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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).

Part One

Having considered in previous articles in this series, Christ's ascension, leaving this earth and going to His Father, it is obvious that His thoughts centre upon His own whom He is about to leave; hence His words, *"I come to Thee but **these are in the world**".* In this, one can almost detect apprehension on the part of the Saviour; it certainly indicates that His people are in imminent danger. *"These are in the world"*; grave concern is expressed by this statement. Our blessed Lord reminds the Father that His followers would now be deprived of His personal presence. He had been their guide, their guardian and ever-present friend, but now He is about to leave them - *"in the world"*.

The question might well be asked, Why leave them still *"in the world"*? Why not take them as did the Lord the thief on the cross? The same day that he repented and believed, God took him to heaven. Why are not all His believing people immediately taken up in like manner? If they are all destined for glory, then why not glorify them immediately? To all these questions, God has His reasons. Whether our lives are long or short, there is an all-wise purpose known only to Him, which ultimately will redound to His glory.

The providential dealings of Almighty God took Jacob and his family into Egypt; there they remained for several generations, enduring tremendous hardships, but how the power of God was demonstrated

through it all! The plagues, the Passover, the Red Sea crossing, the wilderness journeyings where hundreds of thousands of people were sustained by daily miracle for forty years. Great fundamental truth for God's people of all generations has issued from these happenings, yet such truth would never have been written if Jacob had not first been taken into Egypt. This is the mystery of Divine providence. To mortals it may be mysterious, but to the infinite God it is the outworking of infallible wisdom.

It is the purpose of God that each of His redeemed people are left "*in the world*" for the allotted span which He has predetermined which can neither be lengthened nor shortened. It is the sojourn of His people "*in the world*" which so concerns the Mediator in this prayer. They are "*in the world*", exposed and very vulnerable to danger. This is the burden of Christ's intercession in this eleventh verse. What then are the dangers?

By natural birth, as descendants of our fallen, federal head, Adam, we all inherit a corrupt nature which is prone to sin. At regeneration, spiritual life is implanted by the invincible power of the Holy Spirit, but we still have the old nature to contend with and herein lies our **greatest** danger - it is within. In addition to this, we are exposed to dangers which are without, for as long as we are "*in the world*", the Devil will ever stalk our path. It is equally true that throughout our life, the world will tempt us with its many pleasures and carnal attractions; it is Satan's bait to lure us from the paths of righteousness. However, to these **outward** dangers, we would not be nearly as vulnerable if it were not for that old nature **within**, which readily responds to such temptations. In consequence of the fall, there is something within us which will listen to the 'angel of light' approach of the great Adversary. No child of God must be so priggish as to think that they have risen to a higher spiritual level than to be affected by the subtle whisperings of the arch deceiver.

Eve in her primal state did not possess a fallen nature, yet she stopped to listen to the plausible words of Satan, thinking his proposal a good idea, and by so doing, brought lasting ruin to the human race. Let none of us then who are children of the fall, having inherited this sinful nature, think we are immune or can ever build up a resistance to temptation, for we cannot. As long as we are on earth we are in great danger and the Lord knew this. "***They are in the world***", this is His great concern. He knew the powerful leanings within each one of us, a nature so liable to succumb to the temptation of Satan and prone to be attracted by the pleasurable ways of the world.

A fish can live its life in the salt waters of the sea and its flesh still remain fresh, untainted by the brine, but the Christian cannot live in the world as a fish can live in the sea. We do become contaminated by all that is around us; we cannot escape the corruption that is in the world because of the lust that is within us; we have an enemy right within our own bosoms.

It is expressly written in the New Testament, "*Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world*" (1 John 2:15). This injunction is not followed by a catalogue of the many snares of the world, rather does it speak of the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life (cf 1 John 2:16). The reason for this is, that these internal lusts and desires, due to our fallen nature **cause** us to love and to be attracted by the world (all of course instigated by the great Adversary, the Devil). This is succinctly expressed by Thomas Manton: "Satan is our enemy, the world is the bait, but it is **our own heart** which is the traitor". To our shame it must be said that our appreciation of the danger to which we are exposed and the perilous position we are in, as long as we are "*in the world*" is pathetically feeble, even to the degree that often we are oblivious to the danger and fail to be vigilant.

The world in which we live is an evil place; in it there are many enemies and we must know and be quick to identify them. Holy Writ states that *"the whole world lieth in wickedness"*, or the *"wicked one"* (1 John 5:19 & margin); hence Satan is called *"the prince of this world"* (John 12:31). The whole Earth lies in the grip of this monster. Because this world has made him prince; mortal man has accepted him and he now rules over them. Further, this fallen spirit being has become *"the god of this world"* (2 Corinthians 4:4), a mighty, powerful creature. It is with deep significance that Christ prays as He does, for He knows the tremendous subtlety and power of this fallen prince, who exerts all his might to maintain his satanic influence. He cannot contemplate losing any degree of power over **this world**. *"The god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them"* (2 Corinthians 4:4).

The foul design of Satan is to frustrate the purposes of the gospel in order that men, women and young people are retained in his realm. By throwing the dust of the attractions of temporal things into the eyes of sinners, he blinds the mind to spiritual issues and eternal realities. Young people in particular are very susceptible to becoming duped by his wiles, their perception becomes so impaired by his cunning influences, that they continue in the darkness of this world until at last, they fall over the precipice and into eternity, there to discover *"the blackness of darkness for ever"* (Jude v.13).

The **powers** of the world is a further danger to be aware of. This concerns the Church, both the collective body of true believers as well as each individual Christian. When speaking of the Church, one is not referring to Christendom at large; rather is the reference to the true Church of Jesus Christ which seeks to function according to the Divine Mandate. This true Church is a tiny minority to which the world is alien. Every corporate gathering of the Lord's people should

be non-conformist, meaning they do not conform to any worldly pattern, rule, ecclesiastical tradition, idea or practice which is not in accord with the Word of God. Whether in society or in the religious realm, the genuine believer is to dissent from anything and everything which carries no Biblical warrant. *"Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God"* (Romans 12:2). This is to be a 'dissenter' **in the world** in a truly spiritual sense. Such non-conformity will invariably create pressures from different powers *"in the world"*. This is to be expected, for it is the enmity which was put by God in the beginning between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent (cf Genesis 3:15). A non-conformist pilgrim who is a subject of the kingdom of heaven, living by the Law of the King of heaven, passing through this world, must expect the opposition and enmity of the prince of this world. *"All that will live Godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution"* (2 Timothy 3:12); Paul confirmed the souls of the disciples, and exhorted them to continue in the faith, and that they must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God (cf Acts 14:22). The followers of Jesus Christ are *"accounted as sheep for the slaughter"* (Romans 8:36).

Let no believer ever think that the world is a friend to the small minority who are the remnant of grace upon earth. If we are favoured by a government which is tolerant to the Christian, it is a gracious providence of God. It is not that unregenerate men in high places are kindly disposed to God and His people, for those same men could, if the restraining hand of the Almighty was removed from them, act in the same manner as tyrants in other nations. A true Christian must never take such blessing for granted. If in our generation we are given respite from the pressures of the 'powers that be', then we should always be thankful to God and turn it to profitable account, for in a coming day we shall all be held accountable for such a

privilege. One old writer aptly stated, "The roadway to heaven is through a howling wilderness. If ever we happen to light upon a spot of good ground, let us praise God for it, for it will not last long".

In addition to the powers and pressures of the world referred to previously, must be the **men** of the world. The message is clear, "*Save yourselves from this untoward generation*" (Acts 2:40). The Greek word translated 'untoward' means 'crooked' or 'winding' which carries a botanical connotation. Christians grow in a wilderness as trees of the Lord's planting. All around in the native soil of "***the world***" are briars, ivies and the wild vines, whose clinging tendrils would seize upon us, entwining their twisted rope-like growth, entangling us with wild vegetation which stifles development. Such infestation can ruin trees of great potential, causing growth to cease and resulting in deformed, stunted scrub. This is invariably the effect which close worldly associates will have upon a child of God. They can rightly be described as 'carnal seducers'.

The Christian has to live in the world, do business with men of the world, many are employed by the unregenerate. In all this we are to act honourably, striving to maintain good relationships, showing ourselves to be ensamples but never becoming so involved as to form close relationships or deep friendships; in this both old and young people need to be equally careful.

A further hazard is the **things** of "*the world*". Some of these are obvious, but others craftily disguised by the great Deceiver. It is said of the children of Israel in the Old Testament that they "*walked after things that do not profit*" (Jeremiah 2:8). Many Christians today can be placed in this same category. "*Shall I not visit thee for these things? saith the Lord*" (Jeremiah 5:29). God will not have His people walking after those things which do not profit. Every hour of the believer's life is vitally important. God has allotted to us a life

span and for every moment of it, we are accountable . We are not to live our lives as we please, or to fritter away time. The Christian has a calling to fulfil; we are to occupy ourselves to the glory of God until He calls us home. Our great High Priest is fully aware of the danger which we are in at all times, hence the intensity of His words, "***These are in the world***" - a veritable minefield indeed.

"Christian walk carefully: danger is near!
On in thy journey with trembling and fear;
Snares from without and temptations within,
Seek to entice thee once more into sin.

Christian walk prayerfully: oft wilt thou fall,
If thou forget on thy Saviour to call;
Safe shalt thou walk through each trial and care,
If thou art clad in the armour of prayer".

Part Two

"These are in the world". There are Divine purposes for God's children being left "***in the world***" and these are:

1. For the manifesting of the glory of God's grace.

The elect were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world; predestined unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, according to the good pleasure of His will. Because of this, we are accepted in the Beloved, but the reason for it is, that we live to the glory of God's grace (cf Ephesians 1:4-6). The grace of God is manifested "***in the world***" by His children living holy lives; Zacharias and Elizabeth "*were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless*" (Luke 1:6).

Prior to our Lord uttering this prayer in the upper room, He had said, "*If ye love Me, keep My commandments*" (John 14:15) , later adding, "*If a man love Me, he will keep My words*" (John 14:23). These statements compliment His earlier ministry when He stated, "*My sheep hear My voice and they follow Me*" (John 10:27). As the Christian is obedient to the Word of God, walking in the paths of His commandments, he will be seen to be without blame, described elsewhere as "*perfecting holiness in the fear of God*" (2 Corinthians 7:1). This means that our lives are to be so ordered, that light shines before men; they, then seeing our good works, will glorify our Father which is in heaven (cf Matthew 5:16). By this, the wondrous grace of God is manifested.

If at new birth, every elect person was instantly removed from earth, then the grace of God would never be seen by men in changed lives. The peaceable fruits of righteousness produced by those who once were rebel sinners would never be manifested. It is by sanctified lives and upright living, accompanied by good works, that our Father which is in heaven is glorified before men; this is why we are "*in the world*" here, to be "*to the praise of the glory of His grace*" (Ephesians 1:6).

2. To be tried and proved.

Faithful believers in centuries past used to say "The cross is the badge of our society". They did not mean by this, the cross shaped symbol which is seen in church buildings and now, alas, adorning many once non-conformist chapels. This same symbol is commonly worn around the neck, even by some who profess the name of Christ. This cross is not an emblem of true Christianity, it originated in Babylon. When Christians of olden times spoke of the cross as their badge, they meant the sufferings of Christ as described by the apostles. "*That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death*"

(Philippians 3:10). *"Rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when His glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy"* (1 Peter 4:13).

The Christian is *"in the world"* as a follower of a rejected Christ and if faithful to Him and governed by His Word, that Christian will also experience rejection. This is the *"fellowship of His sufferings"* and the sharing of *"His reproach"*, being made *"partakers of His sufferings"*. This is far removed from the gospel as preached by the charismatics, with its accompanying jollification and exuberance. True spiritual happiness is consequent upon holiness of life. *"If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part He is evil spoken of, but on your part He is glorified"* (1 Peter 4:14).

The Lord Himself when He was upon earth, spoke much of His followers being made a reproach, *"If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me"* Luke 9:23). *"Whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after Me, cannot be My disciple"* (Luke 14:27). It is this close identification with Christ that produces the stigma, which sadly many who profess His name endeavour to avoid.

"Must we be carried to the skies
On flowery beds of ease,
Whilst others fought to win the prize
And sailed through stormy seas?"

We are chosen to be soldiers (cf 2 Timothy 2:4). This does not mean engaging in an occasional skirmish, rather is it the taking up of the cross **daily**, always wearing the badge of our profession before the world, which inevitably results in an ongoing battle. Whosoever is not prepared for this cannot be My disciple, saith the Captain of our salvation.

Throughout all generations God has had faithful men and it is in their train that we are to follow. *"Be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises"* (Hebrews 6:12). Never are we to shun our solemn responsibilities, for it is in this way that we are proved and tried. *"These are in the world"* says the Mediator in His prayer. The believer will always be tempted by Satan to avoid ridicule and choose the easy path; to his whisperings, the old nature within will all too readily respond. If this is so and Christians do succumb to the flesh and the Devil, then the glory of God's grace ceases to be manifested, it is obscured.

Trial is sent our way that through them we might be purified. *"The trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ"* (1 Peter 1:7). Never must we be surprised at difficulties and trials overtaking us. *"Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings"* (1 Peter 4:12,13). We are in a Godless, Christ-rejecting world; trials, difficulties and reproaches are inescapable if we are *"walking without blame before Him"*.

3. To be witnesses.

"Ye are My witnesses, saith the Lord" (Isaiah 43:10). These words are not to be taken as applying to preachers only, for that would greatly restrict their meaning. Every one of God's redeemed people, old, young, male and female, is a witness by their manner of life. To all intents and purposes we appear basically the same as others, we are flesh and blood, having differing abilities maybe, but of the same order of creation.

However when a child of Adam is regenerated by the Holy Spirit, that person becomes a child of God and is totally different. In this new dimension there should be evidences, indeed if it is a true work of grace, this will be so. An example of such a change could well be that on the Lord's Day, the Christian will don his or her best clothes and attend the house of God for worship, both morning and evening if possible, with the remaining hours being spent quietly reading, meditating or visiting the sick. The natural man's pursuits are far different; he will engage in pleasurable activities to suit his particular taste; either sport, entertainment, outings, etc. The worldling cannot understand the simple manner of life of the child of God, with its obvious spirit of contentment; *"They think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you"* (1 Peter 4:4). Not only do worldlings think it strange that the Christian is not interested in their activities, not joining in their sport or other pursuits; they may sometimes sneer at the apparent aloofness, but it is by such separation that the Christian bears witness and so glorifies God.

There are those who teach and practise that the believer is better able to glorify God by getting involved with the world's social activities. Be friendly and get among them in order to win them, is their maxim. Such are quick to quote the words of Paul, *"To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak; I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some"* (1 Corinthians 9:22). These sentiments are a total misappropriation of Scripture and a classic example of taking an isolated verse and making it contradict the whole aggregate of Truth. The Bible teaches separation from the world, not amalgamation with it and it is therefore slanderous to say we can do evil that good may come (cf Romans 3:8); 'slanderous' meaning 'false', 'not according to truth'. Sadly it is not only the liberally minded professor who talks and acts in this way for the purpose of promoting their pseudo-evangelistic efforts; similar

evidence can also be seen among those who profess orthodoxy and are highly acclaimed. Separation means from worldly practices and also ecclesiastical practices inconsistent with the revealed Word of God.

The truth of the Bible is frequently segregated into two categories, 'primary' and 'secondary'. When discussing matters where there is a divergence of view on points of doctrine and practice, some men and even some ministers who would be expected to hold to the wholeness and integrity of Scripture, make staggering statements, for example, 'Oh, that is not a saving truth'. This infers that God, in His Word, has laid great emphasis upon a person's salvation, whereas their belief and practice thereafter is relatively unimportant. It is appalling to think that any believer could adopt such an attitude to the Holy Ghost-inspired Scriptures of Truth as to even think, let alone speak of that which is 'secondary' or 'non-saving'. The inevitable consequence of such a view is that, what a mortal man regards as fundamental or primary is to be earnestly contended for, whereas that considered secondary can be ignored or overlooked as circumstances dictate. This line is often taken in order to secure a degree of unity with other Christians and denominations whose practice and teaching are at variance with the Divine Mandate on certain points; this accommodation and seeming tolerance is "*handling the Word of God deceitfully*" (2 Corinthians 4:2). In this manner a phoney, pretentious unity is brought about which is not according to truth. Holy Scripture forbids such amalgamation, its clear directive is, "*We command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us*" (2 Thessalonians 3:6).

When upon earth, Christ the great Head of the Church said, "*To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth*" (John 18:37). Was the Son of God sent

into the world to bear witness to two levels of truth? Was there any evidence in His life or speech which would lead a person to believe that there was anything which could be regarded as secondary in all that He taught and practised? The child of God has been born of God's Holy Spirit and is *"in the world"* to bear witness to that same truth in the same manner. *"As Thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world"* (John 17:18). *"Ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth"* (Acts 1:8). The truth of God's authoritative Word, which is according to the commandment of the everlasting God, is to be made known to all nations for the obedience of faith (cf Romans 16:26). After this manner the Church is commissioned, *"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"* (Matthew 28:19,20). To state that the *"all things"* commanded by the everlasting God can be divided into two sections, one major (primary) and the other minor (secondary), is a cunningly devised fable (cf 2 Peter 1:16). Everything which does not line up, or in any way disparages the inspired Word is fraudulent. The Law of God could not be more explicit or absolute concerning this, *"Thou shalt not bear false witness"* (Exodus 20:16).

Let none hide behind a cliché such as 'The Regulative Principle', which some of us have used inadvisedly in the past until its creedal connotations were discovered. We are not *"in the world"* to witness to historic creeds and confessions, our mandate is, *"all the counsel of God"* (Acts 20:27). There is some good in these handbooks but there is also much of the traditions of men; indeed if scrutinized, they contain detail which is at total variance with the apostles' doctrine. These handbooks are considered by some to be *bona fide*, and tolerated by others on the pretence of preserving unity. Unity which is achieved by compromise and toleration is **not** the unity of the faith;

what is more, such unity gives the unmistakable evidence of a belief in a two tier level of truth in the Word of God, a most serious and deplorable stance. The Christian is *"in the world"* to bear a clear cut witness to the faith once delivered to the saints (cf Jude v.3). This will only be done by the manner in which we live our lives and conduct ourselves with relation to the world and the professing church. Such deportment coupled with *"sound speech, that cannot be condemned"* (Titus 2:8); *"wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ"* (1 Timothy 6:3), is our solemn charge *"in the world"*.

4. To grow and mature.

It has been said that the child of God is first planted in the garden of a local church before he is transplanted into the paradise above; this is a very meaningful statement. Young, tender plants are put out into a cold frame or a sheltered spot in the garden to harden off. In this way, they become gradually exposed to the elements forming a good root system, becoming firmly established, ready for their final planting.

Set in a spiritual family of God's people, we are nurtured in the Word and in discipline, with our roots going down and becoming well established. Unconsciously we flourish and grow; then in God's time, the heavenly Husbandman transplants us to that garden which is the eternal paradise of God.

5. To live in anticipation.

By being left in this world of sin, beset with constant affliction and trial, if we are rightly affected by them and they are sanctified to us, then will our spiritual roots run deep. This being the case, we shall be more and more anticipating our final planting, indeed we shall begin to long for it. This was the attitude to life of the Psalmist, *"Woe is me, that I sojourn in Mesech, that I dwell in the tents of Kedar"*

(Psalm 120:5). The more the Israelites task was increased in Egypt, the more did they cry out for deliverance and for the promised land. O Lord, how long? is the cry of the martyrs (cf Revelation 6:10); *"even so, come, Lord Jesus"* (Revelation 22:20) should be the cry of the Church. *"In the world"* we should live in this spirit of anticipation, so beautifully expressed by the hymn writer:

 "Jerusalem my happy home,
 Name ever dear to me,
 When shall my labours have an end
 In joy and peace and Thee?

 When shall these eyes Thy heaven built walls
 And pearly gates behold?
 Thy bulwarks with salvation strong
 And streets of shining gold?

 Why should I shrink from pain and woe,
 Or feel at death, dismay?
 I've Canaan's goodly land in view,
 And realms of endless day.

 Apostles, martyrs, prophets, there
 Around my Saviour stand;
 And soon my friends in Christ below
 Will join the glorious band.

 Jerusalem, my happy home,
 My soul still pants for thee;
 Then shall my labours have an end,
 When I thy joys shall see".

By the grace of God, may we be enabled to walk after the manner laid down in His Word and live in the spirit of these verses, as long as we are *"in the world"*.

W.H.Molland

The Years of Paul's Seclusion

By no stretch of the imagination could the apostle Paul be looked on as a 'lower light' in the cause of the gospel. There were times however, when the providence of God placed him in what could only be described as 'lower light situations'; places or circumstances which, humanly speaking, might have been more fitted to snuffing out the gospel rays than promoting them. One such time and place was the *"two whole years"* when Paul found himself under house arrest in *"his own hired house"* in the city of Rome; but as in so many other similar situations, God proved **to** Paul and **through** Paul that His Word is in no way *"bound"* (cf Acts 28:30,31).

"And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house" we're told. Those two years of confinement for Paul very much sets before us the great lesson of the Word of God, that God has His own ways of performing His own will. It isn't all that easy to come to a precise time-span with regards to the apostle Paul's life, but it was probably something like twenty eight years since Paul had been converted at Damascus. He preached for a few days in Damascus itself and then God took him away down into the Arabian desert for three whole years where He taught him the depths of the faith into which he had now entered. After those three years he came back to Damascus for another few days, then escaped *"over the wall in a basket"* and came to Jerusalem for *"fifteen days"* where he met Simon Peter etc. From Jerusalem he was sent back to his home town of Tarsus, and it was there, eight years later on, that Barnabas found him and brought him to the work at Antioch. There began his great missionary journeys from the church at Antioch, until the Jews' opposition rose to such a height that he was eventually imprisoned under Felix and then Festus for three and a half years. It was from this imprisonment that he was brought to Rome, and here he was to remain for these further two years in his own hired house, the prisoner of the Lord Jesus.

When we begin to tally up such an outline of Paul's days in the Christian life, we discover that out of the proposed twenty eight years or so, Paul spent something like sixteen of them in comparative obscurity or in prison, and now, two more years under close arrest! What can we say? *"God's ways are not our ways"*. Not only is God pleased to employ a good many lower lights in His service, but He even places His 'brighter' lights in some very dark corners at times. No matter how dark the corner however, it need in no way keep a true light, higher or lower, from shining; so with Paul.

When the great apostle was first taken into custody in Jerusalem some three and a half years before this time, the Lord gave this word to him: *"Be of good cheer...so must thou bear witness also at Rome"*. Therefore, although Paul found himself in Rome as a prisoner, he still knew that he was there under Divine commission and he would act accordingly. He couldn't work outwith his hired house, but he could work **in** it and he could work **from** it, and so he did.

Matthew Henry has a lovely word concerning Paul's hired house in Rome; "When we cannot do what we would in the service of God", he says, "we must do what we can". And then he adds, "Those ministers that have but little hired houses should rather preach in them, if they be allowed to do that, than be silent". That's a choice word in its own right; but there is something very tender and very meaningful behind it, as well. Matthew Henry's father was Philip Henry, one of the ejected Puritans of 1662, and among the strictures that were placed on those men were two Acts of Parliament - the Five Mile Act and the Conventicle Act. The first forbade them to preach anywhere within a five mile radius of their former churches, and the second meant that they couldn't preach to more than eight people at any one time; in fact, something like their immediate family and a few others. But Philip Henry did just that, and for something like twenty years his main congregation was his own family. One of the fruits of that house ministry was Matthew - a man, surely, whose

praise is in the Church even up to this day. "Those ministers who have but little hired houses, should rather preach in them, if they be allowed to do that, than be silent". For those *"two whole years"*, what use the apostle Paul made of his own hired house in Rome!

Paul's **pen** was busy in his own hired house. Humanly speaking, had there been no two year confinement in Rome at this time, there would have been no epistles to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians Colossians or to Philemon, for it was from this first Roman imprisonment that Paul wrote these letters. Paul's **zeal** was busy there as well. It was there, that Onesimus was born again of the Spirit of God - *"Whom I have begotten in my bonds"*, says Paul, as he sends Onesimus back to Philemon with that epistle in his grasp. His **hands** also were busy in that hired house. It was a **hired** house; we might well ask then, how did Paul pay the rent? Of course, this is what all that activity at the church at Philippi was about as they put their heads together and sent off their 'gift' to Paul at the hands of the good man Epaphroditus. But remember what happened to Epaphroditus? He took ill - an illness that was *"nigh unto death"*, Paul tells the Philippians in his letter back to them. The one who had come to willingly minister to Paul finds himself being ministered to by Paul until God has mercy on them both, as Paul says, and Epaphroditus gets well again.

I don't suppose Paul had a leather-bound Guest Book in his own hired house at Rome; if he had such a thing, what names would have been recorded in it. Lower lights and higher lights, the members of the local church at Rome of course, those who had set out to meet Paul at Appii Forum and the Three Taverns as he was conveyed along the Appian Way by the soldiers of Caesar's band. When Paul first saw those brethren and sisters coming to meet him, we're told in Acts 28, *"he thanked God, and took courage"*. He would, no doubt, still be thankful and still be encouraged by their visits to him in his own hired house; and what blessings must they have carried away with them

from that place! Aquila and Priscilla, who had "*laid down their necks*" for Paul at one point, would have made their way there more than once; and Andronicus and Junia, who had themselves endured some imprisonment with him. The mother of Rufus; what kind of service did she carry out for Paul during that two year period? "*His mother and mine*" as Paul calls her, writing back to the Romans. Tychicus, John Mark, Jesus called Justus, Timothy. Just a wee hired house, but surely its sound has gone out into all the earth.

W.J.Seaton (Inverness)

"Faithful ministers do represent the person of the King of kings and Lord of lords. Though the world crown them with thorns, as it did their Lord and Master before them, yet God will crown them with honour".

"Ministers should preach feelingly, experimentally and exemplarily; they must speak from the heart to the heart; they must feel the worth, the weight, the sweet of those things upon their own souls, that they give to others. The highest mystery of Divine rhetoric is to feel what a man speaks, and then speak what a man feels".

"Idleness is hateful in any, but most abominable and intolerable in ministers; and sooner or later none shall pay so dear for it as such. Witness the frequent woes that are denounced in Scripture against them. Where should a soldier die, but in the field? And where should a minister die but in the pulpit".

"Let us do our duties, and let the Lord do as pleaseth Him".

Quotes from Thomas Brooks

Editorial

Some people have a tendency to think that in their own particular sphere they fulfil a very special role, perhaps almost to being indispensable. Sadly such thoughts can secretly lurk in the minds of God's ministers. Deep within are such concerns as, How will the local church fare when I am taken? Will Satan gain an advantage? Will a suitable man take my place? and so on. Though these reflections are private, they are not honouring to God. Each one of us can only serve **our generation** by the will of God (cf Acts 13:36). It is not wrong for a minister to be jealous of the flock of God over which he has been made an overseer (cf Acts 20:28). It is his duty also, to lay and maintain a right foundation for those who will follow him; being constant in prayer for the elders who rule, that there might be the continuity of a faithful witness; beyond this he can go no further. To have an inner agitation in such matters is indicative that faith is not what it should be. The Great Head is sovereign; it is His Church and He is in control at all times. He raises up ministers and He puts them down. He holds the key and it is His prerogative to open doors, close doors or keep present doors open. By the will of God, we serve **this** generation. What His will is for the **next** generation we do not know. Our times are in His hands, as is the future of local churches.

This magazine contains an article on the strange experiences of Paul the apostle, who for many years of his ministry, was in seclusion; not only unjustifiable imprisonment by the authorities, but often almost completely forsaken of other believers (cf 2 Timothy 1:15). Neither is he alone in the records of Holy Writ; Elijah was totally removed from the public eye, and his prophetic witness, for well over three years; this was at a time of great apostacy when we would have said his fearless testimony was most desperately needed. John the Baptist is another example, a man who preached possibly as none other, yet

he was cut off in his prime. How true are the words, "*My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith the Lord*" (Isaiah 55:8). But the thoughts and ways of God are always right. Then let us live as the just should live - by faith, trusting Him "*who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will*" (Ephesians 1:11).

Notices

Annual Bible Convention

Saturday, 2 June 2001 D.V.
Afternoon 3.30 p.m. Tea 5.00 p.m. Evening 6.00 p.m.

Speaker: Mr W.J.Seaton (Inverness)

A cordial invitation is extended to all.

Visiting Preachers D.V.

Lord's Day	3 June 2001	Mr W.J.Seaton (Inverness)
Lord's Day	1 July 2001	Mr F.J.Harris (Cheltenham)

Our beloved sister, Mrs Jessica Prest, a most gracious lady and faithful member of this fellowship for almost forty years, was called home on 27 January 2001, having reached the age of 93 years. The funeral took place at North Road Chapel on Friday, 2 February 2001. We rejoice that she is now with her Lord, where the former things have passed away.