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**North Road Chapel (Evangelical)  
BIDEFORD**

# FORTY MOMENTOUS DAYS

*“...Afterward He appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen Him after he was risen. And He said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned...And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen.” (Mark 16:14-16, 20)*

Consider Mark’s account of the tenth appearance of the Saviour. As described in an earlier article, Mark wrote with a particular emphasis toward a Roman readership. The record is terse and concise, as seen in the concluding section of Mark chapter six, with much detail and truth packed into a few verses. The narrative is very condensed, which creates difficulty in tracing the correspondence to the other Gospel writers. The Apostolic Commission, as Mark states it, is closely connected on one hand with Christ’s appearance to the eleven as they sat at meat (v.14), and on the other with the Ascension (v.19-20). By the manner in which Mark merges these events together, it is evident that a clear chronological order was not his objective. He does not give a programme or timetable, but instead encompasses all the teaching and instruction which the Lord gave His disciples in His closing days and hours with them.

The form of the Commission in Mark differs from that in Matthew, precisely as would be expected from the difference between these men’s respective methods, desires and audiences. Matthew, being more concerned with the Jews, presents the teachings which were of greatest significance to them, in a style similar to the Hebrew epistle, connecting the Old and New Testament Church. Mark

meanwhile, writes to the Roman world and stresses doctrine of particular relevance to that readership, even as Paul does in the later letter to the Romans. It is striking to note that the word ‘**Gospel**’ is only mentioned by Mark in the accounts of the Great Commission. Matthew deals with teaching and making disciples, while Luke describes the preaching of repentance. But Mark especially emphasises preaching the Gospel. This is also one of the key themes of the Roman epistle, as Paul says, “*I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also. For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth*” (Romans 1:15-16). There follows a positive setting forth of such vital doctrine as Justification and Faith, as it applies to all men, specifically Gentiles.

The **universality** of the Gospel is the predominant note in Mark’s concluding verses: “*Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature*”. This does not mean ‘universal salvation’ of all humanity, nor does it imply universal atonement – such a notion destroys the whole doctrine pertaining to the work of Christ. The facts are these – that an innumerable company of Adam’s race have been chosen to salvation; their names are enrolled in the covenant of Grace; and they are **not** all Jews. They are from every nation, tribe and language on the globe. Christ has made satisfaction to God and to Divine Justice for every one of those people. Their sins have been put away by the sacrifice of Himself (cf Hebrews 9:26). A spotless righteousness has been wrought for them by His flawless life, which brings justification and reconciliation with God. This wonderful news, these glad tidings of the Gospel must now be spread abroad through the world! They need to be declared universally, for it is by such preaching that sinners will be saved and brought into the realisation of all these spiritual benefits, and eternal blessing.

One writer has called the Great Commission ‘the marching orders of the Church’. It is important to register this, for whilst these words were originally spoken to just eleven men, and have come to be known as the ‘Apostolic Commission’, in no way is it restricted to those disciples alone. To interpret it in such a way is foolish and illogical. This Commission of the Lord’s is applicable to the Church on earth in every age, and in all generations.

Nor was this command enjoined upon the apostles individually, as though each one of them was required to travel the whole world to effect its fulfilment – such a thing was simply not possible. Rather did it mean that each disciple must go their way, one in this direction, one in another, and wherever they went, to whatsoever part of the world, there to preach the Gospel. By this means, still more would be ‘made disciples’, and in their turn, be bound by this same charge, declaring the truth each in their respective places. So the Gospel spreads, and men and women are brought to salvation.

Through the obedience of the early Christians to the Lord’s command, many churches were established as the Acts of the Apostles records. These churches in turn picked up the torch of witness, and conveyed it still further. The assembly of believers at Thessalonica was one such example. Paul wrote to them in his first epistle: “*We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father... For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing*” (1 Thessalonians 1:2-3, 8). Due to the obedience of the apostles and the infant churches it is said “*So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed*” (Acts 19:20). The Church, in whatsoever place it is found, must preach the Gospel. This is the first part of Mark’s account of the Commission.

Then the inspired writer continues: *“He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned”* (Mark 16:16). Not all who hear the Gospel will be saved. *“The preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness”* (1 Corinthians 1:18). Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, who travelled and preached so extensively concluded: *“Furthermore, when I came to Troas to preach Christ’s gospel, and a door was opened unto me of the Lord... For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: To the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life”* (2 Corinthians 2:12, 15-16). Paul discovered that his preaching provoked one of two reactions – men either **believed** the message, or they **rejected** it. It was either a savour of life, or a savour of death unto them. Either they heard the Gospel preached to their blessing, or else to their own condemnation. A similar statement is this: *“But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God”* (1 Corinthians 1:23-24). Indeed, Paul is still more direct in Romans 1:16 where he states that *“the gospel is the power of God unto salvation to every one that **believeth**”*.

For the same reason, the Great Head of the Church is careful in His terminology when addressing His disciples. His ministers must not form the impression that just because a person regularly listens to the preaching of the word that they are therefore Christians and have been converted. No, there must be a heart response to the Gospel, and the individual must become a true believer. How is this transformation to be identified? Only by **confession**. Belief and confession are inseparably linked in the matter of salvation. *“If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation”* (Romans 10:9-

10). How is a public confession of conversion and newness of life to be made? By **baptism**. A sinner repents, believes and then is baptised. This and this alone is the way instructed by Scripture. Any other formula is outside of the Divine Mandate and to be rejected as an invention of man, or a deception of the Devil.

*“He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, He that believeth not shall be damned”* – could language possibly be clearer? There is nothing ambiguous, nothing obscure, nothing of a doubtful meaning. This was how the Great Head Himself stated it; this is how the apostles preached it; this is how the early Church practised it. There is not a single example in all the history of the early New Testament churches of a person professing salvation and not being baptised. Such a thing was unthinkable, because it was contrary to the instruction plainly given by Christ.

*“And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover”* (Mark 16:17-18). These verses speak of certain signs which were given to authenticate and confirm the extraordinary office of an apostle. For example, the gift of tongues was given as a sign to them that believed not (cf 1 Corinthians 14:22). Such gifts were exercised in those early days and continued as long as the apostolic office endured. Once the New Testament scriptures were finalised, and local Churches established throughout the known world, neither the office, nor the signs were required, and these miraculous powers were withdrawn.

Christianity and the true Church of Jesus Christ are the great standing miracle, which still prevails, against all the ravages of time and all the vicious and subtle powers of Hell – and will prevail until the end of earth’s history. Her works are not physical or bodily, but

moral and spiritual. There are countless numbers on earth and in heaven who can give evidence to being delivered from Satan's bondage; of being changed from hardened sinners into the saints of God through the power of the Gospel. As for 'tongues', has not every believer received a new tongue? For at conversion they are taken from a horrible pit, set upon a rock, and a new song put into their mouths – even praise unto God (cf Psalm 40:3). As for overcoming hissing serpents, what about those devilish vices of malice, envy, pride, temper? By the grace of God and His Divine enabling, these can now drop from the hand of the believer, never to cause further harm. What of resistance to deadly poison? By reception of the Gospel, the saints are preserved from the cup of temptation. The insidious whisperings of the Adversary are neutralised, so that even when lead into temptation, God's people are delivered from evil. What greater example of healing could a Christian witness, than to see those who are dead and immobile in transgression and sin brought to spiritual vitality and newness of life in salvation?

All this doctrine burnt itself onto the heart of Mark as he heard it that day from Christ's own lips. He, with a particular leaning to the Roman world was especially impressed with these words, and was later inspired by the Holy Spirit to report them in this way. His line was not so much to religious Jews as to godless, hardened Gentiles. To them the message must be terse and clear-cut. There was no space for beating about the bush. Moreover, the Roman empire being characterised by power and ability, the Romans needed to be convinced that the Gospel and New Testament Christianity really did change lives and give hope for the future – even eternal life. So with great emphasis does Mark give this account of Christ's tenth appearance. He states the consequences of accepting or rejecting the offer contained in the Great Commission. These outcomes are summarised in two of the most momentous words ever taken upon human lips: **salvation** and **damnation**. The one involves all the

joys and delights of heaven; the other expresses all the horror and anguish of Hell. Both are eternal. This brief article concludes in the same manner as Mark's Gospel, as this vital message is presented once again to every reader: "*He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned*" (Mark 16:16). **Then**, "*Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ*" (Acts 2:38).

W.H. Molland (*transcribed by R. J. Steward*)

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## THE METHODS OF THE GOSPEL

...The truth must be unadulterated. "*If thou take forth the precious from the vile thou shalt be as My mouth*" (Jeremiah 15:19). It must be true of us. "*We are not as many which corrupt (adulterate) the word of God, but as of sincerity (integrity) but as of God (authority), in the sight of God (responsibility) speak we in Christ (power)*" (2 Corinthians 2:17). Truth fails when mixed with error – the wine is watered down and has no value. What, for example, is the use of one preaching the Gospel to children who has taught them to say from their earliest days that they were "made children of God, members of Christ, and inheritors of the kingdom of Heaven" at their baptism? Or how does a sacerdotalist attempt to preach a Gospel of grace through the finished work of Christ while he performs 'mass' and insists upon an elaborate ritual and sacraments as the means of salvation and life?

...The motive must be pure. If I only desire to be a great preacher, to win renown, to have power over others, to see them swayed under me and responding to my appeals, I shall get what I seek perhaps, but God will not be glorified nor souls born from above. The cry for so many professions, so much result, has turned many a preacher from the true aim. The motive must be: **Love to God** and a desire that men may know Him. **Love to men**, and a desire for their eternal salvation...

George Goodman



# THE FEARFULNESS OF FORGIVENESS

*“If Thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with Thee, that Thou mayest be feared.”*  
(Psalm 130:3-4)

There are within the Holy Scriptures certain verses which take the reader by surprise; sections which seem to challenge popular theology, and the comfortable preconceptions of the majority. Take, for example, the subject of ‘forgiveness’. Here is a theme which is the mainstay of the modern pulpiteer, and receives great emphasis in wider Christendom. “Forgiveness”, they glibly say, “is a great free-for-all – everything can be forgiven and forgotten – all sin, past, present and future is dealt with, and the Christian no longer has to strive, or worry about a thing”. Forgiveness is invariably associated with such emotions as love, joy and peace, and spoken of in sweet and sentimental terms.

Against this background, Psalm 130:4 comes as something of a shock, as it states of God: “*there is forgiveness with Thee, that Thou mayest be **feared**.*” A superficial reader might conclude that some mistake or contradiction has been compounded here. Had the Psalmist written ‘There is forgiveness with Thee that Thou mayest be loved, enjoyed, appreciated, thanked’, explanation would be easy; but the notion of God’s forgiveness being a cause for fear demands closer examination.

First, an understanding is needed of the two key words in the text, ‘**fear**’ and ‘**forgiveness**’. Much is recorded in Scripture concerning the “fear of the Lord”. It is described as “*the beginning of wisdom*”

(Psalm 111:10, Proverbs 9:10), and also as the “*duty of man*” (Ecclesiastes 12:13). This term should not be reduced in meaning to simply ‘respect’ and ‘reverence’ (though those aspects are implied); for the same word can just as accurately be translated as ‘to be afraid’, in the normal sense of nervousness and dread. This is not to suggest that the saints of God should act like the devotees of certain heathen religions, living in perpetual terror of a vindictive and fickle Deity who might at any time turn and destroy them. No, indeed! However, to retain a genuine fear of God is right and proper. For those who have truly grasped something of the nature and person of God will be awestruck and daunted by the prospect. Throughout Biblical history those men who were confronted with the Divine presence in a real way were always thus affected, from Abraham (cf Genesis 15:12) to John (cf Revelation 1:17).

Fear is not inappropriate or contradictory for the people of God. Consider some practical illustrations. It is possible to stand at a great height, perfectly safe behind a window or railing, but still to be afraid of the giddyng yards of air between oneself and the ground. Or to stand next to a huge, powerful vehicle or machine, knowing full well that it cannot hurt or injure, and yet still retain a fear of the force it can exert and the power it develops. By grace, the believer knows God to be a merciful and loving Heavenly Father – but still they have reason to fear Him, for His eternity, infinity, omnipotence, majesty and countless unfathomably great attributes. Something is seriously amiss if ever that sense of awe and holy dread is lost.

The great problem of the present day, among people of the world and Church alike is that, “*There is no fear of God before their eyes*” (Romans 3:18). Where that filial fear is absent, a man’s opinion of God is evidently flawed. The thoughts of God which he entertains are clearly too weak, base, human and earthly. If an individual claims to believe in a God whom he does not fear, then He is

servicing a false god, one of his own inventing, limited by his own impoverished imagination.

The fear of God is **essential**. It is a proof of faith, an incentive to obedience, the origin of worship, a guard against sin, the ground of hope, a stimulus to conscience, a guide to the Scriptures, a rule for practice, an instructor of doctrine, a convictor of sinners, and a confirmer of the saints. We dare not be without it.

What then of the word **forgiveness**? To express it in alternative language it means ‘to cease to blame’; ‘to grant pardon’; ‘to free from penalty or obligation’. Whilst this is a central tenet of the Christian Faith, in the legal sphere, ‘forgiveness’ is much more complicated. In the event of a crime being committed, there is only one person with the prerogative to forgive – namely, the person against whom that crime was perpetrated. Even then, that individual can only offer forgiveness in those matters over which they have control.

Suppose a burglar breaks into a house and is disturbed by the householder. After some conversation, the owner is inclined to forgive the thief for his actions. However, this still leaves many unresolved problems, such as the broken window, and the missing or damaged items. Supposing that a policeman had also witnessed the incident: he would inevitably come and arrest the culprit, despite all the protestations of the generous-hearted victim; because a crime has still been committed. The law of the land has been broken, and must run its course, and exact a penalty. Higher authority is now involved, to which all parties are subservient. Forgiveness, then, is no simple matter. It demands prerogative, position and power. If forgiveness is to be effective, it must be done in a legally sound and binding way.

Holding these details in mind, come again to the verse in which the Psalmist says of God: “*There is forgiveness with Thee, that Thou mayest be feared*”, and consider why the existence of forgiveness should induce a fear of the Lord.

1.) Why has God made a means of forgiveness available? Because He knows the heart of man. He knows what humankind is like: “*deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked*” (Jeremiah 17:9), by nature at enmity against God, and incapable of abiding by His law (cf Romans 8:7). Ever since Adam, wherever there has been a law, man’s inclination has been to break it; wherever a boundary, to overstep it; wherever a limit, to exceed it; wherever a requirement, to fall short of it. God looks down and sees that “*the wickedness of man [is] great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart [are] only evil continually*” (Genesis 6:5). There is forgiveness with God, because He knows how badly it is needed – because He looketh on the heart (cf 1 Samuel 16:7). **His omniscience is reason to fear Him.**

2.) God makes provision for forgiveness, because He knows the purity of His own law – it must be so, for He is the Author of it. His law is perfect and demands perfection, as the Psalmist says: “*Righteous art thou, O Lord, and upright are thy judgments. Thy testimonies that thou hast commanded are righteous and very faithful*” (Psalm 119:137-8). This is the nature of God’s holy standard. It is high; it is magnified above all His Name, man cannot attain unto it. God grants forgiveness, because He knows the unrelenting exactitude and righteousness of His Divine legislation. **His holiness is reason to fear Him.**

3.) There is forgiveness with God, because He knows the severity of the punishment that awaits the law-breaker. He Himself has said, “*the soul that sinneth, it shall die*” (Ezekiel 18:4). The curses and judgments pronounced against the transgressor are terrible to hear,

and eternal in duration: “*a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries... For we know Him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto Me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge His people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God*” (Hebrews 10:27, 30, 31). Many modern Churchmen deny the reality of Hell. They say “there is no eternal punishment – everyone gets to Heaven”. If that were the case, then why has God gone to such great lengths to make forgiveness available? Why has He so condescended to make a way of escape possible, if there is nothing to escape from?

Others suggest that alternative means of salvation are to be had, whether by ‘living a good life’, or being born to Christian parents, or through regular Church attendance, self-made righteousness, zeal, confessionals, absolutions, etcetera. If any of these methods availed anything, then forgiveness would be obsolete, and God’s great provision is surplus to requirements. No – the fact that God has gone to such lengths to make forgiveness available is proof positive of wrath to come; unavoidable and inescapable by any other means. God knows it! **His judgments are reason to fear Him.**

4.) There is forgiveness with God – and this teaches certain facts about Him. The only person with the prerogative to forgive, is the one who has been wronged or offended. There is forgiveness with God, because **He** is the one against whom sin is committed! The media are continually publicising the effects of crime, whether upon the victim, the family, the welfare system, the state, or the taxpayer. Coverage is given to the bereaved, injured and insulted. But none consider the heavenward implications, and that every crime perpetrated is **against God**. This is the solemn truth – whether in the quiet of the home, the anonymity of a crowd, or the heat of a moment – every sin is primarily an offence against God.

The Prodigal Son of the parable impertinently demanded his inheritance, as though he could not wait for his father to die. Then he callously deserted home and kindred in the pursuit of his own pleasure. He expended all his wealth on riotous living, possibly ruining many other lives in the process. So soon as the money expired, he betrayed the trust of former friends by leaving them to the mercy of the famine. But when at length he came to his senses, and spiritual realisation dawned, what was his foremost and desperate cry? *“I have sinned against heaven”* (Luke 15:18) – and the God of Heaven. That was the primary indictment to be answered. There is forgiveness with God, because He has been sinned against. **He is an offended God: that is reason to fear Him.**

5.) Recall that an act of forgiveness requires sufficient mandate and authority. An individual can forgive a sin against their person. A manager might forgive a sin committed against a company; a judge forgive on behalf of a nation, a monarch forgive an offence against the crown. But God’s forgiveness is full and complete, covering all sin, of every kind. What does this say about God? His authority is absolute, pre-eminent over all. There is no higher court than God, no power or administration above His jurisdiction. Even the Pharisees recognised this, when they said *“who can forgive sins but God only”* (Mark 2:7). He is King of kings and Lord of lords and Head above all. That the power of ultimate and entire forgiveness is vested in God is a token of His universal supremacy. **His sovereignty is reason to fear Him.**

6.) Further notice that the Psalmist states with confidence that *“There is forgiveness with Thee”*. There is a perpetuity and continuousness about the word. This statement was not limited to a particular time or place. It was true when penned by the Psalmist 3000 years ago, true when the Psalms were consolidated in the complete Holy Bible, true when the scriptures were first translated

into English – and true at this present moment of time. And so long as the earth endures, and the day of grace and opportunity persists, there is forgiveness with God. Though time and history should continue another thousand years, still future generations could boldly say “There **is** forgiveness with God”. How so? Because God is changeless! *“For I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed”* says He (Malachi 3:6). With Him there *“is no variableness, neither shadow of turning”* (James 1:17). That there is forgiveness with God demonstrates His timeless constancy and faithfulness. **His immutability is reason to fear Him.**

7.) It has been seen that, legally speaking, forgiveness is no simple matter; not in human law, nor yet in God’s Divine law. Whilst He is its author, He does not contravene it Himself – He cannot merely suspend His eternal, unbreakable Word in the interests of expediency. The sinner is not pardoned by the exploitation of a loophole in Holy Writ. No – the forgiveness that is with God is evidence of a complicated yet thorough process, which He has enacted, in order to bring **lawful** forgiveness. Yes – He has justified His people – but has Himself remained entirely **Just** in that process. The Roman epistle discloses how it was done:

*“For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, I say, at this time His righteousness: that He might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus”* (Romans 3:23-26). How did God redress the damage that His people’s sins had wrought; the debt which they owed; the penalty which remained outstanding; the broken law demanding recompense; and their complete lack of righteousness?

Three words in the foregoing passage chart the progress of the Divine plan: **Justification**. The people whom God desired to forgive are hopeless sinners, fallen far short of the law's demands, devoid and incapable of any spiritual good. So God came, in the person of His Son, to fulfil the law Himself, and impute the righteousness thus achieved to His people.

**Redemption**. Still against that chosen company of sinners there stood a vast and un-payable debt, compounding interest every moment. So Christ came, and paid that mighty sum with His own precious blood, clearing it at a stroke.

**Propitiation**. The law was yet unsatisfied. There remained the penalty and punishment from which God's forgiven people were to be exempted. But the law's demands could not be defrayed; an insatiate residue of wrath must be meted out. So God gave a Substitute. 'In our place, condemned He stood', and He suffered all the wrath due to His people's sins – and propitiated the claims of a vengeful law.

Only then, with that great and terrible transaction complete; only after all this sacrifice and blood; only after this process of justification, redemption and propitiation, could they who believe in Jesus know the remission of sin.. All this was required – Eternity, History, Calvary – before it could truly be said, "*there is forgiveness with Thee*". There is an immeasurably vast and dreadful work that lies behind the word 'forgiveness'. May every reader, upon consideration of it, be inspired with the **fear of the Lord**, and caused to confess with the hymnwriter:

"O how I fear Thee, living God,  
With deepest, tenderest fears,  
And worship Thee with trembling hope  
And penitential tears."

R. J. Steward



## *The Broken Law Honoured*

Aided by the power of contrast, we purpose... to place side by side man's forgiveness and God's; in other words, forgiveness as exercised by **human** government, and forgiveness as exercised by **divine** government.

The first point of contrast which forgiveness involves: honour to the law broken, and security to the government offended. The considerations which induce a human executive to pardon are totally different from those which move the divine – and here God and man stand in marked and diametrical opposition one to the other. How great the contrast!

There is nothing in the pardon of a **human** government to sustain the majesty of law, and meet the claims of equity. No attempt is made to harmonise the claims of righteousness with the pleadings of mercy; to reconcile the act of pardon with the demands of holiness. No atonement is made, no satisfaction is offered, no penalty is executed; the law is dishonoured, justice is outraged, the government from whence the act emanates is weakened, and its authority lowered in the eyes of the nation; in a word, the criminal is pardoned, and the crime is condoned!

Contrast this with the **divine** pardon of sin. God rests His plan of forgiveness upon a basis which magnifies the law, whose violation He pardons; which executes the sentence, while He remits the penalty; which strengthens the government and lends lustre to its administration, while He spares the sinner who has ignored its authority and rebelled against its commands. God thus takes the matter of satisfaction of justice into His own hands – assumes the responsibility, arranges the preliminaries, and bears the entire cost of the plan – a cost which the infinite resources of Deity alone could meet. It will at once be seen that the great problem of His moral

government which He engaged to solve – and He has solved it – was the harmony of the respective claims of justice and mercy, pardon and holiness, the dignity of the offended government with the forgiveness of the offender. To adjust these conflicting interests, and to harmonise their jarring attributes, was the great work on which Deity embarked – a work in all respects worthy of God. Through the incarnation of the Son of God, by the preceptive obedience of His life, and by the atoning sufferings of His death, He so completely magnified the divine law, and so fully satisfied divine justice, as rendered it righteous and honourable on the part of God to pardon, justify and save the vilest sinners.

Thus clearly the Apostle puts this great truth: *“In whom [Christ] we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace”* (Ephesians 1:7), *“For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous”* (Romans 5:19).

And now, the chief of sinners may approach boldly to the throne of grace and obtain mercy, since he has not only mercy to appeal to, but the merits of Christ to plead. Justice is satisfied, while pardon is extended, and God’s character suffers no dishonour; and His government no injury in forgiving and justifying the most unworthy. We plead a sacrifice all the more acceptable because it is another’s; we bring a righteousness all the more worthy, because not our own. If God should fail to accept us – and most justly might He refuse – yet will He not fail to accept Christ, who obeyed and suffered, died and rose again, in our stead; and all the more because it is His own plan and provision for pardoning and saving the very chief of sinners.

Octavius Winslow, 1874

# Editorial

Mark's account of the Great Commission makes particular reference to the 'preaching of the Gospel'. This is a subject upon which many Christians are deeply exercised, and rightly so, for it is the Lord's command. Yet an important question needs to be answered in this regard, namely: 'what **is** the Gospel?' Before it can be properly ministered, there needs to be an understanding of all that is contained in this word.

The popular interpretation is that 'Gospel' means 'good news', and that in terms of the Christian Faith, that news is: 'believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and be saved'. Consequently, verses like John 3:16 are quoted as examples of 'the gospel in a nutshell', while at a so-called 'gospel service', one can expect to hear a fairly simplistic message on the necessity of faith, coupled with an emotional appeal to unbelievers. Very sharp distinction is made between 'gospel preaching' and ministry of other kinds, such as 'doctrinal', 'devotional' and 'expository'; and whilst an evangelistic message is considered suitable for any congregation, only 'the gospel' is thought to be appropriate for unsaved persons. This segregation of preaching is now so pronounced that in some quarters, separate services are convened for the two different audiences.

A closer examination of the New Testament reveals the folly of this popular misconception. In particular, the way in which the word 'Gospel' is used and applied. The apostles understood something much broader and far-reaching by the term than is the case today. For example, where in the book of Mark is 'the gospel' to be found? Some, according to the common definition, might suggest those words: "*He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved*" (Mark 16:16). But the writer himself gives the answer at the outset of his record: "*The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of*

*God*” (Mark 1:1). The whole of his inspired record comprises ‘the gospel’, hence the title afforded to it. The historical detail, the practical instruction, the doctrine, exhortation and commands are equally deserving of the name ‘gospel’ – not the call to faith only.

Other New Testament writers apply the word ‘gospel’ in a way that challenges its shallow modern usage. Matthew chapter 24 describes the signs of Christ’s coming and the end of the world, stating, “...*the love of many shall wax cold. But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world...*” (Matthew 24:12-14). Here Christ Himself describes an exhortation to continuance and all His foregoing teaching as being ‘gospel’. Similarly, Peter in the intense opening chapter of his first epistle deals with such subjects as the nature of salvation, the world to come, the trial of faith, the origins of Scripture, practical holiness and the eternal purposes of God; but concludes, “...*the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you*” (1 Peter 1:25). The apostle had no doubt that this rich doctrine, indeed that the entire word of God, constituted the Gospel.

To take the general call to faith, and hold it in isolation from the whole counsel of God is to ‘wrest the Scriptures’ (2 Peter 3:16); because the Gospel is only ‘good news’ if preached in its true context. A man walking along a dangerous cliff path will not care to know he can be rescued until he has first realised his peril, and his complete inability to save himself. Nor will it be any relief to him if an inadequate means of deliverance is offered, with no instruction or information on his prospects. At a spiritual level, the Gospel is not ‘good news’ unless accompanied by the preaching of sin, death and wrath to come; unless God’s way of salvation is explained in all its sovereign and eternal perfection; unless there is also teaching concerning the Christian’s future life, in this world

and the next. Only when preached in its fullness does the Word of God become ‘good news’.

The Gospel is not something which an individual needs to hear and believe once, and thereafter has no further need of it. Other verses show clearly that the Gospel includes practical and preceptive teaching, and exhortations to ongoing obedience, and as such is of ongoing relevance to every saint. The truth of the Gospel demands ‘walking uprightly’ (cf Galatians 2:14) and separation from the world (cf Mark 10:29), and subjection to it is demonstrated by an experimental Christian profession (cf 2 Corinthians 9:13); whilst Paul told those who were already believers at Philippi, “*Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ...that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel*” (Philippians 1:27). The Gospel is not a one-off message: Christians are also to be established by it (cf Romans 16:25).

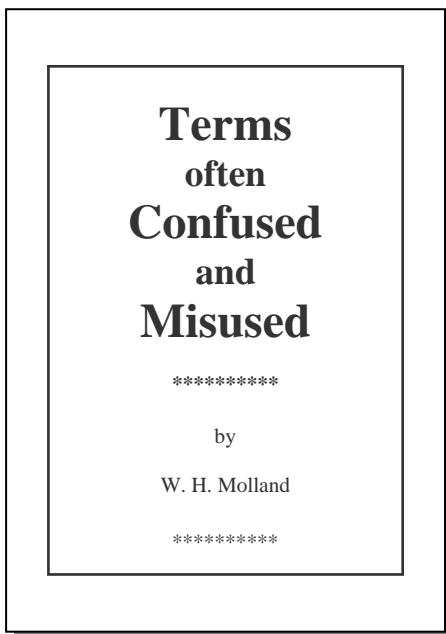
If ‘the Gospel’ is restricted to mean an evangelistic appeal, and little else, then the passages mentioned above cannot be explained. Evidently ‘the Gospel’ is much larger and comprehensive than popular theology appreciates. It is something to be preached, received, and thereafter to stand for (cf 1 Corinthians 15:1). It includes the commandments that the saints are to keep, and the law by which sinners are judged (cf Romans 2:16, 2 Thessalonians 1:8).

‘The Gospel’ is under threat. Such has ever been the case throughout history. Some attacks upon it have been overt and obvious: physical violence, public ridicule, political oppression. Other challenges have been of an intellectual or theological nature: error, heresy, aberrant doctrine, false impostors (cf Galatians 1:6-7). Yet more insidious and potentially dangerous than these, is a subtle erosion of the Gospel from within. This can be observed in the present day, when Christians begin to lose their understanding

of what the Gospel really is, and reinterpret it in their own minds as something lesser or lower than Scripture teaches. As a result of this new and restrictive definition, numerous vital subjects and essential doctrine has been lost from the pulpit, with dire consequences for believers and unbelievers alike.

The Apostle Paul faced such hazards in his own day, and said: “*we were bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God with much contention*” (1 Thessalonians 2:2), “*...I am set for the defence of the gospel*” (Philippians 1:17). It is time for today’s Christians to join in the campaign and wage the same warfare as did the Apostles of old, contending for **all** that God has delivered unto them in His word. The Gospel will best be defended and maintained when it is declared to all men without fear or favour, in its entirety, holding back nothing, **fully** preaching the Gospel of Christ (cf Romans 15:19).

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Recently reprinted, this booklet forms a glossary of fifteen terms which are common among Christians, although often misapplied, without recognition of their true meaning. A useful primer for discerning readers who desire more accuracy in their theological language. (A5-format, 12pp.)

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