

July - September 2018

The Link

NORTH ROAD CHAPEL

BIDEFORD

THE LORD'S DAY

Part 8

“I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord. Our feet shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem. Jerusalem is builded as a city that is compact together: Whither the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord, unto the testimony of Israel, to give thanks unto the name of the Lord. For there are set thrones of judgment, the thrones of the house of David. Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love thee. Peace be within thy walls, and prosperity within thy palaces. For my brethren and companions’ sakes, I will now say, Peace be within thee. Because of the house of the Lord our God I will seek thy good” (Psalm 122:1-9).

This article will consider the content of the Gospels in regard to the Sabbath, and also move further into the New Testament and show the degree of overlap that exists between the Jewish Sabbath and the first day of the week. Fuller details of this will be before us in the next edition, God willing. The substance of this issue can therefore be best described as ‘transitional’ – but all this must be followed through in order to show that in no way was the Sabbath being cancelled or relaxed.

Moving then into early New Testament history after Pentecost, the following episodes are recorded: *“And when the Jews were gone out of the synagogue, the Gentiles besought that these words might be preached to them the next sabbath. Now when the congregation was broken up, many of the Jews and religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas: who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God. And the next sabbath day came almost the whole city together to hear the word of God” (Acts 13: 42-44).* *“Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews: And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures” (Acts 17:1-2).* *“And he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks” (Acts 18:4).*

These Scriptures show beyond all doubt that the Sabbath was being observed, not only by the Jews, but by Greeks and Gentiles also. There is no hint of the Apostles ‘phasing out’ the Sabbath for the New Testament Church age; but what we are to see is **the abrogation of those temporary and figurative enactments of the Jewish age**, which does include the passing of the Jewish **ceremonial** Sabbath. However, in no way does this mean an annulling of the primitive, **original** Sabbath principle of one day in seven for God. The moral, essential law of the ‘day of rest’ **remains**. The judicial and ceremonial additions (such as animal sacrifices, earthly High Priests, stoning for Sabbath-breaking) given at Sinai have passed away; **but God’s day has not**. Indeed, under grace as we now know it in the New Testament, it is reanimated, and its significance greatly increased.

With the resurrection and ascension of Christ, and the descent of the Holy Spirit, the shadows and types of the Mosaic covenant and Jewish law vanished away, as the New Covenant took over. This is the whole argument of the Hebrew epistle. In this transition, those aspects of Sabbatical observances that pertained to the Mosaic economy, based upon Jewish theocracy, were also taken away, leaving the primary essential Creation institution of one day in seven for God. We now have the perfect atonement; an unembarrassed and unencumbered way of access; a better covenant; a nobler Mediator; a more glorious High Priest; and a new, simpler, and far more meaningful sanctification of the Sabbath than man has ever had in past ages.

Alas, this glorious truth is insufficient for the Antinomian critic, who will often make recourse to certain Scriptures, attempting to prove that the Sabbath and its observance is **not** a continuing ordinance in the New Testament, such as: *“But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage? Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years”* (Galatians 4:9-10); *“Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?”* (Acts 15:10); *“Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage”* (Galatians 5:1).

‘This observations of days, etc, is all to do with the law’, some tell us. ‘We must not put this yoke back onto the believers of this age. We must stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free, and never become entangled with this yoke of bondage. We are now not under law!’ Now, if the Moral Law was not a separate thing from the Ceremonial Law, and if the Sabbath was not a Creation institution, these dispensationalists and libertines might have a point – indeed they could be right. But they are wrong: for the Moral Law stands distinct and supreme. The Sabbath pertains to Creation and must last as long as Creation. How essential it is to start right, to get the beginnings straight in matters of doctrine! Those things mentioned in Galatians refer to the Ceremonial and Judicial components of the Law.

It must be noted that during the period described in Acts of First Century New Testament history, there was a degree of overlap. The early converts, particularly Jews, did for a season continue in their Mosaic Institutes, and this, of course, affected the day that they observed, as well as other things. Thus Paul writes: *“And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law”* (1 Corinthians 9:20). *“Then came he to Derbe and Lystra: and, behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timotheus, the son of a certain woman, which was a Jewess, and believed; but his father was a Greek: Which was well reported of by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium. Him would Paul have to go forth with him; and took and circumcised him because of the Jews which were in those quarters: for they knew all that his father was a Greek”* (Acts 16:1-3). There was no virtue in Paul administering the rite of circumcision to Timothy, for the New Testament age had begun and that ordinance pertained to the Old Testament order; but this was a transitional period.

There was not an instantaneous change amongst believers from the formerly legitimate, but now expired practices of Jewry, to New Testament Church order. They had to be taught. Hence Paul again: *“Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to His cross; And having spoiled principalities and powers, He made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it. Let no man therefore judge you*

in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ” (Colossians 2:14-17). *“Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations. For one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs... One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind”* (Romans 14:1, 2, 5). Even the Apostle himself continued to uphold many of the Old Testament practices. He did not fly in the face of the Jews at this point, but also kept the Jewish Sabbath, even though the New Testament era had commenced. These things being said, the authority for the Ceremonial Law was void and gradually through the apostles’ teaching, the practice ceased. But the practice of the Moral Law continues.

One of the great distinguishing marks of the New Testament age is the coming of the Holy Spirit and His Divine ministrations. In the ministry of the Holy Spirit there are many facets, but one of the most vital and important is this: *“For finding fault with them, He saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in My covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put My laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to Me a people”* (Hebrews 8:8-10).

Here, the New Covenant and the true Israel of God is in view, and He says that, by His Spirit, He is going to write His Law upon their hearts. What law can this be other than the Moral Law of God? Indeed, the Apostle Paul leaves no doubt whatsoever that it is this Law: *“Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in **tables of stone**, but in **fleshy tables of the heart**”* (2 Corinthians 3:3). Here is a direct transfer of that Law from tablets of stone to the hearts of God’s people. The Holy Spirit has re-impressed that Law upon the believer’s heart, just as it came from the hand of God on Sinai.

Let this question be answered: **has the fourth commandment disappeared?** Does the Holy Spirit erase that command concerning the Sabbath before making the corresponding impression upon the heart? Is the institution of the Sabbath exhibited and engraved upon the order of the first creation, but not upon the hearts of His people who form the new creation? One commentator observes that if there were a window in the Christian's bosom we should see written within the Ten Commandments; and, said he, "We should see that the fourth commandment filled as large a space upon the fleshy tables of our hearts as it did upon the tables of stone given to Moses."

Concerning the law, Paul says: "*I delight in the law of God after the inward man*" (Romans 7:22). John says: "*His commandments are not grievous*" (1 John 5:3). All this is under the New Covenant – the Moral Law is here, including the fourth commandment, just as in the Old Covenant. In the New Testament there is express recognition given to the Ten Commandments, both by Christ and His Apostles. The Apostles and early believers, both Jew and Gentile, continued to honour the Sabbath after Pentecost, for it is inscribed on the hearts of God's people in the Gospel age.

In conclusion: the Sabbath stretches through all ages; it affects all men in every period of time. It is a sure mark whereby to distinguish the true servant of God from the wicked. The formal and the false professor is soon betrayed by their attitudes to the Sabbath. To the nominal Christian, the faithful observance of this day becomes a burden and an encumbrance; but to the sincere believer, it is a day of majesty and glory. Both in public and private he delights in its hours. It is his highest pleasure. His soul finds rest and repose. His heart is warmed by the sunlight of heaven. His hope is stimulated and his spirit is drawn out on this day of rest in glorious anticipation of that eternal rest. Does not one heart speak for another? Is not corporate worship the Christians' chief delight? Like the Psalmist, they are planted in the house of the Lord – so much at home there, because it is their natural habitat. In their humble gatherings and simple Sabbath assemblies, they are prepared and ripened for that glorious assembly above, that heavenly Jerusalem where they shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

W. H. Molland (1920 – 2012)

CHRISTIANS AT THE CROSSROADS

1 Kings 18:1-16

The season of the year currently upon us is one that is frequently associated with significant life changes. By virtue of the academic calendar common to much of the world, these summer months are times when important choices are made by many – especially young people – about the future direction of study, education and employment. With these decisions may come other alterations in circumstances, such as a move away from the family home, a change in geographical location, or seeking fellowship in a different local church. These are weighty matters indeed, and coupled with the pressure of examinations, application procedures, and the wait for responses and results, represent a real challenge – practically, mentally and spiritually. These are junctions in the path of life at which the sovereign purposes of God and His secret will for an individual become apparent, demanding much personal prayer, and intercession on the part of families and churches.

Let it be noted that work and labour are God's appointment for all humanity, both male and female in their respective spheres, and this was the case even before the Fall. Creative work is a characteristic of God Himself, and a part of His image that is impressed upon mankind. Needless to say, the entrance of sin into the world has rendered work more onerous and cursed with difficulties, and equally caused a disinclination to labour in fallen human nature. Notwithstanding, the universal obligation and pattern remains.

It should also be stated that, for believers, their daily work is as much a part of their Christian testimony as their domestic affairs, or their life within the church. It is erroneous for Christians to imagine that their existence can be compartmentalised or divided. Indeed, for the vast majority, their sphere of work will also be their primary field of service to God, testimony to men, and also of spiritual warfare and conflict. To segregate one's secular working life, as though it were somehow opposed to, or defiling of, one's Christian profession; or conversely, to think the workplace as being exempt from those

biblical principles that apply to one's conduct in the church and the home, is folly in the extreme. The hymn-writer had it right who said:

“So shall no part of day or night
From sacredness be free;
But all my life, in every step,
Be fellowship with Thee.”

(Bonar)

The Scriptures have much to say both to employees, and employers, not least this: “*Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ; Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; With good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men: Knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free*” (Ephesians 6:5-8). Thus, a choice of occupation (or the education leading towards it) is as momentous and important as the finding of a local church, or the forming of personal relationships.

By way of a negative example and cautionary tale, the Scriptures give, in 1 Kings 18:1-16, a brief glimpse of a character called Obadiah (one of several persons of this name in the Old Testament, but unconnected with them). These were dark days in Israel's history, when the faithful servants of God were in short supply, and when even a lone voice for truth might accomplish great things. And this Obadiah is described as one who: “*feared the Lord greatly*” (v.3). However, he is not found shoulder-to-shoulder with Elijah upon Carmel, nor in Samaria confronting and denouncing the wickedness of that generation; but rather, in the capacity of Governor of the King's House. This was one of the highest offices of state (used also, for example, to describe Joseph's role in Egypt) second only to the immediate royal family; and the king whom he served was none other than Ahab the son of Omri. That same Ahab who: “*did evil in the sight of the Lord above all that were before him... more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him*” (1 Kings 16:30, 33); indeed, “*there was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord, whom Jezebel his wife*

stirred up. And he did very abominably in following idols” (1 Kings 21:25-26), whose name long outlived him as a byword for sinfulness (cf Micah 6:16). The incongruity of Obadiah’s faith and his employment is written plainly for all to see.

It is evident that God can, and does, save persons of high rank and office; but equally true that these are exceptional cases (cf 1 Corinthians 1:26). There are also examples in Scripture where individuals were called by grace whilst already serving in compromising or Biblically questionable roles, from which they could not easily extract themselves, to whom the Lord was merciful (e.g. 2 Kings 5:18-19, Luke 3:14, Philippians 4:22). There are also some instances in which God has, almost miraculously, promoted His servants to situations of great influence and authority, to accomplish particular purposes, such as Joseph and Daniel. However, none of the above circumstances should be regarded as a precedent to follow, and none apply in the case of Obadiah.

By his own admission, Obadiah was one who had ‘feared the Lord from his youth’ (cf 1 Kings 18:12). The inference to be drawn from these words is that Obadiah was brought to a saving knowledge of God **before** he was of an age to seek employment – that he secured a place in the household of Ahab **after** what might be called his ‘conversion’. Thus his life and biography depict the numerous problems facing those believers who make bad decisions and poor choices in their careers. These include:

1. Moral Compromise. As the narrative of 1 Kings 18 opens, Obadiah is to be found, going through the land of Israel, parched and barren on account of three-and-a-half years of drought and famine, seeking out any remaining pasture for the king’s horses and mules (cf v.5). Whilst the populace was perishing for hunger and thirst, Obadiah’s task was to preserve the royal stud, by forcibly seizing any water or grassland – upon which the starving peoples’ lives literally depended. Well might he have asked himself how he had sunk to such a morally low point. Compromise of Christian principles often happens by almost imperceptible degrees, even as the collapse of a building commences with the most innocuous of cracks, or a landslide with the tumbling of a few small stones. Perhaps at the start of his reign, king Ahab

was a more reasonable employer; maybe less pagan and vindictive prior to his marriage with Jezebel – and Obadiah’s duties were correspondingly less evil. But once the downgrade began in earnest, Obadiah was too far committed, and dragged down with it. By the time of 1 Kings 18, land requisition may have been the least worrisome of his tasks. The preceding years had included the systematic destruction of altars, and the capture and execution of any professed prophets and servants of the Lord (cf 1 Kings 19:10, 2 Kings 9:7). Obadiah may have been instrumental in sparing the lives of some of them (1 Kings 18:4) – but in how many other instances had he stood mutely by, unable to intervene for fear of exposure? Having begun by ‘walking in the counsel of the ungodly’, he had graduated to ‘standing in the way of sinners’, and ultimately been promoted to ‘sitting in the seat of the scornful’ (cf Psalm 1:1).

2. Absent Testimony. In circumstances such as these, Obadiah’s testimony to the truth was utterly silenced. He could not identify himself as one that feared the Lord in public, and scarcely in private either. Whilst in contrast Elijah was instantly recognised by all as a prophet of the Lord (cf 2 Kings 1:7-8), none reckoned Obadiah as anything other than the governor of Ahab’s house, or worse, as the wicked king’s enforcer. Had any of the Lord’s prophets, sentenced to be executed, observed Obadiah in the courtroom apparently ‘consenting unto their death’, they could be forgiven for having concluded the same. It did not require Obadiah to say or do anything in particular – his choice of calling and service spoke volumes. And those Christians who take up any form of employment that ‘gives the appearance of evil’ (cf 1 Thessalonians 5:22) will likewise find their own testimony silenced before it is even begun. However much they may protest the reality of their faith, an external observer may understandably form the opposite opinion.

3. Dishonesty. When a child of God, in pursuit of a chosen career, suppresses his Christian values and makes a secret of his faith, he is acting disingenuously. Whatever else might be achieved in the workplace, there is no escaping this fundamental act of dishonesty. Their employer, their colleagues, and the Lord, are done a great disservice. Obadiah evidently did

his job well – in many respects he was the model employee. This is seen by the fact that Ahab turns to him for the mission to find pasture, rather than to an equerry or stable-hand or cavalry officer, who might have been a more logical choice. He trusted Obadiah – and yet Obadiah was living a contradictory double life, and even at that time was secretly sustaining 100 prophets, perhaps with stolen food from the royal palace. (cf 1 Kings 18:13). This chronic deception undermined any good that was otherwise achieved. The Apostle says: “[Have] *your conversation honest among the Gentiles*” (1 Peter 2:12). It is the only policy.

4. Fear. Observe the consequences of Obadiah’s chosen lifestyle upon his mental and spiritual health. He clearly lived in a state of constant fear. The verses of 1 Kings 18 show him to be afraid of Elijah (v.7, 9); afraid of Ahab (v. 12, 14); afraid – in a craven, rather than a filial way – of the Lord (v. 12); pre-eminently afraid, it seems, of exposure as a follower of God. The instruction of Elijah was hardly a difficult or dangerous one: “*go, tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here*” (v. 8). It was a reasonable enough request to make of the governor of the king’s house; and since Elijah was a wanted man against whom an international arrest warrant had been issued, there might be great praise, or even a reward for the man who finally brought him to the king. But Obadiah’s feverish mind could only think, ‘if I become associated with Elijah, or suspected of having harboured him all this time, maybe my true loyalties will be discovered, and I shall be unmasked, and killed!’ Obadiah had reached that point at which, alas, many ill-employed believers have arrived, where identification as a believer is their greatest fear. Quite apart from anxiety about their lack of a Christian testimony in the workplace, they instead worry lest ever the suggestion of faith should be ascribed to them. How surely “*the fear of man bringeth a snare*” (Proverbs 29:25).

5. Conflict. It is possible that originally Obadiah, like many before and since, thought that he could have the ‘best of both worlds’: be a servant of God, and also have the high-flying, remunerative career to which he aspired. It was a vain hope. “*No man can serve two masters... Ye cannot serve God and mammon*” (Matthew 6:24). Elijah draws attention to this conflict of loyalties;

for whilst Obadiah subserviently addresses him as “*my lord Elijah*”, the prophet swiftly corrects that statement: “*go, tell thy lord*” – denoting Ahab (1 Kings 18:7-8). As long as Obadiah remained in the service of Ahab, he was no true friend of Elijah, much less an honourable servant of God. “*Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God*” (James 4:4). Those who live as Obadiah did, with a foot in both camps, soon find they have the worst of both. Conscience will not permit them to be fully at one with the world, from whom they keep their profession secret; whilst true fellowship with the saints is equally elusive, because of the suspicion aroused by their worldly calling.

6. Misapprehensions. See what a detrimental effect Obadiah’s chosen course was having upon his faith. Here, at a rendezvous somewhere in Israel are two men who ‘feared the Lord’: Obadiah and Elijah. The former was in no real or immediate danger, and yet he speaks with rising panic of a perceived risk of death, saying ‘I shall be slain’ three times (v. 9, 12, 14). He imagines God to be as duplicitous as himself, and likely to double-cross him by some dark providence no sooner than his message to Ahab is delivered (v. 12). By contrast, Elijah actually had a price upon his head, and was portrayed by Ahab’s regime as ‘public enemy number one’. There was every reason to think that the king would send armed men upon him, and greet him at the point of a sword. And yet the prophet could calmly say: “*Go, tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here... As the Lord of hosts liveth, before whom I stand, I will surely shew myself unto him to day*” (v.11, 15).

There was a reason for this profound difference between them. Three years previously, Elijah had obeyed the Lord, and confronted the king, despite the risks to himself. Since when (and not without severe trial of his faith in the process) he had experienced water, bread and meat supplied by ravens at Cherith; oil and meal perpetuated by daily miracle at Zarephath; and a widow’s dead son raised to life again. What cause had he to fear even the worst that Ahab could do, having witnessed God’s resurrecting power at first hand? Elijah’s testimony was with Paul: “*we were pressed out of measure, above*

strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life: But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead: Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in Whom we trust that He will yet deliver us” (2 Corinthians 1:8-10). The sharp contrast in Obadiah proves how disobedience and worldliness are always detrimental to the soul. While Elijah’s example shows:

“We may trust Him fully,
All for us to do;
Those who trust Him wholly,
Find Him wholly true.” (Havergal)

The Outcome. Ultimately, Obadiah heeded the instructions of Elijah, and went, doubtless with much fear and trembling, to deliver the message to the king: “*So Obadiah went to meet Ahab, and told him: and Ahab went to meet Elijah*” (1 Kings 18:16). None of the dire consequences he feared came to pass. One might ask – was this a happy outcome for Obadiah, or not? There were no immediate repercussions so far as the Scriptures tell, but sadly it would seem he continued in his capacity as governor, his latter state no better than the former. He disappears from the record of Holy Scripture, and is not heard of again. He did not take this opportunity to escape from his undesirable position, perhaps having lost the will to do so long previously. Far better had he never got into it in the first place.

As regards the defence which he repeatedly makes for himself – that by virtue of his position, he had been able to save one hundred of the Lord’s prophets by fifties in caves – the truth of the statement cannot be denied (v.4, 13). But it was no justification. Obadiah was only a ‘secondary agent’ in the sovereign purposes of God. The Lord was able to save Elijah by other means, and with better fare; whilst throughout Israel there were some 7,000 persons who in the providence of God, escaped the persecutions of Jezebel (1 Kings 19:18). Those who resort to pragmatic arguments in support of their erroneous choices – ‘think what good might be done’, ‘maybe I can change things for the better from within’, etc – do but highlight the indefensible nature of their cause. In the things of God, the end never justifies the means.

In this 21st Century, there are many forms of employment that should not even be considered by right-thinking Christians, such as politics, the armed forces, the security services, and parts of the legal profession – in all which, the laws of a godless and secular state might have to be upheld and enforced, in direct opposition to the Law of God. Even vocations once favoured by the Lord’s people, in the fields of medicine, finance, science and education, must now be approached with great caution. And in practically every line of work, the potential threat to Lord’s Day observance needs to be carefully assessed from the outset. A romanticised view of western society as being somehow ‘Christian’ is a fallacy, and of no help whatsoever when making a choice of vocation. We live in an anti-theistical age, when, more clearly than ever, the whole world lieth in wickedness (cf 1 John 5:19). Let Christians then walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, because the days are evil; being not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is (cf Ephesians 5:15-17). May God in mercy grant such wisdom to every reader.

R. J. Steward

“The general rule or principle may be stated thus: if we are daily concerned in seeking to please God in all the details, great and small, of our lives, He will not leave us in ignorance of His will concerning us. But if we are accustomed to gratify self and only turn unto God for help in times of difficulty and emergency, then we must not be surprised if He mocks us, and allows us to reap the fruits of our own folly. Our business is to walk in obedient subjection to Christ, and His sure promise is: “*he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness*” (John 8:12). Make sure you are sincerely endeavouring to ‘follow’ the ‘example’ Christ has left us, and He will not leave you in ignorance or uncertainty as to which step you should take when you come to a parting of the ways.”

A. W. Pink (1886 – 1952)

THE CHOICES OF LOT

“And when the morning arose, then the angels hastened Lot, saying, Arise, take thy wife, and thy two daughters, which are here; lest thou be consumed in the iniquity of the city. And while he lingered, the men laid hold upon his hand, and upon the hand of his wife, and upon the hand of his two daughters; the Lord being merciful unto him: and they brought him forth, and set him without the city” (Genesis 19:15-16).

Who is there among the readers of this paper who feels secure, and has no fear of lingering? Come and listen while I tell you a few passages of Lot’s history. Do as he did, and it will be a miracle indeed if you do not get into the same state of soul at last.

One thing then I observe in Lot is this: **he made a wrong choice in early life.** There was a time when Abraham and Lot lived together. They both became rich and could live together no longer. Abraham, the elder of the two, in the true spirit of humility and courtesy, gave Lot the choice of the country, when they resolved to part company: *“if thou”,* he said, *“wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left”* (Genesis 13:9). And what did Lot do? We are told he saw that the plains of Jordan, near Sodom, were rich, fertile and well-watered. It was a good land for cattle and full of pastures. He had large flocks and herds, and it just suited his requirements. And this was the land he chose for a residence, simply because it was a rich, *“well-watered land”* (Genesis 13:10).

It was near the town of Sodom! He had no concern for that. The men of Sodom, who would be his neighbours, were wicked! It mattered not. They were exceeding sinners before God! It made no difference to him. The pasture was rich. The land was good. He wanted such a country for his flocks and herds. And before that argument — all scruples and doubts, if indeed he had any, at once went down. He chose by sight, and not by faith. He asked no counsel from God to preserve him from mistakes. He looked

to the things of time, and not of eternity. He thought of his worldly profit, and not of his soul. He considered only what would help him in this life. He forgot the solemn business of the life to come. This was a bad beginning.

But I observe also, that **Lot mixed with sinners when there was no occasion for his doing so.** We are first told that he: “*pitched his tent toward Sodom*” (Genesis 13:12). This, as I have already shown, was a great mistake. But the next time he is mentioned, we find him actually living in Sodom itself! The Spirit says expressly, “*He dwelt in Sodom*” (Genesis 14:12). His tents were left. The country was forsaken. He occupied a house in the very streets of that wicked town! We are not told the reasons for this change. We are not aware that any occasion could have arisen for it. We are sure there could have been no command of God. Perhaps his wife liked the town better than the country, for the sake of society. It is plain that she had no grace herself. Perhaps she persuaded Lot that it was needful for the advantage of his daughters, that they might marry and get settled in life. Perhaps the daughters urged living in the town, for the sake of mirthful company; they were evidently light-minded young women. Perhaps Lot liked it himself, in order to make more from his flocks and herds. Men never lack reasons to confirm their wills. But one thing is very clear: Lot dwelt in the midst of Sodom without good cause.

When a child of God does these two things which I have named, we never need be surprised if we hear, by and by, unfavourable accounts about his soul. We never need wonder if he becomes deaf to the warning voice of affliction, as Lot was (cf. Genesis 14:12), and turns out a lingerer in the day of trial and danger, as Lot did.

Make a wrong choice in life – an unscriptural choice – and settle yourself down unnecessarily in the midst of worldly people, and I know no surer way to damage your own spirituality, and to go backward about your eternal concerns. This is the way to make the pulse of your soul beat feebly and languidly. This is the way to make the edge of your feeling about sin become blunt and dull. This is the way to dim the eyes of your spiritual discernment, until you can scarcely distinguish good from evil, and stumble as you walk.

This is the way to bring a moral palsy on your feet and limbs, and make you go tottering and trembling along the road to Zion, as if the grasshopper was a burden. This is the way to sell the pass to your worst enemy; to give the devil vantage ground in the battle; to tie your arms in fighting; to fetter your legs in running; to dry up the sources of your strength; to cripple your energies; to cut off your own hair, like Samson, and give yourself into the hands of the Philistines; to put out your own eyes, grind at the mill, and become a slave.

I call on every reader of this paper to mark well what I am saying. Settle these things down in your mind. Do not forget them. Recollect them in the morning. Recall them to memory at night. Let them sink down deeply into your heart. If ever you would be safe from 'lingering', beware of needless mingling with worldly people. Beware of Lot's choice! If you would not settle down into a dry, dull, sleepy, lazy, barren, heavy, carnal, stupid, torpid state of soul, **beware of Lot's choice!**

(a) Remember this in choosing a dwelling-place or residence. It is not enough that the house is comfortable, the situation good, the air fine, the neighbourhood pleasant, the rent or price small, the living cheap. There are other things yet to be considered. You must think of your immortal soul. Will the house you want, help you toward Heaven or Hell? Is the Gospel preached within an easy distance? Is Christ crucified within reach of your door? Is there a real man of God near, who will watch over your soul? I charge you, if you love life, not to overlook this. **Beware of Lot's choice.**

(b) Remember this in choosing a calling, a place, or profession in life. It is not enough that the salary is high, the wages good, the work light, the advantages numerous, the prospects of getting on most favourable. Think of your soul, your immortal soul. Will it be fed or starved? Will it be prospered or drawn back? Will you have your Sundays free and be able to have one day in the week for your spiritual business? I beseech you, by the mercies of God, to take heed what you do. Make no rash decision. Look at the place in every light, the light of God, as well as the light of the world. Gold may be bought too dear. **Beware of Lot's choice.**

(c) Remember this in choosing a husband or wife, if you are unmarried. It is not enough that your eye is pleased, that your tastes are met, that your mind finds congeniality, that there is amiability and affection, that there is a comfortable home for life. There needs something more than this. There is a life yet to come. Think of your soul, your immortal soul. Will it be helped upwards or dragged downwards, by the union you are planning? Will it be made more heavenly, or more earthly; drawn nearer to Christ, or to the world? Will its religion grow in vigour, or will it decay? I pray you, by all your hopes of glory, allow this to enter into your calculations. 'Think', as old Baxter said, and 'think, and think again', before you commit yourself. "*Be not unequally yoked*" (2 Corinthians 6:14). Matrimony is nowhere named among the means of conversion. **Remember Lot's choice.**

(d) Remember this, if you are ever offered a situation on a railway*. It is not enough to have good pay and regular employment; the confidence of the directors, and the best chance of rising to a higher post. These things are very well in their way, but they are not everything. How will your soul fare if you serve a railway company that runs Sunday trains? What day in the week will you have for God and eternity? What opportunities will you have for hearing the Gospel preached? I solemnly warn you to consider this. It will profit you nothing to fill your purse, if you bring leanness and poverty on your soul. Beware of selling your Sabbath for a good place! Remember Esau's mess of pottage. **Beware of Lot's choice!**

Some reader may perhaps think: 'a believer need not fear; he is a sheep of Christ; he will never perish; he cannot come to much harm. It cannot be that such small matters can be of great importance'. Well, you may think so. But I warn you, if you neglect these matters, your soul will never prosper. A true believer will certainly not be cast away, although he may linger. But if he does linger, it is vain to suppose that his religion will thrive. Grace is a tender plant. Unless you cherish it and nurse it well, it will soon become sickly in this evil world. It may droop, though it cannot die. The brightest gold will soon become dim when exposed to a damp atmosphere. The hottest iron will soon become cold. It requires pains and toil to bring it to a

red heat: it requires nothing but letting alone, or a little cold water to become black and hard.

You may be an earnest, zealous Christian now. You may feel like David in his prosperity: “*I shall never be moved*” (Psalm 30:6). But be not deceived. You have only got to walk in Lot’s steps and make Lot’s choice, and you will soon come to Lot’s state of soul. Allow yourself to do as he did, presume to act as he acted, and be very sure you will soon discover you have become a wretched ‘lingerer’ like him. You will find, like Samson, the presence of the Lord is no longer with you. You will prove, to your own shame, an undecided, hesitating man in the day of trial. There will come a canker on your religion, and eat out its vitality without your knowing it. There will come a slow consumption on your spiritual strength and waste it away insensibly. And at length you will wake up to find your hands hardly able to do the Lord’s work and your feet hardly able to carry you along the Lord’s way and your faith no bigger than a grain of mustard seed; and this, perhaps, at some turning point in your life, at a time when the enemy is coming in like a flood, and your need is the sorest.

Ah, if you would not become a lingerer in religion, consider these things! Beware of doing what Lot did!

J. C. Ryle (1816-1900)

** Whilst this point might sound somewhat anachronistic to the modern reader, it has been retained in the article, as it illustrates an important subject. In every generation, new technologies are developed, and new industries form around them, offering new opportunities for employment: whether the railway network of the 19th Century, or electronic networks in the present day. With every such innovation come new assaults upon the Word of God, and the doctrine of Scripture: ‘a different interpretation will have to be made, in the interests of progress and modernity’; ‘Christian principles will have to be amended to accommodate these new inventions’. Such is **never** the case. The Word of God is ‘truth for all time’, as immutable as its Author. His Holy Law and standard of righteousness is the same today, as it was 100 or 200 years ago. And it will still be the same in a future day, when the internet is considered to be as antiquated as the steam locomotive. — Editor.*

EDITORIAL

In John's Gospel, a remarkable exchange is recorded between the Lord Jesus and the then-Prefect of Judea, Pontius Pilate. Slanderously accused by the Jews of subversion against the state and aspiring to a rival earthly kingdom, the Saviour was questioned regarding the substance of these allegations by the Governor. In response, He summarises the great work of redemption, which necessitated His incarnation, in these terms: "*To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto **the truth***" (John 18:37). Pilate, by this time already convinced that the prisoner before him was no threat to civic order, but rather a victim of the Jewish hierarchy's ambition (cf Luke 23:14-15, Matthew 27:18), gave a moment's consideration to this profound reply, before exiting the room with a rhetorical riposte: "*what is truth?*" (John 18:39).

Despite marvelling at the demeanour of the man before him, Pilate's question seems devoid of genuine inquiry. There may have been a note of pity in it – to think that anyone would be willing risk life and liberty for the sake of an abstract ideology. Most likely his attitude was that same one of scepticism, so prevalent in the present day, that denigrates the very suggestion of absolute truth. The Lord spoke very particularly of "*the*" (definite article) "*truth*" (singular), whilst Pilate's words are framed more generally, and his notion of truth ill-defined.

Such is the mindset of the world at large, which has no 'love of **the truth**' (cf 2 Thessalonians 2:10), but either denies its existence, or else declares it to be impossible to ascertain or prove. The ecumenist claims that there are many truths and all have their merits; the historian says that truth changes in the process of time; the geographer says it varies according to location; the sociologist says it is dependent upon one's cultural context; the scientist will speak only of the balance of probabilities, and truth being relative to the observer; the humanist says that every individual has his own truth, each as valid as the next man's; the modernist says it is all a matter of interpretation.

“But [we] have not so learned Christ; If so be that [we] have heard Him, and have been taught by Him, **as the truth is in Jesus**” (Ephesians 4:20-21). In contradiction to all the gainsaying voices of the world, Christ states that there **is** one, absolute truth – and in consequence, all contradictory theories and philosophies are rendered false. There is one standard of right and wrong, against which all humanity of all time will ultimately be judged. For this cause came He into the world – to testify of this very thing.

The tragedy of the scene in the Praetorium is that Pilate asked: “*what is truth*”, and assuming no satisfactory answer could ever be given, and without waiting for any response, “*when he had said this, he went out*” (John 18:39). But the answer stood, literally, before him; present in the room at that moment was He who said: “***I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me***” (John 14:6). In an act of monumental blindness, that otherwise astute and educated Roman failed to see the solution to his great question. So near – and yet so far.

Pilate’s case is typical of the unbeliever’s condition. They **do not** see, because they **cannot** see – even when the truth is manifestly declared unto them. Said Christ to His detractors: “*Why do ye not understand My speech? even because ye cannot hear My word... ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God... ye believe not, because ye are not of My sheep, as I said unto you*” (John 8:43, 47, 10:26). However, this solemn fact has a glorious counterpart: “*Every one that is of the truth heareth My voice... He that is of God heareth God’s words... My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me*” (John 18:37, 8:47, 10:27).

Thus by virtue of sovereign, electing grace, the experience of the humblest saint surpasses that of Pilate. A face-to-face interview with our Lord in the flesh we may not have, but, time and place notwithstanding: “*we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know Him that is true, and we are in Him that is true, even in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life*” (1 John 5:20).