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# The Link

**NORTH ROAD CHAPEL**

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**BIDEFORD**

# THE LORD'S DAY

## Part 7

*“And it came to pass, that He went through the corn fields on the sabbath day; and His disciples began, as they went, to pluck the ears of corn. And the Pharisees said unto Him, Behold, why do they on the Sabbath day that which is not lawful? And He said unto them, Have ye never read what David did, when he had need, and was an hungred, he, and they that were with him? How he went into the house of God in the days of Abiathar the high priest, and did eat the shewbread, which is not lawful to eat but for the priests, and gave also to them which were with him? And He said unto them, The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath: Therefore the Son of Man is Lord also of the Sabbath. And He entered again into the synagogue; and there was a man there which had a withered hand. And they watched Him, whether He would heal him on the Sabbath day; that they might accuse Him. And He saith unto the man which had the withered hand, Stand forth. And He saith unto them, Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath days, or to do evil? to save life, or to kill? But they held their peace. And when He had looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts, He saith unto the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched it out: and his hand was restored whole as the other. And the Pharisees went forth, and straightway took counsel with the Herodians against Him, how they might destroy Him.” (Mark 2:23 – 3:6)*

Having traced the procession of the Sabbath through some three-and-a-half thousand years or more, up to the period of silence between Malachi and Matthew, the Gospel record is now reached. Here, there is to be discovered a very different state of things to that which obtained throughout much of the Old Testament. Then, the situation was one of laxity, forgetfulness and slackness amongst Israel. But upon entering the New Testament, an iron-like rigidity and cold formality is to be seen, which had also robbed the Sabbath of its true meaning. This attitude was

also denounced by the Saviour, who, by His words and actions, restored the day to its true and original sense.

At this juncture, many critics will grow very excited and say, ‘yes – you might have proved your point up to Malachi, but beyond that the case is lost – for Christ relieved the Sabbath of all its restrictions; He introduced a very different approach!’ Well – let the Gospels be examined with God’s help, that the real teaching of the New Testament Scriptures may be found.

To come to the reading (at the head of this article): “*And He said unto them, The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath: therefore the Son of Man is Lord also of the Sabbath*” (Mark 2:27-28). Now remember that ritualism and dead formality were characteristic of the Sabbath at that time; and thus the Saviour takes His hearers back – not to the Mosaic economy, or even the Moral Law – but to **Creation**. This re-emphasises the importance of Genesis; for it is here that ‘the beginnings’ are found; and in case of any dispute, or misunderstanding of spiritual truth, the Holy Spirit will always refer back to the foundational facts, the source, the origin. So here, Christ goes right back to the beginning and says, “*The Sabbath was **made***”. It is a part of Creation. It was itself created. He then goes on: it “*was made **for man***”. Think back to the Creation account. Which was brought into being first? Man, or the Sabbath? **Man** came first, on the sixth day; then, man having been created, God instituted the **Sabbath** – a day of rest and holy contemplation for him. It “*was made for man*” – God did not first create a Sabbath and then make man to observe it. No! The Sabbath was made for man. For whom? For the Jews? No! For man – **all** men, in all places, for all time. The Pharisees, by the time of the advent of Christ, had it all wrong. They regarded the Sabbath as being uniquely theirs, and had put the truth in reverse (an all-too-common error). They effectively taught that ‘man was made for the Sabbath’. In this respect, the Lord **did** bring about a very different approach; but it was only restoring the Sabbath to its original design and purpose.

Then He says: “*The Son of Man is Lord also of the Sabbath*” (Mark 2:28). He is Lord over all. He made the worlds, and during that Creation week, He made the Sabbath. By virtue of the incarnation, He was: “*found in fashion as a man*” (Philippians 2:8) and became the ‘Son of Man’; made under the law, and subject to that law (cf Galatians 4:4). Nevertheless, He retained His full Deity; and as the Creator of all things, He knew the true nature of the Sabbath, and why He created it. It “*was made for man*”, says Christ.

Becoming man, perfect man, Himself, He, by word and action, restored to men the correct observance of it: “*Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition. Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto Me with their lips; but their heart is far from Me. But in vain they do worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men*” (Matthew 15:6-9). The commandments had been rendered ineffectual by the admixture of human tradition. But, far from the Lord setting aside that law, or watering it down in any way, He upheld its true meaning. To the rich young ruler He said: “*Thou knowest the commandments*” (Luke 18:20); to another He said: “*Keep the commandments*” (Matthew 19:17); on a further occasion, He sums up that law as ‘love to God and to one’s neighbour’ (cf Mark 12:29-31); on the Mount He said: “*I am not come to destroy [the Law]*” (Matthew 5:17). In every instance here, it is the **Moral Law** in view, which includes the **fourth commandment**. The rebukes of Christ to the Pharisees concerning the Sabbath in no way indicate to us that the Sabbath was to be ‘phased out’, indeed not! That law stands or falls together. It is not ten laws – it is **one**, as has been previously described.

Let the testimony of the Epistles also be considered briefly. “*For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. For He that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law*” (James 2:10-11). It is one Law; it is a continuing Law; it is a

Law for all time; and the Sabbath is part of that Law. With regard to the Jews and the Sabbath, their fault was not so much in defect, as in abuse. The Lord set forth its original meaning and simplicity, and never violated its sanctity.

*“And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up: and, as **His custom was**, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood for to read”* (Luke 4:16). This is Christ, the Son of Man. This was His custom, His weekly habit, to be at the synagogue every Sabbath. This day was made for man. He, as man, would keep this day holy – it was devoted unto God. Christ did not make void this law. Christ *“came down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee, and **taught them** on the Sabbath days”* (Luke 4:31). Capernaum was about 20 miles from Nazareth. Here the Lord sheds further light on the true meaning of the Sabbath: He *“taught them”*. This is one of the prime reasons for its institution. It is for man’s spiritual instruction.

The Pharisees levelled a complaint at the disciples as they rubbed out a few ears of corn, walking along the footpath (in all probability, they were en route to the synagogue); and by the reference here to David and to hunger (cf Mark 2:25-26), it is perfectly reasonable to suppose that the disciples picked the grains to satisfy their hunger. These religious bigots pounced immediately. To reap or to gather corn, or to transport goods and carry burdens, would be to violate the Law of God. That would constitute Sabbath breaking! But that which is before us here was no commercial enterprise, and bears no resemblance to the market stalls of wares and fish being sold under the walls of Jerusalem on the Sabbath, such as in Nehemiah’s day. All that the disciples had done was to contradict the tradition of the Pharisees, not the law of the Sabbath day.

Thus the Lord and his followers entered the synagogue, as described in Mark 3, and there in the congregation was a man with a withered hand. *“And He saith unto them, Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath days, or to*

*do evil? to save life, or to kill? But they held their peace. And when He had looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts, He saith unto the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched it out: and his hand was restored whole as the other. And the Pharisees went forth, and straightway took counsel with the Herodians against Him, how they might destroy Him”* (Mark 3:4-6). There was no breach here of the Sabbath. The Scripture clearly states that the Lord of the Sabbath was angry that such heartless formality should mark their religion. He knew what true Sabbath observance was.

Take another example: *“And the ruler of the synagogue answered with indignation, because that Jesus had healed on the Sabbath day, and said unto the people, There are six days in which men ought to work: in them therefore come and be healed, and not on the Sabbath day. The Lord then answered him, and said, Thou hypocrite, doth not each one of you on the Sabbath loose his ox or his ass from the stall, and lead him away to watering?”* (Luke 13:14-15). It was these false hypocritical interpretations that Christ opposed. He was in no way diluting Sabbath observance, with a view to its discontinuation, as some erroneously teach. Indeed, the very reasonings of the Lord suppose the perpetuation of the Sabbath, and the moral obligation of man to observe it. Why bother to correct, to amend, to regulate its false usage, if it was about to be abrogated anyway? Why contend so strongly against the traditions of the Pharisees, if the Moral Law was about to pass away, as some teachers claim?

Contrary to their assertions, it must be stated that, far from our Lord abrogating the Moral Law, He did not in the slightest degree relax it. It is an error of the grossest nature to hint at such a thing. To repeat a fundamental truth: the Moral Law of God, in its ten sections, forms the complete and perfect standard. It is a transcript of the very mind of God. Without it, no man shall see God. The book of Revelation declares: *“Blessed are they that do His commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city”* (Revelation

22:14). This Law must be kept in all its minute and sacred detail, if heaven is to be gained. Only One has ever done it; and wonderfully, He did it on behalf of others: Christ the Surety. He kept the Law of God to the very jot and tittle, and to suggest that He relaxed Sabbath observance, pending its passing away in the Gospel age, is heresy of the most dangerous kind. For if He failed in respect of the fourth commandment, then He is guilty of all! Upon what then could believers rely? For He is our legal Surety. Is it conceivable that the One who became His people's Substitute was Himself a breaker of God's holy law? It cannot be. The very work of atonement and satisfaction to God is at stake in this. Thus is seen again the absolute completeness of the Scripture. Go wrong on one point and the whole faith is imperilled. The Bible is one doctrine – singular. May God grant that we ever view and handle it as such.

W. H. Molland (1920 – 2012)

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There is evidence that the sabbath-law had become encumbered and perverted by Jewish interpretations and traditions. Its benignant spirit had been extracted from it, and what in its Divine simplicity was a boon of inestimable value, had become a burden and a bondage. It seemed as if man had been made for the sabbath, and not the sabbath for man. For example, according to the interpretations of the rabbins, a man might fill a trough with water for beasts to come and drink, but he might not carry water to them. In like manner, according to one school, it was not lawful to heal, or to minister to the sick, on the sabbath-day. Most impious and absurd perversions! But what was needful in such a state of society, evidently was, not so much that the sabbath-law should be republished, as that it should be rescued from perversions alien from its whole spirit and design. And that its genuine character might be all the more effectively and impressively brought out, let the lesson be taught in connection with certain incidents that shall make it memorable. We

find our Lord doing this with other appointments of a moral and permanent kind. And He would only be acting in character, did He do so with this.

Now this, we are convinced, is the true view of the facts in our Lord's history, on which we are now commenting. They were not meant to relax, but rightly to expound the sabbath-law. This is evident from the modes of defence which He adopts, in all of the cases referred to. These vindications vary, but they all speak with one voice; not, 'I am about to abrogate the sabbath'; but, 'I wish to deliver it'. On one occasion He appeals to His Divinity: "*My Father worketh hitherto, and I work*" (John 5:17). That is, 'In performing miracles, such as you have now seen Me perform, I act as God. And even as My Father, in conducting His providential administration, never suspends its movements, so it is with Me in performing miracles'. But on other occasions, He makes His appeal to analogous cases in the history of their nation, or to their own conduct: 'David ate of the shew-bread in the tabernacle to relieve the cravings of hunger, and thus to save health and life. Why, then, blame My disciples for eating the ears of corn, when prompted by a similar necessity? Go and learn what that meaneth, 'I will have mercy, and not sacrifice'' (cf Matthew 12:1-8). Again, 'If an ox or an ass fall into a ditch on the sabbath-day, will ye not draw it out again? Am I then justly charged with violating the sabbath, because I have healed this man with the withered hand; or, because this daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years, hath been loosed by Me from her bonds, on the sabbath-day?' (cf Luke 13:10-17, 14:1-6).

Now we ask, is this like the course of defence that our Lord would have adopted, had the sabbath been on the eve of its decay? But is it not the very mode of defence that we should have expected Him to adopt, had His design been to relieve it from the rubbish of Pharisaism, and to present it in its primeval and untarnished beauty? Suppose you saw a man taking pains to restore a defaced inscription on a pillar, to remove from it the rubble that had been heaped around its base, and to tear away



the ivy that surrounded its summit, would you not infer that it was his intention, that the pillar with its inscriptions should remain for the information of after ages? Such was now the conduct of our Lord in reference to the sabbath-law. And it is very much to the point to remark, that a case cannot be produced from the whole evangelic history, in which He took similar pains with the explanation of a mere ceremonial appointment. “Our Lord”, says a profound and accurate thinker, “corrected those errors alone which had disfigured the pure maxims of the law of universal obligation; we find no corrections made by Him of temporary or national ordinances” (Stopford).

Andrew Thomson (1814 – 1901)

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What closes the argument is, that Christ on the Sabbath Day honoured the synagogue with His frequent presence and service there. “*And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up: and, as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood for to read*” (Luke 4:16), and, as we find in the progress of the chapter, He expounded a portion of the prophet Isaiah to His hearers. Now did Christ thus show us an example of keeping the Sabbath, and shall we, that call ourselves His disciples, neglect it? In vain is our pretence to the name of Christians if we do not trace the footsteps of our illustrious Pattern and Leader to Heaven ... And will not Christ at the Great Day disallow the vain pretensions of such who ‘call Him Lord, Lord and do not the things that He says’ (cf Luke 6:46)? And besides, should not the example of Christ be recommended to, and copied by us from the consideration of the immense love and mercy He has shown to us? Is not His dominion over us purchased and enforced in His blood? If He has loved us and washed us from our sins, shall He not rule us by His laws; and shall not that hand, that dispenses pardon and salvation, sway the sceptre over us? What stronger motives can there be to draw us than the bonds of love?

Thomas Gibbons (1720 – 1785)

# AMEN!

*“And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God. And all the people answered, ‘Amen, Amen’” (Nehemiah 8:6)*

## – Continued –

The first inference then, is:

**1. REPROOF – for our deep silence, and too much neglect of this hearty ‘Amen’.** Which proceeds from these four ill causes:

(a) From thence where all ill things come in upon us, even from... **ignorance and darkness.** When men grew dull and stupid, and neither understood nor cared to understand, either the word of God to us, or ours to Him in prayer, religion was looked upon as a ‘by-business’, or troublesome, laborious, and needless curiosity. It was enough to believe as the church believed, and to pray as the church prayed. And so they devolved all their devotions...

(b) The **divisions among Christians** ... is another cause of this defect and neglect. *“When ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation”* (1 Corinthians 14:26). One was for singing, another for reading, a third for preaching; one for prophesying, another for interpreting. The apostle gives two rules, to oppose this ... *“Let all things be done decently and in order”*, and, *“unto edifying”* (1 Corinthians 14:40, 26). Natural decency forbids all confusion. In our days, some have such schismatical phrases, notions, and doctrines, in preaching, praying, and praising, that a sober Christian cannot say ‘Amen’. Some are so zealous for forms, that nothing else must be a prayer but the Lord’s Prayer ... Others are so vehement against all forms, that they would reduce all devotion to an invisible spirituality; as if they had dropped their bodies and were already crowded within the veil, into the triumphant choir of spirits in heaven. But certainly, while we are in the body, we ought to glorify God with

our bodies as well as our spirits, and with our tongues as the body's instruments in public worship ... "God was made flesh to speak to us; therefore we ought to speak to Him"...

(c) Another [reason for] this defect is the **degenerating of assemblies** from their first constitution ... For these, as all bodies, contract defilements; both in ministers and people. Formality hath overrun that zeal, piety, and charity, which formerly burned among them, so that many assemblies are run down into the spirit of the world ... How have some ministers been thrust in upon the assemblies by a secular hand, who never understood how to preach, or pray a live prayer! And many congregations are full of such ignorance and profaneness, that the arches and vaults in the building give as good an echo as their dead Amens. One comes in his drink; another piping hot out of their worldly businesses; a third in huffing finery and bravery, to be gazed on; another is heavy laden with sleep, and comes for a nap. How can they that are not concerned for God's glory, His church, His word, the pardon of their sins, nor think themselves beholden to God for daily bread, or that they need daily grace, say either 'Our Father' or 'Amen' with any sense? When either ministers or people drink, and swill, and swear, and roar with one another at the tavern all the week, and yet will be the most vocal and loud in their responses on the Lord's Day, it turns men's stomachs and consciences from public expressions, as smelling something too rankly of hypocritical formality...

(d) **Worldly peace, plenty and prosperity**, dirty and dull the wheels of the soul... It is unreasonable – yet too often true – that those tenants who have the best farms, pay God His rent worst. When Christians were kept warm by the zeal of their persecutors, they met in caves and woods with the hazard of their lives; they had a zeal for God and the gospel; they heard and prayed as for their lives, and for the life of religion. It might be the last sermon or prayer they would join in ... which made them ... seal their prayers with warm Amens.

## 2. INFORMATION – If ever the church [is to] recover [its] primitive purity and fervency, [then]:

(a) **The whole worship of God must be in a known tongue**, so that all may say ‘Amen’ in the congregation. It is observed by Tertullian that ... ‘Amen’ is the same in all languages, that all nations might have the same intelligible language in their devotions especially...

(b) **All public [worship is] to be intelligible in [its] matter ...** as well as in the form of language. Ministers are not to use over-studied phrases, and singular notions of their own fancies ... Prayer is putting the word and promises of God in suit; and therefore, plain scriptural pleadings are our best arguments. Any unintelligible or doubtful expressions do but lay a stumbling block in the way, to hinder the hearers giving readily their Amen. Therefore, we must not only pray with our own spirits, but with the people's understanding also: *“I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also. Else when thou shalt bless with the spirit, how shall he that occupieth the room of the unlearned say Amen at thy giving of thanks, seeing he understandeth not what thou sayest? For thou verily givest thanks well, but the other is not edified”* (1 Corinthians 14:15-17)... So God promiseth to give His people pastors after His own heart which shall feed them with knowledge and understanding (cf Jeremiah 3:15)...

(c) **All the congregation must be unanimous** – of one heart, sense, and soul. Or else they can never meet and centre in one Amen, but are in separation when they are together! The apostle tells us that the variance of husband and wife causeth their prayers to be hindered (cf 1 Peter 3:7) (when passion is up, devotion is down); or [in opposition]. But the true Jerusalem is a city at unity with itself: *“Jerusalem is builded as a city that is compact together”* (Psalm 122:3); One Lord, one baptism, one bread, one body, one soul, one spirit, one heart, one faith (cf

Ephesians 4:4-5), and one request: namely, “*that the Lord may be King over all the earth; that the Lord may be one, and His name one*” (Zechariah 14:9), which will be so, when God shall “*give His people one heart, and one way, that they may fear Him for ever*” (Jeremiah 32:39). Then there shall be as many taches as there are loops, and as many sockets as there are tenons, and ‘all the tabernacle be one’ ... This symphony and harmony, when it obtains, will make one Amen; when God’s praises and the saints prayers shall be all one...

**(d)** To all this, there must come in **diligent attention and intension of mind**. For else they cannot consent to all and every part. And as a man who is to set his hand and seal to an indenture will hear all the conditions, that he may know what he binds himself to, so we, being to seal all the prayers with our lips’ and hearts’ Amen, need mind what we seal to... But when [a congregation] shall be intelligent, unanimous, intent, and affectionate, they may, [must], and will say: Amen...

### **3. CAUTION – beware of all that which may hinder this powerful Amen**

**(a)** Then **beware of all sin**. Deliberate sins deaden our faith and spirits in prayer... “We are always as much at a distance from God’s hearing us, as we are from hearing His righteous precepts”. If we regard iniquity in our hearts, God will not say Amen to our prayers (cf Psalm 66:18), and neither can we do it in faith...

**(b)** **Take heed of too much business**. For that dusteth us with so many thoughts, which not only choke the word, but stifle our prayers. The apostle would have them ‘without cares’ that they might ‘serve the Lord without distraction’ (cf 1 Corinthians 7:32, 35). By these convulsive motions of distracting thoughts, which pull us first on one hand, then on the other... all the beauty of duty is gone off; nor can the soul well sit close to the Lord and steady, but sits tottering – half on, half

off – no settled frame of spirit can be maintained. First one business, then another, comes and pulls us off to speak with us, so that we are not at leisure to speak with God.

**(c) Beware of a lazy posture of the body.** For the soul is drawn into consent and sympathy with it. Here the Jews ‘stood up’ to show their reverence and attention to the word of God (cf Nehemiah 8:5). They lifted up their hands, bowed down their heads, and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground. Here was exalted attention and devotion, and most humble veneration, with intense affections; and these could say, ‘Amen, Amen’ (cf Nehemiah 8:6). But to see one sit and hang down his head, and hang his hat on his nose, or perhaps, sleeping till he snore himself awake, and then give a yawn or an idle Amen; anyone, without breach of charity, may think him guilty of lazy hypocrisy with detestation. This is a mocking of God; giving the congregation a flap with this fox’s tail when they have cunningly slept over the greatest part of the prayer; and slipped out of the congregation without removal...

#### **4. DIRECTION AND EXHORTATION: how to keep up this harmonious Amen in public assemblies:**

**(a)** Let pastor and people never meet [without first] some **solemn preparations of heart** to meet the Lord. Rehoboam, and most of the kings of Israel, and their people, also sinned in this: that they ‘prepared not their hearts to seek the Lord’ (cf 2 Chronicles 12:14). He ‘fitted not his heart’, as the Hebrew word imports; it was no more fit to that duty, than an ass is to play upon a harp. We should never offer God that which cost us nothing. “*Put off thy shoes from off thy feet*” (Exodus 3:5) – vain thoughts and vile affections – and “*put on the Lord Jesus Christ*” (Romans 13:14) ere you go into the Father’s presence. A worldly spirit, coming off from common employments, is not fit for communion with God...

**(b)** We must **watch unto prayer** (cf Matthew 26:41, 1 Peter 4:7). For the devil is there, as to catch away the good seed, so to catch us away by every wandering thought. Peter and John were at Christ's transfiguration in the mount, but were sadly "*heavy with sleep*" (Luke 9:32). It is strange, when they should have been taken up with raptures and ecstasies of joy, that they should be so drossy and drowsy. But how hard a matter it is for to watch with Christ one hour in duty! (cf Matthew 27:40). Grief might make them heavy in the garden, and yet Christ's passion, and sweating drops of blood, [ought] to have put them into an agony of compassion! But alas, neither the garden nor the mount is able to transport us, or keep up intension of soul or affection, unless God keep fire on His own altar, and blow up our spark into a flame.

**(c)** Our [intensity] cannot last long...therefore in all public [worship] ... we ought not to be too prolix, but to **labour for strength rather than length**. 'Thick and short', as David's panting (cf Psalm 42:1) and Daniel's praying: "*O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, hearken and do; defer not, for Thine own sake, O my God: for Thy city and Thy people are called by Thy name*" (Daniel 9:19). When weighty petitions are sent up for the whole church, they draw universal consent...

**(d)** When all is done, there is nothing done, but still all to do, until we **implore the good Spirit of God**. Which He gave the Jews here: "*Thou gavest also Thy good Spirit to instruct them*" (Nehemiah 9:20). And He bade them work; for His Spirit was with them, and should remain among them when they built the temple: "*Yet now be strong ... and work: for I am with you, saith the Lord of hosts: according to the word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, so My Spirit remaineth among you: fear ye not*" (Haggai 2:4-5). Christ bade His disciples tarry at Jerusalem till they were endued with power from on high (cf Luke 24:49); there was no preaching or praying without this 'Spirit of grace and supplications' (cf Zechariah 12:10).

It is impossible that the organs of our bodies or faculties of our souls should praise God aright, unless this Spirit of God fill them... He must 'tune the praise, and form the prayer in us' (cf Philippians 1:19); He must 'inlay it, and work it', both in and out; and He is 'the Master of the choir', to hold and keep us in frame, as well as set us in, and enable us to drive all our petitions home, and through to a fervent 'Amen' ... As Tertullian says: "None but God can teach us how to pray to God". That Spirit of adoption that enableth us to say "*Abba, Father*" (Romans 8:15) can only teach us how to pronounce, "*Amen, Amen*".

Thomas Woodcock (d. 1695)

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*"These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God"* (Revelation 3:14). The Amen! This was Christ's favourite word. 'Verily, verily'; it means in Hebrew, 'to be true'. Christ is true in all He says. "*For all the promises of God in Him are yea, and in Him Amen, unto the glory of God by us*" (2 Corinthians 1:20). There are some of you who wish you had the Spirit. Now Christ is true, and He has said: "*I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him: but ye know Him; for He dwelleth with you, and shall be in you*". (John 14:16-17). And again 'I will send Him unto you; for though He tarry, yet wait for Him, for He will come, and will not tarry' (cf John 16:7, Luke 24:49, Habakkuk 2:3). The promise may be long delayed, but never comes too late. Christ makes two kinds of promises: threatening ones, and comforting ones. Now there are some of you whose only hope is that Christ will not prove true to His words. But He is the Amen. Do you think He will take away that word 'Amen' and put 'liar' instead? Christ will be true to His threatening as well as to His comforting promises. He is a Destroyer as well as a Saviour. He is the Amen.

Robert Murray M'Cheyne (1813 – 1843)



## EDITORIAL

Statistics relating to marriage and divorce in the UK make for unpleasant reading, and are a solemn indictment upon the moral state of the nation. Despite the inexorable growth of the population, the number of marriages being contracted is at the lowest level ever recorded, as cohabitation becomes the accepted norm. The expression “living in sin”, once commonly applied to such behaviour, has fallen out of use, even as the practice has increased. Of the diminishing number of marriages made, over 40% are seen to end in divorce, with an average duration being just 12 years. Recent months have experienced sharp rises in the divorce rate amongst older persons and pensioners, as they rush to adopt the spirit of the age, and terminate even long-standing unions. Neither is this an isolated or extreme case. Throughout much of Europe and America the same deterioration is evident.

To the extent that the Church is responsible for declaring the truth and setting the standard in these matters, it is also culpable for the present decline. The words of Hosea have a striking relevance: “*the Lord hath a controversy with the inhabitants of the land, because there is no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land. By swearing, and lying, and killing, and stealing, and committing adultery, they break out ... Therefore shall the land mourn, and every one that dwelleth therein shall languish ... Yet let no man strive, nor reprove another: for thy people are as they that strive with the priest ... [the] **people** are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because **thou** hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children ... And there shall be, **like people, like priest**: and I will punish them for their ways, and reward them their doings*” (Hosea 4:1-4, 6, 9). God’s divine opinion of nationwide immorality is unequivocal; its consequences and punishment inescapable. Yet the principal reproof is levelled at the priests, not the people. The root of the problem was corruption and negligence amongst those who should have known and taught better.

In regard to the doctrine of marriage, the abysmal failure of the modern Church, and its dereliction of duty can be summarised as follows:

### **1. Walking according to the course of this world**

There have been brief periods in history when the general opinion and practice of the world has been in loose conformity with the doctrine of the Church. Then there has come a change; the fashion of the world has passed on to some new low. How will the Church respond? Alas that in many cases, instead of holding ground, maintaining a stand, or forging heavenward, the Church has turned and walked hand-in-hand with the world; seeking to incorporate the world's errors into the Church's practice. This can be seen in matters as diverse as headcovering, dress, language, music, family values – where the world has led, the Church has foolishly followed, ever downwards.

Marriage is no exception. The Biblical standard is patently clear: Marriage is monogamous and lifelong. Divorce constitutes adultery. Remarriage renders both parties guilty of adultery. Death alone dissolves the union (cf Malachi 2:14-16, Luke 16:18, Romans 7:2-3). But no sooner has the world's fashion for infidelity impacted upon the Church, than ministers and commentators are leaping upon parts of the Ceremonial law, and rules pertaining to Jewish betrothal customs, and inventing as many exception clauses as they have divorces to justify, and divorcees to satisfy. The word of God directs the very opposite course of action: "*And **be not conformed to this world**: 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).

### **2. Thou hast forgotten the Law of thy God**

Many evangelical churches boast that they 'preach the Gospel indiscriminately' to any and all who will hear them. In practice, this means that unbelievers in their congregations receive little other than 'simple Gospel messages' every week. It is much to be regretted that churches fail to '**preach the Law indiscriminately**' to any and all

who will hear them! The church is not a factory system for the mass-production of shallow converts. It is the divinely-appointed forum for preaching the **whole counsel of God**; without fear or favour; without bias or prejudice; to saint and sinner alike. Here is a truth entirely lost in mainstream evangelical Christendom today: unbelievers need to hear the Law. They need to hear doctrine. They need to hear the commandments.

Not as though these things were a means to salvation – but God may have other purposes to accomplish in the preaching of them: whether to bring about conviction of sin, or show the magnitude of Divine holiness, or to prick a man’s conscience, or to leave him ‘without excuse’, or to check the sinner in his headlong course, or indeed, to teach him a basic morality. Take the doctrine of marriage as one example. Where is a worldly man or woman to hear the truth on such matters, if not from the pulpit? Not from the National Curriculum, or the NHS, or Parliament, or the media, or the so-called ‘State Church’ – there is no light in these! If there is no knowledge of God in the land, it is because God’s people are not preaching it.

The Lord has but one holy and divine standard, and against it, all will ultimately be judged. *“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad. Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men”* (2 Corinthians 5:10-11). To claim, as some do, that the world cannot be expected to live according to the Scriptures, and therefore should not be exhorted to heed it, is folly in the extreme. Their unbelief is no exemption. The knowledge of God’s impending judgments should motivate Christians to declare it more earnestly.

### **3. It is come upon thee, and thou faintest**

There are Christians, and congregations, who claim for themselves a high degree of orthodoxy, and may on such issues as marriage and divorce, maintain a vociferous stand. Until, that is, they are faced with a real-life

case of it close to home. Perhaps it is within the immediate family circle, or in the spiritual family of the local church. Now the people concerned have names, and addresses, and children, and a regular place in the pew, and there is emotional investment in the situation. Suddenly, the former certainties are up for re-assessment, and re-consideration; a different theological position will have to be adopted for the sake of personal relationships. Principles formerly held ‘in theory’ are not implemented in practice. *“Behold, thou hast instructed many, and thou hast strengthened the weak hands. Thy words have upholden him that was falling, and thou hast strengthened the feeble knees. But now it is come upon thee, and thou faintest; it toucheth thee, and thou art troubled”* (Job 4:5).

Thus even Samuel the Prophet, who fearlessly declared God’s prophecy of doom against the wicked sons of Eli, proved unable to rebuke his own sons for the same sins, several decades later. Like the seed upon rocky ground, there are those whose theological principles have no root. They prosper when circumstances are fine, but when the noonday sun of trial comes, and application is demanded, they wither away. This is no kind of witness to bear! To such the Lord says, in the language of His letter: *“Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and **do the first works**; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent”* (Revelation 2:5)

#### **4. Wickedness in high places**

After the natural and spiritual family, another grievous blind-spot for many Christians has been in relation to persons of power and influence. Marriage and divorce is a case in point. Whatever principles the 16<sup>th</sup> Century English Reformers may have maintained beforehand, these were quickly put in abeyance when the king required his annulment (and then a second, and a third). The same double standard pertains to the present day. Let the bride be a member of a royal family, or the groom a national celebrity, and otherwise conservative Christians are gathered enthusiastically around their televisions to see the wedding, adulteries

and divorces notwithstanding; while the ‘Christian’ press will gladly unite with the tabloid press in their plaudits and platitudes. When the sinner has a famous face, then “*the words of the prophets declare good unto [him] with one mouth*”, and the pressure to conform is great, to: “*let thy word ... be like the word of one of them, and speak that which is good*”. It takes men of the calibre of godly Micaiah to protest: “*As the Lord liveth, what the Lord saith ... that will I speak ... now therefore, behold, the Lord hath put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these thy prophets, and the Lord hath spoken evil concerning thee*” (1 Kings 22:13-14, 23), or with bold John Baptist to say: “*It is not lawful for thee to have her*” (Matthew 14:4). Such men will inevitably be a lone voice, crying in a wilderness, and may pay dearly for their stand – but **they** are God’s messengers, and not the others.

## **Conclusion**

The branch of the British Royal Family that presently holds the throne (and whose dubious marital affairs attract such widespread attention and approval) owes its accession to events of eight decades ago. At that time, the social unacceptability of divorce and remarriage precipitated the abdication of an earlier monarch. The weight of opinion against such practices resulted in a change to the line of succession. How incongruous does the recent history of that family then appear, with divorce and remarriage rife amongst them, and going essentially unremarked! Such behaviour is in direct contradiction to the very principle that once brought them to power. Surely, they of all people ought to be the most ardent opponents of divorce and remarriage? For it could be argued, that if the rules regarding marriage have been rewritten, and the moral standard so substantially altered, then their claim to the throne, and right to the kingdom, is dangerously undermined.

There is a similar, but even more solemn contradiction committed by Christians who seek to justify divorce and remarriage. The Scriptures liken Christ’s work in salvation, and His covenant relationship with His

people, to the marriage contract, in its sanctity, security, proximity and perpetuity. Any practice that weakens the institution of marriage, also impairs the covenantal basis of redemption. For the Biblical connection between these themes is deep and profound; more than simply metaphor, or analogy. God says: “*And I will betroth thee unto Me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto Me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in lovingkindness, and in mercies. I will even betroth thee unto Me in faithfulness: and thou shalt know the Lord*” (Hosea 2:19-20); “*For as a young man marrieth a virgin, so shall thy sons marry thee: and as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee*” (Isaiah 62:5); “*For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church*” (Ephesians 5:31-32); “*And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband*” (Revelation 21:2).

The Lord’s people owe their ‘accession’, their royal-priestly status, to an unbreakable covenant union with Christ. How incongruous does the recent history of the Church then appear, with divorce and remarriage rife amongst them, and going essentially unremarked! Such behaviour is in direct contradiction to the very principle that brings them salvation. Surely, they of all people ought to be the most ardent opponents of divorce and remarriage! For it could be argued, that if the rules regarding marriage have been rewritten, and the moral standard so substantially altered, then their claim to blessedness, and right to the kingdom, is dangerously undermined.

## **ANNUAL BIBLE CONVENTION**

**Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2018 D.V.**

Services: **3.00 p.m. & 5.30 p.m.** Tea served: **4.30 p.m.**

Preacher : Mr J. Munday  
( Exeter )

*a cordial invitation is extended to all*