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**North Road Chapel (Evangelical)
BIDEFORD**

Lesson's from John's Gospel

chapter seventeen

“Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on Me through their word” (John 17:20)

The scope of the Mediator's intercession is clearly brought before us in this verse. In that upper room a few hours before His death, our Lord prayed not only for those eleven men present with Him, but His omniscient mind scanned through the ages right to the end of time, embracing the whole Israel of God - **all** of His chosen and elect people. The Lord describes that company here in His prayer as *“them also which shall believe”*. It is *“believers”* and **believers only**. Although the range of Christ's praying goes far beyond His apostles, it does not go beyond His elect; He does not pray for **all** men, whether they believe or not. Before Him was a perfect and complete picture of every sinner, who through sovereign grace would repent and believe on Him. It was for them, His believing people, that He had a care and concern for from all eternity, and here in the flesh, He prayed for them hundreds of years before they were born. What amazing love! Provision was made for us long before we had a being, just as earthly parents lay up and provide for future generations. What honour is bestowed upon us, that our names should be included in our Lord's will and testament! We, who live nearly two thousand years after the apostles, are bound up in the same bundle of life.

This petition must be kept within the context of the previous verse, *“For their sakes, I sanctify Myself that they also might be sanctified”* (v.19). This clearly defines that the Son of God set Himself apart to become incarnate, to live and to die for that company which God had **chosen**. Christ did not sanctify Himself in order that the whole of mankind might be sanctified, for that was

not God's purpose; He was set apart to make atonement for His people. Just as His redemptive work was according to the Covenant of Grace, so also was His praying. To have prayed in a universal manner in this mediatorial prayer would not only have been completely out of place, it would have been at cross-purposes with the eternal counsel. Christ's prayers and His atonement are of equal extent. His prayers for His own give the evidence of the virtue and the extent of His life and sacrifice and in this prayer He sues for that which He purchased. The work of Christ is a finished work, it fully propitiated a holy God, it has totally satisfied the Divine law, it has forever silenced the accuser, it avails for the vilest sinner who repents and believes. It is **these** for whom Christ prays, the ones who in their day and generation **will believe** on His meritorious atonement which cannot fail or break down. "*I sanctify Myself that they also might be sanctified*", - there are no 'ifs' or 'buts', no 'contingencies', no 'chance happenings'. There is a wondrous unity in all this; these things are ordered and sure; "*All that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me*" (John 6:37). Every one in their respective generation will come one by one; from the north and from the south, from the east and from the west, they will partake of the bread of life to the salvation of their souls and take their place in the kingdom of God.

It is those who believe who are in view. This word "**believe**" must be emphasised; it is not our good deeds, it is not our knowledge of the Bible or of theology, it is not our gracious spirit, or a loving disposition; all of these are highly commendable and good but that which is of paramount importance to salvation is '**belief**'. What does this word actually mean? It means 'confidence', 'reliance upon', to 'accept as absolute truth', in a nutshell, '**God has said it, I believe it**' - this is '**faith**'. Faith is absolutely vital; as in sanctification, so also in faith, it comes through the Word. The object of faith is Christ, but that which is the cause or the instrument, is the Word. The Scriptures testify of Christ; faith is

focussed upon Him so belief is in Him, **through** the Word; *“them also which shall believe on Me through their word”*. True faith most certainly and implicitly believes the Holy Scriptures, and terminates in a Person - that Person is Christ. There is a belief **of** Christ and a believing **in** or **on** Christ. In this verse before us, our Lord does not say ‘them that believe Me’. It is *“them that believe on Me”* through the Word. Believing Christ implies the acceptance of His Word as being true, but believing **in** Christ implies absolute confidence in Him and total reliance upon Him, the PERSON.

There is also another distinction to be made; belief **in** Christ is not a general belief in God. *“Ye believe in God, believe also in Me”* (John 14:1). There is to be a distinct faith in Christ as the God-Man, God manifest in the flesh who is the alone Mediator between God and men; no man cometh unto the Father but by Him (cf John 14:6). In this matter of believing **in** Him, the Holy Spirit invariably brings home to us our lost condition; a sense of our hopeless state precedes believing faith. This is a Divine principle, that men and women must first know the condemnation which issues from Mount Sinai, before they can experience the blessings which flow from Mount Calvary. We must first be exercised by the ministry of condemnation before light and immortality is brought to life through the gospel.

God caused the Israelites to know cruel bondage before they experienced the wondrous emancipation of redemption and deliverance; they were not weary of Egypt until they were afflicted by the Egyptians, (cf Exodus 1:11-13); the prodigal never thought of returning until he began to be in want (cf Luke 15:11-22). Christ said He had come to preach the gospel to the poor, the broken hearted and the bruised (cf Luke 4:18); to that great company who were so blessed on the day of Pentecost, we read that first, *“they were pricked in their hearts”* (Acts 2:37). It is when man is

brought to spiritual extremity that he cries, ‘What shall I do?’ This truth is well set out in the hymn:

“Convince us of our sin,
Then lead to Jesus’ blood
And to our wondering view reveal
The secret love of God”.

No sinner will ever believe **in** Christ until they are convicted of sin and their sinnership; that apart from the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, the wrath of God is upon them and they will be in hell for all eternity. Then it is that they will cry out as did the Philippian jailor, *“What must I do to be saved?”* (Acts 16:30). This belief which is to the salvation of the soul, is in a Person; He is revealed through the Word, but it is faith in Christ **the Person** which saves. *“To as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name”* (John 1:12); *“Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved”* (Acts 4:12). *“He is able to save to the uttermost **all** that come unto God **by Him**”* (Hebrews 7:25).

One day every one of us will stand before God. Shall we stand before Him as **saved** or **lost**? Shall we appear as **sheep** or **goats**? Shall we hear Him say to us, *“Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world”* (Matthew 25:34) or will it be, *“Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels”* (Matthew 25:41)?. The Spirit of God, through the apostle Paul states, *“Through this Man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: and by Him all that **believe** are justified from all things”* (Acts 13:38). Forgiveness of sins and justification come to **all** those who believe in this Man, Jesus Christ, the Mediator.

The question of **preaching** is brought out in the latter part of the verse before us; *“Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on Me through their word”*. The apostles had the Word of Truth committed to them; they were bidden to go everywhere preaching it; *“Ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth”* (Acts 1:8). To the Church of succeeding generations, Christ gives the charge to preach the gospel to every creature, *“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**”* (Matthew 28:20). Men are to preach the Word, not to the end of the apostolic age, but right to the end of human history. It is through the foolishness of preaching that it pleases God to save them that **believe** (cf 1 Corinthians 1:21).

Christ is revealed through the Word; when that Word is preached, the hearers responsibility is to believe, not to reason, ‘Am I of the elect or am I a sheep ordained to eternal life?’. The sinner is commanded to do nothing other than to repent and believe the gospel, and to such He gives an infallible promise that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord, **shall** be saved. God has always had preachers in this world and they have always been in the right place at the right time. Despite the many false prophets who are gone out into this world, He has His true men and in His providence, He puts them just where He needs them to accomplish His purpose. Preachers and preaching are of His ordination. *“For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach except they be sent?”* (Romans 10:13-15). These verses plainly set out the way of salvation through the God-ordained means of preaching, by those who have been appointed by Him. God could have brought Saul of Tarsus into light without Ananias (cf

Acts 9:10-19), He could have saved the Ethiopian eunuch without Philip (cf Acts 8:26-39), He could have instructed Cornelius without Peter (cf Acts 10:9-48), but He did not choose to do so.

True faith and heart belief is begotten of the Holy Spirit, grounded upon the Word, and that Word will continue to be preached as long as there are sinners in this world who are ordained unto eternal life. It is on their behalf that Christ prayed and continues to pray even to the last soul who will believe upon this earth.

W.H.Molland

Deceived Professors

Delusion is, and always has been, a master ploy of Satan. The word means ‘to impose upon the mind a fallacy of which a person can be so convinced as to be unshaken by facts’. There are great numbers of people in churches and chapels today who hold false notions, they verily believe that all is well with their soul, when the solemn truth is that their *“heart is not right in the sight of God”* (Acts 8:21). Speaking generally, Christendom is riddled with nominal Christianity. Taking the whole spectrum of professing churches and assessing the situation with regard to doctrine and practice from a strictly Biblical standard, the conclusion must be that the percentage of genuine Christians is exceeding small.

Because of the Devil’s expertise in this sinister work of deception, warnings are constantly given in Scripture for men and women to examine themselves, such was the case with those associated with

the early New Testament church at Corinth; “*Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?*” (2 Corinthians 13:5). It is imperative that ministers constantly bring all aspects of doctrine before their congregations and warn of the cunning and dexterity of Satan, who is always active in his endeavours to pervert the truth, with a view to deceiving the hearers. Even more malevolent and villainous is the strategy of the great Adversary in putting false prophets into pulpits and clothing them in sheep’s clothing. These false teachers purport to speak the truth but do so with subtle variations, which when analysed against the whole of Divine revelation is not the truth at all; by this **many** are deceived. This was the great concern of our Lord when He delivered His first public discourse as recorded in Matthew’s Gospel, chapters five, six and seven. There is no doubt that this was the most comprehensive sermon ever preached on this planet. The great underlying design of that profound address was to expose and shatter the deception by which the people were beguiled, due largely to the mishandling of the Holy Scriptures by unscrupulous, hypocritical, religious leaders.

The great need today is for ministers to preach after the same manner, for has not the Great Master Preacher left us an example that we should follow His steps (cf 1 Peter 2:21)? Vast numbers of people who profess to being Christians are deluded, and no part of Holy Scripture can be better calculated to awaken such, than the words used by Christ, the living Word Himself, when He said in His sermon, “*Not every one that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven. **Many** will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name? And in Thy name have cast out devils? And in Thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from Me, ye that work iniquity*” (Matthew 7 21-23).

The main thrust of these words is the inadequacy of a mere profession of discipleship. It is fearful to think upon the **many** who have been so very near to the kingdom that they talk of it, even professing to be in it, yet they are not; their hope is false. In true Christian profession there are three most important aspects which need scrutinizing: **Knowledge, Repentance, and Faith.**

Knowledge

A careful reading of the Bible will soon reveal that there are two kinds of knowledge; one is of the head, the other is of the heart. The latter is a saving knowledge, the former is not. Writing to the Christians at Colosse, Paul said, ye “*knew the grace of God in truth*” (Colossians 1:6); from this it is inferred that some only know in theory. It is the “*in truth*” knowledge which was in the mind of the Saviour when He, communing with His Father, said, “*This is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent*” (John 17:3). The true knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ is a saving heart knowledge, even eternal life, **knowing in truth.**

In Rome, there were those who knew God theoretically, as stated, “*When they knew God, they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools*” (Romans 1:21-22). Although these people professed God, His word was not authoritative to them, they lived as they pleased. They worshipped and served the creature (themselves), more than the Creator (cf Romans 1:25); “*They glorified Him not as God*” . They professed much, but by such profession they proved themselves fools and eventually God gave them up (cf Romans 1:25,26). These professors in that city had knowledge, but it was not a heart knowledge bringing salvation, it was purely in the head.

The intellect is an amazing part of human personality but it has to be guarded against, for it can be fraught with many dangers. It is largely through the human mind that untold numbers of men and women have been influenced and deluded by Satan; their guideline becoming ‘**I think**’ rather than ‘**Thus saith the Lord**’. Through this means, the Great Deceiver leads men into more advanced stages of intellectualism, for it is possible to study the ethics and tenets of Christianity in the same way as any other subject. By reading theological works, a man can become proficient in a letter knowledge of Christian doctrine; he can read the biographies of godly men and so discover how the great truths of Scripture affected them. He may come to a point of having an understanding of the mysteries of iniquity and evil and converse upon such matters fluently with others. Such men, in all probability will be regular church goers; they can be, indeed many are, in the pulpits. It is possible that some might even have a clear view of the **theory** of the whole scheme of redemption, but such knowledge is in the head only; it is an acquired knowledge. Although they may know it all and discourse on it, yet they have not a **saving** knowledge of the very subject of which they speak. Paul wrote of these very characters and states, they are “*ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth*” (2 Timothy 3:7).

What these people lack is, that knowledge of true salvation which can only be communicated to the heart by God the Holy Spirit, as set out in the New Testament, “*For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ*” (2 Corinthians 4:6). This is **saving knowledge** and it is not a work of the mind and study, it is a work of grace in the heart. Natural knowledge will produce no fruit of the Spirit; it is a vain thing to profess and make a display of spiritual knowledge if it is not accompanied by a separated life in the world. Knowledge can be a

definite indication as to the genuineness of the profession, but is it of the **heart** or of the **head**? Sadly **many** are deceived on this very point.

Repentance

This is another matter upon which it is possible for a person to be deluded. Although it may seem outrageous to say a person who has repented can be a deceived professor, yet the Devil can play upon the mind in many and varied ways in this connection, as the Scriptures clearly show. Examples are given of those who confessed sin, showed hatred for sin and even displayed sorrow for sin, yet who were never regenerate. *“And Pharaoh sent, and called for Moses and Aaron, and said unto them, I have sinned”* (Exodus 9:27); *“And Saul said unto Samuel, I have sinned”* (1 Samuel 15:24); *“Then Judas, which had betrayed Him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, I have sinned”* (Matthew 27:3,4). Three men who confessed to sin but in it there was no *“repentance unto life”* (Acts 11:18).

Jehu was a man who hated the sins associated with Baal, *“And they brought forth the images out of the house of Baal, and burned them. And they brake down the image of Baal, and brake down the house of Baal, and made it a draught house unto this day. Thus Jehu destroyed Baal out of Israel”* (2 Kings 10:26-28). Surely here was a sincere genuine man? *“But Jehu took no heed to walk in the Law of the Lord God of Israel with all his heart: for he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam, which made Israel to sin”* (2 Kings 10:31). Jehu, a man who no doubt prided himself on his reforms as he manifested great hatred of Baal, yet was he deceived, inasmuch, as his heart was not right before God, consequently his reforms were partial. Coupled with such incomplete actions, there can even be sorrow for sin, as witnessed at Sinai after the appalling scenes of the Golden Calf worship; *“And when the people heard these evil*

tidings, they mourned” (Exodus 33:4). Later further sin ensued, *“And Moses told these sayings unto all the children of Israel: and the people mourned greatly”* (Numbers 14:39). These Scriptures show how men can give an appearance of confession and repentance, and yet be deceived as to their acceptance before God.

Faith

There is a faith or a belief described in Holy Writ which is not a saving faith. It is set out by the prophet Isaiah, *“Hear ye this, O house of Jacob, which are called by the name of Israel, and are come forth out of the waters of Judah, which swear by the name of the Lord, and make mention of the God of Israel, but not in truth, nor in righteousness”* (Isaiah 48:1). These people designated themselves, Israel; they swore by the name of the Lord; they made mention of God; they stayed themselves upon Him, but not in truth, nor in righteousness. They were a deluded people, not genuine; their heads were well informed but their hearts were empty, *“deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked”* (Jeremiah 17:9); a people having a form of godliness but denying (repudiating, rejecting) its saving, sanctifying power (cf 2 Timothy 3:5).

A classic Biblical example of this lack of saving faith is a man by the name of Simon Magnus, of whom we read in the Acts of the Apostles 8:9-24. Under the preaching of Philip, Simon believed; he made a profession and was baptized, received into fellowship with the believers, and even accompanied Philip on his preaching engagements (cf Acts 8:13). Time proved, however, that this man was never regenerate; although it is said, he *“believed”*, it was not a true faith. Regardless of the fact that he had been baptized, Peter had to confront him with these devastating words, *“Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter; for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. ...For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity”* (Acts 8:21,23). This incident shows conclusively how false professions are made, deceiving not only

themselves, but also other Christians, even key workers in the church. Such is the subtlety and skill of Satan.

In His ministry, our Lord emphasises this same teaching as He expounded His parable on the sower; *“They on the rock are they, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away”* (Luke 8:13); they hear the word with joy and believe it. This would appear to be true faith, a belief unto righteousness; but it is not, it is a temporary experience. Wherein lies the breakdown? - no root! The root is that which others cannot see. This is why, on occasions, a local church can be deceived and a false professor be baptized. Such a person has heard the gospel, assented to it, accepted with joy that which they have heard, but not in the way the Scriptures speak; *“With the heart man believeth unto righteousness”* (Romans 10:10). This alone is conversion, heart belief, evidenced by a changed life.

On the contrary, a mental belief is a faith which is alone (cf James 2:17), it lacks the graces which accompany salvation and before long this becomes apparent; the fruits of righteousness are not there, as the root principle from which those fruits spring was never implanted; it was never a true work of the Holy Spirit. *“For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also”* (James 2:26). A profession of faith without the Spirit is totally unable to perform that which he or she professes, because that person is still spiritually dead. A faith which does not purify the heart (cf Acts 15:9), work by love (cf Galatians 5:6), overcome the world (cf 1 John 5:4) and bring forth the fruits of righteousness, will not fit anyone for heaven.

All that has been written in this article does not infer that unregenerate men and women do not engage in good works, for many do, setting oftentimes a fine example both in private life and

public duty. Christ said of the Pharisees that their manner of life outwardly was beautiful (cf Matthew 23:27); indeed they were regarded by some as holy men. Their standards of morality and piety were very high. The apostle Paul, referring to his unconverted days says, he was blameless (cf Philippians 3:6), that was outwardly. When the Lord drew the attention of the young ruler to the ten commandments, his reply was, “*All these things have I kept from my youth up*” (Matthew 19:20); Christ did not proceed to contradict or debate with him. What then was wrong and why are man’s good and noble endeavours of no value? The defect lies in the state of those performing them; they are the fruits of the old fallen nature; they proceed from those who in actual fact are still inwardly at enmity with God (cf Romans 8:7) and until reconciliation has been truly established, as with Cain’s offering, the Lord has not respect unto it (cf Genesis 4:5). Invariably the motive of unregenerate mortals in any good work or supposed spiritual exercise they perform is to pacify the Almighty, or in some degree merit His favour.

Members of Adam’s race must come to a true **knowledge** of their total depravity and hopelessness, together with the intrinsic holiness of the God with whom they have to do. Such conviction under the mighty power of the Holy Spirit will lead to genuine “*repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ*” (Acts 20:21). This is “*the work of faith with power*” (2 Thessalonians 1:11), whereby a depraved sinner becomes a new creature; “*created in Christ Jesus unto good works*” (Ephesians 2:10), “*a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master’s use, and prepared unto every good work*” (2 Timothy 2:21). It is only this wondrous transformation which will give that “*full assurance of faith*” (Hebrews 10:22), enabling the believing sinner to say with total conviction, “*I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day*” (2 Timothy 1:12). Those who thus believe are not

deluded. Through the matchless grace of God, at the last day they will hear those glorious words, “*Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord*” (Matthew 25:21). On the contrary great numbers who, despite their profession on earth, and pleas and protests at heaven’s door, in the hereafter will hear the profession of the judge of all the earth, as their verdict is pronounced, “*I never knew you: depart from Me, ye that work iniquity*” (Matthew 7:23)

‘Deceived professors’ - poignantly the Scripture states, they are **many** (cf Matthew 7:22).

W.H.Molland

“My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus’ blood and righteousness;
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,
But wholly lean on Jesus’ name.
On Christ the solid Rock, I stand;
All other ground is sinking sand”.

A Proven Profession

“And hereby we do know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments” (1 John 2:3).

Questionable professors abound today and this should cause any nominal Christian great concern, producing, within the true child of God, self enquiry respecting the certainty and genuineness of their profession. Such examination can prove a healthy exercise, if it rekindles in the soul a full assurance of faith (cf Hebrews 10:22).

Full assurance - it sounds so desirable! Where does it come from and how can it be secured? Primarily it is a gracious gift of God. He it is *“who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts”* (2 Corinthians 1:22). The Holy Spirit the third person of the Trinity essentially is involved; He *“beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God”* (Romans 8:16). Assurance in our Christian experience is a sovereign work of God, yet in it, responsibility also falls upon us. Hence Peter exhorts us: *“give diligence to make your calling and election sure”* (2 Peter 1:10), and Paul adds: *“Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering”* (Hebrews 10:23). What then are we to do as Christians to increase our assurance of faith? Very clear and practical instruction is given in the verse under consideration, *“And hereby we do know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments”* (1 John 2:3), although John uses neither the word ‘assurance’ or ‘faith’. Rather the word ‘know’ occurs twice in quick succession, producing the striking structure of the sentence. Here is no vain repetition, but an important, God-inspired emphasis on the matter of spiritual knowledge. John here describes our faith as a knowledge of Him, that is, of God; such knowledge is at the heart of a true profession. *“This is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast*

sent” (John 17:3); John describes assurance as a ‘knowledge of our faith’, ‘knowing that we know Him’.

Assurance is succinctly summarised and expressed in the two words, “*we know*”. To have assurance is to be able to say, in honesty and with conviction, “*I know that my Redeemer liveth*” (Job 19:25), “*I know whom I have believed*” (2 Timothy 1:12), ‘**I know** that when He shall appear, I shall be like Him’ (cf 1 John 3:2). Hosea describes faith and assurance in a similar way: “*Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord*” (Hosea 6:3); in other words, then shall we have assurance, if a developing, practical faith is in exercise. Spiritual knowledge is essential, but how may it be defined? It does not concern academic ability or mental capacity. There is an unbiblical trend toward this kind of intellectualism in our day, both in the world and in the church. Yet such wisdom is folly in God’s sight, and of little benefit to the soul. Spiritual knowledge is akin to the knowledge involved in ‘knowing’ a person; a knowledge borne of experience, fellowship and personal interaction. This type of knowledge vitally involves both parties and is not confined to facts and figures, nor restricted to those of high intellect. It engages both mind and will, and produces confidence, certainty and commitment. We dare not, indeed we cannot be ‘ignorant Christians’. This is a contradiction in terms, although such persons abound in the church today. Professors who wish to know only enough to save their own soul, and calm their own conscience, never searching the Scriptures, never seeking to know the depth, fulness or consequence of those things they claim to believe, never entering into that closeness of fellowship with their heavenly Father, “*having a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge*” (Romans 10:2). Spiritual ignorance is as much a danger to the saint as to the sinner; it is a blindfold to the eye of faith. Thus bandaged, the sinner is oblivious to his impending doom (cf Proverbs 16:25), unable to find the way (cf Matthew 7:14), or else erroneously believes he walks aright (cf Matthew

15:14). Similarly the Christian who chooses so to walk, will be forever losing his way, at best tripping and stumbling, and all the while unaware of those signposts and evidences by the wayside which would otherwise greatly increase his assurance (cf 2 Peter 1:9,10).

Assurance of faith then is a glorious consequence of having spiritual knowledge: *“Let him that glorieth, glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth Me ...saith the Lord”* (Jeremiah 31:34). The Scriptures abound with details of practical indications of a true profession. These give the evidence to the nature of the professor; they are the fruit by which the tree may be identified (cf Luke 6:44) and they are a further source of assurance. How can this be? How can our behaviour and practice as Christians give us assurance? Because it is proof to us, as much as to the enquiring observer, of the validity of our profession; we are convinced by our own conduct. A rich vein of instruction in obtaining assurance by practical means is found throughout John’s first epistle: namely by, ‘purity of life’ (cf 1 John 3:2,3), ‘love in deed and truth’ (cf 1 John 3:19), ‘faith in the Word’ (cf 1 John 5:13), ‘our attitude toward sin’ (cf 1 John 5:18,19) and that which is now before us, ‘obedience’ (cf 1 John 2:3). Here are some of the essential hallmarks and proofs of a genuine profession. If a thing is ‘proven’, it is ‘demonstrated to be true or valid by an established procedure’, or ‘its quality is established by experiment’. If we would have assurance then, we must strive for a proven profession.

Obedience to the revealed will of God, or keeping His commandments, is the proof in view, in the verse being considered. The vital link between saving faith and obedience is repeatedly reformed in the inspired writings of John; *“He that hath My commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me”* (John 14:21); *“This is love, that we walk after His commandments”* (2 John:6); *“Blessed are they that do His commandments, that they*

may have right to the tree of life” (Revelation 22:14). The Christian who, out of love to the Lord, strives to walk in the path of obedience, will derive much assurance thereby. Here is revealed one of the hidden blessings of obedience which is frequently overlooked. Obedience is not solely God-ward, or just a means to an end, only rewarding in the ultimate. The very act of obedience produces the blessing of assurance. Hence the Psalmist could say, *“Make me to go in the path of Thy commandments, for therein do I delight”* (Psalm 119:35). Paul reiterates the assurance producing role of obedience when he writes *“Nevertheless, the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal: The Lord knoweth them that are His and, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity”* (2 Timothy 2:19). Salvation is founded upon the one and only foundation which is Jesus Christ (cf 1 Corinthians 3:11). All who are named by His name are eternally saved (cf Romans 10:13); nevertheless the redeemed Christian is immediately called to a life of obedience, ‘departing from iniquity’. This obedience is described as a seal. In times past, the wax seal impressed upon a document guaranteed its authenticity; it is by conformity to the truth that a profession is authenticated, and assurance engendered.

In the light of these things, surely our prayer must be that we *“might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God”* (Colossians 1:10). May God be pleased by these means to grant us the assurance of a proven profession.

R J Steward

Editorial

Learning to rest in Christ's finished work **for** us and the Holy Spirit's work **in** us is a life-long process. Sanctification in the sense that the sinner is regenerated, set apart **by** and **for** God is a Divine work of sovereign grace, in which the person concerned is passive, but this is only one aspect. Sanctification is an ongoing process in which the believer has personal responsibility. To conclude, as many appear to, that having had some initial experience, they are now right with God and will in consequence, live a Christian life, is totally incompatible with Biblical doctrine.

The common notion, that the Old Testament in the main is a book of law, chiefly concerned with Israel; whereas the New Testament is predominantly a book of grace, specifically pertaining to the present-day Church, is an erroneous concept: both Testaments are a unity of truth, neither is to be held in isolation, for one is complimentary to the other. That which God requires of His children in any age, does not vary; it is summed up in one word - **obedience**. Herein lies the ongoing work of sanctification which is conformity to the will of God, as that will is set out in the Holy Scriptures. This demands unswerving resolve and strong determination; acting in the power of the indwelling Spirit with firm conviction and absolute confidence. As the child of God **obeys**, he works out his own salvation with fear and trembling, God working in him to will and to do of His good pleasure (cf Philippians 2:12-13), giving diligence to make his calling and election sure (cf 2 Peter 1:10). To name the name of Christ yet live a life of spiritual indolence is not just to live irresponsibly, it is totally reprehensible. The believer is to perfect holiness in the fear of God (cf 2 Corinthians 7:1), ever remembering that Christ is "*the author of eternal salvation unto all that **obey Him***" (Hebrews 5:9).

Obituary

The Church at North Road has sustained a very great loss in the homecall of Mrs Ruth Dunsdan Abbott, wife of Mr Martin Abbott (Elder in the Church). A woman of sterling character and great ability, she was greatly beloved by all in the Fellowship. Although Mrs Abbott had not been well for some time she endeavoured to carry on as normal, even until the last few weeks of her life, when her body gave increasing evidence of its mortality. In the morning of 11th December 2003 she was taken home to be with her Lord, having spent her God appointed 57 years upon earth. Christ who was her hope, was a reality in her life and in full assurance of faith she died; her closing testimony being, "*I know that my Redeemer liveth*" (Job 19:25). Family and friends gathered for her funeral service at the Chapel, on the 19th December 2003, prior to her earthly tabernacle being laid in the Higher Cemetery, Bideford, there to rest in certain hope of a glorious resurrection at the last day. Our prayers continue for our esteemed brother and his family, that they may experience that comfort which God alone can give, knowing that His grace will sanctify to them their deepest distress.

We apologise for the late appearance of this edition of 'The Link'. Mrs Abbott has been a key figure in the preparation and circulation of this magazine and whilst she typed this edition, increasing weakness prevented her from completing the task. Her untiring labours in typing of all literature produced by the Church, plus the circulation of loan cassette tapes has been exemplary. This work was prayerfully undertaken by her and executed for the honour and glory of God.