

October – December 2000

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**North Road Chapel (Evangelical)
BIDEFORD**

Lessons from John's Gospel

chapter seventeen

"And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to Thee. Holy Father, keep through Thine own name those whom Thou hast given Me, that they may be one, as We are" (John 17:11).

In this verse, a tremendous amount of truth is opened up. It is as if Christ is saying, I am almost on shore, but these dear ones are still at sea, out on the ocean of life, tossed by its billows, exposed to its dangers and subject to its many storms. So does His heart go out in prayer on their behalf. Further reference will be made to this in the future D.V., but for the present we confine our thoughts to the words, *"I come to Thee"*.

This statement must be kept within the context of the concluding section of the Lord's ministry in the upper room where He speaks five times of going to His Father in John 16. *"I go My way to Him that sent Me"* (v.5), *"I go to My Father"* (v.10), *"I go to the Father"* (v.16), *"I go to the Father"* (v.17), *"I leave the world and go to the Father"* (v.28). The interpretation of these words *"I come to Thee"* can refer to nothing other than our Lord's return to heaven. The ascension is not only a cardinal article of the Faith, it is a subject which, if fully appreciated, will thrill the soul above all else. Details of this momentous happening are given to us by the gospel writers; *"And He led them out as far as to Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them"* (Luke 24:50). Having died and risen again from the dead, 'ere He returned to His Father, He blesses His disciples. Redemption having been accomplished, blessing would now flow to all the heirs of salvation. Not only were these disciples **blessed**; at the same time they were **commissio**ned. *"And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth.*

Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen" (Matthew 28:18-20). "So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, He was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God" (Mark 16:19). In heaven, in resurrection power and glorified humanity, He would be given power over all flesh to give eternal life to as many as the Father had given Him (cf John 17:2). "And when He had spoken these things, while they beheld, He was taken up; and a cloud received Him out of their sight" (Acts 1:9). His bodily presence was no longer upon earth, He was now seated on the right hand of God. They saw Him no more, but the cloud remained.

Clouds have great significance in Holy Scripture. It was a cloud which hovered over the Tabernacle in the wilderness, which signified God's presence in the midst of His people. The Lord had just said to those disciples, *"Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world"*. Physically He was gone, but the cloud, the Old Testament symbol of His presence, was still over them. *"All power is given unto Me"* were amongst His last words to them; *"Go ye therefore"; "And they went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them"* (Mark 16:20).

Another point of interest at the Ascension is that as the disciples looked up and saw only the cloud, two angels appeared and said, *"Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven"* (Acts 1:11). This must have struck an immediate chord in the minds of these eleven men, *".... shall so come in like manner"*. The manner of His going - a cloud; the manner of His second coming - clouds. Their thoughts must have gone back further than the upper room discourse, to the

words of the Lord given previously on the very ground upon which they were now standing, Olivet; *"And they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory"* (Matthew 24:30). Are not the clouds described as *"His chariots"* (Psalm 104:3)? The Mediator went back to heaven by means of a cloud; in the same manner will He return; power, authority and triumph are set forth in these Scriptures.

Christ the Mediator left earth and entered heaven as a mighty conqueror; *"When He ascended up on high, He led captivity captive"* (Ephesians 4:8); *"Having spoiled principalities and powers, He made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it"* (Colossians 2:15). An analogy is drawn from the Romans in these verses, who were a great world power in Paul's day. These aggressive forces returning to the capital city after their military victories, would literally drag their captives, fettered in chains, behind their chariots; in this way, they made an open show of their triumph over the enemy. This is the picture which the Holy Spirit draws of Christ in His ascension. He had gone into the realm of death, with all its associated powers of darkness, the demon principalities of hell and of the pit had been engaged. From that horrific domain of satanic power and devilish dominion, Christ arose, having destroyed him who had the power of death, that is the Devil. The old Latin hymn puts this truth in most graphic language:

"The powers of hell have done their worst,
But Christ their legions hath dispersed;
Let shouts of holy joy outburst:
Hallelujah!

He broke the bands of death and hell,
The bars from heaven's high portals fell,
Let hymns of praise His triumph tell:
Hallelujah!

It was as a victorious warrior over sin and death and hell that Christ went back to the Father. As the risen, triumphant One, He prays as recorded in this eleventh verse "*I come to Thee*". Wesley captures something of the thrill of this as he writes:

"Our Lord is risen from the dead!
Our Jesus is gone up on high!
The powers of hell are captive led,
Dragged to the portals of the sky".

"Triumphing over them, He made a shew of them openly". Approaching heaven through the clouds, it is with these words upon His lips, "*I come to Thee*". "*I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do*". Wesley continues:

"Loose all ye bars of massy light,
And wide unfold the ethereal scene:
He claims these mansions as His right:
Receive the King of glory in!

Who is this King of glory? Who?
The Lord that all our foes o'ercame,
The world, sin, death and hell o'erthrew;
And Jesus is the Conqueror's name".

When the Son of God left heaven for earth at His incarnation, the voices of an angelic host rang out over the Judean hills, saying, "*Unto you is born a Saviour, Glory to God in the highest*" (Luke 2:11,14).

Those heavenly beings were equally, if not the more vocal when that same Saviour returned. Human language could not convey greater dignity and majesty than the words contained in Psalm 24: "*Lift up your heads, O ye gates; even lift them up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle,.... the Lord of hosts, the King of glory*"

(Psalm 24:9,8,10) Lift up your heads, swing open the everlasting doors of heaven to receive this mighty Conqueror, the **King of glory**.

Does not this thrill the soul? Is there a more glorious theme in Holy Scripture? The return of the Mediator, the victorious Warrior, who having finished the work which was assigned to Him by the Father, is "*crowned with glory and honour*" (Hebrews 2:9), and made "*higher than the heavens*" (Hebrews 7:26).

"Bless, bless the Conqueror slain!
Slain by Divine decree!
Who lived, who died, who lives again,
For thee, my soul, for thee!

W.H.Molland

Ecclesiastical Titles

A few months ago, a publication of North Road Chapel entitled 'Baptism: Biblical Immersion or Creedal Sprinkling' was sent to a Christian paper of paedo-baptist persuasion to be advertised. This advertisement was inserted and additionally the Editor of that paper kindly reviewed the booklet; a copy of his review is as follows:

"The author, the Rev.W.H.Molland, is Minister of North Road Chapel, Bideford. He argues from the words of the Great Commission, that baptism is obligatory, that it cannot be administered to infants and that it must be by total immersion. He goes so far as to say, "Not to teach and practice believer's baptism is as serious as not to preach the Gospel".

Mr Molland's targets are Presbyterians, the Reformers, the Puritans, the Westminster Confession and Covenant theology. He admonishes Baptists who are prepared to

consort with paedo-baptists and exchange pulpits with them. He recalls the persecution of Anabaptists in Reformation times and concludes with a series of quotations from Baptist writers.

The booklet is a robust attempt to arouse the ranks of Baptists from the slumber into which Mr Molland feels they have fallen and to warn their opponents of the dangers of taking up what he considers to be an unscriptural position. Although obviously written out of deep conviction, it maintains a gracious Christian spirit throughout and it does not fall into the trap of assuming that all paedo-baptists teach baptismal regeneration.

Ultimately one's assessment of this booklet will probably depend on which side of the great baptismal divide one is on".

To this review, the following reply was sent and appeared in a subsequent edition:

"Dear Sir

Thankyou for reviewing the booklet 'Baptism: Biblical Immersion or Creedal Sprinkling', published by North Road Chapel, Bideford, in the June edition of your paper. I was interested in what you said and greatly appreciate your fairness. However I was more than surprised that you styled me, the author of this work, as the Reverend W.H.Molland, especially as you had rightly stated that I was arguing from the words of the Great Commission. That Commission, which is a unit of Truth, specifies that we are to teach and observe all things whatsoever Christ has commanded. Such titles find no place in the Divine Mandate, indeed they are profane. That they should now be adopted by many non-conformist Independents is tragic, as is mentioned in this booklet (p.12).

Your paper is passed on to me regularly and I read it with interest. In no way do I wish to be provocative or show an uncharitable spirit, but I must state that for me, who am but a minister of God's Word, a servant of Jesus Christ, it is very offensive and hurtful to be addressed in this way.

I would esteem it highly if you would publish this letter in order that the stand of North Road Chapel on these issues, is not made to look inconsistent".

The courtesy shown in printing this letter was greatly appreciated.

This incident raises yet again the vexed question of clerical titles, commonly used today by true servants of Jesus Christ, liberal religious professionals and apostates. The whole concept of personal, professional, spiritual appellations is totally at variance with Holy Scripture. Even such a term as 'Master' is forbidden by Christ, for He alone is the 'Master' in His Church (cf Matthew 23:10), therefore for mortals to take to themselves terms which designate Deity such as "*Father*" (Matthew 23:9), "*Holy*", "*Reverend*" (Psalm 111:9) is the depth of irreverence. By designation, these titles place mere creatures alongside the "*High and lofty One*" (Isaiah 57:15); blasphemous indeed and a blatant defiance of the third commandment, "*Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain*" (Exodus 20:7). 'Vain' in this context meaning 'false', 'deceptive', 'to destroy', 'to devastate' (Strong's Hebrew Dictionary).

The gravity of this matter cannot be overstated, yet by many it is treated as of no consequence, and a necessary appendage to religious activity; but to the true Christian faith, it is a sore blight of gigantic proportions. It is deeply saddening to see ministers who stand for so much truth, taking to themselves the title of 'Reverend', or allowing themselves to be thus styled. Societies claiming to be contending for

the Faith or the production of uncorrupted versions of the Word of God, have committees that proliferate with men styled "**The Reverend ...**". Are there not any men amongst them of sufficient integrity and spiritual calibre to withstand this religious pomposity which is a denial of their profession and the work in which they are engaged?

Invariably will these titled men, if challenged, admit that there is no Biblical authority to be thus styled, but state it is a tradition of long standing, and it is understood by people to denote an office in the church, therefore it does not bother nor is it of consequence to them. Others add that it is necessary to have distinguishing titles, it commands respect, giving a degree of authority on spiritual issues. Some years ago the editor of a well-known Reformed Baptist magazine wrote on the question of '**Reverend**'. Amongst other things he stated, "For nearly four hundred years now this title has been employed by countless Gospel ministers (including the most militantly anti-Roman) to indicate nothing more than that they are properly appointed, full-time teachers of the Word. In such a context it can hardly be regarded as a breach of the rule of Christ". In the light of the authoritative Word of Almighty God, this is a staggering attitude to take and the statement made most definitely **is** a breach of the rule of Christ on this matter.

To infer that such titles are necessary to indicate that a man is properly appointed to be a full time teacher of the Word, is incorrect. The writer of this article has been an elder and minister of the Word of God for over fifty years in the same local Church at Bideford and during these years he has spoken often and publicly against ecclesiastical titles. Never once has he been conscious of a lack of respect; in the market place, Church, hospital visitation, hospital services, out-of-door services, government authorities or any other sphere. In a period of more than half a century of Christian ministry,

there has never been the accusation that in his preaching or person, there is a lack of authority. If a man has to assume a title or some form of distinguishing attire to give him spiritual status, then his authority and standing within the community is of little worth. The disciples and workers in the early New Testament Church knew nothing of these carnal innovations yet they were marked men, clearly identifiable as **true** servants of Christ who spoke forth the Word of Truth with authority and power.

If true, regenerate ministers of the Gospel quitted impious titles so that not one remained amongst the ranks of the Lord's messengers, what a testimony to God and His Truth that would be! How great would be the degree of honour which this would bring to Him, who alone is worthy to be revered. Would the true Church suffer by such action? Would there be a loss of status or respect? No! - immediately would charlatans and apostates be manifest, as they would continue to cling to their carnal appellations and man-appointed seats of religious influence.

The reader's reaction no doubt, is that such a thing will never happen; maybe, but it **could** happen. Every genuine minister of the gospel is an individual, as such he is accountable to God and if honest before the Almighty and with himself, he knows that such titles are totally at variance with the Divine Mandate which should be his sole rule of faith and practice. Why is there such gross irregularity? This question can only be answered by two words, 'pride' and 'disobedience'. May God in mercy, grant conviction and repentance that men may drop these wretched appellations and publicly give the reason why.

"Holy and reverend is His name" (Psalm 111:9)

- His alone and none other !

W.H.Molland

Obedience/Disobedience

These two words are correlative and so reciprocally connected as to be inseparable. The first denotes positivity, the second negativity. To be obedient to a cause or principle is positive action, whereas disobedience to that cause is negative action.

Bringing this into the spiritual context, this word in its two aspects is the most vital word that a mortal can ever contemplate, for by it his state is determined, not only in time but also in eternity. We should therefore give earnest heed to these things, lest at any time we should let them slip (cf Hebrews 2:1).

The naked truth concerning the human race is that every man, woman and child is a sinner, born as such, shapen in iniquity from conception (cf Psalm 51:5); *"There is none righteous, no, not one"* (Romans 3:10); *"All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God"* (Romans 3:23). How can this be, seeing that we are all God's creatures, created by Him? One word answers this question - **Disobedience**. *"By one man's disobedience, many were made sinners"* (Romans 5:19); *"By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned"* (Romans 5:12). That one man, Adam, was created in perfection and placed in a perfect environment with one prohibition placed upon him; one test of allegiance to his Creator and in that one test he failed, he **disobeyed**. He did not act positively to the command laid down; by his negation he denied the authority of God and manifested his refusal to **obey**.

Adam being the federal head, the legal representative of the human race brought universal disaster by his act of **disobedience**, for all his descendants are born in sin, inheriting his fallen nature of **disobedience**. It is as stated in Holy Writ, *"The spirit that now*

worketh in the children of disobedience" (Ephesians 2:2). This spirit **now** works in every human ever born, because of the **disobedience** of the federal head. This most solemn fact of a spirit of active **disobedience** being in us all, leads on to very practical matters which must be addressed.

No child can ever be classed as an innocent babe, for every child born into this world is born a sinner. The nature of Adam, the human head is inherent in us all. In infancy a babe shows by tantrums, its determination to have its own way, and as soon as a child is able to give expression by speech as well as action, it becomes obvious that it possesses a spirit of **disobedience**. Where this spirit is allowed full rein, serious problems will follow. Parents cannot absolve themselves from responsibility, for God in His Word, has given detailed instruction upon this matter. He does not give children to married couples for those children to run wild in **disobedience**; with parenthood comes solemn accountability, they are commanded by God the Creator to *"Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it"* (Proverbs 22:6). A child is to be trained in the way in which he **should** go, not in the way in which the child **wants** to go. The child will resent such training, of course, for it is contrary to the spirit which is working in him. If there was not that spirit of **disobedience** at work within, no training would be necessary. To do right would be automatic, but this is not so, hence the responsibility of training which is placed upon parents by God.

Tragically today there is a colossal breakdown on this issue. How is it that there are so many delinquent young people? The word 'delinquent' means 'one failing in duty', 'the culprit', 'the offender'. Behind a delinquent child, there are often delinquent parents; they have failed in their duty of training and discipline; they are the culprits. This is Biblical teaching. God requires that all parents curb the spirit of **disobedience** and train their children in the way in which

they **should** go. For this, they will one day have to give account. Undoubtedly, the vital aspect of child training is the instilling of a spirit of **obedience** into their mind and even a babe must be made to understand that the parents are master. As the child develops physically, obedience is even more important as the spirit of disobedience also develops. There is nothing more pathetic than to see a young child getting the better of a parent, yet it is all too common. There are people who pride themselves on the way in which they have trained their dog, but stand powerless in the face of their young child.

If a principle of **obedience** is not instilled into a child by the parents, then it will never be there and later it will be reflected in other aspects of life such as school, work and in society. The problems in the classroom and in the workshops, to say nothing of the anarchy in the nation, would be of much smaller proportions if those concerned had been trained in **obedience** when they were young. Many parents, through tolerance or a false tenderness, have allowed their children to 'get away with' points of discipline. It is a sorry sight when a parent says 'No' to see the child deliberately and persistently doing the thing forbidden. 'No' should be so emphatic that the child knows what it means and to **disobey** will entail painful consequences. If this is not the case, then **disobedience** will increase at an alarming rate. To a very large degree children are what their parents make them. Children are to obey their parents, it is part of the Law of God; *"Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honour thy father and thy mother; (which is the first commandment with promise)"* (Ephesians 6:1,2). However, children will never obey if their parents have never effectively taught them **obedience**. The parents' **disobedience** in this matter of training and discipline, negates the very authority which God requires them to exercise. In this training, it is essential that parents act as one. The discipline and, if necessary, punishment administered by one parent will not be

effective if the child immediately receives sympathy from the other. If training and obedience is incumbent upon all parents, which it is, how much more pressing is it upon Christian parents, for they, having been spiritually enlightened, have instruction, training and calls to **obedience** to be given to their offspring, of which the unregenerate know nothing.

The adversary has deceived many Christian parents with his wiles and suggestions of 'be lenient on spiritual matters, don't push too much or you will sicken your children'. The Christian parent must be aware of such snares, for many have fallen into this trap. Spiritual training cannot begin too early, indeed a child should never be able to remember when such training actually started. A wise gardener commences to train a climbing shrub from its very first shoots; **it is too late** to train large branches in later years. So with children, it is the tender years which are vital. Nursery rhymes may have their place in mental development, but simple verses of Scripture must be regarded as much more important.

A child of Christian parents should be living in an atmosphere where the Word of God is common place. To say a child does not understand is not valid; salvation does not come to any by understanding, it is by faith; "*faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God*" (Romans 10:17). Therefore to permeate the home with the Word of God is the solemn duty of every Christian parent, so that the children grow up in this environment. Little by little, line upon line, precept upon precept, Divine Truth is imbibed (cf Isaiah 28:10). By this it is not being implied that children will **grow** into genuine Christians, for that is wrought by the Holy Spirit in regeneration and new birth; rather is it that the Word of God is being implanted at an early age and it is this which, according to God's purpose, the Holy Spirit uses unto salvation (cf 2 Timothy 3:15).

The Scriptures have much to say on this matter: children are to be brought up *"in the fear and admonition of the Lord"* (Ephesians 6:4), *"And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up"* (Deuteronomy 6:6,7), *"Children are an heritage of the Lord"* (Psalm 127:3). It is serious indeed if those who are their guardians do not train them aright. Parents are not to be **disobedient** to God by a failure to insist on **obedience** in their children.

Having dealt at length on the matter of **obedience** as it pertains to parents and children, it must be said that there are many other aspects equally pressing. A spirit of **disobedience** with its accompanying negativity is seen throughout the professing Church in varying degrees, both with regard to its teaching and practices; some are mentioned in other articles of this edition. There is a crying need for the pulling down of traditional strongholds. *"Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ; and having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled"* (2 Corinthians 10:5,6). These two verses require careful pondering!

In conclusion, it is necessary to clarify the statement at the early part of this article, that the word '**obedience**' in its two aspects was the most vital that a mortal could contemplate, for by it his state both in time and in eternity, is determined. As has already been established from the Scriptures, by one man's **disobedience** sin entered the world; in consequence all are born sinners with the spirit of **disobedience** and the accompanying sentence of death, tersely summed up by the words *"In Adam all die"* (1 Corinthians 15:22). In contrasting relief are the words, *"By the **obedience** of One shall many be made righteous"* (Romans 5:19). Christ the Mediator, by His

atonement life and death in perfect **obedience** to the Law and to His Father's will, has wrought redemption and salvation for fallen men in their **disobedience** and sin. This is the glorious message of the gospel, that "*Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners*" (1 Timothy 1:15); this message of salvation is preached and made known for the **obedience** of faith (cf Romans 16:25,26).

If any are contentious and will not **obey** this truth but continue to **obey** unrighteousness, wrath will come upon them (cf Romans 2:8). "*What shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?*" (1 Peter 4:17). The Bible answers this question; "*the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power*" (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9).

It can be seen that through the inherent **disobedience** which is in man by nature, he is a sinner, "*dead in trespasses and sins*" (Ephesians 2:1) and doomed to eternal destruction. Because of the **obedience** of Christ in His work of redemption, sinners are saved from wrath to come. Thus the gospel is preached for the **obedience** of faith.

Without doubt this question of **obedience** in its two aspects is the most vital subject which can confront mortal man; to continue in a spirit of **disobedience** he is lost eternally, whereas to repent and **obey** the gospel, he is saved with an everlasting salvation.

W.H.Molland

Visiting Preacher D.V.

Lord's Day

8 October 2000

Dr. J.Hulett (Wool)

Editorial

The content of this 'Link' magazine is written under a deep exercise of heart as prevailing views and customs within the professing church are considered.

Every word of Holy Scripture is Divinely inspired, therefore important, and whilst this may be a trite statement, it needs to be strongly emphasized. There are certain words however, which stand out as having specific significance; '**Obedience**' which has been dealt with briefly in the article '**Obedience/Disobedience**'; another is '**Continuance**'. It is essential that the interdependence of these two words is fully appreciated.

Today the professing church abounds with confusion and disorder; some say Lo here, others Lo there (cf Matthew 24:23). Many who claim Christ as their Saviour have their own thoughts on biblical truth, doing those things most convenient to them and attending churches which best accommodates their thinking. Sadly, they have little difficulty in finding such a church.

When discussing these matters with Christians and pointing out the fact that **we** have "*come to the kingdom for such a time as this*" (Esther 4:14), the view that many take of this Scripture and the contemporary scene is astounding. A common opinion is that we have been born into this situation, this is how things are and there is nothing we can do about it; acknowledge every true believer and accept them for what they are even if they are deficient in certain matters of doctrine and practice; God has received them, so must we. Love must be shown to all who accept what is commonly called the **primary** truth of salvation. Apart from this, everything else is **secondary** and of little consequence and therefore regardless of the measure of compromise, we must strive after unity.

This human reasoning should be immediately dismissed for it is at total variance with Holy Scripture. In the sovereign providence of God we have not come to the kingdom at this time to make the best of such spiritual chaos, embracing all who might make a claim to salvation, regardless of the fact that upon many issues they clearly show an open rejection of Truth. We have, by the grace of God and according to His perfect timing, come to the kingdom at this period in human history, for the express purpose of faithfully discharging that unchanging commission to *"earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints"* (Jude v.3). In that *"faith"* which was *"once delivered"*, termed elsewhere as the *"apostles' doctrine"* (Acts 2:42), there is no **primary** and **secondary** truth. It is in the **entirety** of that doctrine that the Church is always to **continue**. *"For ever, O Lord, Thy Word is settled in heaven they **continue** this day according to Thine ordinances"* (Psalm 119:89,91); *"They **continued** stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers"* (Acts 2:42); *"Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; **continue** in them"* (1 Timothy 4:16); *"If ye **continue** in My Word, then are ye My disciples indeed"* (John 8:31); *"Cursed is everyone that **continueth not** in all things which are written in the Book of the Law to do them"* (Galatians 3:10).

It should now be apparent that like the word '**obedience**', the word '**continuance**' has great significance. To **continue** in *"the faith"* is the authoritative directive for the people of God in every age and situation. Church leaders in general will agree there must be a *"holding fast"* and a firm *"continuance"*. It is at this point that questions arise and confusion sets in. What is to be held fast and what are God's people to **continue** in? In answering this question one must be objective, uninfluenced by sentiment, emotion, prejudice or tradition.

Many additions have crept into the Church over the centuries, which are not written in the "*Book of the Law*", matters which are at variance with "*the faith once delivered*". In consequence there exists infant sprinkling, state-linked churches, political involvement, ecclesiastical titles, vestments, special collars, the observance of pagan festivals and numerous other ritualistic ceremonies.

Men of past centuries receive great prominence today as papers and lectures are produced concerning their belief and practice. Historical creeds and confessions are highlighted and Christians exhorted to follow in the footsteps of the Reformers, the Puritans or others, urging the necessity of adhering to the teaching and practice of those eras. This is a great snare; for whilst there was much good in those periods, yet there was much that was in direct conflict with the teaching so clearly set out in the New Testament.

Many of these practices previously mentioned were never eradicated by either the Reformers or the Puritans; they are the traditions of men which make "*the Word of God of none effect*" (Mark 7:13). These traditions are **continued** to the present day. Whilst there has been secession over the centuries and still is today, yet it is only on certain specific issues. The seceders who break away are invariably seen to immediately set up the **continuation** of a similar system.

In addition to these firmly entrenched traditions mentioned, there are other dogmas and tenets which are now propagated and practised which add to the chaos. They are not entirely new, but they have gathered momentum over the last fifty years and in varying degrees, where accepted, have diverted many local churches from the **truth** as it is in Christ, the Head, and as taught by the apostles in verity (cf 1 Timothy 2:7). Examples of these more recent ploys of the adversary are the proliferation of modern versions of Holy Scripture. The unbalanced teaching concerning the Holy Spirit, which has resulted

in such bizarre happenings and false claims, has caused many to stumble and ruined numerous local testimonies. The Church's attitude toward divorce and the re-marriage of divorcees has put many in an impossible position, as they can no longer speak consistently of the sanctity of marriage and the sin of divorce which God hates (cf Malachi 2;16). How the salt has lost its savour on this issue with disastrous results. The spirit of women's liberation is now also in the Church to a very marked degree; their Biblical role within an assembly of God's people being treated with contempt in many places. Indissolubly tied in with this is the matter of the headcovering of women, which demonstrates submission and the Headship of Christ. Many churches have sunk so low as to treat this most solemn matter as a joke, yet the sobering truth contained in 1 Corinthians 11:1-16 is clearly understandable to all who will come to it with a teachable mind.

Dress is another problem in today's churches. There should be a standard, certainly not a competitive fashion parade, but sadly that which has become so common place is casual attire; so casual that it is not unusual for worshippers to be attired in dress normally associated with the beach, playing field or supermarket; there is little if any distinction. This casual attitude to the clear injunction of Scripture has led to an erosion of standards both in dress and behaviour, which is dishonouring to the Head of the Church. In this, women seek after the latest fashion, often wearing low-cut, short or tightly clinging garments which can never come within the definition of "*modest*" (1 Timothy 2:9). Lest men think they are faultless, there is often the same casual attitude to clothing and personal appearance; King David demonstrated the importance of this standard clearly where he "*washed, and anointed himself, and changed his apparel, and came into the house of the Lord, and worshipped*" (2 Samuel 12:20). Cleanliness, tidiness and appropriate dress are not optional but essential for both men and women, such that "*becometh*

Godliness"; a careless or indifferent approach to these issues manifests a lack of respect and reverence for the Most High God, whose name is Holy.

The professing church to a large degree, has let slip these matters; if they are not addressed and there is no conviction, repentance and reform, then there will be a **continuance** in these things. The people of God are to prove all things and hold fast that which is good (cf 1 Thessalonians 5:21). On these issues ministers are responsible in that they must declare all the counsel of God (cf Acts 20:27), keeping back nothing that is profitable (cf Acts 20:20). Some ministers are reticent to preach all that is in the Scriptures, for fear of emptying their church or chapel! This is human reasoning and evidences the fear of man rather than the fear of God. Will not Almighty God honour His own Word? He **might** honour it by a great sifting, as opposed to an increase, but is it not more to the glory of God to have twenty souls devoted to His Word in its entirety, than two hundred who pick, choose and throw back the Truth, treating the authoritative Scriptures in such a contemptible and **disobedient** manner?

To all of us who handle the lively oracles of God in this day of intense confusion, the inspired Word through the Old Testament prophet is incumbent, "*Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet and show My people their transgression*" (Isaiah 58:1). At this point, qualification is necessary as these rulings pertain to the believers who are the **members** of the church; they cannot be imposed upon the unregenerate. However, it is as the minister declares the Truth and the members are seen to be **obedient** to it, that the salt will maintain its savour and that Church will **continue** in "*the faith*" as it was "*once delivered*". What is desperately needed today is a mass **dis-continuance** of all that which is not in accordance with the New Testament mandate.

An article recently appeared in the Christian press entitled 'Why Good Men Change'. The author drew attention to the number of men who at one time appeared to stand for the Truth and sound practice, but sadly have drifted. This is a timely composition. There is however, that which is even more inexplicable than 'Why Good Men Change' and that is, 'Why Do Not Good Men Change?' Why do those who undoubtedly are truly the Lord's own, **continue** in that which is so obviously at variance with His Word? Chaos, confusion and lack of direction will **continue** to exist in the Church until "*we all come in the unity of the faith*" (Ephesians 4:13). This entails an abandoning of **all** man-made ordinances and traditions, however historical and firmly embedded, or the more recent trends and diversifications. Most certainly we are not to accept things as they are, complacently adopting the attitude that we can do nothing to check the appalling disorder. The situation demands a firm determination not to be a party or show sympathy to any of these spiritual malpractices, rather a firm resolve to tenaciously adhere to the "*apostles' doctrine*" (Acts 2:42), observing **nothing** other than that which the Great Head commanded (cf Matthew 28:20), ever being mindful of His words, "*If ye **continue** in **my word**, then are ye My disciples indeed*" (John 8:31). In this the inseparable link between **continuance** and **obedience** will be manifested.
