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**North Road Chapel (Evangelical)  
BIDEFORD**

## *Lessons from John's Gospel*

### *chapter seventeen*

*"While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Thy name: those that Thou gavest Me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the Scripture might be fulfilled" (John 17:12).*

The overall theme of this section of Scripture is 'the keeping power of Christ'. In His prayer to His Father the Lord says, *"I kept them"*. Primarily this must be understood as referring to His disciples, although in application it is much wider. However, the immediate context must be our starting point. *"While I was with them in the world, I kept them .... those that Thou gavest Me I have kept"*; this means 'I have guarded', like a shepherd would guard his sheep or a soldier his charge; diligently, vigilantly, effectually. *"None of them is lost"*. In a previous incident the Scripture records, *"From that time many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with Him"* (John 6:66). This was not the case with those men who were with Him now in the upper room, although at the time when those others *"went back"* the Lord did say to the twelve, *"Will ye also go away?"* (John 6:67). They did not. They continued to follow. It was not that the Devil did not bother with those men who continued with the Saviour, for He did, as is evidenced in Simon Peter; *"And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat"* (Luke 22:31). In no way must we think that our Lord's disciples were screened from temptation and Satanic attacks, for they were not.

The world is an evil place for any follower of Jesus Christ and it was no different for those disciples than for Christians of any generation; but the Saviour says, *"I have kept them"* - they follow on, they have not turned back. Jerome in his writing states, "We should note that

Christ does not say, I gave them a free-will in order that they should keep themselves, rather does He say, I kept them". This is in perfect harmony with the Old Testament Scriptures, "*He will keep the feet of His saints*" (1 Samuel 2:9), "*The Lord is thy keeper*" (Psalm 121:5). Let no Christian ever think that he or she is such a staunch soldier, so valiant for the truth, that Satan will ignore them. What we think we are, or claim to be, does not impress the Devil in the least; he is not intimidated by any human. It is the **guard** which is round about the child of God which gives the protection.

*"While I was in the world, I kept them in Thy name" - "In Thy name"*. Christ was loyal to God, faithful to His charge; as the Mediator, He omitted nothing. Every detail had been taken care of; as a tender shepherd, He had watched over and guarded those entrusted to Him by His Father. Now He is about to leave this world and go back to heaven. Did this mean that His followers would no longer be kept, that all preservation and guardianship would be removed, and His followers left "*in the world*" to make their own way unprotected? Indeed not! Although the Lord would no longer be physically present, yet He, the Mediator, the **same** Good Shepherd, would by the Holy Spirit **still** care for His flock. He would still feed them in green pastures, lead them beside still waters, guide them with His rod and staff, even carrying the lambs in His bosom.

The saints of God are kept in every generation. They were kept in Old Testament days before the advent of the Saviour, they were kept when He was here upon earth, and all born of His Holy Spirit who live after His ascension until His second advent, **all**, yes **all**, "*are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time*" (1 Peter 1:5). Every man, woman, boy or girl who has been brought into the blessing of salvation, will be kept by the invincible power of God, and will be revealed in the last great day as a child of

God and an inheritor of eternal glory. Not one of His chosen people will be lost. Every descendant of Adam who has been redeemed by the blood of Christ is a member of His body, the Church, which one day will be manifested "*a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing .... holy and without blemish*" (Ephesians 5:27). Is it not unthinkable, even blasphemous, to suggest that the glorious body of Christ is to be presented with members of that body missing, some fingers or toes having mortified and dropped off or a whole limb having been amputated? The Mediator, the Saviour of sinners and the Great Head of the Church is the "*Author of **eternal** salvation*" (Hebrews 5:9), He hath "*obtained **eternal** redemption for us*" (Hebrews 9:12), "*I give unto them **eternal** life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand. My Father, which gave them Me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of My Father's hand*" (John 10:28,29).

The keeping power of God involves the Trinity; Father, Son and Holy Spirit act as one in the salvation and preservation of elect sinners. All engage to this end; their keeping power is sure, it is absolute, it cannot fail, for it is the mighty power of the omnipotent, immutable God. All His many sons will be brought to glory (cf Hebrews 2:10); such is the confidence of all God's children, this is the certainty of their hope. In His prayer Christ says, "*None of them is lost*". This is spiritual security and it is a fundamental aspect of the Christian faith.

Whilst on the subject of the keeping power of God, mention must also be made of His providential care and protection. This truth is often overlooked by the Christian, or perhaps taken for granted. Do we really believe such words as, "*He shall give His angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways*" (Psalm 91:11)? Sadly, many believers misunderstand and neglect the subject of angels.

Arrayed against the child of God are fallen spirit beings, principalities, powers, the rulers of darkness and spiritual wickedness; these are not flesh and blood (cf Ephesians 6:12). The Christian is perpetually watched and in constant danger from these unseen powers of darkness, headed by Satan the prince of these fallen angels. However there are other angels, that innumerable company of unfallen spirit beings, spoken of in 1 Timothy 5:21, as "*elect angels*". These unfallen angels, in the sovereign providence of the Almighty, play a very important part in the keeping and protection of His children who are "*in the world*". This vast spirit force are "*all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation*" (Hebrews 1:14). This is a wonderful truth. Although all the 'powers of darkness' have their eyes continually upon us, **all** that 'celestial host' are at God's bidding; as and when necessary, He sends one or more to minister to us, to be in attendance, to be instrumental in our preservation. This applies particularly to our material and physical existence, and it is a wonderful and gracious provision given by God, for which we should never cease to be thankful. "*The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him, and delivereth them*" (Psalm 34:7).

How many narrow escapes have we had on the roads, or in other situations in life? The Lord graciously protected, we say. Yes, He kept us - physically, but by what means? Who were His instruments? It is in such circumstances and situations that His angels are given charge. They are His ministers sent forth at the appropriate time to encamp round about and to deliver. Some may argue, What about Mr so-and-so, he was a true child of God but he was killed in a road accident, or that other tragedy where a very dear Christian was suddenly cut off? Where were the angels then? None should reason along these lines; our thinking must be right. With God there are no accidents or tragedies. He has appointed the day of our birth and the day of our death. Our lifespan is determined by Him and can neither

be shortened nor lengthened. At the exact time appointed by God, our time on earth will cease; none of us know how. If God sees fit to take us by way of a car collision or any other means, then He will not be sending a ministering spirit to deliver us. Whilst such an one will not experience further physical protection from God in that hour through the instrumentality of angels, that person will immediately awake safely in glory, there to fully realize that they have been spiritually kept by the power of God unto salvation and now preserved unto an eternal inheritance which has been reserved in heaven for them.

The latter part of the verse under consideration poses a problem to many Christians; "*None of them is lost, but the son of perdition*". This statement is used particularly by those who teach that a person can so fall from grace as to be lost at the end. It must immediately be said that if a person is one of God's elect, redeemed by the blood of Christ and effectually called of the Holy Spirit, that person will **never** be lost. How then is this Scripture to be explained, for it refers to Judas Iscariot who **was** one of the twelve whom the Lord Himself had chosen? Is it that Christ could not or would not keep him? This matter demands a very careful examination. The Lord's exact words are, "*None of them is lost, but the son of perdition*". It does not read, 'None of them is lost **except** the son of perdition'. Judas is not an **exception**; he is spoken of as one in opposition. This needs amplification. Those whom God had given to Christ, the elect, He had kept **but** (not except) the son of perdition - No! Judas had not been kept unto salvation, ready to be revealed at the last day. The word '**but**' is not used in the sense of being an **exception**, it is used as being the opposite to the former. The former are the elect who are kept; the latter is the son of perdition who is not kept. The word '**but**' is used in this way in many parts of Holy Writ. Naaman said he would not sacrifice unto other gods, **but** unto the Lord (cf 2 Kings 5:17); those other gods were set in opposition to the Lord. Not any man could eat of the shewbread, **but** the priests

could (cf Matthew 12:4). No sons of perdition will enter heaven **but** those whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life will (cf Revelation 21:27). Christ had no charge to keep reprobates, they were never given to Him, **but** the elect were.

It is perfectly true that Judas was chosen by Christ to be one of the twelve disciples, but in this there was a sovereign purpose. He knew the heart of this man and that he was not one of the remnant of grace; as He so plainly stated, "*Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?*" (John 6:70). In no way was the Lord deceived by Iscariot, He knew his end from the beginning, yea, from all eternity; Judas never figured in the election of grace. The Saviour kept those **in** the covenant **but** not those **outside** of the covenant.

The last phrase presents another problem to some, "*That the Scripture might be fulfilled*". From this there are those who have deduced the theory that Judas could not help himself, he had been created for the purpose of betraying the Son of God. This is a blasphemous suggestion for it places the actual sin upon God Himself. On this complex matter, J.C.Ryle wrote, "Judas was not lost in order to fulfil Scripture, but Scripture was fulfilled by the loss of Judas". To this might be added the words of Thomas Manton, "We are to understand by the sin of Judas and his eternal loss, that then were the many scriptures written of old, fulfilled". In the execution and carrying out of the sovereign determinations of Almighty God, be those counsels of mercy or of wrath, human agencies are often employed. That does not mean that those so involved, be it for good or for evil, are not responsible, for they are. This is the case with Judas Iscariot as the Scriptures make clear. Luke 22:22 states, "*Truly the Son of man goeth, as it was determined*" - **Divine sovereignty**. "*But woe unto that man by whom He is betrayed*" - **human responsibility**.

Can a more tragic thought be contemplated than for a man to live and work with true Christians as did Judas, even to being in the very company of the Saviour, and yet to be eternally lost? Is there not a similarity in this with many today, especially those who are brought up in a Christian environment, knowing all the rudiments of the faith, oftentimes being almost persuaded to be a Christian (cf Acts 26:28)? Yet at the end their epitaph is '**Almost saved, but lost**'.

W.H.Molland

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## The Ministry

### A Distinct Class

The ministers of Christ are, like ordinary Christians, separate from the world. They are partakers of the heavenly calling, by which men are brought out of the world, and made the servants of Christ. In all his epistles to the churches, Paul claims to be a fellow-saint with them, a member of the same spiritual family, and an heir of the same heavenly inheritance. Throughout the Scriptures, the ministers of Christ are spoken of as persons who love Christ, and are from the heart devoting themselves to His service. They must therefore be of the number who are "*called to be saints*".

The ministers of Christ are also separate from ordinary Christians. They are one with ordinary Christians, as being called in one hope of their calling; but, besides the call to repentance and faith, which they have received in common with their brethren, they have been called to special service in the Lord's cause. It is clear from the Holy Scriptures, that there were among the first Christians, persons to whom the work of the ministry was specially entrusted. Paul says concerning these, God "*hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation*"; "*Giving no offence, that the ministry be not blamed*"; "*who hath made us able ministers of the new testament*". He speaks of himself as counted faithful, and put "*into the ministry*", and of the special grace given to



him, that he should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ. The bestowment by the Holy Spirit of special qualifications for special service in the Lord's cause, is plainly taught in 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4. The enquiry, "*Are all apostles? Are all prophets?*" shows that the offices designated did not belong to the whole body of the saints.

### **Their Work**

The special service for which the ministry is designed is the preaching of the Word. The obligation to spread the knowledge of Christ is shared, to some extent, by all Christians. The effectual call of the Holy Spirit, by which any man is brought to repentance and faith, imposes on him an obligation to show forth the praises of Him who hath called him out of darkness into His marvellous light; to let his light shine before men, that they, seeing his good works, may glorify his Father in heaven; and to hold forth the Word of life. Every Christian is bound to do what he can for the conversion of others, and for spreading the knowledge of the truth. But special gifts are conferred upon some, accompanied with special obligations. These constitute a special call to the ministry of the Word.

A knowledge of gospel truth, an aptness to teach, and a heart moved by the desire to glorify God in the salvation of souls, are the evidences of a divine call to the work of the ministry. All these qualifications may exist, in a measure, in ordinary Christians, and a proportionate obligation accompanies them, to use them in the Redeemer's service. No church, no minister of the gospel can, under a proper influence, forbid the exercise of these gifts where they exist. Moses repelled the suggestion to forbid some who prophesied and said, "*Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets*". An active, prudent employment of the gifts possessed by ordinary Christians, would promote incalculably the interests of religion; the restriction of all labour for the spread of the gospel, and the promotion of piety to a select few, is

greatly detrimental to the cause of Christ. But it is still true that there are some whose gifts for public usefulness rise high above the rest, and in bestowing superior qualifications, the Holy Spirit, who divides to every man severally as He will, has indicated His will that the possessor of the qualifications should use them for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.

The Holy Spirit works harmoniously in all parts of His operation. He diffuses one sympathy through all the body of Christ so that the eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of thee. When qualifications for service are imparted by the Spirit to one member, other members under the influence of the same Spirit, welcome its service. Hence every man who believes alone, that he is called of God to the ministry, has reason to apprehend that he is under delusion. If he finds that those who give proof that they honour God and love the souls of men, do not discover his ministerial qualifications, he has reason to suspect that they do not exist. The Head of the Church has graciously provided that in the ordinary course of things, men are able to obtain counsel in this matter, and are not compelled to act on their individual responsibility.

John Gill. D.D

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## *Pulpit Luminaries*

A pulpit is a raised, enclosed platform upon which a preacher stands to expound the truth of the Holy Scriptures; by the means of preaching, spiritual illumination is effused and men and women are made aware of eternal verities. In this sense the pulpit can be correctly likened to a candlestick and the preacher to a candle. Today alas, great numbers of pulpits have no light issuing from them, the candle who stands there is dead, never having himself been ignited and from such a pulpit, trite platitudes and often humanistic reasoning is the content of the short

homily. Consequently the hearers are left in darkness, a darkness in which the natural man is quite happy to remain, for he loves darkness rather than light (cf John 3:19). Such an ecclesiastical pulpit which has no burning candle, can well be described by the words of Christ, "*If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!*" (Matthew 6:23). Such is a sad summary of apostate Christendom.

What of the pulpits in the circles of the so-called 'evangelicalism', with its many shades and sectors. The answer is , very varied. Thankfully, there are a minority of candles which are burning brightly, "*holding forth the Word of Life*" (Philippians 2:16), throwing light on every section of Holy Writ. Other candles are flickering, their light is not steady, they are affected by the least little draught of theological trend or public opinion. Some candles are smoking and exuding an unpleasant smell; the light which is emitted is hazy, indefinite, altogether unclear and compromising, leaving in its trail an unhealthy aroma of carnality. There are also candles which are spilling grease in the pulpit by misinterpretation, thus perverting the sacred Word of God.

Having given this introduction depicting the varying degrees of light coming from the pulpits at this time, we turn to what the Scriptures teach. What does the Great Head of the Church demand from His ministers who are set in the pulpits of many local churches, professing to be gathered in His name?

The people of God are in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation among whom they are to shine as lights in the world (cf Philippians 2:15); "*Ye are the light of the world*" (Matthew 5:14), Christ states in His great sermon on the mount. Whilst every believer is to shed forth by life and lip the radiancy of Christ, it is very particularly the case with men who have been fitted by the Holy Spirit, and called by God to teach and preach the truth of His Divinely

inspired Word. They are lights in the world in a very specific sense; it is as such that the disciples and ministers of the early Church were sent out.

The message of salvation with all the accompanying teaching and practice was to go far beyond Judea and the confines of Jewry; *"all nations"* was the word spoken by the Head. Paul said he had been sent to the Gentiles *"to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me"* (Acts 26:18). In this verse Paul speaks of the faith that is in himself, he desires that his faith might be so manifest to others that by it, they would be brought into spiritual blessing. This facet of truth needs great emphasis. The God-ordained minister is first and foremost to be light in himself. His Christianity is to be not just a profession, it is to be obvious to all, a life showing no dark shadows. This being the case, he can then disperse light by his ministry, for he will be seen as one who, in his person, carries the lamp of Truth. The people of this world sit in darkness (cf Matthew 4:16), but Christ's ministers are entrusted with a sure word of prophecy. Being thus equipped, they are as lights shining in a dark place (cf 2 Peter 1:19), and in this they are not to flicker!

At the incarnation of the Son of God, it was stated that the Holy Child born of Mary was come *"a light to lighten the Gentiles"* (Luke 2:32). In the course of His earthly ministry Christ declared Himself to be *"the light of the world"* (John 8:12); later He said to His disciples, *"Yet a little while is the light with you"* (John 12:35), thus indicating that His bodily presence with them was temporary. After the Saviour had completed the wondrous work of redemption, He returned to heaven; then was the light of witness set in the Church and in a special sense, the ministers or messengers of the churches, styled as *"angels"* or *"stars"* (cf Revelation 1:20 and throughout chapters 2&3). Stars are

luminaries; angels too, are light bearers and within the context of Revelation chapters two and three, it is the ministers or messengers who are being addressed in this manner. In a very real and definite sense, the God-ordained minister is a light bearer in this world. He is a star in the right hand of the Great Head of the Church, a luminary set in the spiritual darkness of this fallen world. Having informed His disciples of the tremendous fact that they were to be the **lights** in this world, the Lord immediately adds, "*A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid*" (Matthew 5:14). In this statement there is more than one meaning each of which is very sobering.

**Firstly** a city which is set on a hill is always in view. So is the minister of the Word of God; he is in an elevated position, all eyes are upon him. He is in a position of prominence both in the Church and in the world. This demands great care, hence the necessity of uprightness of life, a walk which is circumspect, conduct which is exemplary. This office is not given to man to puff him up; a minister is not told that he is set on a hill to form the opinion that he is a person of renown amongst God's people. Neither is it a position in the Church of a professional nature, which necessitates a special title; indeed not! The Scriptures indicate the reverse to be the case. Concerning his office as a minister, Paul said he was the least of all saints (cf Ephesians 3:7,8). When our Lord likened His ministers to a city set on a hill, it was to humble them, not exalt them; to warn and put them on guard, because they would always be under scrutiny, and any degree of sham or infidelity would be immediately registered. They are constantly in public view, they cannot be hid, so Christ exhorts them to "*watch and be sober*" (1 Thessalonians 5:6).

**Secondly** The minister who is entrusted with the light of truth, of necessity needs to be set on a hill. He is the star, the luminary of the local church, the God-appointed messenger. He can also be likened to a lighthouse on a prominent headland. Of itself a city or a lighthouse

is only bricks and mortar; the function of the lighthouse is to diffuse the light. In like manner the minister of the Word of God, having been set in such a high calling, is to diffuse the truth of Holy Scripture, all its doctrine and teaching. He is to shun not to declare all the counsel of God (cf Acts 20:27). It is for this very reason that the light bearer is set on a hill; he is not to be a smoking candle.

Another telling analogy is used by Paul: "*We are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men*" (1 Corinthians 4:9). The thought conveyed here is to be set in a public theatre or arena, observed and heard by the world, angels and men. Most ministers would agree that their ministry is known and observed by men in their particular area; how many are consciously aware that at all times they are being scrutinized by sinless spirit beings? It is not the privilege or the responsibility of these celestial creatures to shine as lights upon this dark, fallen planet; nevertheless they watch with an intense and holy interest. These holy angels are ministers and light bearers of another realm to that of the ministers of the churches as recorded in Revelation chapters two and three, but both are in the service of the same God and both are working to the same end, namely that God shall be glorified. Just as those heavenly ministers never fail in bearing their light in heaven, neither must the stars whom God has called to minister on earth obscure in any way, the light which they are commanded to radiate. The fact of this angelic observation should challenge every minister here below. Matters such as headcovering in the church, which has most solemn spiritual significance as set out in 1 Corinthians 11:1-16, is especially referred to in verse ten as being the subject of close investigation made by the angels on this specific matter. What grease has been spilt from many pulpits on this issue!

The Lord then expands upon the subject of His ministers being light bearers by saying, "*Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the*

*house*" (Matthew 5:15). The minister who is the public expounder of the Word of God is to treat that Word as one unit of Truth; his ministry is to be full-orbed. No minister is to cover up certain truths which are not popular, or to withhold aught that might cause offence. Alas, how much of this is done today, because many of the teachings of the Word of God cut right across current society. The doctrine of the Church and the mandate laid down for Church order is not palatable for present day, carnally minded professors. Consequently many ministers and elders tone down the ministry; certain Scriptures are never referred to, or if they are, they are misinterpreted. In this way the light is put under a bushel, much truth is hidden, never aired, never disclosed. This is a **great sin**. This is the very thing which always has and always will lead to apostasy in the end.

Christ has set His ministers as candles upon a candlestick. He has, by the Holy Spirit, endowed men with gifts fitting them for the ministry and setting them in local churches, that they might give light to all that are **in the house**. By these last three words, a gathered company is in focus; it is the assembled saints, together with a minister, a lightbearer raised up of God in the pulpit to bring the light of Divine Truth to that whole spiritual family. The minister or teacher is a gift given by Christ the Head to a local assembly of God's people "*for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity in the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness' of Christ: that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but speaking the truth in love, may grow up into Him in all things, which is the Head, even Christ*" (Ephesians 4:12-15).

The minister is the gift from God to the local body of Christ. He is set there for the work of the ministry, to edify and build up the saints, for

their development and their perfecting. Not to make them perfect, for that will never be until glorification, rather is it that through sound and thorough teaching, they will grow and develop perfectly, not developing spiritual rickets through malnutrition, or becoming nervy and hysterical through emotion and spiritual excitement, neither showing signs of flabbiness and immaturity as a result of being kept on a milk diet - all these symptoms are very common today. The Truth of the Holy Scriptures is to be served in balance, a full menu, that all come to a position of "**unity in the faith**", all speaking and practising the same things, not tossed about, or carried away with novelties, fancies and extra-Biblical frills.

How can a church come to the happy position of all speaking the same things, if all things have never been taught? How can there be unity of the faith if parts of the faith have been hidden from the members by the minister? Never will there be light "*in the house*" if there is not light in the candlestick. The measure of light in the pew is largely determined by the light given from the pulpit.

The Lord continues His discourse to the minister, "*Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven*" (Matthew 5:19). It is a tragedy when the rank and file of Christians set aside parts of the Divine ruling, but when a minister fragments the Holy Mandate and is partial in his teaching, he is a shadowy luminary, a failing which is lamentable to the deepest degree; yet many a pulpit is marked by this today. For a man called to handle the lively oracles of God, to stand in the pulpit and convey to his hearers the impression that certain teachings are unimportant, or that points considered minor are better never mentioned, because they only engender criticism and possibly cause division, is grievously abusing his office by so degrading God's Holy Word. Such a man is



literally teaching the flock that parts of the inspired Scriptures are of no consequence, they can be ignored. Sadly many companies claiming to be orthodox, err on this very point.

It is the pulpit which must be blamed in very large measure for both the state of the church and the nation. Even that which men and women may call the least important, **must** be taught and practised in the church by the Lord's people. The minister who does not take such a stand has the disapproval of God resting upon him, regardless of any seeming success which may accompany his efforts, or how highly he may be esteemed by fellow ministers. If he underrates even the least little section of that which God has laid down, he will be among the least in the kingdom of God. It was the servant who was faithful in that which men would call little, who will be advanced in the coming day (cf Luke 19:17).

*"He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much"* (Luke 16:10). The word therefore to all pulpit luminaries is, *"Let your light so shine"* (Matthew 5:16)

W.H.Molland

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## *Editorial*

At the time of writing this editorial, another political election is in focus with its usual frenzy and high pressure propaganda. The various parties and their adherents are desperately striving to gain the ear, and so influence the electorate, in order to secure the votes which will get them into power. It is at such times as this that Christians reveal the degree of appreciation which they really have of their heavenly citizenship. This glorious truth may be an acknowledged tenet of their faith, yet in varying degrees, the believer's holy calling is neither seen in their practice nor by their speech.

There is a fundamental question which must be answered: Is a **true** Christian, of earth or of heaven? Christians have, by grace, been translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son (cf Colossians 1:13), declared by the Son to be "*not of the world*" (John 17:16), their conversation (citizenship) now being in heaven (cf Philippians 3:20); as such they are "*a royal priesthood, an holy nation*" (1 Peter 2:9). "*But these are **in** the world*" (John 17:11): however, being still in the world does not make them of it. They confess that they are strangers and pilgrims on the earth (cf Hebrews 11:13). These facts and principles being clearly set out by God in His Word pose a further question: Can a person be a citizen of two countries? It would be an anomaly, and absurd to speak of a person as being **truly** Chinese and at the same time **truly** British. Yet despite all that the New Testament teaches, vast numbers of believers, some perhaps unwittingly claim dual citizenship, inasmuch as they identify with fallen kingdoms of this world, whilst at the same time aligning themselves with the holy kingdom of God.

The shallow grasp which many Christians have of these vital matters is evidenced in their prayers and by the way in which they express themselves. A deplorable example is set by publications circulated by a number of Reformed and Evangelical churches and organisations. Some of them bear the names of men on their committees, which to say the least, cause great surprise. A few have openly declared that they have **joined** a certain political party. What has happened to the teaching of 2 Corinthians 6:14-18, where such a yoke and affiliation is expressly forbidden?

Much is said about '**our**' country, '**our**' Protestant constitution, '**our**' armed forces, '**our**' defences, what is to be the future of '**our**' Christian country. It is claimed that 'at one time England was a people of the Bible', indeed 'the whole nation became, in fact, a Church'; 'that '**our**' country was once loved like Israel of old and God came to dwell in

'our' midst'. Constant reference is made to Rome and the Protestant Reformation, how that Romish trappings and practices were overthrown and a great glory came upon 'our' land. Yet some of the men who write these things, bedeck themselves in robes and dog-collars, carrying out in various forms the sprinkling of infants and other unbiblical practices. What is more, almost every one of these religious champions of Protestant England still take to themselves the title of '**Reverend**', which is no different to the Pope of Rome assuming the designation of '**his Holiness**'. How inconsistent can men be! Counsel and guidance is being given as to how Christians can stem the rot, and so help to bring about a better order by how they place their X on election day.

Having drawn attention to what is presently being circulated, how does it stand up to Scriptural scrutiny? Can men and women who have, by the grace of God, been born into a spiritual family, still speak **before God** of the country of their natural birth, as **their** beloved country, when they have been called out of this doomed world, to pass through it as pilgrims and strangers, heading for that better country? A Protestant constitution may be the structure of an earthly nation, but it is not the constitution of that holy nation, the Church of Jesus Christ. **Ours** is not a natural constitution, it is heavenly. It is not Protestant, which is largely **political**, it is "*all the counsel of God*" (Acts 20:27).

Is it not appalling for a citizen of heaven to speak of a national army as 'our' armed forces"? Has the Church of Jesus Christ armed men, equipped with sophisticated weapons, nuclear submarines and supersonic jets, replete with deadly missiles? Are these 'our' defences, as the people of God? The country in which the providence of Almighty God has placed us, cannot be called a Christian country; it never has been. To contend that England was loved as Israel of old, displays an abysmal ignorance of the teaching of Holy Scripture. One is thankful for the privileges and blessings which we, as Christians

enjoy in the land in which we live; nevertheless, as with all other countries in this world, England comes under that sweeping and all-embracing statement, "*The whole world lieth in wickedness*" (1 John 5:19). It is from such, that God has by grace, called us **out**.

All the political propaganda being bandied about, plus anything of national fervour or patriotism, should have no influence upon a child of God. When upon earth, the Man, Christ Jesus, never became involved in any of the world's politics or authorities. Never did He hint at emancipating the Jews from the domination of Rome, which was the governing power at that time; neither did He look to earthly forces for His protection. The only occasion when a sword was drawn in His defence, He immediately ordered it to be sheathed (cf John 18:11).

Christ made it abundantly clear that His kingdom was not of this world (cf John 18:36). The Christian who is of **His** kingdom is to live and walk in this evil world as **He** did, not claim the 'heavenly', and still affiliate with the 'earthly', for this, most certainly, is not separation in the Biblical sense. The nations of this world are all under Divine sentence of everlasting judgment. Are the 'redeemed' to call any country on this sin-benighted earth, '**ours**'? These are matters of tremendous import for they pertain to the glory of God; it is expressly commanded that citizens of heaven are to "*walk worthy of God who hath called us to **His** kingdom and glory*" (1 Thessalonians 2:12).

Human political elections have no place in the life of a heavenly citizen. The government of this better country, which by grace is **ours**, is permanently in office; it is not a democracy elected by fallen men, it is a theocracy, established by the almighty, everlasting God. "*Yet have I set My King upon My holy hill of Zion. I will declare the decree*" (Psalm 2:6,7). Although mortal men are unaware of it, the God of heaven sitteth supreme over all the elections and deliberations of men. "*The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof*

*is of the Lord"* (Proverbs 16:33). It is the counsel of the Lord which stands, (cf Isaiah 46:10). The King upon the holy hill of Zion declares the decree, "*Thou art the God, even Thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth"* (2 Kings 19:15).

Men do not know what are the decrees of the supreme Ruler of the universe. "*The secret things belong unto the Lord our God"* (Deuteronomy 29:29), His counsel is immutable (cf Hebrews 6:17). Countries of this earth have their various systems; such order and organisation is incumbent upon the rulers of men, but over and above this sits the King eternal and through their deliberations, although they are not aware of it, He outworks His purposes amongst the nations; purposes both of mercy and judgment. These are the governmental workings of the **King Eternal**, which are known only to Himself. "*The powers that be are ordained of God"* (Romans 13:1); "*God is the judge: He putteth down one, and setteth up another"* (Psalm 75:7).

Are there not any responsibilities which the heavenly citizen has to the State as he passes through this world as a pilgrim and stranger? Very definitely! He is to walk worthy of the Lord and of his high calling (cf Colossians 1:10 & Ephesians 4:1); he is to be a witness to the truth (cf Acts 1:8); he is to shine as a light in the world (cf Philippians 2:15), be subject unto the God-ordained authorities (cf Romans 13:1), but should these authorities bring in laws which are in direct conflict with the Law of God, then he is to obey God rather than men (cf Acts 5:29), he is to pay all just taxes (cf Mark 12:17; Romans 13:7). Above all, the Christian is to pray regularly and earnestly for all in authority. In this matter, his prayers are not to be nationalistic, they are to be for **all** men everywhere: **kings** (plural): **all** that are in authority (cf 1 Timothy 2:1,2). Believers, being human, may often be perplexed as they find themselves disagreeing with policies and rulings of men in various nations; nevertheless they must always bear in mind that they are **all** ministers ordained of God, through whom He is working out His

strange designs. The judgments of God are a great deep (cf Psalm 36:6), and *"His ways past finding out!"* (Romans 11:33). Mortal men do not know God's governmental actions, therefore in such situations they can only pray, *"Thy will be done"*. Such a prayer from the heart, though brief, will always be to His glory. Finally, the heavenly citizen is to live peaceably, as far as it is possible, with all men (cf Romans 12:18).

These are the Christian's duties, but he is not to meddle, interfere, or become involved with the secret dealings of God in this age, concerning the nations. With this knowledge, these words of our Lord will take on a very forceful meaning: *"Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God"* (Luke 9:60).

Further help on this subject can be found in the booklet 'The Christian's Citizenship', obtainable free of charge from our bookroom.

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**Announcements**

**Visiting Preachers D.V.**

Lord's Day	1 July	Mr F.J.Harris (Cheltenham)
Lord's Day	8 July	Mr R Steward (Cradley Heath)
Lord's Day	12 August	Dr.S.S.Short (Weston-Super-Mare)

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On Lord's Day evening, 15 April, we had the joy of baptizing Dr. Abraham Cutajar of Grantham, Lincs. Dr. Cutajar, his wife and son Michael, have regularly visited us over several years. Mrs. Cutajar and Michael came to a knowledge of God's salvation and were baptized some years ago. We greatly rejoice that they are all three now united in the Lord. May the blessing of the Lord be upon them as a family, as they strive to live to His glory.