

January – March 2003

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**North Road Chapel (Evangelical)
BIDEFORD**

Lessons from John's Gospel

chapter seventeen

“Sanctify them through Thy truth: Thy Word is truth” (John 17:17)

The subject of **sanctification** is a cardinal article of Christian doctrine to which our attention is frequently drawn in Holy Scripture. There are two main aspects concerning it, **positional** and **experimental**.

In the eternal purposes of God the Christian has been sanctified, or set apart by Divine decree. Before the worlds had an existence or man was created, God chose a remnant to Himself out of a fallen race, yet to be born. These would be **separated** from a perishing world to be vessels of mercy unto honour, **selected** by sovereign election and **called** to be holy. *“According as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love”* (Ephesians 1:4); *“God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: whereunto He called you by our gospel”* (2 Thessalonians 2:13,14). Because we were sovereignly elected, we not only heard the gospel, but by the Holy Spirit's invincible power, we believed the truth which it contained; this is that sanctification, or setting apart by God the Father in a past eternity, made real and vital to us personally - this is the **positional** aspect. We are ‘in Christ’, accepted in the Beloved, an heir of God and joint-heir of Jesus Christ; nothing can annul this.

“Of His own will begat He us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures” (James 1:18). We are a peculiar, or an exclusive people, selected by God and effectually called by the gospel, but we are *“in the world”*; having still the old nature within, and the Devil continually dogging our footsteps.

Christ had already prayed that we might be kept from the evil; now He prays that we might be sanctified - this is the **experimental** aspect of our sanctification. It is not sufficient to be preserved from evil; we are to strive for holiness of life: *“Depart from evil, and do good”* (Psalm 34:14), *“Cease to do evil; learn to do well”* (Isaiah 1:16,17). This is summarized in the first Psalm, *“Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in His law doth he meditate day and night”* (Psalm 1:1,2); the New Testament counterpart is, *“Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God”* (Romans 6:11-13). The man or woman brought to salvation, and to spiritual life in Christ, is to eschew what God has forbidden, and practice that which God has commanded. *“That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness”* (Ephesians 4:22-24); this is the same truth put in a different way. There has to be a ‘putting off’ and a ‘putting on’; this alone leads to true holiness and is known theologically as experimental, practical or progressive sanctification.

Our **positional** sanctification was due solely to the grace of God. He chose us, He provided our redemption in Christ and He called us by His Spirit. We responded to His call, we believed the truth. In **experimental** sanctification (holy living in this evil world), we are also absolutely dependent upon Divine help and supplies of grace from above; of ourselves we cannot live to God’s honour and glory. Nevertheless, as in **positional**, so in **experimental** sanctification

there must be a response, it is not automatic. “*We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that **we should walk in them***” (Ephesians 2:10). The paths of righteousness are the paths ordained of God for His people, but we have to determine, by God’s grace, to walk in them. “*This is the will of God, even your sanctification*” (1 Thessalonians 4:3), but it is a progressive work: “*though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed **day by day***” (2 Corinthians 4:16). This practical aspect of sanctification is a day by day experience, it is not a work which is done immediately, nor is it fully accomplished as a once-for-all attainment upon earth. Some sections of the professing church teach **entire** sanctification, but upon the authority of Holy Scripture, this is heretical teaching and it has to be refuted. The apostle Paul wrote, “*Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus*” (Philippians 3:12-14). This same apostle was ever aware of his shortcomings and in Romans chapter seven, he was Divinely inspired to write on this very matter: “*For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I*” (v.15); “*For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do*” (v.18,19); “*But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?*” (v.23,24). He confesses he had not “*already attained*”, he counted not himself “*to have apprehended*”, he was not “*already perfect*” **but**, he says, “*I follow after*”, I am “*reaching forth*”, “*I press toward the mark*” . This is

progressive, ongoing sanctification; this is what Christ is praying for His people, in the verse which is before us.

The means, or the manner in which Christ's request is to be accomplished is by, or through the truth; He then immediately adds, "*Thy Word is truth*". In the Scriptures we have the revealed will of God for His people in all ages. As our minds are enlightened through the Word of truth, we see the will of God and the course He would have us to take in this world, so by His grace in our hearts, we willingly **accept** His will and determinately set our feet upon that very pathway. This is practical sanctification but it is by **the Word** that we learn; by "*the acknowledging of the truth which is after Godliness*" (Titus 1:1). Godliness, which is expected of every one of us, will not come just by becoming acquainted with the Word of God; there must be the acknowledgment of it **as the truth**. God, by His grace, has brought us to salvation in Christ; He has left us in the world to be to the praise of the glory of His grace. This can only be as we manifest to the world the amazing change that grace has made in our hearts. He which has called us is holy, so are we to be holy in all manner of conversation (cf 1 Peter 1:15). We shall only know such a manner of life if we are instructed and also accept the instruction, acknowledge it and live accordingly. The Scriptures are to be our sole rule in faith and practice. If a Christian lives their life outside of the Word of truth, allowing things in their life which the Word of God condemns or engaging in pursuits and practices for which there is no Divine Mandate, then that Christian will know nothing of **progressive** sanctification.

"*Sanctify them through Thy truth: Thy Word is truth*" (John 17:17). The truth basically comes to us in two ways: the private study of the Word and the public ministry. The latter is the God-ordained means of the expounding and explaining of that truth, therefore the hearing of the public preaching of God's Word plays a major part in our instruction. However a word of caution is needed here because the

best of men are fallible, but what is cause for even greater vigilance is that many of the men who are in the pulpits today, do not handle the lively oracles of God faithfully. Some blatantly distort its truth, some wilfully ignore parts of it and others, in order to appear gracious and kind, only preach a diluted message. None of these ministers will ever lead the child of God into the right paths whereby the sanctification for which Christ is praying, is effected. Whilst upon earth, our Lord specifically said to His own, “*Take heed **what** ye hear*” (Mark 4:24). It is a very solemn thing for a child of God to continually sit under an unsound, or even a deficient ministry, because the former creates the great risk of the listener imbibing something of the error taught; the danger of the latter is that of the listener losing all firm conviction. When vital issues are never stressed, and controversial matters are by-passed, compromise sets in; consequently, things are rarely questioned. If true Christians took to heart these words of the Great Head, “*Take heed **what** ye hear*”, there would be a mammoth exodus from the gatherings throughout Christendom.

This is not the only thing Christ said on the subject of hearing; He also said, “*Take heed therefore **how** ye hear*” (Luke 8:18). When the Word of God is being expounded, we are to listen attentively, girding up the loins of our mind, endeavouring to so concentrate that we grasp the sense of that which is being communicated, so that as the exposition comes to an end, we can recognize it as being the truth. There is that inner persuasion that, although what has been said may have come as an arrow to our hearts, nevertheless we are bound to acknowledge that every word was according to the truth. If the Word of God is ministered consecutively, with no section ignored or passed over, and people are accustomed to hear “*all the counsel of God*” declared, they can soon detect deficiency and will readily mark error.

There is another meaning to our Lord’s words, “*Take heed **how** ye*

hear". It is not just that we might be able to distinguish its orthodoxy; it is that our sanctification shall be furthered by it and that we shall be drawn closer to Christ; our lives being the more transformed to His likeness and we become less conformed unto the world. Never must we form the notion that if we are sound in doctrine and rigidly contend for the faith, that is all that matters. This is a dangerous state of mind and can be a cunning device of Satan, by which much harm can result. We **are** to contend earnestly for the faith, but it is to be done in all wisdom and honesty. The all-important matter which Christ is praying for is, that we might be **sanctified** by the truth. This is on-going and it will never be completed upon earth; the older we get, the greater do we feel our need of it. If Christ did not see this matter of on-going sanctification in our lives to be of such paramount importance, then why did He so earnestly pray for it? May God, by His Holy Spirit, grant that we might be as concerned about this matter as is our Great Head .

W.H.Molland

Preliminary Announcement

ANNUAL BIBLE CONVENTION

Saturday 7 June 2003 D.V.

Preacher: Mr Achille Blaize (London)

The Two Natures

“That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (John 3:6); *“The flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary one to the other”* (Galatians 5:17). These and similar passages clearly connote that there are two distinct and diverse springs of action in the Christian, from which proceed evil and good works. The older expositors were accustomed to speak of these springs of action as “principles” - the principles of evil and holiness. Modern writers more frequently refer to them as “the two natures in the believer”. We have no objection against this form of expression, provided it be used to represent Scriptural realities and not human fancies. But it appears to us that there are not a few today who speak of the “two natures” and yet have no clear conception of what the term signifies, often conveying a faulty idea to the minds of their hearers.

In ordinary parlance “nature” expresses, first the result of what we have by our origin: and second, the qualities that are developed in us by growth. Thus, we talk of anything bestial or devilish as being contrary to human nature - alas that the beasts so often put us to shame. More distinctly, we speak of a lion’s nature (ferocity), a vulture’s nature (feeding on carrion), a lamb’s nature (gentleness). A “nature” then describes what a creature is by birth and disposition. Now the Christian has experienced two births, and is subject to two growths. Two sets of moral qualities belong to him: the one as born of Adam, the other as born of God. Much caution needs to be exercised at this point, lest on the one hand we carnalize our conception of the new birth, or on the other hand, dwell so much on the two natures that we lose sight of the **person** who possesses them, and thus practically deny his responsibility.

In the interests of clarity we must contemplate these two natures

separately, considering first what we are as children of men, and then what we are as children of God. In contemplating what we are as men, we must distinguish sharply between what we are by God's creation, and what we became by our fall from that uprightness in which we were originally made, for fallen human nature is radically different from our primitive condition. Here too, great care must be taken in defining that difference. Man did not lose any component part of his being by the Fall: he still consists of spirit and soul and body. No essential element of his constitution was forfeited, none of his faculties were destroyed. Rather was his entire being vitiated and corrupted, stricken with a loathsome disease. A potato is still a potato when frozen; an apple remains an apple when decayed within, though no longer edible. By the Fall man relinquished his honour and glory, lost his holiness, and forfeited the favour of God; but he still retained his human nature.

It cannot be insisted upon too strongly that no essential part of man's complex make-up, no faculty of his being, was destroyed at the Fall, for multitudes are seeking to shelter behind a misconception at this very point. They suppose that man lost some vital part of his nature when Adam ate of the forbidden fruit, and that it is this loss which accounts for all his failures. Man imagines he is far more to be pitied than blamed. The blame, he supposes, belongs to his first parent, and he is to be pitied because deprived of his capability of working righteousness. It is in such a manner that Satan succeeds in deceiving many of his victims, and it is the bounden duty of the Christian minister to expose such a sophistry and drive the ungodly out of their refuge of lies. The truth is that man today possesses identically the same faculties as those with which Adam was originally created, and his accountability lies in the use he makes of those faculties, and his criminality consists in his abuse of the same. On the other hand, there are not a few who believe that at the Fall man received a nature which he did not possess before, and in his efforts to evade his responsibility he throws all the blame of his

lawless actions on that evil nature. Equally erroneous and equally vain is such a subterfuge. No material addition was made to man's being at the Fall, any more than that some part was taken from it. That which entered man's being at the Fall was **sin**, and sin has defiled every part of his person - but for that we are to be blamed and not pitied. Nor has fallen man become so helplessly the victim of sin that his accountability is cancelled: rather does God hold him responsible to resist and reject every inclination unto evil, and will justly punish him because he fails to do so. Every attempt to negate human responsibility must be steadfastly resisted by us.

The youth differs much from the infant, and the man from the immature youth; nevertheless it is the same individual, the same human person, who passes through these stages. Men we are, and shall ever remain: whatever internal change we may be subject to at regeneration, and whatever change awaits the body at resurrection, **we shall never lose our essential identity as God created us at the first.** Let this be clearly understood and firmly grasped; we are the same persons all through. Neither the deprivation of spiritual life at the Fall, nor the communication of spiritual life at the new birth, affects the reality of our being in possession of what we commonly call 'human nature'. By the Fall we did not become less than men; by regeneration we do not become more than men. That which essentially constitutes our manhood was not lost, and no matter whatever be imparted to us at regeneration, our individuality is never changed.

If the above distinctions be carefully borne in mind, particularly between what our nature essentially consists of and what it became by virtue of the changes passing upon it, then there should be less difficulty in our understanding what is signified by the Lord's assuming our nature. When the Son of God became incarnate, He took to Himself human nature. He was in every respect true Man, possessing spirit and soul and body: "*in all things it behoved Him to*

be made like unto His brethren” (Hebrews 2:17). This does not explain the miracle and mystery of the Divine incarnation, for that is incomprehensible; but it states the fundamental fact of it. Christ did not inherit our corruption, for that was not an essential of manhood. He was born and ever remained immaculately pure and holy; nevertheless, He took upon Him our nature intrinsically considered.

Reverting to our opening passage: *“that which is born of the flesh is flesh”*. Here *“the flesh”* is the name given to human nature as fallen - it must not be restricted to the body (as in a few passages it is), but understood (as generally in the New Testament) of the entire human constitution. In affirming *“that which is born of the flesh, is flesh”*, Christ reiterated the basic and unchanging principle - repeated no less than nine times in Genesis chapter one - that every creature brings forth *“after his kind”*. The quality of the fruit is determined by the nature of the tree that bears it: an evil tree cannot bring forth good fruit. Man’s fallen nature cannot yield that which is sinless. No matter how much fallen man may be educated, civilized, or religionized, in his natural state he cannot produce that which is acceptable to the thrice holy God. He must be born again - a new and sinless nature imparted to him.

This communication of Divine life to the soul is viewed in the New Testament under various figures. It is likened to the implanting of an incorruptible *“seed”* in the soul (cf 1 Peter 1:23, 1 John 3:9); to a cleansing of the heart, a *“washing of water by the Word”* (Titus 3:5, Ephesians 5:26); to a renovation of the will, or a writing of God’s Law in the mind (cf Hebrews 8:10). The figure of the *“seed”* conveys the idea of a subsequent growth; the washing of water suggests a process of cleansing only commenced; while that of God’s writing His Law in our minds intimates the durability and permanence of His work of grace. It is from this new life or nature, imparted by the Spirit, that all spiritual life proceeds.

We have no desire to belittle the marvel and miracle of the new birth: so far from it, we freely accept our Lord's declaration that it is a mystery beyond man's power to solve (cf John 3:8). If the communication of natural life be an enigma to human understanding, much more so is the impartation of spiritual life. Thus in our efforts to simplify one aspect of regeneration we seek to guard against falsifying it at another. What we wish to make clear is, that at the new birth no new faculties are added to man's soul, no addition is made to his essential threefold constitution. Previously, he possessed a spirit and soul and body; he does not now have a fourth thing bestowed upon him. It is the man himself who is born again. As at the Fall his person was vitiated, now his person is regenerated - the full effects of which will only appear at his glorification.

Having thus considered, very briefly, the two natures in the Christian, we must now distinguish sharply between them and the individual in whom they reside. A **nature** and a **person** are in many respects widely different. Whether unconverted or converted, the person is constitutionally the same: it is the one who was dead in trespasses and sins who has been Divinely quickened. It is identically the same individual who formerly was a child of disobedience, under condemnation, who is now justified and sanctified. It is to the person, and not to his nature that accountability attaches. Deeds belong to the individual and not to his nature. No amount of quibbling can gainsay the fact that in his heart even the unregenerate is conscious that he is responsible to act and live contrary to his fallen nature, and that he is justly culpable if he yields to his depraved inclinations. It is on this very ground that God will judge him in the Day to come, and so self-evidently righteous will this be that "*every mouth will be stopped*" (Romans 3:20) and God "*will be clear when He judges*" (Psalm 51:4). How many professing Christians today speak of "*the flesh*" in themselves and in others, in such a way as if its being an exhibition of the flesh thoroughly

explained matters. Were one to rebuke another for conduct unbecoming a child of God, and he replied, Yes, that is the flesh working in me, such language would plainly evidence an attempt to escape responsibility. If evil deeds by a Christian were excusable on the ground that the flesh still remains within him, then by parity of reason every sinner on earth could excuse himself and how then could God judge the world? In point of fact the unregenerate do, everywhere fall back on their sinful nature to escape condemnation, whereas if they listened to conscience they would certainly know that their nature never compelled them to commit a single sin. It inclined them, but they were responsible to control and resist it, and the essence of their guilt is that they did not.

It is the man who sins and is the sinner; it is the man who needs to be forgiven and justified; it is the man who is responsible to walk not in the flesh but in the Spirit. It is the same person all through. It is the **man** who is born again, and not a **nature**. True, at the new birth he receives a new life or nature, so that he now has two natures, and his responsibility is to mortify the old and feed, strengthen and be governed by the new. The flesh is in no wise improved by the presence of "*the spirit*", any more than weeds are bettered by planting flowers in their midst. The flesh and the spirit are contrary to each other, and our responsibility lies in making no provision for the former, acting according to the dictates of the latter.

A.W.Pink

Spiritual Insolvency

One of the petitions in the pattern prayer, commonly known as ‘The Lord’s Prayer, given by the Lord Jesus Christ during the Sermon on the Mount is, “*Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors*” (Matthew 6:12) or “*Forgive us our sins as we forgive everyone that is indebted to us*” (Luke 11:4).

We discover from this petition that human sin is reckoned by God as being **a debt**. The fact is “*all have sinned*” (Romans 3:23); every member of the human race is a sinner, therefore a debtor, one who has not rendered that which is his just due and failed to meet his liabilities. The obvious question is, To whom is the sinner in debt? The sinner is in debt to God, his Maker. What does he owe God and what are his liabilities? Man owes God implicit obedience. The creature is bound to the Law of God; he is obligated to that Law and he is accountable to its commands. Being in default of that Law and not paying his just due, which is obedience, he has run up a vast account; yea, he is hopelessly and irretrievably **in debt**.

A person who contravenes the law of this land is a debtor to the law and liable to imprisonment. This is how it is with the sinner. Because of disobedience man is a debtor; he cannot pay or discharge his responsibilities and is therefore guilty. In consequence he faces certain imprisonment, that imprisonment being an eternal sentence in hell. This is not a rash, fanatical statement. The natural man in his sin, is already condemned; he is simply awaiting the execution of the sentence. The liberty which he seems to enjoy until he is incarcerated, is in itself a bondage, for he is under the strong arm of the Law of God all the time, from which he will never escape. This is a terrible state, which the vast majority of mankind fail to realize. There is no liability like that of the debt of sin, it is fearful to contemplate, for mortal man has **nothing** wherewith to pay and so

clear his debt before a holy God.

An honest businessman will call a halt where it is obvious that his business is failing and financial disaster lies ahead. In such circumstances a receiver will be appointed, financial experts will scrutinise and assess the whole situation and list all the creditors, identifying the amounts owing to them. The firm's assets will be valued and realized and although the man himself may end up without a penny, the creditors will receive a percentage of what they are owed. There is however, nothing like this in the spiritual realm. Fallen man has **absolutely nothing** to bring to God; he has no assets whatsoever.

God created Adam, the head of the race, in His own image (cf Genesis 1:27). In his unfallen state, Adam was righteous; he had the wherewithal to render to his Creator all that was justly due to Him and to meet his every liability. There was no reason whatsoever why Adam should run into debt, but he did. He disobeyed his Maker, failing to meet his commitments and in consequence he became spiritually insolvent; further to this he bankrupted all his descendants. All the human race fell in Adam, the federal head; his ruin is ours. "*By one mans disobedience many were made sinners*" (Romans 5:19); "*In Adam all die*" (1 Corinthians 15:22). This is original sin; we have no righteousness, our capital is gone, we have nothing left to work on, nothing with which to trade. Impossible as this situation is, it is only the beginning, for original sin produces actual sin, which means we keep accumulating interest. Every day we live we sin and so the debt mounts ever higher. "*Innumerable evils have compassed me about*" (Psalm 24:7); "**Innumerable**", **countless sins**; the figures on the debit side of the ledger defy computation. When confronted with such a Scripture as, "*The thought of foolishness is sin*" (Proverbs 24:9), and one begins to contemplate the sins of the **mind** during a person's lifetime, which must be as a swarm of locusts for multitude, to say nothing of the

sins of word and deed; *“Who can understand his errors?”* (Psalm 19:12). Where is the man who has the faintest understanding of the magnitude of his debt? Would any dare to estimate the amount they owe to God? Even if we were called to prepare a case and produce a statement of accounts, where would we start? Our affairs are in such a state that no mortal man could possibly sort it out. The frightening thought is, however, that Almighty God has them carefully analysed and audited and He has a day fixed for an interview. *“He will set our sins in order before our eyes”* (Psalm 50:21). The Divine auditor is impeccable and exacting to the finest detail; there are no inaccuracies in the records of heaven and no evasion from the liability of sin, *“The judgment of God is according to truth Thou shalt not escape the judgment of God”* (Romans 2:2,3).

In this world a bad debtor does not like to be called to account; neither is he likely to be found in a place where his creditors are, for it would be extremely embarrassing to inadvertently meet them. Is not this so in the spiritual? Why do people not come to hear the Word of God preached and why are men of the world evasive of Christian company? Are they not afraid that the matter of sin may come up? They do not want to be reminded that *“every one shall give account of himself to God”* (Romans 14:12). The worldling wants to hear nothing of a day of reckoning, nor does he want contact with a servant of Christ who may confront him with the fact that he will one day be required to give account of his stewardship before the Judge of all the earth (cf Luke 16:2).

When an earthly debtor dies, death frees him of his debt. This is not so in the spiritual; the sinner who dies in his sin is not free. Inflexible justice has to be met; there is immediate distraint on the soul. In the New Testament, the rich man referred to in Luke 16:19-31 was, upon his death, immediately in hell. In a case of debt or fraud on earth, a man will often flee the country in an endeavour to escape his creditors. This cannot be done in the case of a sinner’s

death, for the moment he leaves this world, he is instantly arrested on the other side. *“Whither shall I go from Thy spirit? Or whither shall I flee from Thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, Thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, Thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall Thy hand lead me, and Thy right hand shall hold me”* (Psalm 139:7-10). *“Thy right hand”* - the strong hand of **almighty power** and **immutable justice** will never let go or release. This should give us some idea of the gravity of **spiritual insolvency** - it is an absolute, hopeless situation.

In the light of all this, it is understandable why fallen man has an aversion to God, even to wishing He did not exist. If only he could really believe that death was the end and that it was complete annihilation, how much more at ease he would be; but somehow such a thought does not ring true. There is the constant inner apprehension of **‘after death the judgment’** (cf Hebrews 9:27). It is not strange that man has this secret internal unease for, although a sinner, he has a conscience. He has a mysterious, personal persuasion that he cannot get away from his sin, for which he is accountable. Let serious illness befall him and this inner wrangling is accentuated, for he is hopelessly in debt to God. The bare facts are there; in legal terms a writ has been issued against the sinner by Divine justice. His debt is criminal. It would be strange if a court issued a writ against a man, granting seizure of his estate, together with a warrant for his arrest, and that man still had peace and joy in himself? Such a thing is impossible!

Is there no ray of hope? None whatsoever! The sinner is totally and irretrievably insolvent. However, the **Divine Creditor** speaks in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. He gives direction concerning prayer and in His instruction, He touches upon this very matter of debt; *“When ye pray”* say, *“Forgive us our debts”* (Matthew 6:12). What! Approach the thrice holy, sin hating, sin avenging God and

talk about my sins, even asking Him to forgive them? This is exactly what the Son of God is saying, it therefore must be thoroughly considered. The first thing to be noted in this petition, “*Forgive us our debts*”, is that there is an acknowledgment of the debt, a confession of sin. Self-opinionated, proud, fallen man is reluctant to do this, but when he becomes truly aware of his hopeless state and condition, he begins to think this way. He becomes desperately earnest over the matter of his debt, and will commence to pray, albeit falteringly. This is one of the first signs of a work of grace being wrought by the Holy Spirit: an awareness and confession of sin. Examples of this are found in Holy Scripture, “*God be merciful to me a sinner*” (Luke 18:13); “*I acknowledged my sin unto Thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord and Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin*” (Psalm 32:5).

Forgiveness is one of the first mercies God bestows upon repentant sinners; He alone can do this; “*Who can forgive sins but God only*” (Mark 2:7). This might appear to be an enigma, how a holy, righteous, immutable God can act in this way. The debt is there, the writ and warrant have been issued, and the sentence has been pronounced, “*The soul that sinneth, it shall die*” (Ezekiel 18:20). How then can God forgive the sinner in this way and discharge the guilty? What of the debt? What of Divine justice? What of the character of the Almighty? It must be stated categorically that in this matter of the forgiveness of sin, there is no overlooking the debt on the part of Almighty God. Divine justice must be fully met and those under sentence will know no release until the uttermost farthing is paid (cf Matthew 5:26).

It is on the basis of substitution and suretyship that God forgives the debt. Another has paid to the last farthing. It was for the very reason of substitution that the Son of God left heaven and came into this world as a man, that He might live a perfect life vicariously (on

behalf of) and die the sinner's death substitutionally. "Complete atonement He has made, and to the utmost farthing paid what'er His people owed" (Toplady); "*Jehovah God laid upon Him the iniquity of us all*" (Isaiah 53:6); "*Christ bore our sins in His own body on the tree*" (1 Peter 2:24). He came into this world for the express purpose of putting away the sins of repentant sinners by the sacrifice of Himself (cf Hebrews 9:26).

It is upon the ground of a full propitiatory work having been accomplished by Christ the Surety, for all the chosen, believing sinners, that forgiveness is granted by God. Concerning this forgiveness, it is written, "*I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins*" (Isaiah 43:25). This alludes to a creditor who, when the debt is paid, blots it out of his ledger and forgets it. A business man is only worried over a bad debt as long as the money is owing, but once settled and he has put a red line across the page and marked '**Paid**', that debt vanishes from his mind. This is what happens when a sinner repents of his sin and comes to God for forgiveness, pleading the finished work of atonement wrought by the Lord Jesus Christ. The great catalogue of our sins held in the strong room of the Divine law courts is opened, and through the sovereign grace of God, a red line is drawn across the pages; "*The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth us from all sin*" (1 John 1:7).

There is another picture in Holy Writ which gives further light and assurance; "*Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea*" (Micah 7:19). Here the imagery is a burial at sea, even in the depths of mid-ocean, a grave from which nothing can be disinterred. The sins of the believing sinner are in the ocean depths, they can never be exhumed. Like lead, they have sunk to the bottom, there they will lie undisturbed for the everlasting ages; they will **never** resurface. What a mighty work was that of the sinner's Surety in His atonement and what a wonderful position the forgiven sinner is brought into!

“I will cleanse them from all their iniquity, whereby they have sinned against Me” (Jeremiah 33:8); *“And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath He quickened together with Him, having forgiven you all your trespasses: blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took them out of the way, nailing it to His cross”* (Colossians 2:13,14). The believing sinner must never lose sight of the fact that the substitutionary work of Christ was a **full discharge**.

The sin of every sinner elected of God unto salvation was known to Almighty God; every single sin, past, present and future, with its consequent guilt, in all its reality was imputed/charged to Christ the Surety and He paid the debt in every detail and to the full amount at Calvary. When the Lord Jesus, the Saviour of sinners, was nailed to the cross, every one of their sins was nailed with Him; *“He took them out of the way”*. Mortal man would never had been bidden to pray after this manner, *“Forgive us our debts”*, if those debts had not been paid by another. It is because of this redemption which is in Christ Jesus, that those once **totally insolvent**, are not only cleansed of all the debt of sin and fully discharged, they enter into an **eternal inheritance**, being *“blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ”* (Ephesians 1:3), made kings and priests unto God to reign with Him in His eternal kingdom for ever and ever (cf Revelation 5:10 & 22:5).

“He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth the needy out of the dunghill: that He may set him with princes” (Psalm 113:7,8).

W.H.Molland

Editorial

Another milestone in human history has been reached; the year 2002 has gone and 2003 has been embarked upon. As time passes with such rapidity, so do parts of God's Word take on a greater significance; their relevance becomes more and more apparent to the current situation, both in the world and in the church. This gives a sure indication that time is running out and the end is fast approaching. In order that men be not taken unawares, God has given abundant warning and instruction. *"This know also that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy. Without natural affection, truce-breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high minded, lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God"* (1 Timothy 3:1-4). Does not this frightful list identify the world today? What of the church? *"The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables"* (2 Timothy 4:3,4); *"Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof Ever learning, and never able to come to a knowledge of the truth Evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived"* (2 Timothy 3:5,7,13). Could the professing church of this age be described in words more apposite?

These statements from Holy Writ are no doubt well known to us, but have they become so trite that we are unaffected by them? If this be the case, our profession is lacking in honesty and Godly sincerity. Such people were very common when Christ was upon earth. Addressing them, He said, *"When ye see a cloud rise out of the west, straightway ye say, There cometh a shower; and so it is. And when ye see the south wind blow, ye say, There will be heat; and it cometh*

to pass. Ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky and of the earth; but how is it that ye do not discern this time?" (Luke 12:54-56). The lawlessness, treachery and abominable filth in the world is a great concern to many men and women who are unregenerate; even they can see that things cannot continue in this manner. Regarding the professing church, there is gross mixture, laxity in doctrinal belief, abysmal carelessness in church practice. Multitudes who claim to be Christians, live just as worldlings and the vast majority of churches and chapels engage in activities and enterprises which would break the hearts of their founders.

Far away back in Old Testament history it is recorded, *"The Word of God was precious in those days; there was no open vision Eli was laid down in his place, and his eyes were dim, that he could not see"* (1 Samuel 3:1,2). The old priest had lost his vision; he was still in his place but he was lying down, oblivious to his task, consequently the lamp of testimony was burning very dim. How many are the lamp stands in this sad state today! Our watch word in this late hour must be, *"Let us not sleep as do others; but let us watch and be sober"* (1 Thessalonians 5:6); *"For the coming of the Lord draweth nigh"* (James 5:8).

Mr Roger Steward, who has become well known to us through his frequent visits from Cradley Heath over several years, is now resident in Bideford. It was with much joy that he was received into the membership of the Church on Lord's Day, 6th October. We thank God for such a valued addition.