

January – March 2010

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**North Road Chapel (Evangelical)  
BIDEFORD**

# FORTY MOMENTOUS DAYS

*“Then He said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning Himself”...“Then opened He their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things.” (Luke 24:25-27, 45-48)*

The Gospel writer Luke was, by profession, a Physician (cf Colossians 4:14). Some commentators consider that he was a Jew, but one of ‘the dispersion’, that is to say, one of those whose forebears had been carried off into captivity at an earlier time, perhaps by the Assyrians, Babylonians or Romans, and had subsequently settled in a foreign land. Other writers believe that he was a Gentile. One thing is certain – he was with the Apostle Paul on many of the great missionary journeys made into the Gentile world. It was Luke who penned the book of Acts, as he accompanied him on several of the preaching tours. Indeed, they were together to the very end: the last epistle which the warrior Paul wrote was the Second to Timothy, composed in a prison cell shortly before his martyrdom, in which he states: *“Only Luke is with me”* (2 Timothy 4:11), from which the closeness of their association may be adduced.

These historical details help to substantiate a point previously made in relation to the Evangelists – namely, that Matthew’s emphasis was to Hebrew society, Mark to the Latin, whereas Luke’s great burden was to the Grecian races. At this point in time, such people

were to be found widely spread throughout the known world. The Greeks were an intellectually advanced race; literature and art being a distinguishing mark of their culture. The Greek language was the most full and comprehensive of all human tongues then known, and regarded as the best medium for communication of knowledge and learning. It is to this people that Luke addresses himself; and being a professional man, formerly of Gentile background, he was eminently suited to thus direct his labours. In this, the wisdom of God is again manifested, in His providence and sovereign control. He always has the right man for the job in hand.

In his Gospel, Luke adopts a very strict historical method. He is factual, giving prominence to existing records, in particular the Old Testament scriptures, stressing their authority and foretelling of an atoning Saviour, and emphasising the need of Divine illumination to rightly understand these prophetic writings. This line of approach was necessary among the Greeks, as they largely regarded the Christian message to be ‘foolishness’, as Paul later informs (cf 1 Corinthians 1:23). When recording the event of Christ appearing to two travellers on the Emmaus Road (see *The Link* Jan-Mar 2007) Luke reports the Saviour’s words, “*all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the Law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning Me*” (Luke 24:44). This epitomises the nature of Luke’s Gospel. A further verse reads, “*thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer*” – stress is laid on the historical facts, their authority and subsequent fulfilment. Although these words were spoken initially by the Lord, it is Luke who specifically and uniquely records them. This was the kind of witness necessary in the society to which Luke was called, in the purposes of God.

There is a pertinent application here. In these days, the sufficiency and total authority of Scripture is assailed on every side. Even in churches that claim to be sound and orthodox, it is common to hear ‘primary truth’ and ‘secondary truth’ spoken of. By this low

theology, certain parts of the Bible are relegated to a position of lesser importance than others, the only fundamental tenet being the message of salvation to sinners. Some Christians make this very limited criterion of ‘the Gospel’ the only prerequisite to fellowship with other so-called believers, conveniently overlooking gross errors in Church practice and doctrine, excusing and indulging them as ‘secondary issues’. There is **no such thing** as primary and secondary truth. It is ‘the whole counsel of God’, it is “*all things*”, prefaced by “*thus it is written*”. There is not a single utterance in the Word of God that can be regarded as ‘less important’. “*All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness*” (2 Timothy 3:16).

All Scripture focuses upon the atoning work of Christ. All Christian doctrine prefigures it, or proceeds from it. To this central character – the Holy person and work of the Son of God – Luke now turns, writing “*thus is beloved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead on the third day*” (Luke 24:46). This matter was a great stumbling block to Jewish minds, and to the Greeks, utter foolishness (cf 1 Corinthians 1:23). Yet it was the central theme of all the Old Testament records, taught by the prophets, set forth in types, from Abel to John the Baptist. Were this not so, then all the animal sacrifices of history would have been a meaningless exercise, and the predictions of the prophets but idle words. The fact is, that every lamb slain in sacrifice – from the days of Abel to the last Passover night before the crucifixion – was a vivid and forceful portrayal of the Lamb of God who would ultimately take away sin. All the prophets from Enoch to Malachi spoke of Him. As John rightly states “*the testimony of Jesus is the spirit [the heart, the sum and substance] of prophecy*” (Revelation 19:10). The burden of the entire volume of Holy Writ is, that Christ must suffer and rise from the dead. A vicarious work of this nature was alone sufficient to effect the redemption of lost sinners.

Since the work of Atonement is the focal point of Scripture, it follows that Christ's work upon earth is the great central fact of human history. And this is so – even secular history revolves around it. The reckoning of time is calculated by years 'BC' and 'AD', that is, before and after Christ. Luke well expresses the significance and wonder of this work at the outset of the Gospel "*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men*" (Luke 2:14). It is recorded that at creation, the Morning Stars sang together (Job 38:7); Luke tells of the angels' songs that heralded the incarnation; John discloses by revelation the songs of glorified saints in heaven. But all have the same wondrous theme – all pertain to Christ.

Luke knew well the prejudices of his Grecian audience, and the charge of 'folly' with which they attempted to slur the Christian faith. In consequence of which he stresses the need for Divine Illumination, without which no-one, whether Jew or Greek, can obtain a right understanding. In this particular record of the Lord's post-resurrection appearance, he states "*then opened He their understanding that they might understand the Scriptures*" (Luke 24:45). The universal dullness of man in matters of spiritual truth was only exacerbated among the Greeks who were intellectually biased against it. There are many parallels between those men of the First Century, and humanity today. Modern man is equally set in his mind, and confirmed in his thinking, dismissing the Scriptures as foolish, and considering himself to be too intellectually advanced for the Word of God. Preach the truth to such, and they will soon retaliate with "but I think this...", or, "I believe this...", or "my opinion is...". God's Word alone holds the absolute truth, and yet the unbeliever is blind to it all. Why is it thus? 'Their foolish hearts are darkened' (cf Romans 1:21); or as the Corinthian epistle puts it: "*the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of*

*God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Corinthians 2:14).*

From this it is clear that in the work of Salvation, something more is needed than simply ‘increased light’ – there must be the opening of blind eyes to first **see** the light. The act of taking a blind man from a darkened room and placing him in daylight will not cause him to see. He is blind in either case. The same is true, spiritually. More than the impartation of biblical knowledge, an enlightening of the mind is needed in order to understand spiritual truth. This is the great work of the Holy Spirit of God, for which every sinner should earnestly pray. David, the simple shepherd boy of Bethlehem who later became king of Israel prayed, “*open Thou mine eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy law*” (Psalm 119:18). Isaiah predicted that the Promised Messiah, when He came would, ‘open blind eyes’ (cf Isaiah 42:7). The Apostle Paul actually witnessed this process in operation as he preached the Gospel beside a river in Philippi: “*And a certain woman named Lydia...heard us: whose heart the Lord opened that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul*” (Acts 16:14). Later in the same city, the eyes and heart of a hardened jailor were opened, and he similarly gave attendance to the truth, believed it, was baptised and eternally saved.

Bearing in mind the manner in which Luke was inspired to write his gospel, consider the way in which he reports the Great Commission: “*that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem...*” (Luke 24:47). **All nations.** No area of the planet is excluded; no-one is debarred from hearing of the eternal blessings of God’s salvation. It should also be noted that this mighty work of preaching would ‘begin at Jerusalem’. There is something very touching about this clause. It was over this city that Christ wept saying, “*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent*

*unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not!”* (Luke 13:34). It was in the streets of this city that those impetuous and wild cries rang out ‘Crucify Him! Crucify Him!’. It was the soil of this city that the Man of Sorrows wet with His own tears; its pavements that were stained with the blood of Emmanuel. It was just outside this city’s wall that men hung the Incarnate Son of God on a felon’s gibbet. Surely if any place on earth deserved to be perpetually **debarred** from the blessings of the gospel, it was Jerusalem. If any people ever forfeited the way of repentance, it was the inhabitants of this place. But no! The Lord’s final instructions to His disciples were to preach forgiveness and the remission of sins among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. The place that ran red with the blood of prophets and martyrs past, to which had lately been added the precious blood of Christ – “begin there” says the Saviour.

If such a place as Jerusalem could find forgiveness, none need despair! The author John Bunyan adopts this theme in his book ‘The Jerusalem Sinner Saved or Good News for the Vilest of Men’. In a lively and dramatic manner he portrays the fulfilment of this part of the Great Commission, as Peter declares the wonderful message on the Day of Pentecost, “*Repent and be baptized, every one of you*”. The Apostle Peter had no false reserve about this, no inhibitions, but boldly declared, ‘I am to preach to every one of you. Guilty of the blood of Christ you may be, but through this Man whom ye have crucified is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins!’. What a note to end upon! Might every reader come to know the cleansing efficacy of Christ’s atoning work, through repentance, faith and the belief of the Gospel.

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

# GOOD NEWS FOR THE VILEST OF MEN

## *A Help for Despairing Souls*

*“And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem”* (Luke 24:47). The words were spoken by Christ, after He rose from the dead, and they are here rehearsed after an historical manner, but do contain in them a formal commission, with a special clause therein. The commission is, as you see, for the preaching of the gospel, and is very distinctly inserted in the holy record by Matthew and Mark. *“Go... teach all nations”* (Matthew 28:19), *“Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature”* (Mark 16:15). Only this clause is in special mentioned by Luke, who saith, that as Christ would have the doctrine of repentance and remission of sins preached in His name among all nations, so He would have the people of Jerusalem to have the first proffer thereof. Preach it, saith Christ, in all nations, but begin at Jerusalem.

The Apostles then, though they had a commission so large as to give them warrant to go and preach the gospel in all the world, yet by this clause they were limited as to the beginning of their ministry; they were to begin this work at Jerusalem: *“beginning at Jerusalem”*. Before I proceed to an observation upon the words, I must, but briefly... show you what Jerusalem now was.

First, as to her descent, she was from Abraham by the sons of Jacob, a people that God singled out from the rest of the nations, to set His love upon them... Secondly, as to her preference or exaltation, she was the place of God’s worship, and that which had in and with her the special tokens and signs of God’s favour and presence, above any other people in the world... But thirdly, we are to consider Jerusalem also in her decays; for, as she is so considered, she is the proper object of our text, as will be further showed by and by.



Jerusalem, as I told you, was the place and seat of God's worship, but now decayed, degenerated and apostatised. The Word, the rule of worship was rejected of them, and in its place they had put and set up their own traditions: they had rejected also the most weighty ordinances, and put in the room thereof their own little things. Jerusalem was therefore now greatly backslidden, and become the place where truth and true religion were much defaced.

It was also now become the very sink of sin and seat of hypocrisy, and gulf where true religion was drowned. Here also now reigned a presumption, and groundless confidence in God, which is the bane of souls. Amongst its rulers, doctors and leaders, envy, blasphemy and malice vented itself against the power of godliness, in all places where it was espied; and also against the promoters of it; yea, their Lord and Maker could not escape them. In a word, Jerusalem was now become a shambles, the very slaughter-shop for the saints. This was the place wherein the prophets, Christ and His people were most horribly persecuted and murdered...

This is the city, and these are the people; this is their character, and these their sins: nor can be produced their parallel in all this world. Nay, what world, what people, what nation, for sin and transgression could or can be compared to Jerusalem? Especially if you join to the matter of fact the light they sinned against, and the patience which they abused. Infinite was the wickedness upon this account which they committed.

And now come to this clause, "*beginning at Jerusalem*"; that is, that Christ would have Jerusalem have the first offer of the gospel. This cannot be so commanded because they had now any more right, of themselves, thereto, than had any nation of the world; for their sins had divested them of all self-deservings. Nor yet because they stood upon the advance-ground with the worst of the sinners of the nations; nay rather, the sinners of the nations had the advance

ground of them: for Jerusalem was, long before she had added this iniquity to her sin, worse than the very nations that God cast out before the children of Israel (cf 2 Chronicles 33:9).

It must therefore follow that this clause, “*beginning at Jerusalem*” was put into this commission of mere grace and compassion, even from the overflowings of the bowels of mercy; for indeed they were the worst, and so in the most deplorable condition of any people under the heavens. Whatever therefore their relation was to Abraham, Isaac or Jacob – however they formerly had been the people among whom God had placed His name and worship, they were now degenerated from God, more than the nations were with their idols, and were become guilty of the highest sins which the people of the world were capable of committing. Nay, none can be capable of committing such sins as they committed against their God, when they slew His Son, and persecuted His name and Word.

From these words therefore, thus explained, we gain this observation: **that Jesus Christ would have mercy offered, in the first place, to the biggest sinners...** Oh the greatness of the grace of Christ, that He should be thus in love with the souls of Jerusalem sinners! That He should be thus delighted with the salvation of Jerusalem sinners! That He should not only will that His gospel should be offered them, but that it should be offered to them first, and before other sinners were admitted to a hearing of it. ‘Begin at Jerusalem’. Was this doctrine well believed, where would there be a place for a doubt, or a fear of the damnation of the soul, if the sinner be penitent, how bad a life soever he has lived, how many soever in number are his sins. And sinner, if thou wouldst be saved by Him, His benefits are thine, though thou art a great and Jerusalem transgressor.

John Bunyan 1688

# “Cease Ye From Man”

## *Isaiah 2:22*

Two hundred years before the fall of Jerusalem to the armies of Babylon, the prophet Isaiah was granted a Divine revelation of those great and terrible events. Inspired by that which he foresaw – coming destruction and the sin which would precipitate it – he faithfully warned the people, that they might forsake their iniquity while opportunity remained. Associations with heathen nations, false religion, financial affluence and military armament would all be unavailing in that day. One further timely caution is appended: “*Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils: for wherein is he to be accounted of?*” (Isaiah 2:22). But Isaiah’s visions had a wider relevance and application than simply the political future of national Israel. The language of them is broader and higher, reaching to the end of time itself, and the Last Great Day of the Lord, “*when He ariseth to shake terribly the earth*” (Isaiah 2:21, cf Hebrews 12:26-27). The words of this book cannot be consigned to history alone; they continue to apply in these last days (Isaiah 2:2, cf 1 John 2:18). Its warnings are to be heeded, and its instructions obeyed – not least this, “*Cease ye from man*”.

### **1. THE NECESSITY OF THE COMMANDMENT**

There was a short period of time when man knew his Creator, and consequently had a correct knowledge of himself also. A proper understanding of, and right relationship with God gives to the individual a true perspective upon themselves, and indeed the rest of humanity. Sadly, this period of clarity lasted only as long as Adam was in Eden. With the Fall came division, rebellion and enmity with God, and man’s knowledge of God was irrevocably marred.

This state of self-inflicted separation and ignorance had numerous and dire repercussions. In the absence of God, man lost all sense of proportion, and instead of looking upward to his Divine Sovereign, began to look only to himself, and his fellow man. From amongst the ranks of humankind he began to seek for rulers, leaders and exemplars. To man he looked for help, promotion and salvation; to man he began to direct worship, glory and praise. “*Ye shall be as gods*” the Serpent had lied in the Garden (Genesis 3:5); and man, desperate to recover his losses, determined to make that deception a reality.

This same fundamental attitude still persists to the present day. Denying any higher existence or authority than his own, man makes gods of himself and his fellow creatures. It is a mindset which manifests itself continually in the world, whether in philosophy, politics, education, science, medicine, the news media or popular entertainment. Throughout the earth, humanity heeds only the sound of its own voice, and proudly claims “*it is the voice of a god, and not of a man*” (cf Acts 14:11). Isaiah foretells that this folly will persist until the Second Coming; hence the timeless necessity of this command: “*Cease ye from man*”. There has never been a season when this injunction was not relevant, nor will there be.

The sins of self-deification and man-worship are a flaw inherent throughout humanity, to which all are subject by nature. It arose in the hearts of Adam and Eve at the Fall, and has passed on to every succeeding generation, without exception. This is one of the many stumbling-blocks and obstacles which prevent an individual from coming to God – they have not ceased from man. Even within the regenerated hearts and minds of the saints, it is an aspect of the old nature that continually resurfaces, warring against the spirit. In delivering this instruction ‘cease ye from man’, Isaiah truly gave a “*sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed*” (2 Peter 1:19).

## 2. REASONS FOR THE COMMANDMENT

The directive to ‘cease from man’ is not given in isolation. It is followed by a clause that expresses the sense and reasonableness of the foregoing command: “*Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils*”. There are certain facts, universally true of all flesh, that demonstrate the folly of man-ward adulation.

**Mortality** Man is a mortal creature. The curiously anatomical nature of Isaiah’s words serves to emphasise this. Every man or woman who has ever lived is dependant upon respiration for their ongoing existence. If they cannot draw in air through the nose or mouth, they will die. The absence of oxygen for two or three minutes can prove fatal. The best and greatest men that the world has ever raised have been equally reliant upon the functions of their weak, dying bodies; none have escaped the curse of mortality; none have thwarted the claims of death upon them. The ephemeral, fleeting nature of human life is well expressed in that verse which says, “*all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away*” (1 Peter 1:24). Everyone who lives, from beggars to kings, has this same testimony, “*there is but a step between me and death*” (1 Samuel 20:3), or indeed, a breath.

How foolish does it then appear, for one man to rely upon another, or to place hope in one who is as temporal as himself? How can mortal man, whose life might be measured in years, compare to God, who is ‘from everlasting to everlasting’, immortal, eternal and infinite? It is from God that all other life proceeds, and on Him depends: “*God who made the world...seeing that He is Lord of heaven and earth...giveth to all life, and breath and all things...For in Him we live, and move and have our being*” (Acts 17:24-28).

**Derived Merit** It is not simply the fragile gift of life for which man is indebted to God. It is God who ‘giveth all things’. None would

deny the fact that certain men and women have made great achievements, and demonstrated abilities, talents and skills to the advantage of themselves and others. Some have risen to positions of authority in which they have ruled well, and prospered nations. Others have advanced the causes of science and technology to the benefit of society. This might seem a just cause to praise and extol significant characters, and exalt them to places of high honour. But Isaiah goes on to ask a pertinent question: “*Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils: for wherein is he to be accounted of?*” (Isaiah 2:22). When a final analysis is made, what will ultimately be credited to any man’s account? Will man have whereof to glory in that day? No, for:

“No good in creatures can be found,  
But may be found in Thee” (Ryland)

Not without reason are an individual’s particular abilities described as ‘gifts’ – for that is what they are. In His common mercy toward Creation, God has providentially endowed certain men and women with the means to assist their fellows. Yet if such persons become ‘exalted above measure’, let it be remembered that, “*every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father*” (James 1:17). Even those who have accomplished much in offices of state, and positions of responsibility need to be reminded “*Thou couldest have no power at all...except it were given thee from above*” (John 19:11), “*For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God*” (Romans 13:1). Sinful man cannot boast of his own achievements, because he does not own them – they are lent to him in the providential purposes of God. The best that humanity has to offer is but borrowed virtue and derived merit. Rather than being able to plead their merits in mitigation before God at the Judgement, they will instead have to give an account of how they have used that which was entrusted to them. (cf Matthew 25:14-30).

### 3. TRANSGRESSION OF THE COMMANDMENT

It is evident from Scripture that there is a degree of honour and respect which is due from one man to another, particularly those in authority, whether parents (cf Exodus 20:12), elders (cf Leviticus 19:32), employers (cf Ephesians 6:5), rulers (cf Hebrews 13:7) and those in positions of secular government (cf 1 Peter 2:13-14). Similarly, it is a mark of gratitude to recognise the achievements of those whose labours have profited humanity – provided that the man does not eclipse God. This is Biblical and right, and does not fall within the present terms of reference. The object of this article is to examine the exaltation and praise of man which is contrary to the tenor of Scripture, and transgresses the clear word of Isaiah chapter 2, and other similar passages. Numerous cases of this sin can be called to mind

**Living Persons** The ‘cult of celebrity’ prevalent in modern Western society is a prime example. Men and women of the world glory in their ‘heroes’ and ‘stars’, idolising them with a fervour equal to the proponents of heathen religion. This behaviour is promoted and propagated by the media in a ceaseless stream of sounds and images. It is sadly possible for those who profess faith to be affected and infected by the spirit of the age, and become similarly deluded. Let Isaiah’s solemn warning be taken to heart! More insidious forms of the same sin also exist. Those who would never follow entertainers and sports personalities might still be inclined to give allegiance to politicians, and place their hopes in Prime Ministers, Governors and Presidents. Many Christians have fallen into this snare over the years, and continue to do so, supporting the cause of political parties and pressure groups, as though they believed sinful men had power to revive the morals of society. The Psalmist said: *“Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help. His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish”* (Psalm 146:3). Princes and bureaucrats are helpless. To any of God’s

people who are inclined to idealise or idolise them, the command is ‘cease and desist’.

**Religious Leaders** Whilst rightly rejecting the feted personalities of the world, Christians need also to be warned against committing the same sin, but with a slightly modified object. There is a tendency within Christendom for certain believers to attain a level of ‘ecclesiastical fame’ – writing best-selling books, speaking to packed conferences, accepting invitations to the most popular seminaries and fraternals, sitting on numerous councils, trusts and boards – and thereby creating for themselves a following of enthusiastic devotees within their circle of Church influence. This situation is not more acceptable and excusable than the world’s equivalent on account of its religious bent. It is the more to be rejected and condemned, for arising among the people of God, who should know better.

The Apostles experienced a little of this in the First Century, to the point that Paul was inspired to write: “ *For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men? For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal?*” (1 Corinthians 3:3-4). When they become advocates and supporters of particular preachers, Christians do but demonstrate the carnality and worldliness of their thinking. They falsely worship the channel and instrument, rather than the Source and Sovereign, namely God. To commit so profound an error, in this, the arena of faith and holiness, is sin indeed. “*Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos*”, or any subsequent Church leader, “*but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase*” (verses 5-7).



**Historical Characters** A person does not need to be living in the present age to become an object of adoration and praise. The passage of time can raise a pedestal, on which is placed a figure distorted by bias and nostalgia. The rough edges of their record are softened by sympathetic biographies and documentary inaccuracies, making them more desirable in retrospect than ever they were when alive. Such men exist primarily within the minds of their followers, and are very difficult idols to cast down. This is true in both secular and Church history, and right-thinking Christians should be guarded against it.

One current example is that of John Calvin, the anniversary of whose birth was marked with much hyperbole in the Christian Press last year. None would deny the significance of this man's life and work, or the great contribution that he made to the understanding of much Biblical doctrine. (For such things, God is to be thanked). The cause of truth was prospered throughout Europe in consequence of his teaching and writing, and impetus given to those who sought to secede from the errors of Romanism. However, from the language that has been used of him in recent months, and the volumes of text devoted to his honour, one would think the popish folly of beatification was still upheld within Evangelicalism. Sermons have been preached in which Calvin, and not Christ, is the centre of attention. His book 'Institutes of the Christian Religion' is spoken of by some as though it was on a par with Holy Writ itself, while others describe the doctrine of God's Sovereign Grace as though it were invented by Calvin, rather than merely publicised by him. The religious nature of this enthusiasm is well demonstrated by the fact that many desire to be 'named by the name' of this man, and actually call themselves 'Calvinists'.

To try and separate a man from his sins, and segregate good deeds from evil, is to force a false and unjustified distinction. Those who wholeheartedly subscribe to the religion of 'Calvianity' must either

wilfully ignore, or tacitly accept Calvin's wrongs. There can be no escaping from the fact that whilst preaching much that was good and right, he continued to espouse such gross errors as Covenant Theology, Paedobaptism, Church-State Union, and the suppression of 'heresy' by force, whereby he became directly or indirectly responsible for the deaths of many genuine believers. The very best of men – even godly men – are tainted by sin and prone to error. It is because of this universal infirmity that Scripture exhorts us to 'cease' from them. "*It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man*" even though they are enlightened and believing men; "*It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in princes*" even though they be a prince of preachers (Psalm 118:8-9).

**Self** It is possible to have a correct view of all men, worldly and godly, and evade the pitfalls previously described, and still be guilty of man-worship. For there is one person which every man or woman alive is prone to exalt above measure, and ascribe thereto an inordinate degree of priority and attention – and that is, oneself. So even in a state of isolation, there is the facility for this sin. How common is that attitude which, like Peter of old proudly says 'Although all else shall fail, yet will not I' (cf Mark 14:29). Yet within the hearts of all men are the same infirmities; the capacity for sin is equally present in every one. To imagine oneself to be exempt or exceptional is a delusion: "*He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool: but whoso walketh wisely, he shall be delivered*" (Proverbs 28:26). True wisdom recognises the state of one's own self, and learns to say with the Apostle: "*I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing*" (Romans 7:18); for we are not "*sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God*" (2 Corinthians 3:5). This principle applies to all walks of life, whether in matters practical, academic, financial, and especially, spiritual. The believer ought not to become proud of their development in the Christian faith, or growth in grace, or attainments they have made in their walk with God – for all these

things too, are heaven-sent. *“For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith”* (Romans 12:3).

#### **4. THE EXCEPTION TO THE COMMANDMENT**

There is one case that might be described as the exception to this commandment; one character in all human history who was not subject to the shortcomings, failure and sin of the rest, and therefore one whom it is appropriate to glorify, honour and obey, without qualification or reservation. To Him the reader is directed in the Hebrew epistle, where Paul, conscious that some might be inclined to follow their religious leaders and ecclesiastical heads, points instead toward the only man whom it is safe to emulate: *“Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, **considering the end of their conversation, Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever**”* (Hebrews 13:7-8). Far above the most commendable and godly men, stands the Lord Jesus Christ – He is the great end and object who alone is to be considered worthy of praise. His is the only name under heaven, given among men, which may safely and surely be worshipped.

The very best of this world’s men are subject to variation, change and decay. Those who make a great impression today will fall into sin and shame tomorrow; and in the following of such there is only disappointment and grief to be found. But the Lord Jesus Christ is eternally the same, possessing Divine immutability and perpetual faithfulness. His wondrous qualities will never change; He will never leave or forsake His people. From this Son of Man we ought **never** to cease. In light of these things, might that word which once was said of the disciples, be true also of us: *“they saw no man any more, save Jesus only”* (Mark 9:8).

R. J. Steward

## ONE OBJECT OF TRUST

“*Cease ye from man*” (Isaiah 2:22). Never trust him, for his heart is deceitful; never expect from him, for he is an empty cistern; never follow him, for he is a false guide. Cursed be the man who trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord. Trust ye not in a friend. One object of trust is enough: He has all you want, and has offered to give whenever you ask. He never did deceive, He never can. It is impossible for God to lie. Looking to man dishonours His fulness; trusting in man is pouring contempt on His word; expecting from man is overlooking His agency. If you neglect this loving direction, expect to suffer; if you walk by it, your peace will be like a river, and your soul like a well-watered garden. He knows what is in man, you do not. He cautions you because He loves you. He would save you from disappointment, sorrow and woe. Come then to the conclusion of the prophet, “*Therefore will I look unto the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation: my God will hear me*” (Micah 7:7)... Cease from man, trust not thy own heart; but keep close to thy good Shepherd. He is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory, with exceeding joy.

James Smith, 1840

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“Happy they who trust in Jesus!  
Sweet their portion is, and sure;  
When the foe on others seizes,  
God will keep His own secure;  
Happy people!  
Happy, though despised and poor.

Lo! your Saviour never slumbers;  
Ever watchful is His care;  
Though you cannot boast of numbers,  
In His strength secure you are.  
Sweet their portion,  
Who our Saviour’s kindness share.”

Thomas Kelly

# Editorial

In a changing and deteriorating world, it is of great benefit to focus upon the Lord Jesus Christ, who never changes. He is the Rock of Ages – a place of security and safety in a sea of uncertainty, solid ground amidst the surging tides of change, one fixed and constant point above the raging waters of this present evil generation, never to be moved or overwhelmed.

The Apostle John had experienced rapid and frequent change during his lifetime – seasons of blessing and woe, prosperity and affliction; the ebb and flow of the New Testament Church throughout the Mediterranean regions. Exiled upon Patmos in his old age, he might have been forgiven for thinking all was lost, and giving place to bitterness and despair. Yet the opening verses of Revelation find him *“in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day”*, and still in the active service of his Master. To him the ascended, glorified Lord appeared, and announced Himself with such great titles as *“the faithful witness”*, *“Alpha and Omega”*, *“which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty”*. (Revelation 1:5, 8) By these wondrous appellations, John was assured of the Lord’s unchanging and eternal nature. Here was *“this same Jesus”* whom he had known on earth – unaltered in His grace, love and might; and who, living now in the *“power of an endless life”*, would change nevermore. What immense comfort and encouragement these words must have imparted to the aged Apostle! They have lost nothing of their import with the passage of time.

Within a few verses, however, the Lord cites these same attributes in a very different context. The Church of Laodiceans is the recipient, to whence, with dreadful significance comes the salutation, *“These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God. I know thy works,*

*that thou art neither cold nor hot...So then...I will spue thee out of My mouth”* (Revelation 3:14-16). Christ is again emphasising His Divinely unvarying nature, faithful from beginning to end; but these very same qualities stand to the condemnation of the Laodiceans, and not to their blessing.

What was the difference in this instance? While Christ was unchanged, the professed Christians at Laodicea had altered greatly. The heat and fervour of their original faith had been forsaken, and because of an abundance of iniquity, the love of many had waxed cold. The result was a tepid and unpalatable compromise situation, characterised by apathy, carnality and conceit. The Lord had witnessed their downward course. While they had lowered the standard, changed the nature of their faith, and adopted the world’s attitudes, Christ was still the same; His Word sure, His holy requirements eternally established.

The faithfulness of Christ is a wonderful doctrine to faithful Christians. But to those who presume to alter their faith and practice according to the fashions of the world, and change God’s appointed way for one of their own invention, the very same fact becomes a solemn indictment. They have despised ‘permanence’, and rejected the Stone; having failed to build on the steadfast Rock, they risk being broken upon it instead (cf Matthew 21:42-44). Let each one examine their own hearts, and cleave to Christ with that constancy which His own nature demands.

*Preliminary Announcement*

**ANNUAL BIBLE CONVENTION**

**Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> & Lord’s Day 6<sup>th</sup> June 2010 D.V.**

*Preacher* : Mr Pooyan Mehrshahi  
(Cheltenham)