

April – June 2002

**T
H
E

L
I
N
K**

**North Road Chapel (Evangelical)
BIDEFORD**

Lessons from John's Gospel

chapter seventeen

"I have given them Thy Word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world" (John 17:14).

Having looked in the previous article, at the scorn and reproach of the world towards true believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, we are now to consider how this applies in a peculiar way to the minister of God's Word. He, like the prophets of old, has been given God's Word to publicly proclaim. *"Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience"* (James 5:10). These Old Testament warriors are held up as examples of suffering affliction and patience. What ostracism and loneliness did they encounter!

Elijah was entirely isolated for months in a ravine by the brook Cherith; later he experienced a total lack of human support on Mount Carmel. Admittedly, there were seven thousand people who had not bowed the knee to Baal, but not one of them came forward to identify with the prophet. A minister today often finds himself in a similar situation if he is true to God's Word, for many congregations do not identify with what is preached. In his office, he frequently carries great burdens, because much of his work is confidential; consequently he has to experience isolation, such matters being between himself and God. Nathan had to confront King David, and charge him, saying, *"Thou art the man"* (2 Samuel 12:7). This was not an easy thing to do but he had to do it; such duty falls on ministers today and must not be evaded. Without fear or favour, the apostle Paul shunned not to declare all the counsel of God to the Ephesians (cf Acts 20:27), but he said it resulted in having to fight with beasts in that city (cf 1 Corinthians 15:32). This is figurative language; he is not suggesting that he literally fought

with lions or tigers, but his preaching demanded denouncing idol worship and false religion, which drew out the vicious hatred of men, to the degree that they acted like beasts, ready to tear him to pieces. The apostle had to vehemently stand his ground, defend his position and uphold the doctrine which he preached. The trustworthy minister of today, who preaches the Word in all its fulness, knows something of this. Not only does this Word bait the world, it frequently antagonizes the professing church, and anger soon becomes manifest, sometimes even hatred.

In the verse which we are considering, Christ says of His apostles, "*I have given them Thy Word*"; later He prays that they might be sanctified through the Truth. Sanctification has a dual action; it is through the Word that believers are brought to a **unity** of the faith; it is equally true that through the Word, **division** is caused: "*For the Word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart*" (Hebrews 4:12). A minister may be aware on times that his message is going to be piercing, the application having a keen cutting edge. Should he by-pass that particular portion of Scripture, or blunt its application? To do this is a most fearful thing, yet not a few are guilty. The Great Head of the Church has given **His** Word to His ministers; it is not man's to toy with, to dilute or to ignore. Christ is the Master-builder of the Church; ministers are mere labourers, they do not know the **purpose** of the Truth which they are to bring to the people. It is for them to be honest in their charge; the results belong unto the Head. It is not the concern of the minister whether the Word preached causes unity or division. A faithful minister is aware that the Word of God will sometimes pierce, but he must not hold back; he may see members leave because of it; many places of worship have even closed on account of the Truth, yet in all this, God is **sovereign**. It is the prerogative of the Great Head of the Church to close doors as well as to open them, as is clearly set out in Holy Writ, "*And to the angel of*

the church in Philadelphia write; These things saith He that is holy, He that is true, He that hath the key of David, He that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth" (Revelation 3:7). It is better to have been a minister in a church which closed **because** of the Truth, than to be a minister in a church which is kept open through a compromising ministry.

When Christ gave His Word to His apostles and commissioned them to preach it, He gave them no guarantee as to how it would be received, or what would be its numerical success. Even in this Gospel of John, the Lord told His disciples to make use of the Light whilst they had it, because darkness would come upon them. This was proved; they had a measure of liberty in the early stages of their ministry, but terrible persecution came their way toward the end. The Lord had given them His Word and they preached it, consequently the world hated them. The church at Thessalonica suffered the same experience; *"For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance and ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction"* (1 Thessalonians 1:5,6). The Truth of God faithfully preached, invariably will bring in its wake, trial and affliction. The Spirit of God reminded the Hebrew Christians that after they were illumined, they had *"endured a great fight of afflictions"* (Hebrews 10:32). The churches in Asia Minor, under the powerful ministry of the apostle Paul, were established on sound Biblical principles, but they did not last long. Before the apostolic age had even finished, the Great Head had to dictate to the apostle John, letters of censure to be sent to many of those infant churches. One would think that, having had such an illustrious start, actually established by an ordained apostle of Jesus Christ, they would have remained for **all** time as lasting monuments to the Truth, yet within a generation or so, they no longer existed.

We come to the latter part of our verse, *"They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world"*. The follower of Jesus Christ is on a

completely different course to the man of the world, in that he has within him the Spirit of Christ, he is guided by the law of righteousness, he endeavours to follow the will of God and to live for heavenly things. By comparison, the natural man has the spirit of the world in him, he follows its customs, is guided by the law of sin and lives for earthly things. It is not just the Church's **teaching**, but also the Christian's **manner of life** which is contrary to the world and antagonizes the worldling. Our Lord said, *"If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you"* (John 15:19). The heart of the natural man is addicted to the world and its ways, he cannot go in any other direction, whereas those regenerated by God's Holy Spirit have a new nature; at new birth, other principles are implanted, higher ideals motivate the soul; *"Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the Divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust"* (2 Peter 1:4). A Christian is bound for another country which is an heavenly; he is therefore to live *"in the world"* as one bearing the marks of heavenly citizenship, not living according to the customs and fashions of this world but adorning the doctrine of Jesus Christ. This applies even in dress, not only on the Lord's Day but every day, in leisure hours as well as at work. Slovenly attire is increasingly popular today, outrageous fashions are copied by the young, hair styles for women and men change constantly, set by the most dubious of characters, yet people, and often Christians, follow like foolish sheep. Make-up and excessive jewellery, much of which is nothing less than heathen symbolism - crosses, wishbones, boots, horseshoes and similar charms are used in bangles, brooches and necklaces, and are worn, even by some who profess the name of Christ. How careful the child of God should be in their person and dress. This word given by the Lord covers all these things, *"they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world"*. If Christ had come to earth in the present generation, instead of two thousand years ago,

does anyone dare to think that, as a young man, He would have been caught up in this worldly culture? Would the world's fashions, theatres, clubs or arts have held an attraction for Him? The answer to all these things and many more, is definitely, No! Then, "*be ye therefore followers of God as dear children*" (Ephesians 5:1). He has left us an example that we should follow His steps (cf 1 Peter 2:21). Our pattern is not a **worldly** Christ, He is a **separated** Christ. He took no part whatsoever in the world's pleasures, its sport or its politics; He was completely and totally apart from these things.

All this is included in "*Thy Word*", which has been entrusted to ministers of the present day, but sadly, many are being very selective in what they preach and what they ignore?

W.H.Molland

THE LOCAL CHURCH

This article is the substance of an address given by the minister of North Road Chapel on the occasion of the Annual Meeting of the church members on 10th November 2001.

Whilst the subject of the local church involves many aspects of doctrine and practice, for the purpose of the meeting it was dealt with under just four headings:

1. The Church - its Head.
2. The Church - its nature.
3. The Church - its members.
4. The Church - its ministers.

These are cardinal points for a company of believers who seek to gather in a Biblical manner, so forming a local church.

The Church - its Head

"He is the Head of the body, the Church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things He might have the pre-eminence" (Colossians 1:18); God "hath put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the Head over all things to the Church, which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all" (Ephesians 1:22); "But I would have you know, that the Head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the Head of Christ is God" (1 Corinthians 11:3); "I speak concerning Christ and His Church" (Ephesians 5:32).

It is of paramount importance that Christians have a thorough grasp of 'Headship', as a failure on this point will result in great weakness throughout. Primarily, **all** headship is vested in Christ; He is Head over all things; He is the great creator, He is the mighty sustainer, He is the munificent benefactor of every creature, He is the supreme governor of all nations, whether this is recognized or not. In a coming day the knees of all people who have ever lived, will bow in acknowledgement of His Headship.

As Head of the election of grace, Christ was before all things, appointed in eternity past to be God's servant as the Mediator, to redeem a remnant of a fallen race. *"Behold My Servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom My soul delighteth; I have put My Spirit upon Him" (Isaiah 42:1).*

"Be Thou My first elect, God said,
Then chose the Church in Christ its Head".

Christ is Head of the Church which is His body. As the human head relates to the physical body, so does Christ to His Church. He brought us into being by natural creation then, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, created us anew, fitting us as members in particular into His mystical body, and as living stones

into His Church. He *"is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption"* (1 Corinthians 1:30). As members of Him, He is our mighty sustainer; He holds us by His omnipotent hand and we shall never perish. He ministers grace upon grace during our earthly pilgrimage and will bring us to glory where, in our glorified bodies, we shall bear His very image.

Pertaining to human life, the head and the body are inseparable, together they form one unit; so it is with Christ and the Church, they can never be divided in time or in eternity. It is as the relationship of a bridegroom to his bride; Christ and His Church are eternally wedded. The recognition of this must be supreme in every aspect of church life. Expounding this analogy of husband and wife as it is in the human realm, the inspired Word states, *"God would have you know that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is the man"* (1 Corinthians 11:3). Headship is vested in the man; women are always to recognize that *"the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man"* (1 Corinthians 11:8); she is the *"weaker vessel"* (1 Peter 3:7); the wife is to submit unto her husband for he is her head (cf Ephesians 5:22,23). This is Divine order in the natural and it is **supremely** so in the spiritual; it concerns Christ and His Church (cf Ephesians 5:32).

For this reason of headship, Scripture states that a woman is to cover her head and a man is to uncover his, in all corporate gatherings of the Lord's people (cf 1 Corinthians 11). This is nothing to do with custom, culture or etiquette; it is the authoritative Word of Almighty God. It is a vital aspect of church practice because it gives a physical demonstration of a fundamental point of doctrine, namely the **headship** of Christ and the church's subordination to that Headship.

Distinguishing attire or uniform finds no place in New Testament Church order, nevertheless modest apparel and that which becometh Godliness is enjoined (cf 1 Timothy 2:9,10). Unsuitable dress for

either male or female is not God-honouring. The world takes notice of this. To see a family dressed in their best clothes, making their way to the house of the Lord on the first day of the week, is to openly give evidence to the sanctity of the Lord's Day, and is a powerful rebuke to the masses who profane God's holy Sabbath. A Christian's dress is part of the witness, it is a badge which marks us out from the slovenly, casual and often immodest garments of today's society.

Sadly the majority of those who profess the name of Christ in this age see no relevance in these matters, in fact many think it is to the advantage of a local church if they dress and act in a casual manner, because it is more likely to attract unbelievers. By such reasoning the church is being influenced by the standards of the world, instead of the world being influenced by the Church. In nothing is this more apparent than in the matter of head covering, yet this is the most vital, because it signifies the **headship** of Christ within the Church. What aspect of Church doctrine is more important than the recognition of **headship**?

In previous generations, Christian men and women had a high regard for this matter of headship, both in the home and in the church. They were well aware of the straightforward teaching of 1 Corinthians 11:1-16 and other kindred Scriptures. Reverently did they hold to such tenets of the faith, having an appreciation of their profound significance. Today the matter is treated with impunity and ministers will twist these Scriptures in all conceivable ways in an effort to make them mean other than the clear Holy Spirit-inspired statements which they are. In this way, congregations are "*at ease in Zion*" (Amos 6:1). If those faithful men and women of past generations who knew these truths and practised them, could come back and quietly open the door of the average place of worship at a Lord's Day service, they would close the door in horror at the sight of a sea of uncovered female heads, saying, 'What has gone wrong? There is now no demonstration of **Christ's Headship!**'

What an indictment! Yet it is now the norm in church assemblings and few will raise a finger in protest, or give a word of counsel or rebuke to those who blatantly disregard the mandate of Scripture.

To say that this matter of demonstrating headship is unimportant, is to deny the authority of God's word. There are three aspects of "*the faith*" to which Almighty God demands we give visible, tangible evidence. Firstly, a remembrance and setting forth of Christ's death with bread and wine; secondly, the public confession at conversion, by immersion in water, so demonstrating that the one concerned has died to the old life and is raised to walk in newness of life; thirdly, the public exhibition and acknowledgement of the Headship of Christ in His Church, by the male members heads being uncovered and the female members covered. Would it not be the depths of profanity to sit at the communion table, refusing to furnish it with bread and wine, or to claim to be conducting a baptismal service, yet objecting to having any water in the baptistry? It is equally impious to claim to be acknowledging the Headship of Christ in His Church, when the very tangible means which He has ordained to demonstrate it, is abolished.

The Headship of Christ and the Divinely appointed means for its demonstration, is a matter of the utmost gravity, which is the more emphasized by the Holy Spirit. "*But if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God*" (1 Corinthians 11:16). To the church at Corinth who were at fault on this issue, the inspired writer says, 'If you are going to be contentious over this, be informed that we, the apostles, have no such custom (practice). You are contending for something which does not figure in the 'apostles' doctrine'. What is more, no other New Testament church would dare to ignore this Truth; in your lax practice, you Corinthians stand alone'. Alas today, such statistics would reveal an opposite result; so loose have local churches become, that a company of believers who adhere to this practice is now the rare exception.

The Church - its nature

The word 'church' in Holy Scripture never signifies a building, yet many who profess the name of Christ use it in this way. Not only do Anglicans call their places of worship 'churches', but so do many non-conformists, whereas in the past they would have been known as chapels. According to a current English Dictionary, 'chapel' is a correct designation for a non-conformist place of worship. This is yet another example of how words are losing their meaning and how terms become increasingly confused. How vital it is that Christians "*hold fast to sound words*" (2 Timothy 1:13); only by sound words and correct definitions can truth be accurately communicated.

It is worth mentioning that in the Old Testament, many places set apart for Divine worship were styled 'the house of God'. For example, where Jacob built an altar and where he and his family worshipped, they named it Bethel, 'the House of God'. The Old Covenant Tabernacle was called 'the House of God' and many times in the historical books of Kings and Chronicles, Solomon's temple is spoken of as 'the House of the Lord', but never in Scripture are such places called 'a church'. Always in Holy Writ it is a company of **redeemed people** who come together corporately in any one place, who are designated 'the church'.

We read of the church being gathered together at Antioch in order that Paul might address them (cf Acts 14:26,27); the church at Corinth coming together in one place (cf 1 Corinthians 14:23). Such groups were in many regions in early New Testament times - Galatia, Macedonia, Ephesus, Philippi, Colosse, Rome, Thessalonica and a number of other locations. Some met in homes, some in hired halls; few, if any, had special buildings in those early New Testament days. However that made no difference, there were born-again believers in these areas and when they gathered together in one place in their particular district, they constituted a **local church**.

It is essential that some detail is given concerning these groups that came together to form a church; such companies did not consist of people who had become attracted by some new religion, and thought they would loosely attach themselves, for a time at least, and see how it worked out. No, there was no such thing as loose attachment; that most certainly was not the **nature** of the Church of Jesus Christ in those early times, neither is it today.

Everyone admitted into the fellowship of a local body of Christians must be soundly converted and testify to their conversion by baptism, that is, total immersion in water. Nothing other than this measures up to the New Testament directive, and those who have been truly converted should be seen to strive after holiness, both in heart and walk. Reception into the membership of a company of believers constitutes a coalition, meaning a uniting of individuals into one body. The Biblical analogy is the human body, many members or constituent parts such as hands, fingers, legs, feet, eyes, ears and so on all co-ordinating and acting as one. *"The whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth"* (Ephesians 4:16).

Early New Testament churches most certainly were not nationalistic; there was no church of Judah, no church of Asia; no link whatsoever with state or government, no semblance of anything political. A primal New Testament church was seen as 'an ecclesia', a company of men and women, gathered out of the world and separated unto God. Neither was there a confederation of churches, no denominations, no man-made unions, no central House of Bishops or Court of Presbyters. Each local company of believers were independent, each gathering to the name of the Lord and owning His Headship. As the early churches developed in the apostolic age, so was their ordering more fully established and their **nature** became more apparent.

For a local church to function according to the Divine Mandate, it must be independent, autonomous, self-supporting, self-governing, self-contained, yet catholic in outlook; standing for "*all the counsel of God*" (Acts 20:27), declaring Truth in its entirety without fear or favour to either saint or sinner, holding back nothing that is profitable (cf Acts 20:20). This is the New Testament ruling for a local church. For its accomplishment, that church must rely entirely upon the grace of God, the precious blood and righteousness of the Lord and Saviour, the gracious assistance of the Holy Spirit and the infallible Word of God; all the members coming to the unity of the Faith, all speaking the same things. A church so ordered will be fitly framed together and grow unto an holy temple unto the Lord (cf Ephesians 2:21). If this is the **nature** of the church, there will be true "*unity of the Spirit*" and the fruits of righteousness will follow; "*which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God*" (Philippians 1:11).

The Church - its members

Membership in a local church involves responsibility. Each member, male and female, having been received into a company of God's people, has a duty to fulfil. The first and foremost duty is to maintain the unity of that church; this is not a tolerant unity where members have their own opinions and hold various views, but all agree to differ and tolerate each other. This most certainly is not the unity of which the Scriptures treat. Each member is to endeavour to "*keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism*" (Ephesians 4:3). In the "*one body*" of believers there is "*one Spirit*"; He, the Holy Spirit, will guide the believers into all Truth, the "*one faith*" once delivered, not conflicting views. He will focus their minds and hearts upon Christ, the "*one Lord*", the Great Head of the Church; giving them also sound views of the "*one baptism*", amidst all the confusion and error

which exists on that matter. He will ever keep before them the hope of their calling to an inheritance reserved in heaven.

When members of a local church all speak the same things, all perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment (cf 1 Corinthians 1:10), then the truth of the Old Testament Scripture will be in evidence, *"Then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the Lord, to serve Him with one consent"* (Zephaniah 3:9). *"All call upon the name of the Lord, to serve Him with **one consent**"*- each member active and involved, with their heart in the work and witness of the fellowship, not standing aloof. *"That ye may with one mind and with one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ"* (Romans 15:6); *"one mind and one mouth"* is the very essence of corporate church life. Many minds but one single thought, each mind and heart acting in perfect unison to glorify God and the Lord Jesus Christ. Many mouths yet all speaking as one; this is the great importance of the word '**Amen**'; only four letters yet it is one of the most important words to every church member. By that little word the individual member identifies with the minister who is declaring Divine Truth. He is the God-ordained channel, the one mouth, but at the end of the sermon all the members, male and female, are to say '**Amen**', for in this way they all involve themselves with the preached word; thus does the witness and testimony become corporate.

The same principle obtains when a brother leads in prayer; it is one mouth, but as he concludes, all should say '**Amen**'. This is incumbent upon **every** church member, it is their duty to identify with his supplication, confession and thanksgiving. He is leading the gathered saints and they must audibly indicate that they are a part of the body and with *"one consent"*, show involvement.

It should be obvious to every church member that it is their solemn duty to pray daily in their homes for one another, giving thanks for

every spiritual, physical and material blessing, seeking guidance and protection, but a member's duty in prayer does not stop there. Early New Testament believers were seen often to gather together in one place for prayer. Times of corporate prayer are a vital part of church life at which every member should attend whenever possible. The Church of Jesus Christ on earth is in conflict; the battle primarily is against principalities, powers of darkness, spiritual wickedness; indeed all the energies of hell are against a true church. It is only as a church is united in prayer as well as in the Truth, that these forces can be held back. Public prayer, like public preaching, should be the united voice of the church; if a brother's or sister's 'Amen' is never heard in a church prayer meeting, it weakens that church's defences. Often it has been said, 'A chain is only as strong as its weakest link'. Let this searching question be asked, 'Am I, as a member, strengthening or weakening the chain?'

Church members should also be very careful regarding associations and involvement with the world; separation from the world is of paramount importance. Christians are a people separated unto God, set apart by God for Himself. The Church is a garden enclosed. A local church is not common land or a moorland heath, free for all to run over for enjoyment, indeed not! A true church has fences, boundaries are set; it is "*the habitation of God through the Spirit*" (Ephesians 2:22). The eternal God deigns to dwell amongst His people who gather in His name, after the order which He has set out in the New Testament Scriptures. It must always be remembered that holiness and Godly fear is to characterize His dwelling. "*Holiness becometh Thine house forever*" (Psalm 93:5).

The light-hearted, flippant manner in which many attend places of worship today shows that these basic principles have been swept aside. The following questions might well be asked, 'How can a spirit of holiness and reverence be brought about and established within a fellowship of the Lord's people? Can it be done by enforcing a strict set of rules and regulations? Would religious

pomp and awesome ritual produce the desired atmosphere? Certainly not! Holiness in a local church will only be known where there is a striving after holiness upon the part of every member. By this is meant upright living and obedience to the Word of God.

One of the enviable marks of a company of believers is constancy, meaning 'firmness of mind', 'attachment', 'reliability', 'faithfulness'. Example is one of the most powerful influences, and this operates either for good or ill. Every member in a church should be concerned that their example is right; if not, that member will diffuse a poor influence within the fellowship. Let none forget that what one member thinks he has liberty to do, every member could do. What then would become of the church? An old couplet, well worth repeating is, "If every church member was just like me, What sort of a church would this church be?". To be a member of a local church is a serious matter; it demands tremendous dedication and Holy Spirit-inspired determination.

The Church - its ministers

By the term 'ministers', reference is being made to church officers. In the New Testament there are only two offices, elders and deacons. However, throughout Christendom many additional offices have been created, with a profusion of titles given to those holding such positions, all of which carry no Biblical warrant whatsoever. The starting point for this subject, 'ministers', must be a correct understanding of the word itself. The dictionary defines this word as 'a servant who is accountable', 'a person entrusted with responsibility'. It should at once be observed that these designations denote accountable roles, they are not titles. These definitions most assuredly put church officers in their true spiritual perspective.

The qualifications of elders and deacons, their respective duties and manner of appointment within the local church are matters of great importance and are clearly set out in the church and pastoral epistles.

A careful study of these New Covenant writings will reveal that these ministers are in the plural and form a vital part of the ordering of a fellowship of believers constituted according to the New Testament directive. They are to be men, upright in life, examples unto the flock and having a good report from them that are without. Elders in particular, are to bear rule in the church, to oversee all the work; they must be fitted to instruct the flock of God, able to guide, counsel and advise. In this, each appointed elder must have an aptitude to teach (1 Timothy 3:2), but it does not say preach. There is a subtle difference between teaching and preaching. Every elder is charged with these duties and they are accountable for such a responsible office; but within the eldership it is equally clear in the New Testament that there is one who "*labours in the Word and in doctrine*". He is the one who treads out the corn, that the members might be fed (cf 1 Corinthians 9:9); the labourer who studies (cf 1 Timothy 5:17,18); the star or minister (cf Revelation ch's 1&3). In each instance it is singular. The one described, is in the right hand of the Head of the Church, by whose upholding and through the aid of the Holy Spirit, he expounds the Scriptures, shedding light upon Divine Truth.

To have a correct Biblical view of this distinction among elders is of fundamental importance in a local church. An aptitude to rule, counsel, guide and teach does not constitute a preacher. Preaching is a gift which is given by God Himself and a man either has it or he has not. It cannot be cultivated, neither must it be assumed. Other officers in a church may well be able to profitably take an occasional service, but this does not mean that they are fitted for permanent pulpit ministry. To appoint such an one could well lead to disaster. It is dishonouring to God to put a man permanently into the pulpit who is manifestly not gifted for the office.

Having stated that all church officers are entrusted with great responsibility, servants who are accountable, this is doubly true of the one in eldership who is gifted by God to preach and set apart for

that work. He is a minister or a servant in a special sense and can rightly be termed 'the minister' in as much as he is the mouth-piece of the church, the star, the angel or messenger. Although he is charged with tremendous responsibility, he is still nothing other than a servant. First and foremost he is the Lord's servant, secondly he is the servant of the church, raised up by God for that very purpose - to serve. If a minister in a church thinks that in himself, he is somewhat superior to other members in that body of believers, he has missed his true sense of vocation. He is not a professional in the church, he is a servant for Christ's sake. He is to be respected, esteemed very highly in love for his work's sake (cf 1 Thessalonians 5:13), but not to be looked upon as some spiritual dignitary.

Taking a broad view of Christendom, the pulpit ministry is approached in a variety of ways. There are denominations where access to the pulpit is only through their own specified theological colleges. Some have fixed periods of time for a minister to stay, then he must move on to another church within that denomination; others leave a minister to act freely, to stay in a church permanently or move on if inclined so to do. Independent churches usually have their own pattern and practice, some good, some not so good and some definitely bad.

Leaving the broad spectrum and concentrating upon those who would claim to carry out Biblical principles; confusion here is often in evidence. It is not unknown, indeed at the present time it is all too common for a man who is in the pulpit ministry to suddenly announce his service in that particular church is to end. There can be valid reasons for this, such as poor health or old age, but sadly this is not often the case. They are said to 'have a call' (what is meant by this remains an enigma) and so they move on to another church for little other reason than a change. Sometimes it becomes apparent that a minister is moving because of difficulties or impending trouble in their present situation; others leave a fixed ministry to itinerate, possibly on a global scale; none of this is

commendable. When a local church is left for whatever reason, with no fixed pulpit ministry, that church is often very vulnerable. The usual practice in such circumstances is to make enquiries, put out feelers, invite a few who are supposedly called to the ministry or leaving Bible College, to preach, meet the fellowship, assess their qualities and capabilities, then make a choice; to 'invite one to the pastorate'. More often than not this is a matter of expediency. It is not that the blessing of God has never been upon such moves, but by observation it must be said, that many places benefitted little, indeed not a few fellowships have been ruined by importing strangers. Sadly the criterion with many seeking a minister is, Does this man appeal to the young people? Is he a good mixer? Is he a Greek scholar? Does he read Hebrew? Has he a sense of humour? Is he a good visitor? With the exception of sick visiting, these other matters are incidental. What is more, the question of visiting should be largely undertaken by the other officers of the church, other than essential pastoral visits, leaving the minister to his studies. The Puritans used to say, 'Keep the minister chained to his desk'.

The people of God within a local church are likened unto a flock of sheep and lambs. The picture is of a farmer shepherding those sheep; he has bred them, he knows their generations, their peculiarities, their potential, their growth rate; certain ones which are prone to foot troubles, others to breaking out through fences and many other traits and tendencies. What is more, that farmer is very attached to his sheep despite them being a mixed bunch. Would a strange shepherd know these sheep? Would those sheep know him? In the natural realm, shepherds do not run away from their flock, even though some might be troublesome; farming is a life's commitment. This is the Biblical analogy for local folds of God's sheep. If in His sovereign providence, a man has been gifted of the Holy Spirit to preach, and placed in a certain area and set apart by the local church for the regular ministry of that church and the care of its members, then it is his solemn charge as long as God enables him, to stick to his responsibility. For one posing as a minister and

shepherd amongst a flock of God, to walk away and leave them unless there is a bona fide or Biblical reason, is reprehensible.

Whilst no minister can foresee the future, he can but serve his generation by the will of God (cf Acts 13:36); nevertheless the continuity of the witness and testimony should be prayerfully before him. If he observes any gift which may be manifesting itself in younger men under his ministry and pastoral care, then such should be counselled, guided and encouraged. It is the firm belief of this minister that Biblical churches should not only be independent, autonomous and self-governing, they should also, under the Holy Spirit's leading and the Head's gracious provision, be self-propagating, with a future shepherd being prepared and raised up from among the flock. Ministers should ever be watchful, prayerful and faithful in this, that they commit the truth to such who in turn will be able to teach others also (cf 2 Timothy 2:2). This is a very important part of a minister's work; it is not only commendable, it is his duty and it is God-honouring. For a minister to look upon his position in a church just as his vocation which he is free to leave if so inclined, is a most unworthy thought. The local flock of God, its present and future, should be his great concern.

When changes do come in a church through age, sickness or death, and appointments have to be made, no novice is to be put into the permanent pulpit ministry (cf 1 Timothy 3:6). This does not mean he must at least be a middle-aged man, but it does mean he must have a thorough grasp of the Scriptures and be uncompromising with the truth. It also carries the thought of not being a newcomer to the church; rather one who is truly settled in the fellowship and has gained the respect and confidence of the members. He must also be able to preach acceptably, having free utterance of speech, a good command of words; not hampered by restriction in his diction, he must articulate and pronounce his words distinctly; not talking too fast and running one word into another, remembering that he is addressing the elderly, as well as those in their prime.

A true minister will also be interesting, though he be handling deep doctrine, he will not be dry. He will hold his congregation, but never pander to the flippant. As a true pastor, he will always "*feed the people with knowledge and understanding*" (Jeremiah 3:15). He will speak with ardour and passion, especially when dealing with evangelistic subjects. Above all else, there must be that obvious anointing of the Holy Spirit upon a minister; this alone gives unction and causes his words to come over with power.

When the time comes for changes in the pulpit ministry here in this chapel, which it will in God's time, it is my responsibility before God to counsel and guide. Be very hesitant about calling a man from outside. Also be warned against setting apart someone in the church who does not measure up to the Biblical standard. It may be necessary to carry on humbly and prayerfully with your God for a time, until you are sure that the right man is in your midst, settled, tried and proved.

Meanwhile it is my great joy and privilege to continue among you as one that **serveth**; my fervent prayer being, that this local church will ever be preserved from a weak, deficient or unqualified ministry. Amen.

W.H.Molland

Dear Saviour, may this Church of Thine,
Flourish in all Thy ways,
Increase in love, abound in zeal,
And grow in fervent praise.

May the dear pastor of the flock
Be faithful and sincere;
Preach the whole counsel of the Lord,
And firmly persevere.

Books

Revelation Spiritually Understood C.D.Alexander

Prior to the production of this 565 page hardback, Charles Alexander's superb work on the Book of the Revelation was only obtainable in copious type-written pamphlets. We are thankful that it is now available in its present form. We highly recommend this volume, which must rank amongst the finest of expositions on this subject. Price £15.00

Battle for the Church David Gay

An account of the epic struggle to recover the New Testament pattern of church life in England. Compelling reading. A book which has been to the enlightenment of many Christians. 522 page hardback. Price £15.50

The Keys of the Kingdom Poh Boon Sing

A study on the Biblical form of Church government. A robust work on a most necessary subject. 417 page hardback. Price £10.50

Apply to: The Bookroom Secretary
North Road Chapel (Evangelical)
BIDEFORD N.Devon EX39 2NW

Annual Bible Convention **D.V.**

Saturday 1 June 2002 at 3.30 p.m. & 6.00 p.m. Tea served 5.30 p.m.
Lord's Day 2 June 2002 at 10.45 a.m. & 6.30 p.m.

Preacher: **Dr. David Allen** (Stowmarket)

A cordial invitation is extended to all