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**North Road Chapel (Evangelical)
BIDEFORD**

Lessons from John's Gospel

chapter seventeen

"I have declared unto them Thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith Thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them."

(John 17:26)

The phrase "*I have declared*" has respect to the Lord's ministry on earth, prior to His crucifixion; whereas "*I will declare*" doubtless refers to the forty days after His resurrection, and prior to His ascension, when He continued to instruct His disciples in "*things pertaining to the kingdom of God*" (Acts 1:3). However, it is the **subject** of the Lord's declaration which is the all-important aspect of this wonderful prayer's conclusion: "*Thy name*".

In everyday speech, it has often been asked 'What's in a name?' If given careful thought, this question cannot be dismissed lightly, for names have very great significance. Without them, there would be absolute chaos. Genesis, the book of beginnings, sets the precedent and shows the Divine origin of names. The Lord God, having formed man from the dust of the ground, proceeded to breathe life into him, and bestow a **name** upon him; a name by which he might be personally and particularly called henceforth. Adam, in his turn, conferred a name upon his wife, and called her Eve (cf Genesis 3:20).

Upon finalizing creation, Almighty God brought every living creature to the man, whom He had made "*in His own image*" (Genesis 1:27), and gave him the awesome responsibility of naming every one (cf Genesis 2:19-20). There was a divine reason for this: it was for the clear and permanent identification of every species. The great Creator did not intend that the rich variety of His creation should simply be termed 'creatures'; each must be distinguished by

a name. Consequently, to this day, we have a vast vocabulary by which we differentiate between the fish of the sea, the fowl of the air, the beasts of the field, cattle and creeping things, after their kinds, in all their diversity and multiplicity. Thus we identify the dog, the cat, the bird, and within these broader groups, the innumerable different species. An example from the avian kingdom being the goldfinch, the owl, and the buzzard; names are of paramount importance.

If this is the case with the animal creation, how much more so with the human? When the first child was born on earth by natural generation, Adam and Eve did not simply look upon that child and say ‘Male’. No, they named that boy, Cain. Later another was born and they called him Abel. A principle had been instilled into them that there must be distinction and identification. It was not sufficient for all Adam’s race to be styled merely ‘Man’ or ‘Woman’, for what confusion would have ensued! The essential business of life would be rendered well-nigh impossible: communication, identification, trade, education, law and order, legal or personal transactions – all depend upon names. From the signing of a cheque, to the repeating of marriage vows, names are essential.

The importance of names goes beyond even the physical realm; they have great spiritual significance. The Holy Spirit through the inspired scriptures reveals the exactitude of the plan of redemption. In a past eternity before creation was effected, a covenant was drawn up within the Godhead whereby a remnant out of Adam’s race was elected unto eternal salvation (cf Ephesians 1:3-5, 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14, 1 Peter 1:2). The Scriptures do not reveal how many were elected, other than stating that it is: “*a great multitude which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people and tongues*” (Revelation 7:9). Albeit within the Trinity, each one elected was known individually. “*The Lord knoweth them that are His*” (2 Timothy 2:19), even to the number

of hairs on their heads (cf Luke 12:7). The Everlasting Covenant does **not** say that some nominal total of mankind must be reached, no – the covenant is specific, “*ordered in all things and sure*” (2 Samuel 23:5). The Book of Life does not simply state a fixed number; it states **names**, which were written into that book before the foundation of the world (cf Revelation 13:8 and 17:8).

In the eternal boardroom of Deity, when the great scheme of redemption was laid out, it was **not** so worded that atonement would be made for an unnamed aggregate of souls, whose actual identities depended upon their future response to the call of salvation. What a perversion of Truth this is! Alas this is how very many view and present the gospel. In His sovereign choice, God did not elect a stated number of **unknown** persons, but of **known** individuals who were identified by **name**. These were the ones for whom the second person of the Godhead would stand surety. It was not a conveyance of nameless humanity from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light – God elected and gave to His Son a specified people. Just as the High Priest of the Old Testament times carried the names of those whom he represented upon the breastplate which he wore, so likewise Christ, the Great High Priest of the New Covenant, had before Him **all the names** of those for whom He stood. They are the ones who comprise ‘The Remnant of Grace’; no more, no less. They were clearly distinguished and recorded by **name** before they existed, and will be effectually called by the Holy Spirit through the gospel in their respective generations.

The Strong Room of the Third Heaven is the depository of the Everlasting Covenant, together with all its ‘appurtenances’; here everything is eternally secure. Nothing becomes obsolete; nothing ever calls for amendment or alteration. All records are accurate, every clause and statement authentic and irreversible. Every registration is so precise and exact that there will never be mistaken

identity or false representation. The infinity, omniscience and infallibility of God ensure this. These are Divine attributes of which many Christians have but a feeble understanding. The positiveness and explicitness of sovereign election is a fundamental tenet of the ‘faith once delivered to the saints’, for which every Christian should contend (cf Jude 3). There is a word written in the Old Testament prophecies concerning the exactness of this, “*For Jacob my servant’s sake, and Israel mine elect, I have even called thee by thy name: I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me*” (Isaiah 45:4). Israel was elected by God; at the time they did not know it, but the Almighty said, “*I have called thee by thy **name***”, and to make it even more clear and secure, He says “*I have **surnamed** thee*”. Does not this show the punctiliousness of God’s election?

We live in a relaxed, familiar, indefinite society where Christian names are the norm, and what confusion is often caused by this! For example, contact needs to be made with a certain individual in a business or professional establishment, but they are known only by their first name. A telephone call is made, and much embarrassment ensues as the receptionist tries to determine the true identity of the desired employee. What is the **surname**? Is it not apparent that names and clear identification are vital? How can homes, businesses or governments possibly be ordered and function apart from precise identifiable names? Is not infinite wisdom seen in this creation principle? Think too of the final judgment day when the books are opened, together with the Book of Life; would it not be frighteningly disconcerting if there were no names on its pages? Because of the Divine accuracy and exactitude of ‘The Everlasting Covenant’, no believing sinner need ever fear that there will be a breakdown or miscarriage of justice. “*Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by **thy name**; thou art mine*” (Isaiah 43:1). “*Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me*” (Isaiah 49:16).

“My **name** from the palms of His hands
Eternity will not erase;
Impressed on His heart it remains,
In marks of indelible grace.”

Toplady

Much detail has been given so far in this article concerning the indispensability of names. This being the case in the terrestrial, it is infinitely more so in the celestial. Hence our verse states: “*I have declared unto them **thy name***”. “*The Great, the Mighty God, the Lord of Hosts is His name*” (Jeremiah 32:18). The eternal God is to be distinguished from all others. He is high above all. “*The Lord your God is a God of gods, and Lord of lords, a great God, a mighty and a terrible*” (Deuteronomy 10:17). “*The God of hosts, is His name*” (Amos 4:13). “*He is greatly exalted*” (Psalm 47:9). “*He is not a man*” (Job 9:32). He is not a created being, He is the ever existent, eternal, thrice holy God; without beginning, without end, the One “*whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting*” (Micah 5:2), whom the “*heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain*” (1 Kings 8:27). He is the almighty, eternal, omnipotent Jehovah. “*I am the Lord: that is my **name**: and my glory will I not give to another*” (Isaiah 42:8).

God is eternally supreme; unseen by man, and apart from Divine revelation, He is unknown: “*no man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him*” (John 1:18). Christ the Son came into the world to reveal and **declare** the truth about God. All that was foreshadowed and set out by type, symbol and prophetic utterance in the Old Testament, He, the Son of God came to explain and fulfil. In that distant Old Covenant era there was much that to human minds appeared obscure. True it was that God did on times make various appearances, becoming visible either as a man or an angel, to divulge certain intentions, either of blessing or judgment. Such

appearances are theologically termed ‘theophanies’; but these visitations never gave a full revelation or disclosure of all that comprised, or was contained in God’s **name**. An Old Testament incident recorded in the book of Judges chapter 13 gives a very informative example of such a theophany. It concerns a man named Manoah and his wife. The appearance was first to the wife: “*Then the woman came and told her husband, saying, A man of God came unto me, and His countenance was like the countenance of an angel of God, very terrible; but I asked Him not whence He was, neither told He me His **name***” (v. 6). Upon relating this to her husband, Manoah sought out this heavenly stranger for himself, “*And Manoah said unto the angel of the Lord, What is Thy name, that when Thy sayings come to pass we may do Thee honour? And the angel of the Lord said unto him, Why askest thou thus after my name, seeing it is secret?*” (v. 17-18). The name, character and purposes of God were not fully revealed in those Old Covenant days, much that was enshrined in His **name** was secret, until the only begotten Son, who came from the bosom of the Father, declared Him. “*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*” (Hebrews 1:1-2). The incarnate Son, Jesus, the Christ, was the

“Declarer of the Father’s name,
 Expression of His grace,
 The Word of Life, the Light of men,
 The Lord with unveiled face”

Conder

Thus could Christ the Mediator at the end of His earthly ministry lift up His eyes to God in prayer, and with that degree of verity and sincerity which only Deity possesses, say, “*I have declared Thy name*” – the **name** of the sovereign eternal God and His purposes.

(To be continued)

W. H. Molland

Seasons in the Soul

III. Summer

The annual return of summer is eagerly anticipated by many. The days grow longer, the light increases, and the weather becomes warmer. The animal kingdom is alive with activity, whilst trees and plants put on their full foliage. *“When they now shoot forth, ye see and know of your own selves that summer is now nigh at hand”* (Luke 21:30). Thus we joyfully welcome the summer season back to these shores.

For those who lived in Bible times, summer held a special significance and import. Their lives were dictated by the climate to a much greater extent than is the case today. Natural light was essential in completing the common duties of life: *“The sun ariseth...Man goeth forth unto his work and to his labour until the evening”* (Psalm 104:22-23). The summer brought with it more hours of daylight in which work might be done. Journeys could be taken, which had been impossible during winter. Warmth, and health, and opportunity were increased with the changing seasons. Harvesting of summer fruits (cf Jeremiah 40:12) and threshing (cf Daniel 2:35) were just two of the tasks facilitated by the improved conditions.

By contrast in the present day, people’s enthusiasm for the summer is largely due to its connection with holidaying – the great annual objective of many men and women. After twelve months of waiting and discussing and planning, they take several weeks’ leave from their employer, and devote it all to the search for happiness and enjoyment. Vast sums of money and inordinate lengths of time are expended in the name of recreation and relaxation. It is a sad reflection upon society today, that work is often regarded as merely an unfortunate necessity in support of a hedonistic lifestyle. Yet as

the pursuit of pleasure and leisure increases, satisfaction and contentment seem to decrease in proportion.

In dealing with the summertime of the soul, the former and more Biblical definition applies. This is not a period in the Christian experience of ease or idleness; but rather of increased light, health, heat, and opportunity to perform that which our Lord requires of us. How then is this desirable, summer-like state to be achieved?

In the previous article, spring was compared to the regeneration and conversion of a believer. It therefore follows that to make the transition into spiritual summertime, a process of development and growth must ensue. Spiritual development is a matter much neglected by churches and Christians today, yet it is a vital tenet and teaching of Holy Scripture. The Christian faith is described as a ‘new life’, which starts with rebirth (cf John 3:3); but this is only the beginning. Just as in the physical there follows a development from childhood to adulthood to maturity, so too in spiritual matters a similar process of growth must be engaged upon. Many scriptures bear out this important doctrine. John, for example, speaks of three distinct stages in the Christian life: “*children*”, “*young men*” and “*fathers*” (cf 1 John 2:12-14), each with their particular characteristics, graces and needs. Peter says: “*grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*” (2 Peter 3:18); whilst Paul’s desire for the saints is: “*that we henceforth be no more children...but speaking the truth in love, may grow up into Him in all things, which is the Head, even Christ*” (Ephesians 4:14-15).

Physical growth is a combination of the miraculous working of God in the human body, (which He has “*fearfully and wonderfully made*”) and of personal responsibility in matters of diet and exercise. The same applies to Christian development – which is the result both of God’s grace, and the saint’s obedience to His Word, where growth is commanded. For a believer to remain in a state of

spiritual infancy is dangerous to their soul, damaging to their testimony, and dishonouring to their God. Serious rebukes are directed to such people as these (cf 1 Corinthian 3:1-2, Hebrews 5:11-14).

Taking a lead from these inspired words, we dare to enlarge the analogy of the seasons. It is not sufficient for Christians to dwell in a perpetual springtime, delightful and enjoyable though this stage may be. Sporadic and unpredictable showers are prone to come, hampering any work. Strong winds occasionally arise, which may perturb the young Christian's progress (cf Ephesians 4:14). Besides which, no fruit was ever ripened by the weak vernal sunshine, nor was there ever a harvest gathered in. No – the true child of God will always desire to see the springtide of their first conversion, and earliest experiences, develop into the midsummer of Christian adulthood and strength.

This turning of the soul's seasons will be brought about by increasing measures of spiritual light; but from whence does this light come? The Psalmist answers: "*The entrance of **Thy** words giveth light*" (Psalm 119:130). God's inspired Word unto man, attended by the Holy Spirit's power, is **light**; His statutes and commandments 'enlighten the eyes' (cf Psalm 19:8). As Cowper wrote:

“A glory gilds the sacred page,
Majestic like the sun;
It gives a light to every age;
It gives, but borrows none.

The hand that gave it still supplies
The gracious light and heat;
Its truths upon the nations rise;
They rise, but never set.”

As sunlight is essential for the summer, and food is necessary for growth, so God's Word is vital for the Christian's life and development. Let the believer who desires to make progress in their faith devote themselves to the regular reading and prayerful study of their Bible. It is a light which can disperse the thickest clouds of doubt, warm the coldest heart, enliven the dullest of spirits, and cheer the most downcast soul. The Christian who makes daily recourse to its illuminating pages will experience daily rays of spiritual sunshine, whatever the prevailing conditions. This is a light which will never be eclipsed, nor set: it is perpetually risen, and beaming forth truth. "*We have a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the Daystar arise in your hearts*" (2 Peter 1:19).

From Scripture we learn of another light source – namely the Incarnate Word, our **Lord Jesus Christ**. He testifies of Himself "*saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life*" (John 8:12). This is not simply a promise of regenerating light upon conversion; it is a promise to those who follow Him, of light throughout their Christian walk. He is the "*Daystar*" who abides in the believer's heart by faith. Enjoyment and experience of this light requires a deepening relationship, appreciation, and love toward Christ. Peter's exhortation is "*grow in...the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour*" – get to know Him better. Every saint is spiritually united to the Lord Jesus, and made one with Him. It therefore behoves us to become closer to Him, more 'conformed to His image' (cf Romans 8:29), and to live in the glorious light which He affords (cf 2 Corinthians 4:6).

“Each day let Thy supporting might
My weakness still embrace;
My darkness vanish in Thy light,
Thy life my death efface.”

Furthermore, we read, “*that God is light*” (1 John 1:5). “*The Lord God is a sun and shield: the Lord will give grace and glory*” (Psalm 84:11), “*the Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory*” (Isaiah 60:19). God the Father is light: He is the embodiment and source of the light of life, truth, holiness, knowledge and glory. As we are united to Christ more fully, so we become closer to God the Father, and are bound up in the relationship that unites the Trinity of God. Scripture confirms this wondrous fact: “*Ye are Christ’s; and Christ is God’s*” (1 Corinthians 3:23), “*our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ*” (1 John 1:3). In this blessed state of communion, the saints experience the Lord’s face ‘shining upon them’ (cf Numbers 6:26), and the light of His grace and peace.

The challenge of scripture is to “*walk in the light, as He is in the light*” (1 John 1:7). The Christian can never, nor will ever attain to Deity, however, they are promised a ‘partaking of the divine nature’ (2 Peter 1:4), and are commanded to strive after ‘God-like-ness’ or godliness. “*Exercise thyself...unto godliness. For...godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come*” (1 Timothy 4:7-8). This is what ‘walking in the light of God’ means: making godly characteristics our own habitual course and conversation; as obedient children emulating our Heavenly Father.

Here then are the means whereby the Christian may know greater measures of light to illuminate and warm the heart, and produce a summertime within the soul. Yet it must be noted that with greater light, there comes greater responsibility. “*For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required*” (Luke 12:48). It is incumbent upon those who have been granted light, to walk in accordance with it. Any excuse of ignorance or continuance in the darkness is utterly removed. The saint who has been blessed with an abundance of knowledge and truth can never justifiably return to

their previous state and condition. Alas that in the present day many of God's people are seen to forsake the light into which they have been brought, and instead of taking earnest heed to the things they have heard, are prone to let them slip. Such will receive the due penalty for their disobedience (cf Hebrews 2:1).

Light brings with it tremendous obligation and opportunity, which cannot be neglected. Our Lord's command is that we should "*walk while ye have the light*" (John 12:35). While God's Word is so freely available, and spiritual health is strong, and light is shed abroad in the heart, the child of God must strive to make progress, capitalise upon the soul's summer, and "*follow on to know the Lord*". For no-one knows what the future holds of hardship, trial, or persecution, which in the purposes of God may come, over-clouding this season of light and liberty. None can know how many more days of life are left to them, in which they may do the works of God. Then let every Christian cultivate in themselves the mind that was in Christ Jesus, who said: "*I must work the works of Him who sent me while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work*" (John 9:4). Then "*let us who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for a helmet, the hope of salvation*" (1 Thessalonians 5:8). There is a work to be done, a war to be waged, and a pilgrimage to be completed.

Thus in the mercy and grace of God, and through obedience to His Word, the saint can know a spiritual summertime which predominates the 'year' of life. May such be our happy experience!

“The eternal glories gleam afar,
To nerve our faint endeavour;
So now to watch! To work! To war!
And then – to rest for ever.”

R. J. Steward

TIME

“That which hath been is now; that which is to be hath already been; and God requireth that which is past”

(Ecclesiastes 3:15)

There is no such thing as ‘Time’ with God. He knows no limitation. Eternity – infinitude – illimitable, are the words of heaven’s vocabulary. ‘Time’ is an earth-word, finite, that the finite might understand. A pure Anglo-Saxon word, ‘*tima*’, akin to tide; thus giving the idea of unrest and uncertainty.

Longfellow asks, “What is time?” and answers: “The striking of the clock – the running of the sand – day and night – Summer and Winter – months, years, centuries. These are but arbitrary and outward signs – the measure of time; not time itself. Time is the life of the soul. If not this – then tell me what is time?” But time is not ‘the life of the soul’, unless by that is meant, that period of eternity during which the soul is located – for is it not eternal? Time, indeed, is as a ‘sand-glass’, the grains of which soon run out; and having passed this narrow isthmus between two eternities, never can re-pass. Anne Ross Cousin was conscious of this when she wrote:

“The sands of time are sinking;
The dawn of heaven breaks;
The summer morn I’ve sighed for –
The fair sweet morn awakes.”

Time! Unto what shall we liken it? It is as a single sun-ray thrown across the vast expanse of eternity; a parenthesis in eternity; the chrysalis of eternity. It is but a ‘speck on space’; a bubble floating lightly about the eternal universe; as a dew-drop in the ocean; a light, thin cloud, floating through the illimitable. In Genesis 1:14 we find the first intimation of time, and of what it is constituted –

“day and night... for signs and for seasons, and for days and years”. God constituted time; it is not ours to do with what we will.

(1) It is a period of **purifying**; of intermingled joy and sorrow; of gleam and gloom.

“I hear the muffled tramp of years
Come stealing up the slope of time;
They bear a train of smiles and tears,
Of burning hopes, and dreams sublime.”

(2) It is a period of **experience**, which shall mould our state for eternity. The essence of experience is variation. “There is no hour, that has not its births in gladness and despair”. Time, in the prospective, is as the porch to the palace; the vestibule leading to eternity; the waiting-room for the immortal, before the presence-chamber of their King.

(3) It is a period of **opportunity**, never to be regained; a period during which word and action receive the seal of immortality. It is the session before the eternal Sabbath. Only those know the value of time who live much in eternity; who have seen the ‘spiritual’ beyond the ‘material’; who have seen the ‘reality’ that underlies all ‘appearance’.

Our years are sharp reminders of the past; and prophetic index figures of the future.

“’Twill not be long – our journey here:
Each broken sigh and falling tear
Will soon be gone, and all will be
A cloudless sky, a waveless sea.
These chequered wilds, with thorns o’erspread:
Thro’ which our way so oft is led –
This march of time, if faith be strong,
Will end in bliss! ’twill not be long!”

Day and night, Spring and Summer, Autumn and Winter, are God's ways of distributing Time; and each division is big with suggestion. Spring may symbolize childhood; Summer, manhood; Autumn, old age; and Winter may symbolize death; in short, each year is an epitome of life. The division of Time is a beneficent arrangement. The changes from the brightness of noonday, to the blackness of midnight; from Spring's sunshine and flowers, to Autumn's shadows and yellow leaves; from Summer's heat to Winter's frost – these are voices whose emphasis and pathos are ever uttering grand yet awful lessons about mortality and death.

Life is measured by years, because of its brevity. The years of our pilgrimage are uncertain, and at least they are few. This brevity should lead men to lay aside every unnecessary engagement and care, and choose only those interests that most require their thought. "Never put off till tomorrow," said Earl Chesterfield, "what you can do today". Its brevity should also lead men to a wise economy of its resources. We must 'walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time' "*Redeeming the time, because the days are evil*" (Ephesians 5:16). He who knows most, grieves most for wasted time.

The worth of time we cannot over-estimate; the possibilities that lie in every year for good or evil are prodigious. God, most liberal of all other things, is exceedingly frugal in the dispensing of time; for He never gives us two moments together; nor grants us a second, until He has withdrawn the first, still keeping the time in His own hands, so that we are perfectly uncertain as to whether or not we shall have it. We dote upon this world, as if it were never to have an end; and we neglect the next, as if it were never to have a beginning. "*So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom*" (Psalm 90:12).

W. Graham Scroggie

Beyond

Beyond this fleeting, shadowy vale of tears,
Beyond its ceaseless struggles, hopes and fears,
Beyond the tumult of a chequered life,
Beyond its pleasures vain, its changes rife:
What endless joy and peace the soul await,
Within the portals of the Golden Gate.
There where no earthly cloud shall dim the sight,
But all be bathed within the radiant light
Of God, who will in that supernal day,
For ever wipe the tears of earth away.
Beyond, where we shall never bid farewell,
No more be heard of death's departing knell;
Beyond the reach of human grief and pain,
Beyond the reach of sin's defiling stain,
By weary toil and care no more be pressed,
But enter into everlasting rest,
Beyond the mists of doubt and dark dismay,
Within the sunshine of eternal day;
Beyond the sorrows of a burdened heart,
Beyond the heavy strife, the bitter smart,
Where every tempest shall at last be stilled.
Soon will the lonely pilgrimage be done,
Soon will the struggles cease, the race be won.
Oh! Drooping heart, no more in grief despond,
A little while, and thou shalt dwell – Beyond.

Florence M. Taylor

A WITNESS FOR GOD

A witness for God is the most uncompromising man on the face of the earth. He never lowers the flag. He never adopts his testimony to altered circumstances. General unfaithfulness only nerves him – braces him up to a more complete surrender to his Master’s interests. No surrender of the truth is ever thought of. He may die, death alone being the check to the course and testimony of the witness, but he will never sacrifice one iota of his testimony. He is a man who counts not his life dear to him if he may but finish his course with joy.

A witness is essentially a martyr, the word for both being the same in Greek. God and His glory is his watchword. A witness for God is a man who has put his life and character into the Lord’s keeping. Would you be a faithful witness for God – another Antipas “*one against all*”? Then you may have to seal your testimony with your blood, as Stephen in the midst of religious Israel (Acts 7:58-59), or Antipas amongst the professing people of God (Revelation 2:13). A true servant of God never defends his character – that the Lord takes care of – and woe unto the man who wantonly takes liberties with the character and ways of God’s witness. He enters into a controversy with God, as Numbers 12 solemnly intimates. A witness for God is a man who meekly bears reproach, suffering and distress, but is consumed, yea, burns, when the glory of Christ is in question (Exodus 32). May the Lord lead to increased and unswerving faithfulness to the Master and His mission!

Anon.

“To maintain pure truth in the Church, men should be ready to make any sacrifice, to hazard peace, risk dissention, and run the chance of division. They should fear the loss of truth more than the loss of peace.”

J. C. Ryle

Editorial

How swift is the passage of time! Coupled with this is the ever-increasing tempo at which life is now lived by the world around us! The present age is marked by rapid change in all sections of the community. Small businesses shut down almost by the week. Larger enterprises are taken over by national and often international giants. Great industrial and manufacturing organisations move their massive undertakings to other parts of the world. Amalgamations amongst finance houses, banks, building societies and insurance companies are all commonplace happenings in the twenty-first century. Political and governmental changes also bring about a constant need for adjustment, as long established rule and practice is set aside in favour of new regulations and policies.

Education receives a constant ongoing emphasis; travel and experience is reckoned to be of great importance. Communication and information is flashed around the world in a few moments. Knowledge is thus greatly amplified in the earth. *“Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased ”* (Daniel 12:4). Despite all this supposed progress, it cannot be said that wisdom has advanced correspondingly, or that the world is becoming a more secure, or better place in which to live. Earthquakes, floods, droughts, tornados and ‘natural disasters’ occur with growing frequency, yet man with all his ingenuity and boasted development cannot exert any control over such catastrophes. Crime, lawlessness, moral deterioration, unrest, and the absence of a true spirit of contentment increases at an alarming rate, with no effective restraints.

The same trends, agitations and changes are seen throughout Christendom. Over many years, various amalgamations have taken place amongst main line denominations; usually with a view to

strengthening their ailing causes. A few generations ago, within the evangelical wing of the church, the concept of forming societies that would serve to give stimulus and bind companies of Christians together, came into vogue. Consequently, over the years a number of Fellowships, Alliances, Councils and Movements evolved inaugurated by well-intentioned, though misguided men. Time has proved that their aspirations have not been realized, nor their desired ends achieved. The reason for their ineffectiveness is the impossibility of binding Christians together when they are not united in the truth. Sadly, some in the present day are pursuing the same course, apparently oblivious to the futility and the certain long-term damage that is caused by endeavouring to unite anything which the Scriptures sharply divide.

Such activity is increasingly pronounced at the current time amongst certain sections of the Lord's people. Calls are made, and encouragements given to unite upon 'Reformed doctrine' and 'confessional Christianity' – claimed to be the ideal basis for union. Does this provide a sure and unshakeable foundation upon which to stand, and could it possibly produce the unity set out in Holy Writ? It is clear that "all the counsel of God" is not embodied in that which is termed '**reformed**'. The historic creeds and confessions do not speak with one voice, but are at variance with one another; neither do they contend or set forth in its entirety "**the Faith**" as it was once delivered unto the saints by Divine Inspiration. Whilst much good may be found in parts of these productions, they can never be termed "**a sure word of prophecy**". A unity based upon these 'articles' immediately entails a disregard of many of the distinctive tenets and practices of New Testament teaching. What authority does the Bible hold with those who can so readily relegate **parts** of God's revealed will to 'secondary status'? What could be more dishonouring to **Him** who has magnified His Word above all His name (cf Psalm 138:2)? Do these movements bring about a

Godly confidence, and thus perfect, stablish, strengthen and settle the believer in the **truth**? (cf 1 Peter 5:10)

The conclusion of all these changes, efforts and coalitions which are abroad, is, that notwithstanding man's many inventions (cf Ecclesiastes 7:29) his ideas, policies and theories, none have produced the hoped-for results; things wax worse and worse. In all departments, world and church, there is widespread confusion, instability and uncertainty; "perilous times" are upon us.

What do all these things portend? **The Last Days** (cf 2 Timothy 3). It is no vain repetition to reiterate this awesome reality, for "*The great day of the Lord is near, it is near, and hasteth greatly*" (Zephaniah 1:14). "*When ye see these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads: for your redemption draweth nigh*" (Luke 21:28). "*The earth and **the works** that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness?*" (2 Peter 3:10-11). The believer is to hold fast, and not let go his righteousness, that his heart does not reproach him (cf Job 27:6). "*Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown*" (Revelation 3:11). We live in the evil days of the end time, days of insecurity, lawlessness and great wickedness in the world, and of mixture, deception and subtle compromise in the Church. The cry of the hour is: no toying with, or putting confidence in the world, but **separation**; no false unity in the Church, but **purity**. "*A wise man's heart discerneth both time and judgment*" (Ecclesiastes 8:5).

The child of God is to overcome, and keep **God's works** unto the end (cf Revelation 2:26). No latitude is granted in this; the word is, "*Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give you a crown of life*" (Revelation 2:10). The Christian's soul must be possessed in patience (cf Luke 21:19), not perturbed or agitated, "*Patiently*

waiting for Christ” (2 Thessalonians 3:5); occupied according to the instructions laid down by the heavenly ‘Nobleman’, awaiting His return (cf Luke 19:12-13). May God in mercy grant a **true awareness** amongst His people as to the late hour of this generation; that when the Master cometh, His servants shall not be found sleeping, but loyal to Him and His mandate (cf Mark 13:34-37). *“The time is short”* (1 Corinthians 7:29).

Hark ‘tis the Watchman’s cry,
“Wake Brethren Wake!”

THE HOPE OF THE EARLY CHRISTIANS

1 Thessalonians chapter 1

The Thessalonians had received this hope of the Lord’s return as a fundamental truth – they were converted to it. They *“turned from idols to wait for His Son from heaven”*. It was not a new strange doctrine among them, not a truth held only by a few who had more knowledge than others, but their common hope; and so prominently so, that we see at the close of this chapter it was the talk of the country round about that here were a set of people waiting for the return of the Lord from heaven.

In this epistle, and indeed throughout the New Testament, the truth of the Lord’s return is brought to bear upon all subjects that concern us; whether for joy, comfort, warning, reproof, or encouragement, all is referred to His appearing.

The true power of living in this waiting for the Lord from heaven is in personal love to Him: nothing else will give it. Alas that we should be so dull, cold, loveless with such a Saviour, such a Head, hope and home!

Author Unknown