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**North Road Chapel (Evangelical)  
BIDEFORD**

# *Lessons from John's Gospel*

## *chapter seventeen*

*"I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldest keep them from the evil"* (John 17:15).

God's redeemed children are left in the world for their appointed life span to be witnesses unto Him for His honour. It is not the plan or purpose of God to take them to glory immediately upon their regeneration, either by death, or direct translation as with Enoch and Elijah. They are to weather the storms of life, withstand the attacks of the Adversary and walk in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. To this end, Christ prays that they should be kept "*from the evil*".

There is considerable confusion over what is meant by the words, "*the evil*". Some believe this to mean evil in a general sense, others that it refers to the Devil; the original Greek word can be translated 'the evil thing' or 'the evil one'. The following references will clarify this: "*When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the **wicked one**, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the wayside*" (Matthew 13:19); "*I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the **wicked one***" (1 John 2:13); "*Not as Cain, who was of that **wicked one**, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his **own works were evil**, and his brother's righteous*" (1 John 3:12); "*And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us **from evil***" (Matthew 6:13); "*But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay nay; for whatsoever is more than these cometh of **evil***" (Matthew 5:37). It is clear from these Scriptures that you cannot divorce 'evil' from 'the evil one'; he is primarily the one who instils the temptation. In the case of Cain, the

thought was harboured, he sought no deliverance from it and in consequence his works were evil. In contrast, the young men to whom John wrote **overcame** the wicked one.

In the verse which is before us, both lines must be kept together, the **evil one** and the **evil things**. Our Lord is praying that as long as His own are in the world, they should be preserved from the great deceivableness and snares of Satan, which would lead them into the evil of sin. It has been rightly said: "Satan is the author, the world is the bait, sin is the hook". We must never forget that Satan was the originator of sin, and he is the great promoter of it in this world. Man, because of his depraved state through Satan, is a ready and willing dupe, but behind it all is the Devil. *"He that committeth sin is of the Devil; for the Devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the Devil"* (1 John 3:8). The Spirit of God directs our thoughts beyond the evil to the **prime cause** of all evil which is *"the evil one"* - Satan. He is *"the god of this world"*, *"the prince of the power of the air"* and, the Holy Spirit of God through the apostle Paul says we are not to be ignorant of his devices lest Satan should get an advantage over us (cf 2 Corinthians 2:11). Firm grounding on the subject of the Devil is essential, that we be not ignorant, rather informed of his artifice. Because our Lord and master had full knowledge of his cunning strategy, He prayed in this manner, *"I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldest keep them from the evil"*, or 'the evil one'.

There have been many men and women throughout human history, who have come to a point in life when they genuinely wanted to leave this world; they may or may not have had good reasons. The Scriptures furnish us with a number of examples: *"According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death. For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live in the flesh, this is the*

*fruit of my labour: yet what I shall choose I wot not. For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you”* (Philippians 1:20-24). The apostle Paul says himself that he is in a strait, a dilemma; he has a desire to depart and to be with Christ which is far better. He is ravished with the thought of his eternal inheritance and of being glorified like unto Christ - to be ‘with Him’ in all that this term involves. *“Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you”* - he realises that the Christians at Philippi, and many other places, needed help; they were not sufficiently grounded to be left, therefore it was needful for him to remain in the world a little longer. God has **His** purposes, and His will must be done. Christians must patiently wait God’s time, no man must look for his reward until his work is done; no soldier must look for discharge until the battle is over, no sentinel set upon the watch is to tire in his duty till released by his commanding officer.

Another example of a man wishing to die, is Jonah, although his reasoning was completely different to the apostle Paul’s. This man became extremely agitated because God had spared the Ninevites after he had gone to Nineveh and preached against them: *“But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry. And he prayed unto the Lord ....Therefore now, O Lord, take, I beseech Thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live. Then said the Lord, Doest thou well to be angry?”* (Jonah 4:1-4). Was Jonah being reasonable in his thinking, allowing anger to reign in his heart to the degree of wanting to die? In this disgruntled state, the prophet went out and sat on the east side of the city; the weather was very hot, but the eye of God was upon him as he brooded in this very sad state of soul. There in the heat, God caused a gourd to miraculously spring up to provide shade for this unhappy individual; however the next day, God saw fit to cause this plant to wither and die, which only increased Jonah’s anger. *“But God prepared a worm when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd that it*

withered. And it came to pass, when the sun did arise, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted, and wished in himself to die, and said, It is better for me to die than to live. And God said to Jonah, Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd? And he said, I do well to be angry, even unto death” (Jonah 4:7-9). This man was so upset and peevish at the manner in which God had acted, both in His sovereignty toward sinners, and in His providence to him personally, that he **justified** his reasoning in the very face of God; this shows the lengths to which man will go when he allows the Devil to generate an unholy anger in his heart. Jonah then continued by actually **dictating** to the Almighty that it was better for his life to be brought to an end; this request was in direct opposition to the will and purpose of God. This man, by fostering his grievances, had slipped into the net of the evil one.

Job is a further example: he longed to be released from this life because of overwhelming sorrow and affliction. *“Why died I not from the womb? Why did I not give up the ghost when I came out of the belly?”* (Job 3:11). *“Oh that I might have my request; and that God would grant me the thing that I long for! Even that it would please God to destroy me; that He would let loose His hand, and cut me off!”* (Job 6:8,9). At a human level, we may have a degree of sympathy with this dear man who was passing through terrible fires of affliction, but the manner of Christ’s prayer for His people is not, ‘Father, release them’; rather does He pray, ‘Father, keep them’. This is to be the manner of **our** praying and living.

In the pattern prayer given to us by our Lord, we are instructed to pray, *“Lead us not into temptation”* (Matthew 6:13) - this does not mean that we pray for total exemption from it, for we are in the world, a world which lieth in the wicked one, and we are not going to be taken from this world until our life has run its course. Christ knew that temptation from the Adversary would be common to all

His people, but in teaching them the manner in which they were to pray, it is that they should not fall under the weight of temptation, or succumb to the suggestions of Satan. Hence the following petition, *“Deliver us from evil”*. Our prayer is not to be delivered from the world, but rather from the evil of the world, which is all instigated by the evil one. In the verse before us (John 17:15), Christ’s petition is not for immunity, but for victory and conservation. Paul echoed this as he wrote to Timothy, *“And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto His heavenly kingdom”* (2 Timothy 4:18).

A most vital exhortation to us is found in 1 Peter 5:8: *“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the Devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour”*. Our Adversary walketh about; we never know when he is going to cross our pathway. The next verse instructs, *“Whom resist steadfast in the faith”*. The Devil can accost us in privacy, even in our devotions, bringing all manner of things into our minds when we should be concentrating upon spiritual matters. Although we are upon this earth, in *“the world”*, our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ. We are to be sober and vigilant so that we **maintain** that fellowship and communion, and not fall into the evil of letting Satan mar this vital communication.

The Devil is also adept in causing the child of God to become absorbed in business life, with success, position and riches in the world. *“But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith”* (1 Timothy 6:9,10). Many a Christian has fallen right into this temptation when the Devil has put an easy way to success before them. This is a hurtful lust. Young people in particular, need to beware of being beguiled by such foolishness; *“Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be*

*added unto you” (Matthew 6:33).*

The Devil is an extremely skilled strategist; he knows individual weaknesses and temperaments, and he adapts and adjusts his suggestions accordingly. He even has an ecclesiastical approach which is intensely subtle. This takes many forms; carnal attractions and gimmicks in evangelism and worship; human eloquence, intellectual ability and scholastic attainment in the ministry. Great numbers have fallen victim to these pseudo-spiritual suggestions which stem from the father of lies. Another of his very dangerous devices is to inflame men with a desire for pre-eminence in a church, causing them to hanker for official positions in an assembly of God’s people. What havoc and damage has been caused to fellowships by the appointment of men to positions of authority, for which they were never fitted. The stealth of the Adversary lies at the back of all such misguided appointments.

An elder must be well taught, *“not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into condemnation of the devil. Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil”* (1 Timothy 3:6,7). To be well taught does not mean that he is to be clever, quick-witted and able to immediately lay his tongue to an isolated verse of Scripture to prove any situation; rather does it mean grounded in the truth, balanced, wise and experienced. Without these qualities he will fall into the condemnation of the Devil. *“Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without”*. How do associates at work view the man? What kind of a name has he in the business world? What do neighbours think of him? Is he patient, gentle? Does he have an aptitude for teaching? Does he manifest grace in his heart, or is he rough in his manner and approach? When occasion arises, does he speak the truth in love, or harshly state the facts? Would those in trouble seek his counsel, or would they give him a wide berth? The standing of a man in the eyes of them which are without must be

given careful consideration, as well as his standing in the local assembly, or else he will fall into reproach, meaning ‘shame’ or ‘disgrace’. This, says Paul, is “*a snare of the devil*”. Satan is always behind these many traps!

Our Lord said to three of His disciples, “*Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation*” (Matthew 26:41); be vigilant that the evil one does not ensnare you. We are to watch that we be not careless, and we are to pray that we be not self-confident. In this matter of watching, it is more than a guard against actual sins; it is the secret motives which control us. **This** is where the ‘evil one’ starts, deep in the human heart; he first works by suggesting things which seemingly could be advantageous. This was his basic and primary approach to Eve in Eden; it was successful and his tactics have never changed.

Our blessed Lord knew our exposure and vulnerability to the ‘evil one’ whilst we are in the world, so He prayed, and still prays, “*Keep them from the evil*”.

W.H.Molland

## The Urim and the Thummim

An increasing lack of appreciation and depth of understanding is apparent among Christians today concerning the Atonement and High Priestly work of Christ. There can be little doubt that this is due to a neglect in teaching of the Old Testament types, particularly those relative to the tabernacle, the priesthood and the offerings. It is in these profound figures and symbols that the many aspects and fine points of the Mediator’s amazing work are elucidated and made more understandable to us. These things are historical and have long since ceased; they were “*a figure for the time then present*”

(Hebrews 9:9), nevertheless, a thorough grounding in these types is essential to a sound understanding of that which is pivotal to the faith.

The Mosaic economy and Levitical system was an order set up by God for His glory and Israel's good for that particular time, "*ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation*" (Hebrews 9:10). However the Scriptures make it abundantly clear that they were patterns of heavenly things and better sacrifices; they were figures of the true (cf Hebrews 9:23,24). The prime object of the whole of the Old Covenant order was to foreshadow and point to the New Covenant, with a great High Priest, not of the Aaronic order but as is testified of Him, "*Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec*" (Hebrews 7:17). He is the Christ, the sent One of God, the Mediator of the New Covenant (cf Hebrews 9:15). He "*was once offered to bear the sins of many*" (Hebrews 9:28); He offered one sacrifice for sins forever and by His one offering, all those sanctified (the elect of God), are perfected forever (cf Hebrews 10:14). He now sits at the right hand of God (cf Hebrews 10:12); there He continueth, having an unchangeable priesthood, ever living to make intercession for His people (cf Hebrews 7:24,25); appearing in the very presence of a thrice holy God on their behalf (cf Hebrews 9:24). These are glorious, well-known and frequently quoted New Testament truths, but most Christians have only a scant knowledge of the tremendous detail contained in the Old Covenant order which are "*figures of the true*". All has been written for the learning and instruction of those who live in the New Covenant age. Without a knowledge of the Pentateuch (the books of Moses), much of the content of the New Testament epistles cannot be fully appreciated.

The **Urim** and the **Thummim**, although forming an important part of the regalia worn by Aaron, are two of the most neglected objects of the Mosaic economy. It has to be admitted that this is somewhat of a mysterious subject and most commentators have little to say on it.

Despite their apparent disinterest, the fact remains that these two articles are mentioned in the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, 1 Samuel, Ezra and Nehemiah and therefore **cannot** be unimportant. Sadly, some have put bizarre, superstitious interpretations upon these objects, even suggesting that they might have been akin to the little heathen Teraphims (images). Such thoughts are profane and are to be immediately rejected. The Holy Spirit does not inspire thoughts of this nature concerning the garments of “*glory*” and “*beauty*” designed by God Himself, to be the attire of one, Divinely ordained for such a holy office (cf Exodus 28:1,2).

When confronted with a subject such as this, which undoubtedly has an element of obscurity, a careful approach must be made but most certainly it is not to be ignored, because it is so frequently alluded to in the Word of God. Our guideline in such a situation is, “*The secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law*” (Deuteronomy 29:29). Where there is no revelation, it is presumption to pry; mortal man is not to be wise above that which is written. Our prayer must always be, “*Keep back Thy servant also from presumptuous sins*” (Psalm 19:13); to be presumptuous, or to presume is sin. On the other hand we must never overlook those things which **are** revealed and **do** belong unto us. It is by perseveringly searching the Scriptures, “*comparing spiritual things with spiritual*” (1 Corinthians 2:13), that we learn and are guided by the Holy Spirit into the truth. It is the diligent, not the dilatory, who are made fat (cf Proverbs 13:4). Not to receive that which God **has** revealed is as heinous a sin as presumption. For this very reason, the minister or teaching elder is required of God to “*labour in the Word and in doctrine*” (1 Timothy 5:17); such are approved of God, **workmen** who rightly divide (expound) the Word of Truth (cf 2 Timothy 2:15).

The Holy Scriptures do reveal a considerable amount of detail concerning the **Urim** and the **Thummim**. There can be no doubt that they were two separate objects, but what they actually were we are not told, neither was any command given to Moses to make them; he was simply told to put them into the breastplate of judgment (cf Exodus 28:30). The breastplate was a carefully designed fabric, folded over to form an interior pocket or pouch, one span (9 ins) square, upon which were twelve stones representing the twelve tribes of God's earthly people. This breastplate, with the names of these chosen people, was bound to the High Priest upon his breast. *“And Aaron shall bear the names of the children of Israel in the breastplate of judgment upon his heart, when he goeth in unto the holy place, for a memorial before the Lord continually”* (Exodus 28:29).

As with all the explicit particulars of both the tabernacle and the priesthood, **all** was a shadow of good things to come, figures of that which in later generations would become reality. Thus it was with the **Urim** and the **Thummim**, whatever they may have been. The starting point for this investigation of these two rather abstruse articles must be their meaning, quoting Strong's Hebrew and Chaldee Dictionary: Urim - 'light', 'brilliancy', 'fire'; Thummim - 'perfection', 'complete truth'. Knowing that Christ is prefigured in all the detail of the Mosaic economy and Levitical system, these definitions remove the element of mystery.

The **Urim** - the emblem of light, brilliancy and fire. With this enlightenment, we examine the Scriptures: Eleazar, the priest, asked counsel after the judgment of the Urim before the Lord. At his word, the children of Israel went out and at his word they came in (cf Numbers 27:18). What the Urim was is not important, the vital point is what it signified; through this means, in certain circumstances, the mind of Jehovah was conveyed to His people. Light was given through the Urim. This corresponds with New

Covenant truth, *“Whatsoever doth make manifest is light”* (Ephesians 5:13). Thus it was in the Mosaic era, the High Priest with the Urim in his breastplate, became the channel by which God made manifest His counsels. The interpretation is obvious. Christ is the anti-type of the Urim; He, the great High Priest, makes known the eternal purposes of God. Things which were obscure, to which men’s eyes were blinded, are revealed in and through Him. He makes known to His own the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven; He conveys to us with brilliancy, the hope of eternal life - the **Urim** indeed. He is light, *“in Him is no darkness at all”* (1 John 1:5). The mind and will of God is perfectly revealed to Him, and He is the one and only means whereby this is communicated to His people. *“In Him was life; and the life was the light of men .... That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world”* (John 1:4,9); *“Then spake Jesus .... saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life”* (John 8:12). Most assuredly, Christ is the reality of which the Urim was the figure; the light of the knowledge of the glory of God shines in the face of Jesus Christ (cf 2 Corinthians 4:6).

The **Thummim** - the emblem of perfection and complete truth. Throughout the pages of Holy Writ, is given the evidence that Christ was the absolute fulfilment of the figure of the Thummim: He *“is over all, God blessed for ever”* (Romans 9:5); every perfection was in Him; concerning His humanity, even at conception He was Divinely designated *“that holy Thing”* (Luke 1:35). As the incarnate One, the Mediator, the Father said, *“This is My beloved Son”* (Matthew 3:17); He was the One in whom the Father delighted (cf Isaiah 42:1); grace was poured into His lips (cf Psalm 45:2), *“Never man spake like this Man”* (John 7:46), there was no deceit in His mouth (cf Isaiah 53:9). He was the *“Lamb without blemish and without spot”* (1 Peter 1:19), *“He is altogether lovely”* (Song of Solomon 5:16), He did no sin, He knew no sin, in Him there was no

sin; He was holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners. This is He of whom the Thummim is but figurative; a High Priest in whose very bosom was absolute perfection and unsullied truth.

These two articles were not separated, they were together in the pocket of the breastplate, the one signifying **light** and the other **truth**. Concerning the Lord Jesus Christ, we frequently find two of His holy perfections linked together in the Scriptures. For example, He was “*full of **grace and truth***” (John 1:14); He is **light**, He is **love** (cf 1 John 1:5 & 1 John 4:8), each are Divine qualities but they must never be separated; like the Urim and the Thummim, they lie together in the heart of the great High Priest of the New Covenant. He is gracious and He loves, but His grace is sovereign, His love is holy, they reign through righteousness (cf Romans 5:21), always within the compass of light and truth. In all His counsels and deliberations, there is a perfect balance. He is eternal light and the absolute embodiment of truth as He emphatically stated, “*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). Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, wrote, in Him “*are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*” (Colossians 2:3); little wonder it was prophesied that “*His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor*” (Isaiah 9:6).

In this capacity of perfection and truth, He, the great High Priest, communicates and ministers to His people. He has perfect knowledge of the Father’s thoughts, “*the Father loveth the Son, and sheweth Him all things that Himself doeth*” (John 5:20). “*All things are delivered unto Me of My Father; and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him*” (Matthew 11:27); “*The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into His hand*” (John 3:35). Our great High Priest communicates these things to the believing, enquiring soul. To His friends, He says, “*All things that I have heard of My Father I have made known unto you*”

(John 15:15). Such ministry and communication is very wonderful, but it becomes infinitely more meaningful and precious when set against the background of these Old Testament types.

Aaron's garments were said to be made with **cunning work** (cf Exodus 28:6-15); the Biblical definition of this is 'well designed', 'carefully thought out'. The breastplate which had the twelve stones, each stone engraved with the name of one of the twelve tribes of Israel (God's chosen people), was to be worn upon the chest of Aaron. Incorporated within this breastplate was the pocket or pouch, mentioned earlier, formed by the double thickness (cf Exodus 28:16). Into this cavity was placed the **Urim** and the **Thummim** (cf Exodus 28:30). This breastplate was then chained to Aaron's shoulders and bound to him with a lace of blue, to be worn before the Lord continually. The fine detail of all this is graphically set out in Exodus 28:15-30. The cardinal point relating to these two objects is that they lay right **upon** the breast of the high priest, and immediately **behind** the twelve stones representing the people of God. What typology! Could anything be more profound? - 'well designed', 'carefully thought out'. Lying right behind us, the chosen people of God, is the One who, in absolute perfection, verity and truth, can give light upon any and every matter, communicating to us through His Word all the treasures, mysteries and wonders of God's eternal purposes of grace, to the end that we might be filled with all the fulness of God (cf Ephesians 3:19).

The High Priest of our profession has passed into the heavens, nevertheless we lie upon His heart and by His Holy Spirit, He is ever present to guide, help and lead us. He is concerned with the minutest difficulty or the strangest circumstance in our lives. Let us never hesitate to approach Him to ask counsel, for He, the **perfect Urim**, is always there to be contacted.

The other meanings of the **Urim** - 'brilliance' and 'fire', must not be

passed over, for, as with every aspect of truth, it is not perfect unless it is all kept together; such is the profundity of these two objects. The Book of the Revelation helps to clarify these definitions: *“And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks; and in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle. His head and His hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and His eyes were as a flame of fire; and His feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and His voice as the sound of many waters. And He had in His right hand seven stars: and out of His mouth went a sharp twoedged sword: and His countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength”* (Revelation 1:12-16). Who can fail to see in these verses the brilliance and fire of the **Urim** fulfilled in the anti-type.

This portion of Scripture gives a further glimpse of Christ in His High Priestly character. He is here seen in the midst of seven churches (cf Revelation 1:20), surveying these companies of His people. The Scripture states, *“His eyes were as a flame of fire”*; the thought being conveyed here is ‘searching’, ‘penetrating’. The light, and holy perfections of the Divine **Urim** and **Thummim** was scrutinizing local churches in Asia Minor and with all the perception of Deity, the great High Priest says, *“I know thy works”*. Because of His Divine insight, He could give words of encouragement or rebuke as He saw fit.

He functions in precisely the same manner in 2002 A.D., moving among the churches of today. He has only one standard in doctrine and in practice; that is, *“All the counsel of God”* (Acts 20:27), holiness becometh His house for ever (cf Psalm 93:5). He, who has an unchangeable priesthood in the heavens, marks everything that defiles or is irregular amongst those who profess His name. With eyes which penetrate into every activity in a local church, and with the brilliance of the sun shining in its strength, He registers all

blemishes, litter, stains and dust. Through His Word, He raises His warning voice against all the declension and delusions evident in so many churches of this age in which we live. To those who, like the Ephesians, have left their first love, He says, *“Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent .... or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent”* (Revelation 2:5). The church is to be ordered and run, not as men **think** or **choose**, but according to the New Testament pattern, consciously gathering to the name of the Lord. Only then will they *“worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness”* (Psalm 29:2).

The **Urim** and the **Thummim** was placed within *“the breastplate of judgment”* (Exodus 28:30). He who sits at the right hand of the majesty on high, is a **King-Priest**; He reigns and rules in equity and holiness. The brilliancy of His ‘light’ and the perfection of His ‘complete truth’ as depicted by the Urim and the Thummim is the **only** communication which we shall ever receive from Him; this communication is His Holy Word and it is mandatory in every detail. Therefore *“Hear counsel, and receive instruction, that thou mayest be wise in thy latter end”* (Proverbs 19:20).

W.H.Molland

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## A Word about Controversy

Many religious persons have a dread of controversy, and wish truth to be stated without reference to those who hold the opposite errors. Controversy and a bad spirit are, in their estimation, synonymous terms, and strenuously to oppose what is wrong is considered as contrary to Christian meekness. Those who hold this opinion seem to overlook what every page of the New Testament lays before us. In all the history of our Lord Jesus Christ we never find Him out of controversy. From the moment He entered on the discharge of His office in the synagogue of Nazareth, until He expired on the cross, it

was an uninterrupted scene of controversy. Nor did He, with all the heavenly meekness which in Him shone so brightly, treat error and truth without a reference to those who held them, or study to avoid giving its proper appellation to those corruptions in doctrine or practice that endangered the interest of immortal souls. His censures were not confined to doctrines but included the abettors of false principles themselves. And as to the apostles, their epistles are generally controversial. Most of them were directly written for the express purpose of vindicating truth and opposing error, and the authors of heresies do not escape with an abstract condemnation of their false doctrine. Paul again and again most indignantly denounces the conduct of opposers of the gospel and by name points out those against whom he cautions his brethren. When Hymenaeus and Alexander erred concerning the faith and when he delivered them unto Satan, that they might learn not to blaspheme, he did not compliment them as amiable and learned persons. Even the apostle who treats most of love, and possessed so much of that spirit which was eminently manifested in the Divine Master, does not avoid controversy; nor in controversy does he study to avoid severity of censure on the opposers of the truth.

In the examples of opposing error left on record for our imitation, we perceive nothing of that frigid spirit of indifference which smiles on the corrupters of the Word of God, and shuns to call heresy by its proper name. With what holy indignation do the apostles denounce the subtle machinations of the enemies of the gospel! In vain shall we look among those faithful servants of the Lord for anything to justify that trembling reserve which fears to say decidedly that truth is truth or that error is error. In what style, indeed, should perversions of the truth of God be censured? Ought they to be treated as mere matters of opinion on which we may innocently and safely differ? Or ought they to be met in a tone of solemn, strong and decided disapprobation? Paul warned Christians against men who arose from among themselves, "*speaking perverse things to*

*draw away disciples after them*”, and instead of complimenting false teachers in his day, denounced an angel from heaven on the supposition of his preaching another gospel. And if an apostle was withstood to the face when he was to be blamed, are the writings of those who subvert the gospel to be passed on without rebuke?

While a spirit of lukewarmness and indifference to truth is advancing under the mask of charity and liberality, there is a loud call on all Christians to “*stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel*”, to present a firm and united phalanx of opposition to error under every name, from whatever quarter it may approach, and not to “*stumble in their ways from the ancient paths*”. Should believers become unfaithful to their trust, and be seduced to abandon their protest against false doctrines? They may gain the approbation of the world, but what will this avail when compared with the favour of God?

Robert Haldane

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### ***Editorial***

Questionable teaching and faulty practice is increasingly prevalent today among individual Christians and fellowships which once were considered stable. There are many contributory factors to this, behind which is the **subtlety** of the great Adversary. Therefore great vigilance on the part of all God’s people is necessary.

There are teachers abroad claiming appropriate designations who are very popular. They appear on the platforms of various conferences and seminaries with a great flourish of theological knowledge, scholastic ability, zeal and persuasiveness. By this, many Christians are impressed, some even convinced that such seeming intellectuals are bound to be sure guides. This is not always the case! All teaching is to be tested by the Word of God. Much that is

propagated at evangelical and reformed conferences and seminaries is of little help to individual Christians or local churches. There are not a few instances where long-term harm has been caused by these so-called impressive lectures and influential courses. It is clearly apparent that those engaged in these supposedly highly necessary seminars are, in the main, men of very mixed beliefs, coming from churches which differ greatly, yet they appear together from time to time in various assumed academies. These lecturers, or speakers, may be given the subjects they are to handle, but how can the **unity** of the faith and uniformity of New Testament practice ever be furthered when the ‘teachers’ are of such varied persuasions? It appears that provided there can be some form of agreement on what is erroneously termed ‘primary truth’, other matters can be overlooked. Consequently much teaching is never touched upon in these circles, whilst certain other views and beliefs are voiced with fervour and vehemence. Sadly many pastors and elders have been greatly influenced by some of these prominent figures who are on the circuit of these ever increasing conference centres and theological seminaries. In consequence, bewilderment and confusion is evident amongst numerous companies of believers where there should be unity and cohesion.

It is the role of the **God-ordained** minister to labour in the Word and in doctrine, in order to feed the flock of God, over which the Holy Ghost has made him an overseer, keeping back nothing that is profitable, rather setting forth all the counsel of God (cf Acts 20:20,27,28), without fear or favour to either saint or sinner. Only in this way are believers edified and a local church really established in the faith. No aspect of doctrine is to be suppressed and no Biblical practice spurned, if any gathering of God’s people is to be brought to a unity of the truth, all speaking the same things.

It is deplorable to witness the readiness with which Christians today will assemble, sitting for hours listening to an historic lecture or a theological treatise and yet are disinclined to listen to a solid

exposition of the Word of God. That which is of a scholastic nature needs to be very carefully assessed; there might be a place for it in the church, but it is a **very** limited place. History bears evidence to the dangers of ‘Scholasticism’. By such evidence all church leaders should be warned, for it is evident from notices and advertisements appearing regularly in the Christian press, that there is a widespread gullibility to this trend. Ample proof of this dangerous drift towards the academical is evidenced in statements made in various magazines, the perusal of theological syllabuses and access to ‘Christian’ websites. Recently it was stated that the church needed more theologians; correctly defined, theology means ‘the science of God and of Christianity’. Surely the desperate need of the church is an awareness of the intrinsic **holiness** of God and the absolute **authority** of His inspired Word. This will only be brought about by the work of the Holy Spirit through the Scriptures, not by theological training or studies in the science of God, or of Christianity.

How polemical subjects appeal! For example, what books have been written and lectures given to refute evolution. Christians will avidly read such literature and gather in large numbers to hear a Christian lecturer relate facts and findings, plus a few clever arguments, only to be told, in conclusion, that the Bible is true after all! Why is it that those who profess to be true Bible-believing people, are caught up with these things? Are not the just to “*live by faith*”? The Divinely inspired, inerrant Word states “*that the worlds were framed by the Word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear*” (Hebrews 11:3). The attitude of every child of God should be, ‘God has said it, I believe it’; that is final! Academics and intellectuals however, think that they must **mentally** convince their adherents by scientific means, detailed analysis and carefully worded compositions. In this there is great danger, many being convinced by the words of mortals, rather than an unwavering faith, belief and absolute confidence in the Scriptures of Truth. This drift towards the writings and lectures of men should

set alarm bells ringing in those who strive to live according to “*the simplicity that is in Christ*” (2 Corinthians 11:3). Recently a well known and popular figure in ‘reformed’ circles wrote on a very important and precious subject in which he quoted extensively from the Puritans. The following statement was then made: “This is sound Puritan divinity”. ‘Divinity’ means ‘the quality of being Divine’, ‘Deity’, ‘Godhead’. There are Christians who totally repudiate such statements. Is not the Word of God the only court of appeal? Do true believers need the Puritans and Protestant reformers to convince them of the truth? Indeed, how many of these ‘Reformers’ preached “*all the counsel of God*”? Yet these mortal men are often blasphemously termed ‘the Divines’. It is grievous that men in the ‘reformed’ school lay such stress upon historical Confessions of Faith and Ancient Creeds, in which is contained much that is at variance with Holy Scripture. It is a common practice with those of this ilk to quote extensively from ancient writers (unheard of by the majority of Christians), yet they are set forth as bona fide and unchallengeable. Tragically many Christians are influenced by this apparent show of learning.

These may be the methods of an intellectual, or one who could be described as a ‘speaker’ or ‘lecturer’, but it is not preaching in the Biblical sense. Biblical preaching needs no other foundation, backing or confirmation than the Scriptures themselves. All other methods tend to be the display of fleshly knowledge. Invariably, this is the precursor to the serious canker of scholasticism. The arch-deceiver knows that his time is short and works with increasing stealth and furtiveness, seeking if it were possible, to deceive even the elect. Therefore more than ever before, the alarm needs to be sounded, “*Be not carried about*” (Hebrews 13:9).

### **Visiting Preachers D.V.**

Lord’s Day	7 July	Mr F.J.Harris (Cheltenham)
Lord’s Day	22 September	Mr A.T.McNabb (Dudley)