

January – March 2005

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**North Road Chapel (Evangelical)  
BIDEFORD**

# *Lessons from John's Gospel*

## *chapter seventeen*

*“Father, I will that they also, whom Thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which Thou hast given me; for Thou lovest me before the foundation of the world.”*

(John 17:24)

In this high priestly prayer, our Lord expresses four specific desires for His people: their preservation (v 11); their sanctification (v 17); their unity (v 21); and their participation of His glory (v 24). The latter might well be regarded as the climax of His intercession.

When upon earth, the great motivating factor in the life of Christ was the **Father's will**. *“Not My will but Thine be done”* was His governing principle; but here at this point in His prayer, with divine authority He says, **“I will”**. In no way was this unbecoming, for ever must it be borne in mind, that although upon earth in fashion as a man, He was still very God of very God (cf Philippians 2:6-7); God manifest in flesh (cf 1 Timothy 3:16). That which was before the Mediator at this point, was the ultimate glory which would result from the work of redemption, which was His covenant engagement with the Father. Earlier in this prayer He had drawn attention to the fact that the Father had given Him power over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as the Father had given Him (v 2). It was in the light of that power vested in Him as the appointed Mediator of the Everlasting Covenant and plan of redemption, that He speaks with authority saying: **“I will”**. However, these two short words require further elucidation in order that the truth which is being set out be more fully understood; this necessitates the scriptures being searched.

Our blessed Lord was soon to die, and here in the Upper Room, the disciples had been commissioned to pass on to future generations all that they had heard from His lips. These few men were then favoured to actually hear the Son of God in His human form – the man Christ Jesus, pray; and amongst the many sacred utterances in His prayer are the words ‘Father, **I will**’. This can rightly be regarded as the Saviour’s last will and testament. By virtue of that which He was about to accomplish, He had great legacies to bequeath, the climax of which is heaven at the last. So He inserts this clause in ‘**His Will**’, “*Father I will that they also whom Thou hast given me, be **with me** where I am*”.

Wills are legally binding documents. If upon the death of a person we are notified by a solicitor that we are a beneficiary under that person’s will, and that a legacy has been left to us, we know by the authority of that notification, that it is a fact; the deceased person had **willed** it. In consequence, within a few months, the estate is wound up and the legacy arrives. Then we come into personal possession; the inheritance becomes reality.

In reverence let the parallel be drawn. We, the Lord’s people, figure in His will; we are beneficiaries. He has willed that upon His death we shall have eternal life and be where He is at the last. Notification of it has been given in the Holy Scriptures; already we hold the earnest (cf Ephesians 1:14) and ere long, we shall enter into the fullness and reality of the entire legacy, being with Him for eternity, beholding His glory. Can mortals contemplate a more amazing prospect? The Son of God Himself, the Mediator, our Saviour and Head has stated in **His will** that we shall be forever with Him. Not one of His chosen ones is left out of that document. Our Lord will not be satisfied until He has all that blood-bought throng with Him in glory; this is the zenith. For this He is personally coming to finalise at the appointed day. This is the winding up of the estate.

Whilst the spirits of just men who have died throughout human history are immediately “*with Christ*” (Philippians 1:23), and “*made perfect*” (Hebrews 12:23), yet there is a state of dissolution of human personality, in as much as they are separated from the body. This is described as being “*unclothed*” (2 Corinthians 5:4). The body lies in the grave and goes to corruption. It is not until the last trump of the great resurrection day that death will be swallowed up in victory. Then will the corruptible put on incorruption; the mortal put on immortality; and the spirit already with Christ will be reunited with its resurrected and then glorified body. At that point, the work of redemption will be completed. This will see the culmination of all that was laid down in the Everlasting Covenant which Christ as Mediator came to fulfil.

By comparing things spiritual with things spiritual (cf 1 Corinthians 2:13), light is thrown on this specific petition concerning all His redeemed ones participating in His glory. Not one will fail to pass through the gates of the eternal city and enter the Father’s house. Oh the rapture! The indescribable joy that will be ours when we stand before our Lord and King, clad in all the glorious array of His righteousness. “Father, **I will this**”, He prays, “It is My bequest”.

Contemplating these scriptures, our eyes are focussed on that day of which no man knows, not even the angels, only the Father (cf Mark 13:32); the day of the Second Advent, when Christ will actually come in person, just as men saw Him go at His Ascension (cf Acts 1:11). He will gather His believing people in state, and give them an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom (cf 2 Peter 1:11). They will enter as kings and priests unto God (cf Revelation 5:10), and reign for ever and ever (cf Revelation 22:5). What a stupendous sight this will be! All the redeemed of all ages, their bodies newly raised and glorified, reunited with their spirits, meeting the Lord in the air (cf 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17), as a royal priesthood, bedecked in the very glory of Christ, they will be

escorted into the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world (cf Matthew 25:34). How majestic will be the sight as Christ the glorious Head, the Captain of their Salvation, heads that vast procession, all clad in robes of dazzling purity! Can we imagine the exultation of the myriads of angels as they witness this triumphal entrance? Our minds might well recall the angelic strains at our Lord's ascension, His **personal** entrance into heaven. The scene is briefly outlined in the Book of Psalms: "*Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the king of glory shall come in. Who is this king of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle*" (Psalm 24:7-8). If such was the approbation when the Mediator entered heaven alone, what will it be in that coming day, when the power vested in Christ to give eternal life to all that the Father has given Him (cf John 17:2) reaches its objective, and the last soul for whom He died is brought to salvation? Death, the last enemy to be destroyed, will be vanquished, redemption's goal reached, and the final triumph of immortality. The Head and **all** His members will file through those everlasting doors in their teeming millions, washed in the blood of the Lamb; what will be the acclamation of the angels **then**? It will be as the voice of many waters, the voice of a great thunder (cf Revelation 14:2). The volume of their praise will be tumultuous.

When banished to the Isle of Patmos, John had a preview of this triumphant future event. He records it: "*and all the angels stood round about the throne... and one of the elders answered saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? ...These are they which came out of great tribulation and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb*" (Revelation 7:11-14). At these revelations, John the apostle fell prostrate as one dead (cf Revelation 1:17).

Many years ago, a poet captured something of this glorious sight, causing him to write a sacred song:

“These, these are they who in affliction’s woes,  
Ever have found in Jesus calm repose  
Such as from a pure heart flows,  
Washed in the blood of the Lamb.

These, these are they, who in the conflict dire,  
Boldly have stood amid the hottest fire;  
Jesus now says – ‘Come up higher’,  
Washed in the blood of the Lamb.

Safe, safe upon the ever shining shore,  
Sin, pain, and death, and sorrow all are o’er;  
Happy now and evermore,  
Washed in the blood of the Lamb.

Sweeping through the gates of the New Jerusalem  
Washed in the blood of the Lamb.”

T. C. O’Kane

To such words, surely the heart of every true child of God must respond: **Hallelujah!**

To contemplate the everlasting kingdom is a sanctifying exercise. Preachers should constantly be bringing heaven and the eternal glory before the people, for when the soul is enraptured with the “*things which must be hereafter*” (Revelation 4:1), it will not be so entangled with the things of the present. The thought of death, though it be the last great enemy to face, will lose its forebodings. The comments of Thomas Watson on this theme are very expressive: “*Death is the chariot that is to carry us to Christ. When Jacob saw the wagons which Joseph had sent to fetch him, the spirit of Jacob revived. What is there in the world to be compared with heaven? Either there must be something in the world to detain us, or it is the terribleness of the passage, or else a contempt of what is*

*to come, that we are unwilling to die. If we have anything in the world more worthy than Christ, – father, mother, wife, friend, or earthly delights, then this is a sign of a carnal heart.”*

Asaph is a classic example of a man who had his priorities right; his sights were correctly focussed, as his words reveal: *“Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides Thee”* (Psalm 73:24-25). David wrote in similar vein, *“as for me, I will behold Thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with Thy likeness”* (Psalm 17:15). Christ Jesus, our Lord and Saviour, has left us in no doubt as to His great longing to have His people with Him, where He is. How frequently do the Scriptures indicate this: ‘I will that they may be with Me’ (cf John 17:24); *“be with Me in Paradise”* (Luke 23:43); *“to be with Christ”* (Philippians 1:23); to be forever with the Lord (1 Thessalonians 4:17). Ought not this to be reciprocated on our part? Is not heaven our Fatherland? The Father’s house, our home?

“O Homeland! O Homeland! The veil is very thin  
That stretches thy fair meadows  
And this cold world between:  
A breath aside may blow it,  
A heart throb burst it through,  
And bring in one glad moment  
The pearly gates in view.

O Homeland! O Homeland! One – chief of all thy band,  
One – altogether lovely,  
One – Lord of all the land,  
Now standeth at thy portals  
To welcome there His bride;  
And, resting on His bosom,  
I shall be satisfied.”

Lucy Rider Meyer

The soul is transported to even loftier heights, as our Lord continues His prayer, “*That they may behold My glory*”. In that coming day, we shall behold the King in all His beauty (cf Isaiah 33:17), but the truth being set out goes far beyond being a spectator, for in that glory, we are participators. The glory which God has given to Christ as the Mediator, He (our Lord), has given to us (cf John 17:22). When He appears at His Second Advent, we shall see Him as He is – **glorified humanity**; immediately we shall be **like Him** (1 John 3:2). Our present, mortal bodies changed and fashioned like unto His **glorious body** (cf Philippians 3:21).

The prayer continues, “*For Thou lovest Me before the foundation of the world*”. This closing phrase reveals that the glory of Christ as Mediator had been prepared from all eternity, before time began, or man was created. In loving Christ in this capacity as Mediator and Head of His people, God loved us, as being ‘in Christ’. This gives the explanation of that statement made by the Almighty in the Old Testament, “*Yea, I have loved **thee** with an everlasting love*” (Jeremiah 31:3). All the elect of God have ever been seen **in Christ**. Consequently, the hymn-writer could state: “The love wherewith He loved the Son – Such is His love to me”.

The eternal love of God to us His redeemed people, plus the glory of Christ which we are not only to behold, but also to share, is a subject of such magnitude that we can but feebly comprehend it as yet. Nevertheless, as in the mirror of God’s Word we behold the glory of the Lord, so by the Holy Spirit will the things of earth retreat, and the glories of heaven come nearer; the temporal will more bitterly disappoint, and the eternal more fervently enrapture. The conclusion must be to forget those things which are behind, and reach forth to the things which are before, pressing toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus (cf Philippians 3:13-14).

W. H. Molland



## *THE SINS OF THE TONGUE*

The gift of speech is a marvellous gift. For five whole days of creation's first week the Almighty was clothing the newborn earth with light and verdure, and covering it with the myriads of animal life. But it was a voiceless world. At length God made man in His own image, with not only a soul to appreciate his Creator, but a **tongue** to give expression to his homage, and "as the new-formed being gazed around him, the silence was broken, and creation thrilled with the melody of speech".

Philosophers tell us that every uttered word produces a vibration in the atmosphere: an ingenious theory has therefore been broached that these vibrations never entirely cease! If this were true, we should still be moving among the inaudible words of all our progenitors. This seems fanciful in natural philosophy; but there is a sense in which every uttered word **lives for ever**. It lives in its influence on the speaker, in its influence on others. Paul's voice echoes still; millions of God's faithful messengers, being dead, yet speak!

When Latimer was on trial for heresy, he heard the scratch of a pen behind the tapestry. In a moment, he bethought himself that every word he spoke was **taken down**, and he says that he was very careful what he uttered. Behind the veil that hides eternity is a record-book, in which our every syllable is taken down. Even the most trivial are not forgotten, for the Lord Jesus tells us that "*every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgement*"! If our words have an eternity of existence, if good words have so potent an influence to save, if idle, or profane, or poisonous speech work such perennial mischief, how needful is the perpetual utterance of the prayer, "*Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips*"!

I. Among the many sins of the tongue are **idle words**. “*Avoid foolish talking*”, says the wise apostle, “*and let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt*”. There is a peculiar sin in idle talking when we remember that the same expenditure of breath might be productive of so much blessing. When we contemplate a Whitefield in the full rush of his resistless oratory, – now startling a guilty sinner from his slumber on the verge of hell, now leading a bewildered wanderer to Christ, now kindling a saint into rapture, and now melting a rebel into penitence, – we grow indignant at the thought that this prerogative of speech should so often be spent in silly jests and contemptible frivolities. Are time and eternity so lacking in themes of importance that we shall spend our precious breath in fuming emptiness? Surely, if we would but reflect how soon our tongues will lie silent in the tomb, and how speedily the dust will gather upon our lips, we should be awed into more sobriety and purity and carefulness of speech.

Shall we never jest? Does not a pleasant joke sometimes do good like a medicine? Very true. There is more marrow in a wise man’s jokes than in a fool’s solemn inanities. But a wise man “*sets a watch on his lips*” even when he utters a pleasantry. Especially, he never jests at the wrong time, or about sacred things. He never utters puns and parodies on the Bible; for what men have once laughed at, they seldom reverence. Heartily do I wish that I had never uttered a ludicrous application of a Scripture line, and had never heard one; for the profane or indecent burlesque will often shoot into my mind in the midst of a sermon or a prayer. Wit and humour are allowable when controlled by good sense and by reverence for God; but when we venture into the sublime domains of Revelation, we should put our shoes from off our feet, for the ground whereon we stand is holy. From my soul, I abominate **merriment in the pulpit**. Should he court a grin who should be winning souls to God? When an ambassador of Christ descends to make sport in the sacred desk, the devil laughs.

**II.** Malicious words are cousins in sin to idle and profane words. Paul says, “*Let all bitterness and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice*”. Kind words are the oil that lubricates every-day intercourse. They cost little. A phrase of common comfort, “that by daily use hath almost lost its sense will fall upon the saddened heart like choicest music”. We love to meet certain people; they always have a kind, cheerful, inspiring word for us; they make us hopeful, and heal our heart-aches. Others we instinctively shun; they always have a sly thrust at somebody. They hatch mean suspicions in our minds. They are ever letting out a drop of **acid** on some character or cause that is dear to us, and the acid leaves an ugly stain. There was an ancient malediction that the tongue of the slanderer should be cut out; if that summary process were now enforced, we fear that some of our acquaintances might soon lose the “*unruly member*”. A slanderer is a public enemy. One reckless tongue is enough sometimes to embroil a whole village and to set a church in a flame. “*There are six things which God hates; yea, seven are an abomination unto Him*”. The seventh of the category is “*the false witness who speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren*”.

**III.** In treating of the sins of the tongue, we must not omit a word in regard to that feculent ichor that exudes from some lips in the form of obscenity. Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh; and a filthy imagination, like a fever, comes out on the tongue. In companies of youth, in shops and counting-houses, in rooms of colleges and boarding-schools, in ships’ cabins and soldiers’ tents, a vendor of obscenities is a walking pestilence. Long years do not obliterate the filthy memories; nor even the converting grace of God can wholly purify the unclean chambers of imagery.

And then there is **profane swearing**. This is the most gratuitous and inexcusable of sins. The man who swears turns speech into a curse, and before his time rehearses the dialect of hell. He waits for no bait, but “bites at the devil’s bare hook”. The shrewd Quaker’s advice to the profane youth, “Swear away, my young friend, till thee gets all that bad stuff **out of thee**”, points to the real source of the vice; for it is out of an evil **heart** that proceed evil thoughts, false witness, and blasphemies.

We fear that the purest tongue will need much purifying before it is fit to join the celestial praises of God’s upper temple. For that worship let us attune our voices by ceaseless prayers, by words of love, by earnest vindications of the right, by habitual “*speech seasoned with salt*” of Divine grace. The melody of heaven will spring from a **harmony of hearts**; each voice there will bear a part in the song of Moses and the Lamb.

Theodore Guyler D.D.

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## *Spiritual Liars*

“*Remove from me the way of lying*” (Psalm 119:29). How we should be humbled by such a prayer as this, for it is evidently an appropriate one for all the Lord’s people. The fact that it is not only recorded in Holy Writ, but here in the 119<sup>th</sup> Psalm, rather than in the prayer of a particular individual on some special occasion, plainly intimates this. There is nothing in the Old Testament of wider latitude and of more general application than the various petitions found in this Psalm: each of them is pertinent to the experiences and exigencies of **all** the saints, and the one now before us is certainly no exception, no matter how loath we may be to

acknowledge the truth of it. Reader and writer alike are spiritual liars, guilty of dissembling before both man and God.

There are different kinds of lies; some are spoken, others are acted; some are intentional, others involuntary. We often pretend to be what we are not, and are indictable with much formality. We are guilty of making promises to God which we break, of uttering penitential confessions while our hearts are hard and unaffected, of asking for spiritual blessings for which we have no felt need, or returning thanks for mercies which have made no impression upon us; and all of this is a species of abominable dissimulation. When we are convicted and made conscious of the same we cry, “*Remove from me the way of lying*”!

How well suited is this petition to the quickened child of God, who is often made painfully conscious of how much insincerity and hypocrisy is mixed up with his worship, supplications, repentance, and thanksgivings! When an honest heart examines his religious life, reviews his prayers, and ponders his character and conduct, he perceives how little **reality** and how much dissimulation characterises all his spiritual exercises, until at times it seems that he himself and all pertaining to his solemn profession is only a sham. If it were not so it would be quite useless for him to pray. “*Remove from me the way of lying*”. Observe how strongly this is expressed: not simply “deliver me from lying”, but “*the way of lying*” – a regular course, a confirmed habit.

Now the very fact that **we** find this petition so well-suited to our case supplies clear evidence that we must be among those who are enabled to see themselves in God’s light, for no Satan-blinded and sin-deceived soul feels and knows himself to be a spiritual liar. Moreover, the petitions which the Spirit of Truth has so graciously recorded in this 119<sup>th</sup> Psalm are most obviously neither designed for, nor suited to those who are dead in trespasses and sins. Should

not this very consideration at least revive the spark of assurance which so often waxes dim in your breasts? Furthermore, the very fact that you can, from the depths of your soul, feelingly pray, “*Remove from me the way of lying*” is clear proof that you are **not** among those who love darkness rather than light. You want to be genuine with God, to be delivered from all insincerity, and this evidences an honest root amid the rank weeds and thistles of deception and formality.

Perhaps you answer, ‘I follow you thus far, but alas, I have not the ear of God. Countless times have I confessed to Him my lack of sincerity, and begged Him (in substance at least, if not in those identical words) to “*Remove from me the way of lying*”; but so far from my prayer being answered, I am conscious of increasing unreality in my devotions’. Thank God that you **are** so conscious, dear brother and sister: if God had given you up “to a reprobate mind” (as He had the sovereign right to do, and as He has countless millions of our fellow creatures), then you would be quite unconscious of “the deceitfulness of sin”, quite indifferent to the unreality of your devotions. I ask you, frankly, is it not so? Yet perhaps that hardly removes your difficulty.

But this does: “*Remove from me the way of lying*”, like many another prayer, awaits its answer till the life to come! We were born in “*the way of lying*”: it is the very sphere in which “*the flesh*” lives, moves and has its being; the way of lying ends only when the flesh itself is removed. Till then, the quickened soul is burdened, exercised, shocked, plagued, grieved by it – by the unreality and formality of his devotions – and that very grief finds expression in this prayer which is so well-suited to some exercises of soul. Then step out of your mental gloom for a moment, into the warm sunshine of the implications of this verse, and thank God for having placed in your hands, yes, and put into your mouths, such a prayer as this, which, because it **is** so well-suited to your case, denotes that

you are entitled to make use of the same; which in turn, proves you belong to that quickened company who are painfully aware of the plague of their own hearts.

A. W. Pink

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## Seasons in the Soul

### *I. Winter*

The glorious truth contained in the pages of Holy Scripture is often found to be illustrated by images from the natural world. From the dreams of Joseph in Genesis, to the graphic scenes in Revelation, God's Word abounds with types and allegories from nature. Our Lord Himself was a great proponent of this theme, and the record of His earthly ministry is graced by the birds of the air, the flowers of the field, the colours of the sky, the harvest of wheat, and much more besides.

Let everlasting thanks and praise be unto God the Holy Spirit, Inspirer of the sacred volume, who in His infinite wisdom ordained these simple object lessons – not merely as embellishments or poetry, but “*for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope*” (Romans 15:4). And what comfort and hope we derive from the simplicity of the Bible's language, for thereby the slow and foolish heart is brought to faith and understanding. “*Wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein*” (Isaiah 35:8). These portions of Scripture are particularly memorable, and become very precious to the saved soul. With such analogies from nature often in his mind, the Christian finds that the world around him, fallen though it be, ever points to its Creator; the

natural realm becomes a perpetual reminder of spiritual truth. Thus the hymn-writer could say:

“Heaven above is softer blue,  
Earth around is sweeter green,  
Something lives in every hue  
Christless eyes have never seen.”

Encouraged by the tenor of Holy Writ, and the example of Christ’s mode of preaching, consider what may be learned from the **seasons** of the year – that annual succession of Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter – continuing their ceaseless round in the providence of God. Each comes at its appointed time, bringing particular conditions of weather, having its effect upon the earth, and then giving way to the next in never-failing procession. What an apt reflection these are of the state of man’s soul! For the soul too, knows its times and seasons, changes in condition, and progress from one situation to another. Let the parallels then be seen, and the lessons learned.

Consider the wintertime, now upon us. Here is a picture of the unregenerate soul, for it is a season typified by **darkness**. The nights lengthen; the days are often overcast with cloud; mist and fog obscure the light. Even so, in the godless heart, the night of sin endures, and the whole body is full of very great darkness (cf Matthew 6:23), which prevents sight, or knowledge, or progress of any kind. “...*Their way shall be unto them as slippery ways in the darkness: they shall be driven on, and fall therein*” (Jeremiah 23:12), “*They know not, neither will they understand; they walk on in darkness*” (Psalm 82:5). Yet despite his perilous condition, the natural, sinful man craves this blackness and obscurity, as a cloak for sin, and a barrier against God, and to his own condemnation loves darkness rather than light, because of his evil deeds (cf John 3:19). If the light of truth should momentarily shine in, it is



eclipsed by the thick vapours of sin, and cannot be comprehended (cf John 3:19). This is a darkness so intense, that it “*may be felt*”, as its gloomy influence affects every part of existence. Nothing but the quickening ray of the Light of Life has the power to dispel it:

“’Tis midnight with my soul till He,  
Bright Morning Star, bid darkness flee.”

With the darkness, comes the **cold** that typifies the season. First rain and wind bring a pervading chill; then ice and snow follow, plunging the temperature below freezing. Frosts harden the ground to an unyielding solidity, and water is frozen motionless in its channels. Such is the state of the unrepentant soul. The bitter wind of sin chills the affections, and numbs the conscience. Where once guilty tears might have flowed for wrongdoing, an icy coldness forms; where once the Word of God might have found entrance, and taken root, there develops an iron-like impermeability – a hardness of heart. “*They made their hearts as an adamant stone, lest they should hear the law, and the words which the LORD of Hosts hath sent in His spirit by the former prophets*” (Zechariah 7:12). This hardening is but a consequence of the “*deceitfulness of sin*” (Hebrews 3:13), in which a man waxes “*worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived*” (2 Timothy 3:13). Sin, in its vicious cycle, is like a frost biting ever deeper into the soil.

The winter is also characterised by **lifelessness**. The harshness of the weather, and barrenness of the ground brings death to the animal kingdom, whilst plants lose their fruit and leaves, and struggle for survival against the elements. Dearth and privation obtain as the land is held in the grip of winter. The unsaved soul presents a similarly lifeless spectacle, for it is “*dead in trespasses and sins*” (Ephesians 2:1). In this inhospitable environment, there “*dwelleth no good thing*” (Romans 7:18), not a leaf or blade of goodness, not a spark of grace, nor one iota of righteousness, for the soul is

spiritually dead. In all its howling wastes of depravity and degeneracy, the only power that continues to thrive and grow – is sin.

Yet, in looking out over a wintry landscape, though it appears devoid of life, there is **hope**. Hope in the knowledge that, of all the trees that stand, gaunt and leafless across the scene, all are not dead. Some are deciduous, and whilst for a season they are indiscernible from those which are perishing, these will at length put forth shoots, and bud and leaf, and eventually bear fruit. The same principle applies in the spiritual realm.

Such was the encouragement given to Isaiah at the commencement of his earthly work of prophesy (cf Isaiah 6). The vast majority of his hearers would reject the Word of God that he delivered to them. Rather than being convicted by it, and turning to repentance, their eyes and ears and hearts would be rendered incapable of receiving it, to their eternal condemnation. “*But yet in it shall be a tenth*” was God’s promise to His servant; a small proportion would hear and believe, from amongst the masses of spiritually inanimate Israel. They were the deciduous trees amidst a forest of dead wood; like “*a teil tree, and as an oak, whose substance is in them, when they cast their leaves*” (Isaiah 6:13). For the present indistinguishable from the reprobates, and concealed from human sight or sense, they would in time, hearken to the divine message, and come to newness of life, and spiritual fruitfulness – manifestly “*the holy seed*” of God.

“*Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace*” (Romans 11:5); Isaiah’s consolation is ours too! For this cause we also labour on, and faint not, knowing that whilst the gospel’s call is rejected by the majority, there are a few in whom it will prove effectual. The seemingly impenetrable darkness, and interminable coldness of heart which typifies the

world, will in some instances be dispelled by the effulgence of heavenly truth; their soul's winter will thaw into spring, and, where once death held sway, eternal life will dawn. No Christian, however insightful, can discern those who are appointed unto life; and so, faithfully, and without fear or favour, he broadcasts the universal call, and "*commandeth all men every where to repent*" (Acts 17:30), knowing that God in His sovereignty will turn the hearts of those He has chosen.

The changing of the seasons is the Divine prerogative, in the spiritual as in the natural. The same omnipotent hand that moves the Earth around the Sun, moves souls from their dead-in-sins position, unto life everlasting: "*God is my King of old, working salvation in the midst of the earth...Thou hast set the borders of the earth: Thou hast made summer and winter*" (Psalm 74:12, 17). No power or force of man can end the winter season prematurely, and precipitate the spring – it is humanly impossible. Neither can he by his devices work the salvation of a soul. Only the inexorable power, and sovereign might of God can effect this greatest of all transformations.

There remains a further aspect of the analogy of winter, which is worthy of consideration. How often within the soul of the Christian, a chill arises, and a cooling off occurs. In one who has long enjoyed the summer of salvation, and the heat of faith and love, the conditions are prone to change. Devotion toward God seems to dissipate, spiritual graces wane, and the whole outlook becomes dull and overcast. Prayer, once a joyful engagement, now seems to strike a leaden sky, and return unanswered. In this state of inclemency, one might almost think that the winter of unregeneracy had returned to the soul; thus doubts and fears set in, and the situation worsens.

What is the cause of such times of coldness? What produces this depression within the heart? For it is the distressing experience of many true Christians. In natural wintertime, the sun is no less bright; its brilliance and heat is in no way diminished. Neither has the sun moved from its settled position within the solar system. The change is with the Earth. The tilt of its axis renders it further away from the sun; the thickness of its atmosphere, through which the sun's rays must pass, is increased. The same truth applies in the spiritual. God does not hide Himself from His child, nor remove Himself to a great distance; His infinite love and grace has not reduced in its abundant measure. The problem is with the Christian, who has distanced himself from his Heavenly Father – perhaps unwittingly at first, but by degrees the rift has widened: “*your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you, that He will not hear*” (Isaiah 59:2). There has not been any change in the eternally changeless God, His goodness and mercy endures the same; but earth-born clouds of sin have arisen in the saint, hiding the ‘Sun of his soul’ from his eyes.

The remedial action necessary is made clear in Holy Scripture. Let the distressed Christian, in the spirit of repentance “*draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you*” (James 4:8). Let those heart-harboured sins be dealt with in confession, and then will the light of God's countenance again be seen and felt. Then will warmth and gladness return, and that which was feared as winter, turn again to spring.

“Visit then this soul of mine;  
Pierce the gloom of sin and grief;  
Fill me, Radiancy divine;  
Scatter all my unbelief;  
More and more Thyself display,  
Shining to the perfect day.

R. J. Steward

# Editorial

Another year has run its course and we now embark upon a further lap of life's journey. It is a time of retrospection (looking back) and prospection (looking forward); a juncture which calls for a serious review of the past, and acute vigilance for the future. *"Thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee"* (Deuteronomy 8:2). No doubt as we do this there is much which humbles, and there is also much which encourages.

An important question to be asked at this point is: 'in what measure have we redeemed the time, or to what degree have we frittered it away?' The misapplication of time is a tendency that is becoming increasingly apparent in modern society; work and assignment must constantly give place to leisure and pleasure. This same attitude and spirit is all too often seen in the Church; obligations within local companies of God's people have to fit in with the lifestyle and demands of the individual. In this, Christians need to judge themselves unsparingly, that nothing of the Lord's good pleasure is outstanding, before they set out on their own good pleasure. Where such a misplacement of time obtains, the seeking **first** the kingdom of God and His righteousness (cf Matthew 6:33) becomes priority number **two**.

Time is a God-given commodity, and we are accountable for its use; we either use time, or we lose it. To waste or misuse that for which the Creator holds us responsible is a most serious matter. So too is procrastination, which is the thief of time. To delay action, or put off immediate duty and responsibility to a future date, means that time has been lost; God has been robbed of that which He has entrusted us with. This dilatory trait of procrastination should be non-existent in the child of God.

Whatever our stewardship of the past year might have been, that is now gone, it cannot be retrieved. Ahead of us (according to the plan of God) is more time; this must now be our prime concern, for, “*Time is short*” (1 Corinthians 7:29). “*Knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light*” (Romans 13:11-12). We are to redeem the time (cf Colossians 4:5), redeem it because of the evil days in which we live (cf Ephesians 4:5). It means to recover the loss which procrastination may have brought about, and improve the present opportunity.

“Has He called thee to the plough?  
Night is coming, serve Him now;  
Faith and love in service blend,  
On His mighty arm depend;  
Standing fast until the end, Onward go!

In this little moment then,  
In thy ways acknowledge Him;  
Let His mind be found in thee;  
Let His will thy pleasure be;  
Thus in life and liberty, Onward go!”

*Preliminary Announcement*

**ANNUAL BIBLE CONVENTION**  
**Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> & Lord’s Day 5<sup>th</sup> June 2005 D.V.**

*Preacher:* Mr Alun McNabb  
(Great Bridgeford)