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The Link

NORTH ROAD CHAPEL

BIDEFORD

THE TABERNACLE OF GOD

Part 7

“And it came to pass, when the ark set forward, that Moses said, Rise up, Lord, and let Thine enemies be scattered; and let them that hate Thee flee before Thee. And when it rested, he said, Return, O Lord, unto the many thousands of Israel.” (Numbers 10:35-36)

The rings and staves provided for the Ark, and the three-fold covering of a veil, badgers’ skins and a cloth of blue, supplied all that was needed for its safe movement from place to place. Accordingly, this present article considers the ‘career’ of the Ark, or, the many journeys that it made. For God’s people were pilgrims in a wilderness, travelling to the destination which He had appointed them; and everywhere they went, the Ark must go also. Ultimately, the promised inheritance was possessed, and the permanent structure of the Temple established, allowing the staves to be finally withdrawn. The Ark, with the people, had ‘entered into its rest’ (cf Psalm 132:8).

1. The Wilderness

For many years prior to this, the Ark accompanied them, complete with its carrying-poles, typifying Christ’s presence with His people through the wilderness of this world. The circuitous route which this involved can be traced in the Scriptures, commencing in the Book of Numbers: *“At the commandment of the Lord the children of Israel journeyed, and at the commandment of the Lord they pitched: as long as the cloud abode upon the tabernacle they rested in their tents”* (Numbers 9:18). The Divinely-supplied pillar of cloud was their guide in every movement.

In the following chapter, Moses is heard in conversation with his father-in-law Jethro, in whose locality the people were then situated, and it is evident a meeting between them had occurred. Speaking of the

journey that lay before them, Moses said: “*Leave us not, I pray thee; forasmuch as thou knowest how we are to encamp in the wilderness, and thou mayest be to us instead of eyes*” (Numbers 10:31). ‘You know this barren wilderness so well!’ ‘Stay with us, and your advice will be invaluable’. This is the carnal reasoning of Moses. Alas – what is man? Even the best of men? As if he needed the help of a Midianite to pilot him, when they had the abiding, visible presence God, as a cloud above them!

In the end, this very dubious, worldly policy was not followed, as a subsequent verse records: “*And they departed from the mount of the Lord three days’ journey: and **the ark of the covenant of the Lord went before them** in the three days’ journey, to search out a resting place for them*” (Numbers 10:33). This was God’s pattern. The Ark of the Covenant of the Lord was amongst them. This would be their guide, and by it, their resting places were to be found out. They did not require any human assistance.

How precious is the typology here! Do not those words from the New Testament immediately spring to mind, which state: “*the sheep hear His voice: and He calleth His own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. And when He putteth forth His own sheep, He goeth before them, and the sheep follow Him: for they know His voice*” (John 10:3-4). When the cloud lifted, indicating that Israel must move on, the Ark was borne ahead to find the next stopping point. Likewise, “*when He putteth forth His own sheep, He goeth before them*” – when the providence of God ordains changes in our lives, He, the Good Shepherd, typified by the Ark, goes before to prepare the way.

Since the Lord is their Shepherd, His people shall not want for guidance or any provision; but rather will be led beside still waters, and made to lie down in green pastures. He will prepare for them a laden table and overflowing cup even in the midst of hostile, enemy territory; and when the last and darkest stage of the journey is reached,

even the Valley of the Shadow of Death is no cause for fear, since He is present, to bring His people safe into the House of the Lord, therein to dwell for ever (cf Psalm 23).

Then leave it all in the hands of the Ark's antitype, the Great Shepherd of the Sheep! For He knows the wilderness better than any other, having trodden it Himself. He will take care of everything in this life, and ultimately provide a resting place in the splendour of His presence for all eternity.

2. The Borders of Canaan

This is only one aspect of the travels of that sacred vessel, the Ark. In due course it came, in company with the people, to the borders of Canaan for the first time. But the country having been spied out, the people heeded only the evil report of the unbelieving majority, and refused to enter in. Whereupon God turned them about, and forbad them to proceed any further into the promised land. Resenting this prohibition, the next day they determined to go in their own strength to fight against the Amalekites: *“But they presumed to go up unto the hill top: nevertheless the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and Moses, departed not out of the camp”* (Numbers 14:44).

The word ‘presumed’ here, means ‘to act without leave’, ‘to take for granted’, or ‘to form over-confident opinions’. Israel, acting against the Divine commandment went up against the enemy who occupied the land – but the Ark never left the encampment. What was the outcome? *“Then the Amalekites came down, and the Canaanites which dwelt in that hill, and smote them, and discomfited them, even unto Hormah”* (Numbers 14:45). Israel had to learn the lesson that if the Ark was not with them, signifying the presence of the Lord, then they would know nothing but failure and disaster. How pointed an application is here! Whether in the life of an individual believer, or a church – if the Lord is not preminent, leading the way by His

direction, and carnal wisdom is relied upon instead, only catastrophe can result.

3. The Crossing of Jordan

After forty years of wandering in the wilderness, the continued course of the Ark can be followed in the book of Joshua. The four decades spent in the desert was a long record of complaint, murmuring and unbelief – yet the Ark was still with them. God had never removed it. Now, a generation later, the people were brought once more to stand on the threshold of the promised land. What a picture this is of the marvellous patience and longsuffering of God toward His people in every age. Notwithstanding their sins, shortcomings and miserable failures, His word forever holds good: “*I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee*” (Hebrews 13:5).

On the second occasion, the people of Israel stood on the verge of Jordan – and that river would have to be crossed in order to reach Canaan. In the Scriptures, Jordan is ever a symbol of trial, judgement or death. Consider these words of instruction that were given: “*And it shall come to pass, as soon as the soles of the feet of the priests that bear the ark of the Lord, the Lord of all the earth, shall rest in the waters of Jordan, that the waters of Jordan shall be cut off from the waters that come down from above; and they shall stand upon an heap*”. “*And Joshua said, Hereby ye shall know that the living God is among you, and that He will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Hivites, and the Perizzites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Jebusites. Behold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth passeth over before you into Jordan*” (Joshua 3:13, 10-11).

As soon as the Ark was carried into the river, the waters rolled back. This was to signify to the people that henceforth, no enemy would stand against them, or prevent them from claiming their inheritance. All that opposed their way would be overcome in like manner. This is

an eloquent pre-figuration of the work of Christ Jesus. When the Lord was taken by wicked hands and led to Calvary; and when, (by the determinate counsel of Almighty God) He there stepped from the brink into the billows of Divine wrath, in that instant they rolled back. He subdued all the raging waves of terrible vengeance, and they fled away beneath His feet.

There is now no power on earth, or in Hell, that can ever prevent an elect soul from obtaining the eternal inheritance procured for them by Christ (cf Romans 8:1, 31-34). All who are born again by God's Holy Spirit will be escorted safely through life, and death, into the heavenly Canaan. No force or person shall prevent them attaining their appointed haven. Of what vital importance was the Ark! Israel would never have come through the wilderness, nor crossed Jordan without it. Equally impossible is it for any saint to make safe passage through this life, and enter into their eternal rest, but by the guiding and preserving grace of God in Christ Jesus.

4. The Conquest of Jericho

Unlike its spiritual counterpart, earthly Canaan once reached, had to be fought for. The first campaign was against the walled city of Jericho. The miraculous way in which its defences were overcome and victory gained is documented in Joshua chapter six. The detail of relevance to this study is that as the people processed around the city, the Ark went at the head of the column. No less than ten times in the first 13 verses is the Ark mentioned.

According to their God-given directive, the Israelites silently circumscribed the city's perimeter on six consecutive days, and seven times on the seventh day. Whereupon, trumpets were blown, a cry was raised, and the walls fell in ruins. The power which accomplished this great feat was not in the marching, or the blowing, or the shouting. No – the power was of God, whose presence was signified by the Ark.

If the strongholds of Satan which beset and oppose the people of God today (and they are many) are to fall; if proud imaginations “*and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God*” is to be cast down (2 Corinthians 10:5) – it will only be accomplished in the power of God, and under the Divine leadership of the Captain of our Salvation.

“Yes, in Thy name, O Captain of Salvation,
In Thy dear name, all other names above;
Jesus our Righteousness, our sure foundation,
Our Prince of Glory, and our King of love.

We go in faith, our own great weakness feeling,
And needing more each day Thy grace to know;
Yet from our hearts, a song of triumph pealing,
We rest on Thee, and in Thy name we go.”

(Cherry)

5. The Failure at Ai

The second campaign in which the people engaged nearly ended in disaster. The tragic incident is related in the seventh chapter of Joshua. Through pride, self-sufficiency, and a lack of waiting upon God, Israel were greatly humiliated. The inhabitants of Ai – fewer in number and less well-defended than those of Jericho – overpowered Israel, and put them to flight. Deeply distressed, Joshua sought the Lord’s face in prayer, and God revealed to him the cause of their failure: there was sin in the camp. An individual had seriously transgressed the covenant. That man, Achan, was identified and dealt with as the law demanded. Only then, when sin had been eradicated, did God commence to work again.

“And the Lord said unto Joshua, Fear not, neither be thou dismayed: take all the people of war with thee, and arise, go up to Ai: see, I have given into thy

hand the king of Ai, and his people, and his city, and his land” (Joshua 8:1). There follows the account of the successful conquest of Ai, at the second attempt. The victory secured, Joshua raised an altar, and upon its stones, inscribed the words of the Law: “Then Joshua built an altar unto the Lord God of Israel in mount Ebal, As Moses the servant of the Lord commanded the children of Israel, as it is written in the book of the law of Moses, an altar of whole stones, over which no man hath lift up any iron: and they offered thereon burnt offerings unto the Lord, and sacrificed peace offerings. And he wrote there upon the stones a copy of the law of Moses, which he wrote in the presence of the children of Israel. And all Israel, and their elders, and officers, and their judges, stood on this side the ark and on that side before the priests the Levites, which bare the ark of the covenant of the Lord, as well the stranger, as he that was born among them; half of them over against mount Gerizim, and half of them over against mount Ebal; as Moses the servant of the Lord had commanded before, that they should bless the people of Israel” (Joshua 8:30-34). Here are all the people of Israel, confronted by an altar, and the Law, assembled around the Ark.

There are many pertinent applications to be made from this incident. First it must be said that, if there is sin in a company of God’s people, then they cannot enjoy true spiritual success. They may give the appearance of progress, or have a crowded church building, but they are not the recipients of God’s true blessing. Known sin in a local church, and the offender, must be addressed in the Biblically-directed way.

Their objective at Ai achieved, the people of Israel found themselves surrounded by many illustrations and examples of the Law of God: the nature of Achan’s recent demise, the judicial destruction of a heathen city, an altar prepared for the purpose of sacrifice, and the words of the law literally written upon its stones. Faced with these things, the people assembled around the Ark.

There are two matters which are vitally important for the Church today, namely the **Law**, and **Calvary**. Some will quickly retort that ‘Christ is the end of Law’. In one sense, this is true – but it is not the whole truth. Christ fulfilled the Law on the behalf of His people. It is because he obeyed every detail of it, and thus obtained the perfect standard of righteousness, that His people can be justified before God. Thereafter, their walk is to be ‘in the way of His commandments’. The Law is the blueprint of holiness.

When the altar of Calvary and the Law of God take prime place within a Church, the people will be truly Christ-centred – men and women who know and realise that they are ‘justified freely by His grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus’ (cf Romans 3:24) – and who consequently, like Zacharias and Elizabeth of old, walk “*in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless*” (Luke 1:6).

6. The Land of the Philistines

Once settled in the land of Canaan, the Tabernacle with its furniture was set up at Shiloh. It was from this location, in the degenerate days between the judges, that the Ark was taken – borne away by the apostate sons of the priest, in the vain hope that its presence on the battlefield might turn the course of a lost war. Their carnal reasoning availed them nothing; they were slain, and the Ark passed as a battle-trophy into the hands of the Philistines. But the Ark profited its new owners nothing, and after a series of plagues were visited upon them, they yielded to their fears, and returned the vessel to Israelite territory, with such gifts and ceremony as their heathen traditions dictated. Thus it abode in the frontier town of Kirjath Jearim for many years.

It was not until the reign of king David that efforts were made to repatriate the Ark to its rightful place at the centre of worship. These designs and desires were good and commendable; but the way in which they carried them out was not: “*And they set the ark of God upon a new*

cart, and brought it out of the house of Abinadab that was in Gibeah: and Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, drave the new cart” (2 Samuel 6:3). ‘A new cart’ – this was precisely the same technique for transporting the Ark which the Philistines had adopted before (cf 1 Samuel 6:7-8), when it was in their hands. But the Israelites should have been better instructed. God had appointed that the Ark was to be wrapped in its three-fold cover, borne by its staves, and only by the Kohathites of the priestly order of Levi. Whatever are David and the people of Israel thinking? They have departed from the God-ordained pattern, and adopted the methods of the Philistines.

How tragic to see the Ark of God treated in this way, by such a man as David! Indeed God’s Divine displeasure was made abundantly clear by the death of one of the drovers shortly thereafter (cf 2 Samuel 6:6-9). Yet this is an episode which finds its parallels throughout the church today – where countless liberal, modernistic ‘Christians’ have devised all manner of means to ‘convey Christ to the people’, as they would claim. Every kind of worldly, unbiblical vehicle is employed in the cause of this so-called evangelism. ‘What is the difference’, they ask, ‘so long as the Ark is on board – so long as Christ is mentioned somewhere?’ ‘Besides, our method is far more impressive and attractive than a few Koathites carrying the Ark – much more appealing than mere preaching!’ Does not this sort of argument sound unpleasantly familiar?

The yet-more-grievous feature of this episode is the fact that a man of David’s stature also adopted such practices, and was carried along with it. And still today, many true men of God, in positions of authority in local Churches, highly regarded in their denominations, who ‘did run well’, are similarly deceived. Turning aside from the God-ordained simplicity of the New Testament, they follow in the wake of apostate Christendom. Thus the name of Christ is bandied and jostled about on every cart which man’s imagination can conceive, with dreadful

consequences. From the record of the Ark and all that it teaches, may God save us from this untoward generation; that we, with the reverence and dignity that He has Himself appointed – and which alone becometh those who are priests unto God – might faithfully bear His name, and uphold a testimony to His glory, amidst ever-increasing apostasy.

W. H. Molland (1920 – 2012)

“A solemn charge is given to the people of God not to conform themselves to the ways and customs of the heathen. Let the house of Israel hear and receive this word from the God of Israel: *“Learn not the way of the heathen”* (Jeremiah 10:2) – do not approve of it, no, nor think indifferently concerning it, much less imitate it or accustom yourselves to it. Let not any of their customs steal in among you (as they are apt to do insensibly) nor mingle themselves with your religion. Note – it ill becomes those that are ‘taught of God’ (cf John 6:45) to learn the way of the heathen, and to think of worshipping the true God with such rites and ceremonies as they use in the worship of their false gods. *“Take heed to thyself that thou be not snared by following them, after that they be destroyed from before thee; and that thou enquire not after their gods, saying, How did these nations serve their gods? even so will I do likewise. Thou shalt not do so unto the Lord thy God... What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it”* (Deuteronomy 12:30, 32).”

Matthew Henry (1662 – 1714)

“...they ought to have followed what God taught them in His law, and not to have turned aside either to the right hand or to the left... But as human minds are always wanton, they were very desirous of knowing what the Gentiles observed; but whenever this wantonness possesses men’s minds, they necessarily blend darkness with light.”

John Calvin (1509 – 1564)

THE ARK IN CAPTIVITY

When Israel had grievously sinned, and the Ark of the Covenant was forfeited to the Philistines – as though, since the Divine presence had departed, the symbol must also depart – wherever the Ark was borne, it carried destruction to the idols and populations of Philistia. Dagon was found on successive mornings fallen upon his face to the earth before the Ark of the Lord, and only the stump was left. The people were smitten with sore diseases, so that they said, “*Send away the ark of the God of Israel, and let it go again to his own place*” (1 Samuel 5:11).

It was necessary for Jehovah to vindicate the symbol of His presence, and the fear and awe of Him falling on the Philistines laid them open to the sore ravages of the plague. It is the presence of God in the Church which is the sole [source] of victory. When we realise that He is in our midst, we cannot be moved; nay, we are more than conquerors. “*Behold, the Lord rideth upon a swift cloud, and shall come into Egypt; and the idols of Egypt shall be moved at His presence, and the heart of Egypt shall melt in the midst of it*” (Isaiah 19:1).

In these days of religious declension, throughout professedly ‘Christian’ nations, we are apt to say that the situation has passed beyond [any] power to retrieve it. “*And there ran a man of Benjamin out of the army, and came to Shiloh the same day with his clothes rent, and with earth upon his head. And when he came, lo, Eli sat upon a seat by the wayside watching: for his heart trembled for the ark of God. And when the man came into the city, and told it, all the city cried out*” (1 Samuel 4:12-13). Then the venerable judge fell backward and died; and the wife of the slain priest bore a son, and named him Ichabod, saying, “*The glory is departed from Israel: because the ark of God was taken*” (1 Samuel 4:21). But when Israel had resumed its [former] attitude towards God, all this was

altered. The Ark was replaced, because God was replaced in the affection of His people; and the power of Philistia was absolutely and permanently broken by the successive victories of David and Joab.

How is it with thee? Have the inward foes been too strong? Have they desolated thy peace? Have they robbed thee of the sense of God's [presence]? Dare to believe that whatever has transpired cannot break the Divine Covenant. It was the Ark of the Covenant, remember, which was seen by the divinely-instructed John when the Temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in His Temple the Ark of His Covenant (cf Revelation 11:19). The Ark of which we are speaking may have perished when the Babylonians took the Holy City and burned the Temple; but the reality of which it was the symbol, abides with the Church and the individual soul. God cannot break His Covenant. Though we believe not, He abideth faithful. He cannot deny Himself; and it is our Father's good pleasure to give us the Kingdom... Dare to believe that notwithstanding all thy failures and sins, He stands by His ancient promises, and that if thou wilt but return, even thou shalt see the glory of God in thy restoration to that fair image which He conceived for thee before the worlds were made...

The symbol may pass, and must. Indeed, its transience was clearly foretold: "*And it shall come to pass, when ye be multiplied and increased in the land, in those days, saith the Lord, they shall say no more, The ark of the covenant of the Lord: neither shall it come to mind: neither shall they remember it; neither shall they visit it; neither shall that be done any more*" (Jeremiah 3:16). But the essential spiritual fact abides, to which the Apostle refers in that sublime series of questions, for which there is only one reply: "...*neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord*" (Romans 8:38-39).

F. B. Meyer (1847 – 1929)

HATH GOD SAID?

“Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!...which justify the wicked for reward, and take away the righteousness of the righteous from him!” (Isaiah 5:20-21, 23)

In recent months, the church in Britain, the ‘Christian press’, and concerned persons everywhere, have been reacting to news of government legislation that would utterly subvert the ordinance of marriage. It is proposed to render matrimony ‘genderless’, such that couples may be married who fail to meet the most fundamental criterion of being a man and a woman; and thus to entirely corrupt the God-given, Biblical institution.

This represents a drastic fulfilment of the words of Isaiah’s prophecy, where that which God calls ‘evil’ (cf Leviticus 20:13, Romans 1:24-27) is commended as being acceptable, normal and progressive; whilst that which God calls ‘good’ (cf Matthew 19:4-6, Ephesians 5:22-33) is denounced as anachronistic, outmoded and discriminatory. Those who presumptuously declare such things claim that they are acting according to sense and reason – but it is a wisdom that exists only ‘in their own eyes’. The true motivation is evident: political expediency and perceived gains at the ballot box. This legislative ‘justification of wickedness’ is done solely for material reward. Meanwhile, those who raise a voice of objection on account of the holy standard of God’s Word are defamed as bigoted. Their righteousness is thus ‘taken away’ by the accusations of their detractors.

This ‘redefinition of marriage’, and gross reversal of Scripture that it entails, is an extreme case – but one which should not have taken the

watchful Christian by surprise. The process whereby truth is turned completely upside-down is a long one, and happens by degrees. It is apparent to any student of history that legislation of this nature would have been unimaginable in the nineteenth century, but was facilitated in the course of the twentieth, and is being enacted in the twenty-first. The response of the churches to such suggestions one hundred years ago would have been unanimous and united; fifty years ago, less definitive and more ambiguous; whilst in the present age, it is only the minority who raise a voice in protest. The current crisis has not resulted from a sudden sea-change, but through a gradual ‘waxing worse and worse’ (cf 2 Timothy 3:13).

The first fact which must be grasped is that the primary scene of this declension is not the world, nor society in general – but **the Church**. The people of God upon earth are the trustees of Truth. They are the custodians of Biblical doctrine – including the ordinance of marriage. The situation that obtains at present cannot be entirely blamed upon an ungodly world which has lain in wickedness, ignorance and rebellion since the Fall. Neither is it primarily the fault of national governments – which are invariably comprised of unbelieving men and women – and at numerous times and places have been directed by popular opinion, false religions and secularism. No – the root of this evil must lie within the Church, since the principle of marriage is supposed to be enshrined in her doctrine and practice.

The ‘redefinition’ of the Word of God, by those who ought to be defending and obeying it, has a long pedigree. Indeed, it forms the prelude to the Original Sin, and is first among the tactics of the Adversary: *“Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, **hath God said**, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye*

*shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. And the serpent said unto the woman, **Ye shall not surely die...***" (Genesis 3:1-4).

The noblest ordinance, the greatest commandment, can be undermined by the insidious and subversive question, 'Hath God said?' Let the thought that there is room for improvement, or latitude in interpretation, or the possibility of error, in the law of God, be entertained for a moment, and 'ere long it will be transgressed. Delude man into thinking that he may 'redefine' the commandments, and they will soon be revoked or reversed altogether.

The erosion of the marriage institution is nothing new either. It goes back as far as Lamech, the sixth from Adam in the line of Cain, who defied the God-given commandment and was guilty of bigamy (cf Genesis 4:19) – part of a career in sin which included murder (v. 23). This would be the pattern of things to come. Certain of the patriarchs fell in the same transgression: Abraham, Jacob and David with dire consequences. The hard-hearted, unbelieving Jews invented a way (as they thought) to break the indissoluble union in the days of Moses, and they were still acting in the same unlawful manner at the time of Christ (cf Matthew 19:8).

Owing to this sad historical record, any defence of marriage must 'begin at the beginning', and return to the opening chapters of Genesis. This is the policy which our Lord adopted in refuting the practices of His own wicked and adulterous generation. But here the problems start; because for over 150 years, the Church itself has been undermining its own foundations. The 'genesis' of all things as described by infallible God has been supplanted by those 'origins' theorised by fallen men. The very first book of the Bible has been written off by many as nothing more than poetry, mythology or allegory. And while such critics pride themselves in their perceived cleverness and intellectual rigour, they fail to realise that they have

‘sold the truth’, forsaken their heritage, and voluntarily relinquished their best defence. Now, when the modern churchman or liberal theologian finds the doctrine of marriage challenged or overturned, he can no longer make any recourse to Genesis. To attempt it would be hypocrisy of the highest order. Faced with a battle for the very heart of Christian doctrine, he finds he has no weapons to use; as they were traded long ago for worthless human philosophies, and science falsely so called.

Marriage, being appointed for man at the beginning of earth’s history (Genesis 2:20-24) may be described as a ‘Creation Ordinance’, being appropriate for, and incumbent upon, all humanity. It is not alone in this respect. The principle of one day in seven, a ‘sabbath’, set apart from the days of the week for sanctified purposes, is equally a Creation Ordinance. Together with these, the opening chapters of Genesis redound with other vital doctrine, including: the reality and personality of Satan, the proper worship of God, the principle of atonement through sacrifice, and the nature of sin, death and judgment.

These matters stand or fall together. It is not possible, nor lawful, to take from the Scriptures only those parts that are more palatable or favourable, and omit or negate the rest. It is grossly inconsistent for a believer to noisily defend marriage, whilst having no regard for the right observance of the Lord’s Day. That Christian has no credibility who can deny in one breath the doctrine of penal substitution, and in the next allege to be a supporter of marriage. Oh, for godly consistency, and integrity maintained! The best defence of any one Biblical principle is obedience to the whole. Yes, by all means let a firm stand be taken for marriage, but, “*these ought ye to have done, **and not to leave the other undone***” (Matthew 23:23).

What has been said concerning the ‘Creation Ordinances’ is equally true of the entire Word of God, namely: that it is applicable to all

humanity (whether they care to believe it, or not). The Psalmist grasped this, when he said “*thy commandment is exceeding broad*” (Psalm 119:96) – that is – broad in its content, its completeness, and in the range of its application. There is only one Divine standard; one Law; one Book against which the actions of all mankind will be judged. A fact which seems to have been lost sight of today – especially from the pulpits of the land, where there is a general opinion that only ‘the gospel’ (by which is meant, high-pressure evangelistic appeals) can be preached to unbelievers. Consequently, matters of morality, righteousness and proper behaviour are rarely heard in mixed congregations. Long before the present controversy erupted, the Church had relinquished its role of speaking truth to wider society. Its voice is weakened by years of neglectful silence, during which it has indulged, connived, or excused the sins of the worldly man on the grounds that the Law of God was not relevant to him. Now, that voice is scarcely audible at all.

Another respect in which the Church has been the architect of its own demise has been in its relationships with the world. In an ill-advised effort to be popular and appealing, they have to a great extent ‘learned the way of the heathen’ (cf Jeremiah 10:2), and been conformed to their image (cf Romans 12:2). This has been the case in matters pertaining to marriage also. One might have hoped that within a body of people who are directed by the Word of God, there would be a greater respect for Biblical ordinances, and a determination to uphold them. This has not proved to be so. The rise in marital breakdown, and the frequency of divorce has risen amongst church-going populations, in almost direct proportion to its increase in the nation.

In certain denominations, the conducting of wedding services is seen as a useful source of revenue, or even an ‘evangelistic opportunity’. This has led to a revoking of rules governing who may be married, and has seen otherwise respectable congregations debasing themselves to the

whims and fancies of couples wanting outlandish and extravagant ceremonies, according to the latest fashion. Any moral or personal requirements in the individuals are overlooked, the spiritual aspect is eradicated, and the person and glory of God is conspicuous only by its complete absence. This is another example of marriage being defined **for** the Church, **by** the world.

There has also been a tendency, particularly in Britain, for the Church to associate itself too closely with the State. A form of godliness in governments of the past has bred a false sense of security in the minds of many believers, who wrongly imagine that they live in a ‘Christian country’, and that the State may be relied upon, or democratically manipulated, to uphold Biblical principles. This is a delusion. Notwithstanding, many Christians continue to vote for political parties whom they think will favour the cause of truth, and stake their hopes for the prosperity of the Church in the godless administrations of the world. For many centuries, the Church has been willing to devolve certain of its responsibilities to the State, and to allow a reciprocal interference by the State into its own affairs. For example, in more recent times, the undue influence of ‘equal opportunities’ legislation has been painfully apparent in matters of Church membership, and the appointment of its officers. The relevant commandment is: “*come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord*” (2 Corinthians 6:17); which injunction applies morally, practically, and politically.

These things said, it should hardly come as a surprise to find the State busily ‘redefining marriage’. Particularly when the same thing has been done within the Church itself for hundreds of years. The attempts of stiff-necked Hebrews and Pharisees to make marriage anything other than life-long and monogamous, have continued right into the present day. The dubious origins of Anglicanism are to be found amidst the vain efforts of Thomas Cranmer to justify divorce and remarriage. He was but one of many. Whether by the invention of ecclesiastical

annulments; or legal decrees nisi; or the wilful mistranslation of vital words in modern Bible versions; or the reading of an ‘exception clause’ into Scripture, and thereafter making a rule of it; the institution of marriage has suffered most from those appointed to preserve it, namely the Church. Even within places that flatter themselves with such titles as ‘Evangelical’ or ‘Reformed’, few would express any concerns at the marriage of persons guilty of fornication, adultery or divorce, in spite of the clear prohibitions in the Word of God. Why then ought not the State, led by this utterly bad example, add one further, heinous ‘redefinition’ of its own?

In the midst of the current protestations concerning this legislation (and God grant that they may avail some good), let every Christian soberly reflect that the whirlwind being reaped at present, has already been long in the sowing (cf Hosea 8:7). To which the Apostle adds this warning: *“For the time is come that **judgment must begin at the house of God**: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?”* (1 Peter 4:17-18)

R. J. Steward

Marriage is understood in every culture and civilisation as the committed union of a man and a woman. No state or legislature can defy this natural order, any more than it can ‘repeal’ Newton’s Law of Gravity. Even metaphorically ‘marrying’ describes the joining together of two opposite or dissimilar items.

An Act of Parliament declaring black to be white, or that two and two make five cannot change the truth of the matter. It is both futile and arrogant for politicians to attempt to overturn reality, and as pointless and misguided as the royal decree of King Canute to stop the tide in its inexorable cycle.

R. D. Boswell

EDITORIAL

The Apostle Paul, by Divine inspiration, adjured Timothy: “***Hold fast the form of sound words***” (2 Timothy 1:13). It is a timeless instruction. For at the heart of the Christian faith stands the Word of God: the sum of revelation pertaining to Himself, His Son, His salvation, His standard, and His sovereign purposes. If these words be attacked, or if this ‘foundation be destroyed’ (cf Psalm 11:3) there is danger indeed for the Lord’s people.

The very existence of this commandment teaches much in itself: **first**, that ‘these offences must come’; the Word of God will ever be subjected to opposing and adverse forces, against which, a defence must be mounted; **second**, that this assault will come not only against particular words, but also upon their form and soundness (that is to say, their meaning and integrity); and **thirdly**, that this onslaught will be of such an intensity as to necessitate a ‘fastness’ and firmness on the part of those who stand for the preservation of Holy Scripture.

It is infrequent (though not impossible) for these attacks to fall directly upon the paper-and-ink substance of the Bible. More often, the challenge comes against its earthly guardians, namely believers, who are responsible for the protection and practice of it. Let them be overcome, and they may soon become instrumental in changing the form and sound of Holy Writ for themselves. Some of these offensives against the saints are described in the same chapter of the Epistle, including: afflictions and suffering (cf 2 Timothy 1:8, 12), a spirit of fear (v. 7), neglect and forgetfulness (v. 6), shame and embarrassment (v. 8). By these and many other means, the Great Adversary would have Christians and Churches loose their hold upon the Word of Truth, and allow it to be added to, subtracted from, diluted, ‘modernised’, re-interpreted and re-defined – all to their spiritual detriment.

How then is a suitable defence maintained, and the instruction to 'hold fast' obeyed? It begins with an unswerving belief in the plenary authority and Divine inspiration of Holy Scripture (cf 2 Timothy 3:16). This must be followed by a seeking out of the Word in an accurate and trustworthy translation (which in the English language can be found in the Authorised Version of the Bible).

It is further reinforced by the continuance of that 'form of sound words' in all reading, preaching, prayer and hymnody. To this is added a consistent interpretation and exposition from the pulpit (cf Acts 20:20, 27); committal of the Word to memory (cf Psalm 119:11), and a daily doing of that which it commands (cf James 1:22). And when the whole is crowned by a prayerful reliance upon the grace of God, then the Word of Christ richly indwells the soul (cf Colossians 3:16), and the weakest saint may hold it fast.

The Church at North Road wishes to express thanks to those who have sent messages of sympathy and condolence upon news of the death of Mr and Mrs W. H. Molland. The Lord grant that all who are affected by this bereavement may be comforted "*by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God*" (2 Corinthians 1:4).

ANNUAL BIBLE CONVENTION

1st & 2nd June 2013 D.V.

Saturday 3.30 p.m. & 6.00 p.m. Tea served 5.00 p.m.

Lord's Day 11.00 a.m. & 6.30 p.m.

Preacher : R. J. Steward
(North Road Chapel)

a cordial invitation is extended to all