

April – June 2003

**T
H
E

L
I
N
K**

**North Road Chapel (Evangelical)
BIDEFORD**

Lesson's from John's Gospel

chapter seventeen

“As Thou hast sent Me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world” (John 17:18).

Two primary objectives are set forth in this verse: the mission of Christ and the mission of the apostles, and the comparison between them is clearly shown by the two words *“even so”*.

The mission of Christ may be divided into three aspects: Who sent Him, the nature of His mission and the ends or purposes for which He was sent. Firstly, ‘Who sent Him?’. The verse itself supplies this answer; Christ says to His Father, *“Thou hast sent Me”*. Further confirmations of this truth are, *“God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the Law”* (Galatians 4:4), *“Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son”* (1 John 4:10). Secondly, ‘the nature of His mission’. Christ was sent into this world by God as Mediator, therefore the nature of His mission was a mediatorial work - He was a Divinely appointed Mediator. Thirdly, ‘the ends or purposes for which He was sent’. As Mediator, His two principal offices were that of prophet and priest.

Christ was officially sent by God as prophet, to tell out the wondrous message of God's grace to sinful men. *“He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up: and as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up for to read. And there was delivered unto Him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He hath anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives,*

and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord” (Luke 4:16-19). But this had to be ratified by His own blood, which pertains to His priestly office. “*God ... sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins*” (1 John 4:10); we are bidden to “*consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus*” (Hebrews 3:1). It is just the offices of Apostle/Prophet and High Priest which are mentioned because it was these two which were chiefly operative at His first advent; the office of Kingship would be manifested more particularly at His second advent, and is not the aspect being covered by this verse under consideration.

The opening verses of the Hebrew epistle are very important to the subject before us: “*God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son*”. In the role of gospel preachers, Christ is **first**; He was first commissioned, He then sent forth apostles and through their ministry came pastors, ministers and teachers. The mystery of redemption was never fully revealed until Christ came, then all the counsel of God pertaining to man’s salvation was clearly set forth. God **sent** His Son; Christ came into the world bringing, from the very bosom of the Father, the glorious truths of the Covenant of Grace. This brief outline of the mission of Christ will serve as a background for the comparison which is drawn to the mission of the apostles, as our Lord says in His prayer, “*even so*”.

The major part of our Lord’s prayer in John 17, is taken up with His own people rather than Himself, so it is essential that we recognise this emphasis; “*As Thou hast sent Me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world*”. It is “*them*” who are Christ’s great concern. Previously He had prayed, “*Keep through Thine own name those whom Thou hast given Me*”, “*Sanctify them through Thy truth*” (John 17:11,17). Whilst the Lord had **all** His people of

every generation in view in this prayer, it is equally true that there are more specific applications. The apostles present in the upper room were particularly in view here, so Christ prays, *“As Thou hast sent Me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world”*.

“Even so”, ‘in like manner’; how does this comparison hold good? There could appear to be problems with this brief background which has been set, for Christ was sent to redeem; the apostles were not redeemers; - Christ was not just a Prophet, He was also a Priest; the apostles were not priests in the sense that Christ was; - Christ was sent as the Divinely appointed Mediator, the God-Man; the apostles were only mortal men. It must be understood that in this comparison drawn by the Lord, there is some likeness but there is **not** equality. The similitude holds good inasmuch as the apostles were authorised ministers as was Christ; they were Divinely appointed, official messengers. *“He that receiveth you receiveth Me, and he that receiveth Me receiveth Him that sent Me”* (Matthew 10:40); *“He that heareth you heareth Me; and he that despiseth you despiseth Me; and he that despiseth Me despiseth Him that sent Me”* (Luke 10:16).

Christ was sent by God to declare the truth of the New Covenant, and He was the first commissioned to do so. In due time, He chose unto Himself twelve men who had a special, unique place in the foundation of the New Testament Church; they were **called** by the Great Head and **sent**, and they possessed special gifts. From the days of the apostles, others have been called by God in a lesser degree, and although Divinely authorised, fitted and sent, these true ministers and pastors are certainly **not** equal to the apostles of the New Testament, any more than the apostles were equal with the Lord. Nevertheless there are similarities; if this was not so, the Lord would not have drawn the comparison by saying, *“even so”*. The mission of Christ was unparalleled and by its Divine

uniqueness, it was clearly distinguished from the ministry of the apostles. Likewise the mission of the apostles was extraordinary and unmatched when compared to the work of the ministers who have followed them. Nevertheless, **all** have this in common - they must be **sent**. The apostles were appointed to write the New Testament scriptures; present day ministers are appointed to teach those scriptures and to preach its sacred Truth. *“How shall they preach, except they be sent?”* (Romans 10:15); this is the apostle Paul speaking of an ordinary minister, but the same comparison applies.

In this matter of preaching the Truth, we see the continuity of ‘God sent’ messengers; Christ was **sent** by the Father, the apostles were **sent** by Christ and, through the truth which they communicated by the Holy Spirit, others were called of God and **sent** - the ordinary, abiding gifts of minister, pastor, teacher, and by this means, a succession of preachers continues. This is the Divine pattern set out in our Lord’s closing words (known as the Great Commission), before He ascended into heaven; *“Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen”* (Matthew 28:18-20).

It is true that these words were spoken to the eleven who had been in the upper room, but to restrict this to the apostles only would be gross misinterpretation, for they would soon pass away. In this commission Christ promises His power and His presence right to the end of the world, not confined to the apostolic age but covering the ongoing succession of God-sent ministers of every generation. However, it is necessary to emphasize that only God-appointed men are in view; those who are called, sent and authorised. The

comparison drawn by our Lord in prayer to His Father is, “*As Thou hast sent Me ... even so have I also sent them*”. How do we know that a man is Divinely called and sent by God? The apostles were personally called by Christ when He was here upon earth, and He sent them forth to preach. Our Lord is now in heaven, so how can this apply? Does God really send men today, or do men study and take to themselves the office as a calling? - sadly, the latter is very prevalent. Thousands of men who stand in pulpits today are there because they have chosen it as a career. They may be eloquent and perhaps zealous Bibliolaters, even appearing very pious, but they have not been sent in the sense in which Christ prays in John 17:18.

“*I will give to Jerusalem one that bringeth good tidings*” (Isaiah 41:27). When the Lord gives to an earthly Jerusalem (a local church), one that bringeth good tidings, that church will know; they will recognize him as a God-sent messenger to them, a gift from the Great Head Himself. Christ does send forth labourers into His harvest (cf Matthew 9:38), yet local churches have to be very careful because “*many false prophets are gone out into the world*” (1 John 4:1); many false Christs have arisen (cf Matthew 24:24). Only **one** Christ was sent by God; only **twelve** apostles were called by Christ. God is as selective today in whom He sends, therefore a local church must be diligent in their discernment by identifying only those who evidence being Divinely fitted for this purpose.

“*Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God; who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life*” (2 Corinthians 3:5,6). No man **of himself** is sufficient for the true ministry of God’s Word. He may have a good brain, he may be clever in that he can master theology, study and remember church history, possess a grasp of doctrine and quote portions of Scripture with mental ease but this will not necessarily make him a God-appointed

minister. This Scripture states that “*the letter killeth*” - and it will; Biblical rigidity, if the spirit is not right, will kill any church. It is important for a minister to have a thorough comprehension of Biblical doctrine, to some degree be a theologian, and have a working knowledge of church history, but if his **confidence** is in this, his preaching will lack life; it may be correct but it will be dead orthodoxy. The Divinely-sent minister’s sufficiency will be in God, and the Spirit will put life into the words which he speaks, causing the hearers to be attentive. That same Spirit will rivet the words upon the minds of those that listen, it will be carried deep into their hearts so that by it the vital life of the church will be maintained and edified.

The apostle Paul said, in writing to Timothy, a young minister, “*I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that He counted me faithful, **putting me** into the ministry*” (1 Timothy 1:12). The **Lord** put the apostle into the ministry; Paul did not choose it as a vocation. The Lord put him there because He counted him faithful and so He enabled him. Some men are attracted to the office, but they are not fitted; some are fitted but not willing to accept the responsibility. Some, alas, thrust themselves into the position, activated by carnal desires, corrupt ambition or secular honour; what havoc is wrought in a church and dishonour brought to the Lord when this happens!

If a man is a God-sent minister, he will be suitably gifted, Divine enabling will be clearly manifest, his messages will always be accompanied by power and conviction; he will have something of the graces of Christ and the unction of the Holy Ghost.

W.H.Molland

The Word of God

This article is the substance of the address given by the minister of North Road Chapel, on the occasion of the Annual Meeting of the church members on 24 November 2002.

With much exercise of heart and prayerful concern, the subject for this church meeting is to be ‘The Word of God’, often referred to as ‘The Holy Scriptures’ or more commonly known as ‘The Bible’. The definition of ‘Bible’ is, ‘the sacred writings of Christianity’, ‘the textbook of Authority’, ‘the only Rule of Faith’. You may well question the need to speak on such a subject as this in the assembly of believers who meet at North Road Chapel for this is the very thing for which we stand. Thank God for this! Nevertheless, it is tragically possible for that for which we contend to become common-place, then reality becomes nominal.

This volume, the Bible, is sacred, it is holy, it is relevant and authoritative in every detail to all humanity throughout all nations in every generation. Speaking generally of today’s society, the Bible is an unknown Book. If the average person in the community were asked what they know of the Bible, they would state that they were not interested; religion was not their scene. In the many denominations, sects and parties of Christendom, some form of the Bible would be there, parts of it would be read, but much of its content would be called into question and some parts totally rejected. Those who profess to be orthodox, vehemently stand for the Divine inspiration of the Bible, its authenticity, being the Christian’s sole rule in faith and practice, the only authoritative guide to salvation, sanctification and glorification. Such professed tenets are commendable but are they always bona fide? A cursory glance will reveal that these claims on many issues are not sincere and genuine; their words, teachings and practices belie that which they affirm. Where this is the case, it may be concluded that their

professed belief in the **absolute authority** of Holy Scripture, which is in very truth the Word of God, has become nominal, although they themselves may be totally unaware of it. Knowing the slothfulness of our minds and the deceitfulness of our own hearts will make us realise that this may not be the unnecessary subject which we at first thought it to be.

‘The Word of God’ - what a theme! Dare any man ignore it or trifle with it? Dare any minister misrepresent it or any human, scorn its sacred truth? It must be apparent to any thinking Christian that there is a determined effort today, fanned by Satan himself, to completely banish the authority of the Bible. It should not be difficult to see the reason for this. This Book, in an uncompromising and absolute authoritarian manner, rebukes men for misconduct, telling them in the plainest of language what they must and must not do. It demands unqualified submission from mortal man, its standards and requirements are quite obviously, far above human thought or wisdom.

There is morality and spirituality within these pages which man, in his pride, rebels against. He wishes to establish his own righteousness, setting up his own principles according to his own vain imaginations; hence there is conflict with the Bible. If only the authority of the Scriptures could be totally obliterated, then mankind would obtain the long-coveted state of absolute independence, the fulfilment of their idyllic dream, total democracy, everyone pursuing their own course and living just as they please. Such a regime would result in universal lawlessness, for it is only as some of the Divine principles are still adhered to, that such a fearful state does not exist. Nevertheless, the Word of God predicts that in the *“end time”* such conditions will prevail. Total lawlessness - this is Satan’s goal and to attain it, that mighty monster is the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience (cf Ephesians 2:2). He, the great deceiver, the father of lies, influences fallen man to

believe a lie and thus destroy the Word of Truth, but ultimately he will be eternally put down; for the Lord will consume that wicked one with the spirit of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming (cf 2 Thessalonians 2:8).

All the propaganda of Satan against the Word of God is lying deception; this Book is the Word of Truth, it is all “*settled in heaven*” (Psalm 119:89), it is not an earthly publication. The lower heavens and the earth will one day pass away, but God’s Word will never pass away (cf Luke 21:33); not one jot or tittle of God’s Law will fail, all will be fulfilled (cf Matthew 5:18); “*the Word of the Lord endureth for ever*” (1 Peter 1:25); it is “*the Word of Life*” (Philippians 2:16). There is no “*death in the pot*” as there was in the pottage of Elisha’s day (cf 2 Kings 4:40); speaking of the Word of God as being ‘living’, the sense conveyed is, that within these pages, there is spiritual, inexhaustible, inextinguishable truth which pertains to life everlasting. The Bible is unique; there is nothing else in this world like it; it stands supreme. This is a fact of tremendous significance: there is **nothing** in this world which can aspire to this Holy Ghost-inspired volume. Its value is of more worth than **all** the riches of earth in total - not its paper and ink, not its binding, but the **Truth** which it contains. It treats of matters of the highest authority and the greatest importance to human existence.

Apart from the Word of Life, man has no hope. In this world, all around us are things and creatures which we look upon as living - trees, plants, flowers, insects, birds, animals, fish, men, women and children - nature lovers speak of all this as ‘the living world’. More appropriately, it should all be considered as **dying**. People speak of being in ‘the land of the living’; we are not, we are in the land of the dying. Death is the great monarch of this fallen world. At every turn we see the gruesome evidence and results of the universal sway of him who hath the “*power of death, that is the*

Devil” (Hebrews 2:14). By his subtle influence over Adam, the federal head of the human race, “*sin entered and **death** by sin; and so death passed upon **all***” (Romans 5:12). The fearful power of death has made this whole world a gigantic cemetery; this is a frightful picture, yet it is true.

Is there nothing in this dying world, all of which is subject to corruption, that is in reality, incorruptible? There is one thing: it is the incorruptible seed of **the Word of God**, that liveth and abideth for ever (cf 1 Peter 1:23). Remove this and the world would be bereft of its only everlasting, living commodity. Apart from the truth contained in the Bible, all is total disaster; this can be said of no other work. It has a perpetual freshness, inexhaustible, and to the earnest reader, even the most familiar passages yield as much, if not more, refreshment the hundredth time they are perused, as the first. The Bible is a fountain of living water and that water is always fresh and always refreshing. This ‘Living Word’ is pertinent to every person in every circumstance or situation; never does it become obsolete. Changes in human knowledge and opinion come and go; centuries of progress and so-called advancement does not affect the Bible one iota. Because this is a dying world, the writings of men are dying works; they may appear to sparkle with new light and life at one period of history, but later generations discover its information to be of no substance.

The Bible is the only book the world has ever seen or will see which gives precise, accurate and absolute reliable information upon every subject that it covers. Critics say that it is unscientific but this is not so; the Word of the Creator God is truly scientific and needs no scientist, archaeologist or any of their findings to prove its authenticity - this is **the Word of God**. Discoveries will never disprove it, progress will never overtake it, and what is more, the Bible imparts knowledge of which the scientist knows nothing. It declares that, “*If any man think that he knoweth anything, he*

knoweth nothing yet, as he ought to know" (1 Corinthians 8:2). It is only in the Word of God that mortal man is made aware of his true position - a ruined, perishing creature under the condemnation and power of death, totally without strength. The Bible never presents the career of the human race as progress, rather it is declared to be a career of disobedience and departure from God. Man has a preference for darkness rather than light, because his deeds are evil (cf John 3:19); his achievements and his civilization are never applauded in Scripture, indeed, nothing is said in Holy Writ in praise of man or his natural endowments, but on the contrary, it derides his wisdom as being foolishness with God. Never does the Bible predict an ultimate triumph as being the goal for human civilization, the very reverse is the case: *"Evil men shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived"* (2 Timothy 3:13). The Bible addresses all ranks and conditions of men: kings, rulers, parents, children, husbands, wives, masters, servants, rich, poor, bond and free; it is no respecter of persons. Like a road roller, it flattens all men to one common level.

There is nothing in this world which assumes authority over man, or that imposes laws upon him, which will never be rescinded, except the Bible. This is a most impressive fact. Every decree, command and precept is eternally authoritative - there is nothing else upon earth like this. Little wonder that Satan, the god of this world, and men who are his dupes, desire to be rid of this (to them!) troublesome Book, for then all absolute and final authority would be banished. Then indeed would be opened up that door of total lawlessness where the Devil can work, *"with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved"* (2 Thessalonians 2:9,10).

In the light of these facts, how we should value this Book; that we have it, that we can preach it, heralding forth its sacred truth, for it

is **the Word of God**. It is the only thing in this world which is absolute truth and can hold back the forces of evil, bringing light and life to fallen mortals who are dead in trespasses and sin. This Word is entrusted to us, His redeemed people; we are to promote it, sow it and scatter its sacred truth in all places and under all conditions. Every believer has this Word in his heart; it is "*written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart*" (2 Corinthians 3:3). By this means, the individual Christian is, or should be, moulded and guided. Such a sanctified life is one of the most powerful means of propagating the truth. There are multitudes who will never read the Word of God, equally as many will never go to hear it preached, but they can see the Word of Life being held forth and shining as light in the world through, and by, a Christian who is walking in all the commandments of the Lord, blameless, as did Zacharias and Elizabeth (cf Luke 1:6). Such Christians are living epistles, "*Known and read of all men*" (2 Corinthians 3:2).

To the local church here at North Road this is the charge given to us, for which each member is accountable to God. There are special roles in the church for which certain ones are fitted and called, but it is incumbent upon **every** member to manifest the Word of Truth by our life. We are passing through the domain of death, the territory of the last great enemy to be destroyed. On every hand our eyes meet the unmistakeable evidences of the supreme grip which death holds, but in the same domain of death, there is the living Word, of whom the written Word entrusted to us, is the transcript. We are to sow this Word of life beside all waters, amidst the scenes of death. He, the living Word, of whom the written Word testifies, is in this dying world to impart life to the perishing sons of Adam. He is the Son of God, the Second Man, the Lord from heaven, the Mediator, the Man Christ Jesus, He who liveth and was dead and behold is now alive for evermore and has the keys of hell and of death (cf 1 Corinthians 15:47; Revelation

1:18). He, as Man, has spanned the gulf between the realm of death and the realm of life. This is why He, the Lord from heaven, became a partaker of flesh and blood; not to improve flesh and blood but that *“through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the Devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage”* (Hebrews 2:14,15). He, the living Word, is *“the way, the truth and the life”* (John 14:6). Mortal men may be very ingenious, but not one has, or ever will bring forward a scheme whereby they can escape death or effect resurrection from the dead. This Man, the Incarnate Word, through His life, death, resurrection and ascension, has *“abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel”* (2 Timothy 1:10).

These truths, and very much more are all contained in **‘the Word of God’**, His immutable Word of Truth. May none of its holy precepts or any part of this sacred Mandate ever be ignored, trifled with or misrepresented by any who at present, or in the future, might form a part of the corporate body of believers who meet at North Road Chapel, Bideford. Amen.

W.H.Molland

“The thoughts of men are lies.
The Word of God is true.
To bow to that, is to be wise:
Then hear, and fear, and do”.

Joseph Hart

What is our attitude to God's Word?

The knowledge that the Scriptures are inspired by the Holy Spirit involves definite obligations. Our conception of the authority of the Bible determines our attitude and measures our responsibility.

If the Bible is the Word of God, then:

It is the Final Court of Appeal.

It is not a question of what I think, or of what anyone else thinks; it is, What saith the Scriptures? It is not a matter of what any church or creed teaches; it is, What teaches the Bible? God has spoken, and that ends the matter. *“Forever, O Lord, Thy Word is settled in heaven”*. Therefore it is for me to bow to His authority, to submit to His Word, to cease all quibbling and cry, *“Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth”*. Because the Bible is God's Word, it is the final court of appeal in all things pertaining to doctrine, duty and deportment.

This was the position taken by our Lord Himself; when tempted by Satan, He declined to argue with him, He refused to overwhelm him with the force of His superior wisdom, He scorned to crush him with a putting forth of His almighty power. *“It is written”* was His defence for each assault. At the beginning of His public ministry, when He went to Nazareth where most of His thirty years had been lived, He performed no wonderful miracle but entered the synagogue, read from the prophet Isaiah and said, *“This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears”* (Luke 4:21). In His teaching upon the rich man and Lazarus, He insisted that, *“If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead”* (Luke 16:31), thus signifying that the authority of the written Word is of greater weight and worth than the testimony and appeal of miracles. When vindicating before the Jews His

claim of Deity (John 5), He appealed to the testimony of John the Baptist (v32), to His own works (v36), to the Father's own witness at His baptism (v37), and then, as though they were the climax, He said, "***Search the Scriptures...they are they which testify of Me***" (v39).

This was the position taken by the apostles. When Peter would justify the speaking with other tongues, he appealed to the prophet Joel (cf Acts 2:16). When seeking to prove to the Jews that Jesus of Nazareth was their Messiah, and that He had risen again from the dead, he appealed to the testimony of the Old Testament (Acts 2). When Stephen made his defence before the 'counsel', he did little more than review the teaching of Moses and the prophets. When Saul and Barnabas set out on their first missionary journey, they "***preached the Word of God in the synagogues of the Jews***" (Acts 13:5). In his epistles, the apostle continually pauses to ask "***What saith the Scripture?***" (Romans 4:3, etc.); if the Scripture gave a clear utterance upon the subject under discussion, that ended the matter: against their testimony there was no appeal.

If the Bible is the Word of God then:

It is the Ultimate Standard for Regulating Conduct.

How can man be just with God, or how can he be clean that is born of a woman? What must I do to be saved? Where is true and lasting peace and rest to be found? Such are some of the inquiries made by every honest and anxious soul. The reply is: "***Search the Scriptures***"; look and see. How shall I best employ my time and talents? How shall I discover what is well-pleasing to my Maker? How am I to know what is the path of duty? Again the answer is: What teaches the Word of God?

No one who possesses a copy of the Bible can legitimately plead ignorance of God's will. The Scriptures leave us without excuse. A lamp has been provided for our feet and the pathway of

righteousness is clearly marked out. A chart has been given to the sailors on time's sea, and it is their own fault if they fail to arrive at the heavenly port. In the day of judgment, the Books will be opened and out of these Books men will be judged, and one of these Books will be the Bible. In His written Word, God has revealed His mind, expressed His will, communicated His requirements; and woe to the man or woman who takes not the necessary time to discover what these are.

If the Bible is the Word of God then:

It is a Sure Foundation for our Faith.

Man craves for certainty. Speculations and hypotheses are insufficient where eternal issues are at stake. When I come to lay my head upon my dying pillow, I want something surer than a 'perhaps' to rest it upon. And, thank God, I have it. Where? In the Holy Scriptures. I know that my Redeemer liveth; I know that I have passed from death unto life; I know that I shall be made like Christ and dwell with Him in glory throughout the endless ages of eternity. How do I know? Because **God's Word** says so, and I want nothing more.

The Bible gives forth no uncertain sound. It speaks with absolute assurance, dogmatism, and finality. Its promises are certain for they are the promises of Him who cannot lie. Its testimony is reliable for it is the inerrant Word of the Living God. Its teachings are trustworthy for they are a communication from the Omniscient. The believer then has a sure foundation on which to rest, an impregnable rock on which to build his hopes. For his present peace and for his future prospects he has a, "*Thus saith **the Lord***", and that is sufficient.

A.W.Pink

Editorial

‘Continuing’. This is a word which has come into prominence over recent years in some religious circles. It is imperative that the meaning of the term and the manner of its usage be carefully analysed in the light of Holy Scripture, because of the way in which it is used by those who are sympathetic to it, and the effect it is having upon others. The definition of the word **‘continue’** in the English Dictionary is ‘to carry on’, ‘to keep up’. In its New Testament Greek form, its meaning is more comprehensive; ‘to stay in the same place’, ‘to abide’, ‘to remain’, ‘to persevere’, ‘to be constant’, ‘to adhere closely’, ‘to attend assiduously’; - it is unlikely that any would disagree as to the authenticity of these definitions. The question which arises, however, is, What is being assiduously attended to, or what is being kept up?

Throughout the New Testament, the words **‘continue’**, **‘continued’** and **‘continuing’** are used frequently, and nearly always in connection with doctrine and practice; reference to this must be the starting point of this article. It is recorded of the first New Testament believers, *“they all **continued** with one accord in prayer and supplication”* (Acts 1:14); *“they **continued** stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers”* (Acts 2:42). Concerning certain disciples, the Lord said, *“Ye are they which have **continued** with Me in My temptations”* (Luke 22:28). The early New Testament Church was exhorted to **continue** in the faith (cf Acts 14:22); if professed believers **continued** in the Word of God, then it would be evident that they were true followers of the Lord (cf John 8:31); it was through the **continual** preaching of the apostles’ doctrine (cf Acts 19:10) that *“mightily grew the Word of God and prevailed”* (Acts 19:20).

Exhortations and warnings are constant throughout the church, pastoral and general epistles. *“You, that were sometime alienated*

*and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath He reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreprieveable in His sight: if ye **continue** in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven” (Colossians 1:21-23); “Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; **continue** in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee” (1 Timothy 4:16).*

In his first epistle, John wrote concerning those who **continued not** with those who were adhering to the truth; by this severance, it was manifest that they were not at one with the truth (cf 1 John 2:19). Following this schism, the faithful were exhorted thus, “*Let that therefore abide in you which ye have heard from the beginning. If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall **continue** in the Son, and in the Father*” (1 John 2:24). This then is a fair and honest setting forth of the word ‘**continuing**’ as it is found in the New Testament; it is ‘to abide in’, and ‘to adhere to’ “*all the counsel of God*” (Acts 20:27), as it was preached at “*the beginning*”. This is termed by another inspired writer as “*the faith*” (Jude v.3).

What then can be said concerning those sections of the professing church who are using this same word for the **continuation** of their own particular denominations which are in sad decline, and indeed, never were based upon New Testament faith and order? There has been of late, a number who have disassociated themselves from their former allegiance, only to propagate the same principles still using a national church designation, but adding the word ‘**continuing**’. Surely this is an enigma too obscure to fathom; to those who think seriously, it is inexplicable. What is the spiritual purpose of this? Churches carrying a national identity find no warrant whatsoever in Scripture, even though their confessions and

handbooks of doctrine and practice may contain much that is good, they also contain much that is patently in conflict with the Word of God. If then, there is a genuine concern for the Truth, why **continue** in error? “*Shall we **continue in sin** that grace may abound? **God forbid***” (Romans 6:1,2).

In this day of spineless Christianity, many are influenced by the ever increasing movement and change prevalent within the professing church. None of this change amounts to anything of real worth, nor will it bring the people back into genuine alignment with the authoritative mandate of Holy Scripture. In addition to this, there is a sad failure on the part of men who claim to stand for **all** the truth, yet who work in harmony with those they know preach and practise much that is flagrantly unbiblical. As long as this loose fellowship **continues**, bewilderment will escalate amongst the hearers, for the apparent sound ministry on other matters by those who assert Biblical orthodoxy, is recklessly flawed by this mixed fraternisation.

In order to accommodate this eclecticism and give reformed ecumenism a supposed Biblical base, yet another pseudo-Bible version is required containing such words as: ‘And they continued steadfastly in the Reformer’s and Puritan’s doctrine, reformed fraternal, infant sprinkling and scholasticism, and they had all things common. So mightily grew the confusion, and flourished!’ (compare/contrast Authorised Version; Acts 2:42-44 & 19:20).

The ever increasing perplexity and frustration of many believers today, will only be rectified by Christians, particularly those in church leadership, earnestly contending for the faith which was **once delivered**; giving no credence whatsoever to any who have added, subtracted or amended that once-for-all Divine authoritative charge entrusted to them. The great Adversary, knowing that he hath but a short time, is working with increasing stealth and

furtiveness. His ‘angel of light’ approach towards God’s people adds greatly to the treachery. Does not the Lord warn His own of the extremes to which some men will go, yet firmly maintain that they are acting according to the mind of God? (cf John 16:2). **Anything** which is preached, taught or practised, other than the apostles’ doctrine, is accursed, anathema, be the preacher a man of reformed and evangelical renown or even an angel from heaven (cf Galatians 1:8; 1 Corinthians 16:22).

With all the glaring evidence of departure, compromise and mixture, the inspired Word sounds forth as a trumpet blast from the very throne of God, “*Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong*” (1 Corinthians 16:13). It is only as ministers and elders heed this sovereign injunction to stand fast in **the faith**, like **men**, that local churches will be set according to the ordering of the Great Head, let alone **continue!**

“As good stewards, we must maintain the cause of Truth against all comers ... This is an age in which truth must be maintained zealously, vehemently, continually. Having received the truth, we are to hold fast the very form of it, as Paul bids Timothy to do. This is the duty of heirs of heaven. Stand fast for the truth and may God give the victory to the faithful”.

C.H.Spurgeon

“Buckle on the heavenly armour; patch up no inglorious peace;
Let thy courage wax the warmer as thy foes or fears increase”.

J.Hart