christian is to have his eye fixed upon Him who is the leader and commander of His people (cf Isaiah 55:4); described in this verse as the author and finisher of faith ('*our*' in the A.V. being in italics, was not in the original). It is as if Christ sets Himself with the candidates as a runner in the life of faith. Bearing in mind that faith is belief and obedience to the Word of God, this becomes very meaningful. Being the author and finisher of faith means that He, the Mediator, is the only One who began and completed without a falter, the whole course of this race. It was a life of faith in very truth, flawless obedience to the will of God. **He** is the one perfect example.

It was for the joy set before Him that He ran the race. In consequence, He is now seated at the right hand of God and He is both the pattern and the object of faith. To all who lay aside every weight, keeping their eye upon Him and running with patience the race **set before them**, meaning obedience to the Word of God, have great reward and joy ahead. The Lord Himself has promised, *"To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father in His throne"* (Revelation 3:21). In this verse the Saviour is represented as the captain of our salvation, the

leader of the long procession of those who have lived by faith (obedience). **He** is the pattern for us to emulate, the great **overcomer**.

This is emphasized, even confirmed by the fact that no title of office is given in verse two of Hebrews chapter twelve; it is simply the personal, human name of **Jesus**. The reason for this is, that stress is being laid upon His humanity. The Saviour was truly made like unto His brethren in all things (cf Hebrews 2:17). By the perfect life of the **man**, Christ Jesus, we see Him who is the author and finisher of faith. He began and He finished in total submission and dependence upon God. **'Look unto Jesus'** is the Divine injunction, He is the only One to set our sights upon. From the manger in Bethlehem to the cross on Golgotha, there was never a moment when the **man**, Christ Jesus, was out of communion with God, the reason being, He did **always** those things which pleased the Father (cf John 8:29); no weights or entanglements hindered or obstructed Him. That which entices the carnally minded, held no attraction for Him. In absolute sincerity He could say, *"I have overcome the world"* (John 16:33). The Prince of this world came and found nothing in Him (cf John 14:30). There was no response from Him to any allurements which the Devil could put in His pathway. Nothing could ensnare or impede the Saviour in the course which was **set before Him**. Here is the personification of a life of faith. A Man who in an absolute sense could say that He had respect unto the recompense of the reward, which was the throne of glory.

Endurance and fortitude marked the Saviour at every point. Anything and everything which would tempt or dissuade Him in His mission was attempted by the great Adversary, but to no effect. Ridicule, ignominy, hardship, persecution, or suffering to the Man, Christ Jesus, was totally disdained. His face was set as a flint to go to Jerusalem. There His work on earth would be finalized, but what unparalleled anguish would be entailed in its accomplishment. The scourging on

Gabbatha's pavement, the mockery and derision of the people, a crown of rough, sharp thorns pressed upon His brow, actual nails literally hammered through His hands and feet, by which means He was suspended on a felon's cross at Golgotha, that place of a skull. Neither was this all, yea, it was but the beginning of His sufferings, for He was to enter into a realm of suffering which no man or even angel can appreciate. The unmitigated wrath of God fell upon Him by virtue of all the sins of all the elect being imputed to Him. Steadfastly and resolutely did He bare His breast for the sword of Divine justice to be thrust into His very heart. This was the course **set before Him**, from which He never turned back; He gave His back to the smiters and His cheeks to them that plucked off the hair; He hid not His face from shame and spitting (cf Isaiah 50:5,6). *"Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end"* (John 13:1).

It was for the joy which was set before Him that the Lord Jesus endured the cross, despising the shame. All this is summed up so succinctly by Paul as, inspired by the Holy Spirit, he wrote, *"Christ Jesus who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father"* (Philippians 2:5-11).

This is the consummation of all things. *"When He shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when He shall have put down all rule and all authority and power"* (1 Corinthians 15:24), then will

the Church be presented without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, it will be holy and without blemish (cf Ephesians 5:27), adorned as a bride for her husband (cf Revelation 21:2). Looking upon that innumerable company clad in robes of white, who form His bride, the Church's glorious Head and Bridegroom will be heard to say, "*Behold I and the children which God hath given Me*" (Hebrews 2:13). Then will the praises of God be sung in the midst of the Church in very truth (cf Hebrews 2:12). This is the joy which was set before Him, the anticipation of the glory which would follow His sufferings (cf 1 Peter 1:11). "*Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into His glory?*" (Luke 24:26).

The Man, Christ Jesus, who has covered the course and finished His work on earth is at the present moment "*set down at the right hand of the throne of God*". He is "*crowned with glory and honour*" (Hebrews 2:9); He is invested with universal dominion, all power is given unto Him in heaven and earth (cf Matthew 28:18); He is entrusted with the sole rights of judgment, for as glorified Man, He has power over all flesh (cf John 17:2). Glory, power, dominion and the executing of final judgment also pertain to the course set for the Mediator and for the consummation of His work.

These many aspects have great relevance to every believer. We are to be true **followers** of Jesus Christ on earth; not only that we become partakers of Christ's sufferings, but when His glory shall be revealed, we may be glad also with exceeding joy (cf 1 Peter 4:13), for it is "*if we suffer, we shall also reign with Him*" (2 Timothy 2:12). This question of reigning with the Lord does not receive the attention it demands. Much is said concerning the priesthood of believers, but equal stress should be put upon the fact that we have also been made kings (cf Revelation 1:6). At the end of the course, overcomers are to sit with Christ on His throne as kings (cf Revelation 3:21). In this, the

overcomers have a vital role to play, *"And he that overcometh, and keepeth My works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of My Father"* (Revelation 2:26,27).

The fearful judgment of the last day is committed into the hands of that Man whom God raised from the dead (cf Acts 17:31). In the execution of that judgment we, His people, are to be involved, *"Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? Know ye not that we shall judge angels?"* (1 Corinthians 6:2,3).

How little do believers appreciate all that is entailed in being an heir of God and a joint-heir with Christ. If we are ultimately to be glorified together with Him, we must suffer with Him in the interval; this is the clear teaching of Romans 8:17. Looking at Christendom today, how little can be seen of true Christianity. Biblical Christianity consists of being conformed unto the image of God's Son (cf Romans 8:29). This will only be brought about by laying aside every weight and running with patience the race set before us, looking unto Jesus and having respect unto the recompense of the reward.

W.H.Molland

The Members of the Universal Church are known by their Profession of Christ and their Obedience to His Commands

Christ's followers are described as lights in the world (cf Philippians 2:15). They are a candle which is lighted, not to be put under a bushel, but that it may give light to all who are in the house (cf Matthew 5:15).

They are a city on a hill, which cannot be hid (cf Matthew 5:14). They are commanded, "*Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven*" (Matthew 5:16). Their obedience to this command has distinguished them in all ages, and made them visible to the world.

The disciples of Christ are bound to profess their attachment to Him before the world. This obligation is taught in such passages as the following: "*If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved*" (Romans 10:9); "*Whosoever therefore shall confess Me before men, him will I confess also before My Father which is in heaven*" (Matthew 10:32).

But something more than mere profession is necessary to distinguish the true followers of Christ. Many say, Lord, Lord, who do not the things which He has commanded. To such persons, however loudly they may profess His name, He will say, "*Depart from Me, ye that work iniquity*" (Matthew 7:23). He recognises those only as His followers who are obedient to His precepts; and He has taught us to recognise them in the same manner: "*By their fruits ye shall know them*" (Matthew 7:20); "*Ye are My friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you*" (John 15:14). A life of holy obedience to Christ is readily distinguishable from the common course of this world; and where it is exhibited, men cannot fail to see it.

The visibility of the Church consists in the visibility of its members. Our Divine Master came, "*a light in the world*"; and all His followers are lights; some of them burning and shining lights, and other stars of less magnitude. But as the constellations of heaven have no other light to render them visible than that which the several stars emit, so it is with the Church. All its light is the light of the members, and all its visibility depends on their lustre.

J.L.Dagg D.D.

Editorial

Fortitude, meaning 'strength of mind', 'power of determination', is a very important and vital Christian virtue which is not as apparent as it should be amongst many professing Christians or local churches.

Christians are to be humble, self-denying, gracious and patient in all things, yet they are never to be faint-hearted, fearful or indecisive; rather should they show firmness of mind, resolution and courage. *"For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind"* (2 Timothy 1:7). A Christian is to act manfully, showing strength of character; *"Stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong"* is the Divine injunction (1 Corinthians 16:13). The children of God are in a sinful world, in which they are to live soberly, righteously and Godly (cf Titus 2:12); fully aware and vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked, as was Lot in Sodom (cf 2 Peter 2:7); having no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reproving them (cf Ephesians 5:11); separated from the world, unto God; confessing that they are strangers and pilgrims on the earth (cf Hebrews 11:13); seen to be going forth unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach (cf Hebrews 13:13). This is the hallmark of true Christianity and it calls for firm resolve and spiritual tenacity.

The same strength of mind and decisive action is required in the ecclesiastical realm; a Biblical Church is to be militant. It must *"contend for the faith"* (Jude v.3), stand fast and hold the traditions which have been taught (cf 2 Thessalonians 2:15), be vigilant against any who would pervert the gospel of Christ (cf Galatians 1:7), withstand those who have turned from the truth to fables (cf 2 Timothy 4:4); exhort the gainsayers by sound doctrine (cf Titus 1:9), withdraw from those who will not walk after the traditions set out in the apostles doctrine (2 Thessalonians 3:6).

To be loyal to the God of Truth and His mandate in these matters, demands **fortitude**. To all who name the name of Christ, the word is: *"Be strong and of a good courage, fear not, nor be afraid of them: for the Lord thy God, He it is that doth go with thee; He will not fail thee, nor forsake thee"* (Deuteronomy 31:6).

Notices

Annual Bible Convention

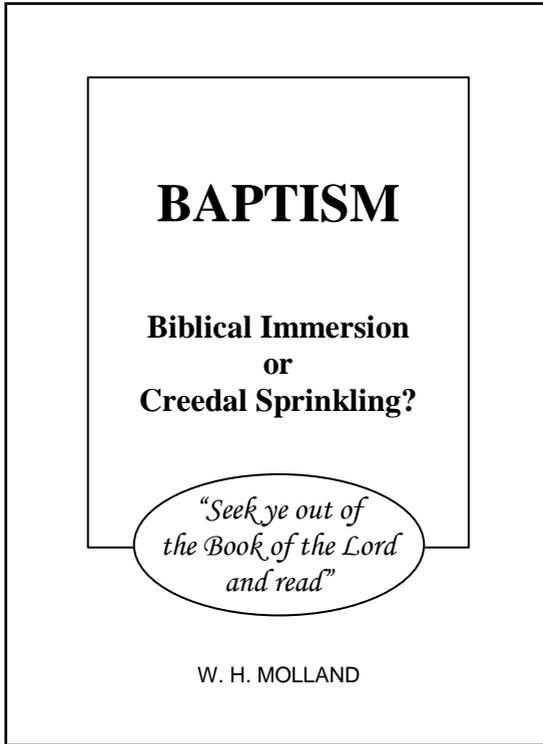
Saturday, 3 June 2000 D.V.
Afternoon 3.30 p.m. Tea 5.00 p.m. Evening 6.00 p.m.

Speaker: Mr A.McNabb (Dudley)

Visiting Preachers D.V.

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|------------|---------------|--------------------------------|
| Lord's Day | 23 April 2000 | Mr R.D.Steward (Cradley Heath) |
| Lord's Day | 7 May 2000 | Mr M.Wood (Bridgwater) |
| Lord's Day | 4 June 2000 | Mr A.McNabb (Dudley) |
| Thursday | 13 April 2000 | Mr F.Stanbury (Bow) |
| Thursday | 20 April 2000 | Mr F.Stanbury (Bow) |

Lord's Day, 9 January 2000, was a memorable occasion as Matthew Wort made his public confession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ by baptism. We continue to pray that truths set out in this baptismal service may yet be used of the Holy Spirit, in salvation to other young people who were present. It is a great joy and encouragement to see Samuel and Matthew now worshipping with their father.



Interest and concern has prompted the publication of this 24 page booklet, the title of which explains its content.

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The Bookroom Secretary
North Road Chapel (Evangelical)
Bideford, Devon
EX39 2NW