

October - December 2017

The Link

NORTH ROAD CHAPEL

BIDEFORD

THE LORD'S DAY

Part 5

“The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward.” (Psalm 19:7-11)

Having established that the Sabbath is an integral part of Creation, common sense alone would preclude the idea that such an institution would ultimately become part of a Law that was itself temporary. The very fact that the Sabbath is a part of the act of Creation, and set as a pattern for the human race, demands that it be in existence for all time – as long as that Creation exists. This is the case; and of the Ten Commandments that constitute the holy standard, the observance of the Sabbath is one. This initial institution appointed at Creation by God Himself is the order for humanity to follow. It was written upon man's heart at the first. Thereafter it found its place upon the tables of stone, inscribed by the very finger of God, which forms the imperishable and indestructible statute-book of perfect righteousness. It is not called a ‘collection of ten laws’ – it is ten commandments, which when kept together form **one** law; **the** law, singular. Each part is of equal importance, and to fail in one is not a ‘one tenth failure’, but a breaking of the whole. “*The law of the Lord is perfect*” (Psalm 19:7), meaning it is ‘whole’ and ‘complete’. “*The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether*” (Psalm 19:9), that is, when held together and not separated. He that offendeth in one point is guilty of all (cf James 2:10).

Whatever force and authority one of the Commandments has, so have the other nine. How reads the first commandment? “*Thou shalt have no other gods before Me*” (Exodus 20:3). How reads the fourth? “*Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy*” (Exodus 20:8). Man is as much obligated to the fourth as to the first. It is one integral Law. How can a person who claims to love the Lord with all their heart, their mind and their strength – whilst omitting, or being slack, in Sabbath observance – be said to keep God’s Law? If man is bound in every age to have and acknowledge only one God; to worship Him, not with graven images but in spirit and in truth; to reverence His holy name and take it not in vain; to obey parents; to abstain from murder, adultery, theft, false witness and covetousness; so also is he bound, for all time, to consecrate the Sabbath.

One old writer states this: “the first commandment gives us the **object** of worship; the second commandment gives us the **means** of worship; the third commandment gives us the **manner** of worship; and the fourth commandment gives us the **time** of worship”. This is the God-ward aspect of the decalogue summarised, and there is much truth in that statement. It is also interesting to note that the second and fourth commandments are set out in greater detail than any of the others. The means and occasion for worship receive the most emphasis.

The fourth commandment is introduced in a different way from all the others: “**Remember the Sabbath Day**” (Exodus 20:8). God is here using language that directly connects this commandment with foregoing events, namely, Creation: “*For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath Day, and hallowed it*” (Exodus 20:11). This is only a ‘republication’ of an already-Divinely-appointed ordinance. How then can men distort the plain teaching of Scripture in the way in which they do, and dare to reduce the Sabbath Day to a limited and temporal observance, originating only at Sinai?

There is another very forceful point to note in the giving of the commandments. This Moral Law was written by God and given to Moses before all the complicated detail of the ceremonial and judicial law was declared. God gave to Moses the primary rules of obedience first. The significance of God's holy standard, known in Eden but sadly obscured by the corruption and depravity of men, is now restored by solemn republication. Not mixed in with the ceremonial law, but published separately. The Decalogue took pride of place. The two tables of stone contained these ten commandments, and no more.

Later, when all the revelation of Sinai was completed, and all the details of the Old Testament law finalised, another distinction was afforded to the two tables of stone. Whilst the 'Book of the Law' and the other Mosaic statutes were placed 'in the side', or beside, the Ark of the Covenant (cf Deuteronomy 31:24-26), the tables were deposited within (cf Deuteronomy 10:1-5, 1 Kings 8:9). There was no location that could confer greater significance or higher honour upon the Decalogue. Time and again, the Bible stresses the dignity, the prominence and the lasting authority of this Law.

That man who trifles with the Ten Commandments, or glibly declares that they are irrelevant or non-binding, is in a terrible and unenviable position. Far more correct and desirable are those old historical statements, such as: "Lord have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this Law... Lord, write all these Thy laws on our hearts we beseech Thee". A Christian who takes this stance is on safe ground.

Having got thus far, it is clear that the Decalogue stands alone and supreme, and is binding upon all men of all generations. During the era of the Levitical economy, whilst retaining its special identity, it was observed alongside the tenets of the ceremonial and judicial laws. Examples of the application of the fourth commandment are recorded in Scripture: "*Ye shall keep the sabbath therefore; for it is holy unto you: every one that defileth it shall surely be put to death: for whosoever doeth any work*

therein, that soul shall be cut off from among his people. Six days may work be done; but in the seventh is the sabbath of rest, holy to the Lord: whosoever doeth any work in the sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death. Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the sabbath, to observe the sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant” (Exodus 31:14-16). “And while the children of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man that gathered sticks upon the sabbath day. And they that found him gathering sticks brought him unto Moses and Aaron, and unto all the congregation. And they put him in ward, because it was not declared what should be done to him. And the Lord said unto Moses, The man shall be surely put to death: all the congregation shall stone him with stones without the camp. And all the congregation brought him without the camp, and stoned him with stones, and he died; as the Lord commanded Moses” (Numbers 15:32-36).

Here, a breach of the fourth commandment is shown to be punishable by capital sentence. At this point, the Dispensationalist and the Antinomian have a field-day, and claim this as evidence that the Sabbath is a solely Jewish institution, and not at all for the Church; and if it were, then death by stoning ought also to be reinstated. This is an intentional and foolish conflation of two separate things. The **moral** law instructs the universal observance of the Sabbath. The **judicial** law directed the legal practices of the Jewish nation, during its existence. There was no mention of the death sentence inscribed with the fourth commandment upon the tables of stone, because it did not belong there. Whilst acknowledging this important distinction, these portions of Scripture still serve to show the seriousness with which God has ever viewed the profanation of His holy Sabbath.

The sabbatical principle also extended into the Jews’ **ceremonial** law. *“And six years thou shalt sow thy land, and shalt gather in the fruits thereof: But the seventh year thou shalt let it rest and lie still; that the poor of thy people may eat: and what they leave the beasts of the field shall eat. In like manner thou shalt deal with thy vineyard, and with thy oliveyard. Six days*

thou shalt do thy work, and on the seventh day thou shalt rest: that thine ox and thine ass may rest, and the son of thy handmaid, and the stranger, may be refreshed ” (Exodus 23:10-12). “Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye come into the land which I give you, then shall the land keep a sabbath unto the Lord. Six years thou shalt sow thy field, and six years thou shalt prune thy vineyard, and gather in the fruit thereof; But in the seventh year shall be a sabbath of rest unto the land, a sabbath for the Lord: thou shalt neither sow thy field, nor prune thy vineyard” (Leviticus 25:2-4).

Again, the critic will be heard to ask why Sabbath-keeping Christians are not also adding these observances to their religious practices. The answer is the same. These pertain to the ceremonial law, given to the Jews for season, and not perpetuated into the New Testament age. The moral law meanwhile, stands apart; given directly by God, enshrined in the Ark of the Covenant, never amended nor altered; neither will it be. In the purposes of God, the tables of stone did not include such matters as the sabbatical year and the death penalty for sabbath-breakers, for these things were peculiar to the Jewish people; and like the altars and offerings and an earthly priesthood, have given place to a better order.

In conclusion, it is necessary to make application to the present generation. The authors of such errors as Dispensationalism little considered the mischief that would be wrought in the Church, which in turn has affected society. Take away the fourth commandment as some have done, and claim that the Sabbath is not for the Church, and the whole Law of God is shattered – for it is one Law. To set aside that Law is a perversion of the grossest nature. The evil harvest of these old errors is being reaped in the present day.

Even in circles where there has been less Dispensational influence, a similar problem persists. Many within mainstream Christendom will loudly bewail the want of moral teaching in schools, whilst failing to

register its absence from their own pulpits. God has not entrusted His truth to secular educational establishments, but to the Church; and she has failed profoundly in the declaration of it. Where can one go in these days to hear preaching on the Ten Commandments, or sermons about Sabbath observance? In perhaps ninety percent of modern churches, it is not even hinted at. Under the wrested Scripture of 'we are not under the Law, but under grace', the truth is fallen, and the salt has lost its savour.

The Seventeenth Century was a dark time in Britain, but God raised up a body of men called the Puritans, and they preached the Law. John Bunyan himself received his first awakening in Elstow Church as he sat under a sermon on Sabbath-breaking and God convicted him of sin. He was not converted until some time later, but this rough, fighting, gambling character was arrested by the Spirit of God through the preaching of the Law. For men who claim to be ministers of the Word of God to claim that the narrative of Genesis 2 (giving the Divine origin of the Sabbath) is null and void, and continue by saying that the Ten Commandments do not apply to us, is to do violence to the Faith. It is nothing short of the destruction of the truth; they are scattering poison of the vilest kind. Such persons should not even get a hearing, let alone support; for what could be more dishonouring to God than when those who name His Name reject His Law? For God has entrusted His Law to us: it is His standard, the statute-book of Heaven, a transcript of the Divine mind, the very Law of the Kingdom of God. Woe unto the man who dares to devalue it. May God grant to every reader a deep conviction on this matter.

W. H. Molland (1920 – 2012)

If you want to know whether your religion is authentic, try it by 'your feelings and habits about means of grace'. Prove it by the Sunday.

J. C. Ryle (1816 – 1900)

BUNYAN'S TESTIMONY

“All this while I was not sensible of the danger and evil of sin. I was kept from considering that sin would damn me, what religion soever I followed, unless I was found in Christ: nay, I never thought whether there was such a one or no. Thus man, while blind, doth wander, for he knoweth not the way to the city of God (cf Ecclesiastes 10:15).

But one day (amongst all the sermons our parson made), his subject was to treat of the Sabbath day, and of the evil of breaking that, either with labour, sports or otherwise; wherefore I fell in my conscience under his sermon, thinking and believing that he made that sermon on purpose to shew me my evil doing. And at that time I felt what guilt was, though never before, that I can remember; but then I was for the present greatly loaded therewith, and so went home, when the sermon was ended, with a great burden upon my spirit.

This, for that instant, did embitter my former pleasures to me; but hold, it lasted not, for before I had well dined, the trouble began to go off my mind, and my heart returned to its old course; but oh! how glad was I that this trouble was gone from me, and that the fire was put out, that I might sin again without control! Wherefore when I had satisfied nature with my food, I shook the sermon out of my mind, and to my old custom of sports and gaming I returned with great delight.

But the same day as I was in the midst of a game ... a voice did suddenly dart from heaven into my soul, which said, ‘Wilt thou leave thy sins and go to heaven, or have thy sins and go to hell?’ At this I was put to an exceeding maze; wherefore ... I looked up to heaven, and was as if I had, with the eyes of my understanding, seen the Lord Jesus look down upon me, as being very hotly displeased with me, and as if He did severely threaten me with some grievous punishment for those and other ungodly practices.”

John Bunyan (1628 – 1688)

A SANCTIFIED SABBATH

“If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on My holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable; and shalt honour Him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words: Then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it” (Isaiah 58:13-14).

If it be inquired what sabbath it is that is here spoken of, we shall not need to stick long upon the solution. Some indeed of the anti-sabbatical doctors, who love neither the name nor the thing, will needs expound it of the yearly sabbath, the day of the strictest rest among the Jews in their solemn convention for humiliation and atonement, of which we read (cf Leviticus 16:31, 23:27-31). But surely it is an unreasonable straitening of the text to confine it to this, especially since the prophet had sufficiently insisted upon that subject, both by way of reproof and exhortation, in the former part of the chapter. Here, therefore, I conceive, we are to understand the weekly sabbath; not only the seventh-day sabbath which was yet in being, but the first-day sabbath also, which was to succeed: the prophet, being an evangelical prophet (as one calls him, ‘the evangelist Isaiah’) speaks of the evangelical sabbath, which was to continue to the end of the world.

Note, in the first place, that, **from the creation of the world to this day, God never suffered His church to be without a sabbath.** As soon as ever there was a church, though it was but in its infancy, and confined within the narrow limits of a single family, and few souls therein, God did immediately institute a sabbath for it. *“And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had made; and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it He had rested from all His*

work which God created and made” (Genesis 2:2-3). This, some learned divines suppose, to have been by way of anticipation only; to be a sabbath in [reserve], as it were, until the church should have need of it. Others, as eminent and learned as they, do assert it to have been by way of **institution**; a notion of a far more easy understanding than the former, and more useful. This sabbath rested, it seems, sometimes in silence: save only that we may possibly spell it out in some imperfect characters in their offerings and sacrifices before ever the law was given, which were originally proper sabbath-work; until at length we may read of it in words at length: “*And [Moses] said unto them, This is that which the Lord hath said, To morrow is the rest of the holy sabbath unto the Lord*” (Exodus 16: 23). And this some conceive to be a second and renewed institution; but with little probability. Moses rather speaks of it as a thing **known** to the Israelites in the wilderness, it being of a more ancient original than the miracle of the manna: yet it may serve as a testimony unto the sabbath, and of use unto our purpose.

From thence therefore we must step on as far as Mount Sinai, for a new institution; and there we may find it standing in the midst of the ten moral precepts, the fourth whereof it makes in number: “*Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy*” (Exodus 20:8). Then was that command, which before was given by word of mouth, and continued by tradition, now written in words at length, engraven in stone by the immediate finger of God; and there it stands during all the time of Moses and the prophets on its own basis, until the Messiah came, who put upon it His own sanction (cf Matthew 5:17-48). And under that sanction did the seventh-day sabbath continue, until upon the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, that Sun of Righteousness, and by His command to His apostles the sabbath was translated to the first day of the week, and that continued by apostolical practice, and by the practice of succeeding ages of the evangelical church, the gospel-sabbath, or Lord’s Day even to this present generation.

Such, I say, hath been the care and love of God to His church to this day, that it never was without a sabbath, unless it were when the want of a sabbath was the punishment of sinful neglect and obstinate violation of the sabbath (cf Lamentations 2:6). And this care God used upon a twofold account:

1. Upon the account of **His own sovereignty**. That is, that by reserving one day in seven for His own immediate worship, He might be actually acknowledged as the great Sovereign Lord of ourselves and of our time. The sabbath is as the first-fruits among the Jews; whereby we do not only entitle God to the whole harvest, but whereby the whole lump and mass is sanctified to us.
2. A second account is **God's pity and compassion to His creatures**. God saw the heart of man since the fall so fixed to the world (cf Ecclesiastes 3:11) and immersed in the pleasures and profits thereof, that had He left man to himself, he would not have spared for divine worship one day in seven weeks; not, possibly, in seven months, or in the whole year; but he would have even drudged himself and the irrational creature to death in the pursuit of worldly fruitions. And therefore, God hath enjoined him the severe observation of one day in seven, that He might lay upon him the necessity of minding and seeking the things of eternity; and whilst the rational creature did enjoy a spiritual rest for the soul, the irrational creature might have natural rest for self-preservation. Thanks be to God for His unspeakable gift!

Observe, **this day God was pleased to honour with the title of a 'sabbath'**, as both here, and in the fourth commandment. Which signifies 'rest': because on this day both God the Father and God the Son, respectively, did rest from Their own proper work, and by Their precept and pattern command it and commend it for a stated rest to the church of God for ever (cf Genesis 2:2). What the reason, therefore, is why some learned men of our generation should be so exceedingly offended at that name 'sabbath', that they cannot so much as hear it with patience,

is to me a wonder even to astonishment. And while they are so much offended at the name, the vulgar sort of Christians are thereby, I am afraid, as much offended at the thing. As to the first of these, I have heard some say, they like it not, 'because it is Jewish'. But to that we reply:

1. Not the Jews, but the **God of the Jews**, gave it that name here and elsewhere; and,
2. The notion of a sabbath signifies no more but 'rest'; and is rest Jewish? Oh, that men would look into their hearts to see whether the reason of this disgust is not more latent there!
3. And were it a Jewish name indeed, is not the Jewish name 'sabbath' better than the heathenish name 'Sun-day', the name which heathenish idolaters gave it in their dedication of that day to the created sun? Notwithstanding, consult their calendars, writings and languages, and you can meet with no other name or notion but Sunday all over. At this we have more cause to be offended, than they have at the notion of a Sabbath.

As for the vulgar sort of people, it is the **thing** which offends them more than the **name**; not the rest so much as the nature of the rest, is that which they dislike. Were it a ... rest [for] carding... gaming ... dancing, ... such a one as the Israelites once celebrated in the wilderness, wherein they did eat and drink, "*and rose up to play*" (Exodus 32:6); such an one for all the world like the Popish devotion celebrates (after mass and evensong, as they call it, pipe and dance, and then to the ale house or tavern); such a rest would gratify the sensual world of carnal Christians. But for a holy 'rest', a rest to be spent in public, domestic, and secret duties of religion, reading the scriptures, praying, singing of psalms, hearing the word preached, repeating at home what they heard in public, catechising their families, meditation, etc., these things do not please the unregenerate part, but men are ready to murmur, as they did of old,

“*What a weariness is it!*” (Malachi 1:13) and, ‘When will the sabbath be over?’ (cf Amos 8:5), etc.

From these words, “*My holy day*” (Isaiah 58:13) take a third rule: **we must look upon the sabbath as a day of divine institution not of a human ordination**. The sabbath hath a ‘divine right’ written upon it, more authentic than theirs that decry it. “*My holy day*” and “*the holy of the Lord*” twice in this thirteenth verse; and this, not in reference only to the seventh day, but in reference to the first day of the week, which this evangelical prophet had then, by divine revelation in his eye. How much more doth it concern us, who are reserved to this glorious administration under the gospel, to own the divine right of the evangelical sabbath! Surely it is the voice of the glorious Trinity that calls it ‘My holy day’: God the Father by creation, God the Son by redemption, and God the Holy Ghost by sanctification, sending down a rich and plentiful effusion of gifts and graces upon the apostles, for the enabling of them to go forth and convert the Gentiles, by the preaching of the gospel. To deny God His own right is sacrilege and atheism.

Thomas Case (1598 – 1682)

God hath set four peculiar marks of honour on [the fourth commandment]. (1) It is the largest of all the commands. (2) It hath a solemn ‘memento’ prefixed to it. (3) It is delivered both positively and negatively, which the rest are not. And, (4) It is enforced with more arguments to strengthen the command upon us, than any other.

It is, and must needs be moral, and not ceremonial; because all the reasons that enforce it are perpetual, and the Sabbath continued when the ceremonial law ceased, and was vanished.

John Flavel (1628 – 1691)

THE TIME OF REFORMATION

“These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also”
(Acts 17:6)

It has always been the policy of the advocates of error, when unable to sustain themselves by sophistry, specious reasoning and false logic, to stigmatize the advocates of the truth as innovators, disturbers of the peace, and dangerous to the harmony and interests of the community. Such was the course pursued by those who uttered the language of the text. Paul and Silas, having been released from the Macedonian prison, where they had been confined for preaching the Gospel, took their departure from Philippi, and passing through Amphipolis and Apollonia, “they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews” (Acts 17:1). Here Paul, according to his usual custom, met the Jewish rabbis and teachers, and reasoned with them out of the Old Testament Scriptures, concerning Jesus of Nazareth – proving to them that he was the Messiah. His reasoning on this subject was so forcible, that many of the Jews were convinced, and professed their faith in the Saviour. This stirred up the hatred and envy of the discomfited rabbis; and, finding themselves unable to cope with the superior logic and masterly reasoning of Paul, they enlisted the prejudices of the rabbis, and gathered a mob, and created a riot, and endeavoured to lay violent hands on the disciples, and thus accomplish by force and superior numbers, what they could not effect by fair argument. Their accusation against the disciples is contained in the words of the text: *“These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also”*. My theme is:

I. THE AIM OF THE RELIGIOUS REFORMER. A Reformer is one who seeks to remove abuses which have crept into an organization or community, or one who boldly enters a field where error has held undisputed sway, and fearlessly wields amid giant powers of opposition, the weapons of truth. He aims to entirely revolutionize the minds of the

community in which he labours, on that particular subject where he believes reform to be needed. A compromise between truth and error is not what he seeks, and will not satisfy him. ‘The truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth’, is his motto. Old systems of error, however sacred on account of their antiquity, he boldly attacks. Though massive darkness has long brooded over the people, he aims to dissipate the gloom, and shed upon them brilliant rays of light. His work is a mighty one; the end for which he labours is noble and sublime. He holds a position in advance of the community in which he resides, and the age in which he lives – hence he possesses traits of character that are peculiar, which fit him to toil and suffer for the accomplishment of his designs.

A spirit of noble daring is his. He fears not to grapple with error, though sanctioned by age, and supported by popular favour. He scruples not, if need be, to stand alone, as the champion of truth. With undaunted intrepidity he braves the “world’s dread laugh” or meets its frown. With a spirit of indomitable perseverance, he steadily adheres to his purpose and determinedly pursues his single object. Every obstacle thrown across his path affords a new incentive to increased activity. Every difficulty he meets, only gives new strength and inspires fresh courage. He is not to be turned aside. Having put his hand to the plough, he looks not back. Self-sacrificing effort and benevolent labour are his. His time, talents, property, are all laid upon the altar of truth. He toils, not to achieve a name, to amass wealth, or to advance a sect. He labours for the good of others, while often he receives only their hatred, reproach and persecution. If there is one picture on earth that reminds us, more than any other, of the meek and lowly Saviour, it is the spirit and conduct of the reformer, patiently suffering at the hands of those whose moral elevation he labours to effect. And here is the test by which the true and false reformer may be tried and discovered. Infidelity boasts of seeking a reform. But when did Infidelity ever inspire its advocates with a spirit of self-denial for the good of others? Where are its sacrifices made to benefit and elevate the human race? Did infidelity ever suffer to benefit man? Does it today go forth, as an angel of mercy, to labour, to suffer,

and to bless? No, no. But the true reformer has a high purpose, a benevolent aim; he occupies holy ground, and he can suffer, unjustly suffer, to benefit his fellow-men. Let us notice:

II. THE REPROACH OF THE REFORMER. All Reforms are attended with agitation and conflict, but none more so than reforms in religion. At first, the reformer may attract but little attention. His attacks on error may appear so feeble, and his efforts to advance the truth may seem so faint, that the opponents of truth may esteem only the smile of ridicule and scorn necessary to throw his work into insignificance, or a slight exertion of authority sufficient to extinguish it. But let him continue with boldness, energy and eloquence, to plead for truth and begin to make an impression upon the public mind, and gather adherents around him; then will his adversaries become agitated and alarmed. Like the fierce storm, lashing into foam the waters of the mighty deep, they stir up the popular mind, until the entire community moves in angry surges, and persecution and violence ensue. The more bold the onset, the more forcible the elucidation of truth, the more numerous the adherents to the reform, the more fiercely will the advocates of error oppose the effort, and the more desperately will they seek to crush by force, or circumvent by cunning, what they cannot master by argument, or defeat by sound logic. In such an event, the reformer labours under every disadvantage. He is reproached as a disturber of the public peace. He is regarded as the cause of all the confusion and uproar, and must bear all the odium connected with it. Look at the text and its connection. The disciples had peacefully taught in the synagogue in Thessalonica, yet all the uproar was charged upon them: "*These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also*". Thus it has ever been. The opposers of reform have lashed into fury the elements of political strife, and then have charged the peace-loving disciples of truth with all the disastrous results.

The reformer is also reproached as an innovator. He is opposing old customs and popular usages. He seems to be ruthlessly trampling on all

that has been held beautiful and venerable. He seems to be setting up individual and novel opinions against the united and established wisdom of ages. He seems to be destroying everything and advancing nothing. He seems to be a reckless intruder, trespassing on ground rightfully occupied by others. He seems to touch sacred things with an impious hand. He seems to be sowing dissensions, destroying hallowed institutions, and introducing unauthorized innovations. But he perceives that these old forms and venerated institutions are the offspring of error, and that truth and right demand their extermination; in the name of God, therefore, he goes forth, to overturn, to revolutionize, and to reform.

He is further reproached as illiberal, uncharitable, bigoted, and narrow-minded. Because he refuses to call error truth, and darkness light, and wrong right, the slaves of error, the victims of darkness, and the followers of wrong conclude that he is uncharitable and narrow-minded. They forget that it is the highest charity to expose error and oppose wrong, and that only the largest minds and most benevolent hearts will seek to disseminate light and dispel darkness, even though 'the darkness comprehendeth it not'. There never yet was a reform attempted, that did not suffer the reproach of the dominant party. Look at that old reformer Lot: "*This one fellow came in to sojourn, and he will needs be a judge*" (Genesis 19:9). Look at Moses, the prophets, John the Baptist, Martin Luther, Roger Williams. All these were reproached as innovators, and virtually charged with 'turning the world upside down'. But the greatest innovator that ever appeared in our world was Jesus Christ. He was the Great Reformer. He aimed directly to abolish the old dispensation and make all things new. He paid no respect to the antiquity of the scribe, the morality of the Pharisee, or the sanctity of the priest. He threw Himself upon the merits of the truths He delivered, and declared Himself a radical innovator and reformer. Did not He meet reproach? Let the purple robe, the reed sceptre, the thorny crown, the mocking homage, and the blood-stained cross reply.

The apostles were reproached. The Gospel which they preached was a great innovation upon old and venerable institutions. No reform could

ever be compared with that which they sought to effect. They aimed to overturn all the religions in the world. Hence they were accounted ‘vagabonds, fools, and moon-struck madmen’. They were treated with ridicule, scorn, and contempt. They, a few ignorant fishermen, seeking to abolish those religions which had stood for centuries, and which had gathered around them all the charms of history, philosophy, and poetry; religions whose massive temples towered in majestic splendour to the very clouds – religions which numbered among their devotees, crowds of kings and heroes, artisans and sages, and which were cherished by the most powerful and refined nations of the earth. It is not strange that at first they were only deemed worthy of ridicule; nor is it surprising, that as success crowned their persevering labours, they became the subjects of violent hate and bitter persecution. They were shaking the foundations of ancient superstitions, they were disturbers of the public peace, they were detestable innovators, they were hateful reformers, in short, they were ‘turning the world upside down’.

This kind of reproach Baptists especially have been called to endure. They are great innovators. Of all persecuted sects, the Baptists stand forth as most prominent, simply and only because they aim at a more complete and thorough reform than any others ever attempted. They teach that Christ’s kingdom is not of this world; that the church is not a national, political, or provincial establishment; but a congregation of holy men, separated from the world by the receiving of the Holy Spirit. They seek to ‘turn the world upside down’ – not in the odious sense, but in the proper and desirable sense. The world is wrong; it is morally wrong side up; it needs to be revolutionised, and primitive Christianity alone can do it. This is the instrument by which Baptists aim to accomplish their design. By the propagation of primitive Christianity, they confidently expect to achieve a complete and entire Reformation in the Pagan, Romish, and Protestant world, and bring the race of man back to God. We pass on to notice:

III. THE TRIUMPH OF THE REFORMER. The true religious reformer must ultimately triumph. However opposed, reproached, and persecuted, he triumphs. Even when he appears to be discomfited he triumphs. While he struggles on in adversity, and while sad reverses meet him in his work, still he triumphs. The power of the truth is manifest in the support it yields him amid these disheartening circumstances. The consciousness that he has discharged his duty with fidelity, fills his mind with peace. He feels that the smile of God is upon him; hence the frowns of the opposers of truth, and their anathemas, are lighter than vanity to him. He esteems 'the reproaches of Christ greater riches than all the treasures' of earth. The shame of the cross he counts greater honour than all the applause of the world, and the martyr's death is to him sweeter than all earthly pleasures. He exhibits a dignity of character that far outshines all others, and totally eclipses, on the historic page, all his slanderous persecutors. He is as far superior to the time-serving demagogue, as are the burning beams of the meridian sun to the last sickly rays of the feeble taper, flickering in its socket, and just ready to expire. He knows no fear of consequences. Duty, it is his to perform – results, are God's to control. He stands firmly, as the rock in the ocean, unmoved amid the howlings of the tempest and the fury of the waves. For him there is a glorious future, however dark the hour of trial may be; and though for a time he endures reproach, he will have a name when his persecutors have perished and are forgotten.

Every true religious reformer that ever lived in this world triumphed. Daniel, and the three Hebrew worthies, possessed the spirit, endured the reproach, and achieved the triumph of Reformers; they saw their enemies clothed with shame, and the cause of God, which they had espoused, gloriously advanced. And though their pathway to success lay through the lions' den and the burning furnace, these only made their triumph more sublime, and shed a new halo around their names. Martin Luther triumphed – and though Rome anathematized and bitterly execrated him, the name of the poor monk of Erfurth is honoured wherever evangelical Christianity prevails; while the distinguishing

doctrine for which he contended has become one of the strong bulwarks of the Protestant world, and the terror of Antichrist. Roger Williams triumphed – though banished from the Massachusetts colony, and driven into the desert wilds among the Indians ... How superior the fame of such men to that of the mere military hero!

There is a great deal of this work of reform before the church at the present day. Especially is this true of the Baptist churches of this country. They are prepared to labour for a more thorough reformation than any others can undertake. There are forms of error, productive of incalculable mischief, which none others can consistently attack; while all others retain and seek to perpetuate the unscriptural dogma of infant baptism, which with every other traditionary rite must be abolished, before the ... revolution will be complete. Let it be remembered that each has a personal interest and responsibility in this matter. Let the inquiry be, 'Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?' Every Christian is to aim to reform, first himself; then the world. The Word of God must be our weapon. With this, old forms of error must be attacked, and the conflict only end when the field is left in possession of truth. *"Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who, for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God"* (Hebrews 12:1-2).

J. Q. Adams, from *"Baptists: Thorough Reformers"*, 1858

The following items of literature are available free of charge from North Road Chapel, and recommended to our readers:

Why Baptists are not Protestants

C. E. Tulga

The Trail of Blood

J. M. Carroll

Biblical Truth and Reformed Theology

W. H. Molland

EDITORIAL

It is impossible to overlook the fact that this month (October 2017) will mark the 500th Anniversary of ‘The Reformation’ – both because of the lasting influence those events have had upon the practice of Christianity today; and also for the amount of attention it is receiving in the religious, and secular, media. It is disturbing to hear atheistic commentators misappropriating those historical circumstances as a commendable case of rebellion against the status quo, and all forms of ‘organised religion’. But it is equally incongruous to see with what incautious enthusiasm ‘The Reformation’ is embraced by many Evangelical churches, who exult in the dubious title of ‘Reformed’. It is essential to adopt a more balanced and accurate view. Modern-day Christians who stand for the autonomy of local churches, or believer’s baptism, or who are at variance with their recognised State Church, would not have received any sympathy from the Reformers of the 16th Century; but would instead have been censured, prosecuted, or even executed by them, for holding such doctrines. Baptists, Independents and Non-Conformists in general, owe their existence far more to characters whom popular-church-history has dismissed as ‘Radicals’, than they do to the men celebrated as ‘Reformers’.

The passage of the true Church from beneath the dark clouds of state-sponsored Romanism did not happen suddenly in 1517. Neither was it the work of one, nor several, renowned personalities. To form such an opinion gives rise to other errors:

1.) **It neglects the preceding fifteen centuries of church history.** ‘Justification by Faith’ did not begin with Martin Luther; the principle of Divine Sovereignty was not an invention of John Calvin’s. These glorious facts were unmistakably declared by Christ and the Apostles at the dawn of the New Testament age. ‘The Reformation’ was actually a Rediscovery. Nor had these vital doctrines been so entirely lost as might be imagined. Amongst various maligned and persecuted

Christian sects, the thin, golden line of truth was preserved throughout the Dark Ages. The Reformation was not the invention of Lutheranism, or Calvinism (these terms are man-glorifying distractions) but a recovery of God's timeless truth.

2.) **It neglects subsequent events.** The term 'Reformed Baptist' is a misnomer. Believers' baptism, and many other aspects of church order we take for granted today, never proceeded from the 'Reformers'. It required the life, and work and martyr's deaths of such little-known characters as Manz and Sattler to achieve this, and other separatists and dissenters whose names history has not recorded. They will not receive any national recognition or commemoration, but they fulfil the description of Hebrews 11:33-38, "*of whom the world was not worthy*".

3.) **It consigns 'reformation' to history.** The word 'Reformed' is past-tense; it suggests something finished, or that has ended long ago. Alas, that this is true! The momentum gained in the 16th Century quickly dissipated, the work incomplete, and thus the long shadow of Rome still darkens so-called 'Reformed' churches today. In what ways? Infant sprinkling and the falsehood of covenant theology; association with politics and the secular state; adherence to a liturgical calendar and the celebration of Christmas and Easter; career churchmen with their distinguishing clothing or honorific titles (like 'Reverend'); presbyteries and denominational committees imposing their authority over local churches; 'cross' symbolism and depictions of Christ – these diverse errors share a common origin: they are all fallacies of Roman Catholicism that the Reformers never eradicated, and were never removed since.

We thank God for those reformative events that providentially broke the dominion of Popery five centuries ago, and portended the religious freedoms enjoyed in the present. But we sorrowfully acknowledge, after a period of 500 years, how much **reforming** still remains to be done. Be ye not 'Reformed', "*but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God*" (Romans 12:2).