

January - March 2019

# The Link

**NORTH ROAD CHAPEL**

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**BIDEFORD**

# THE LORD'S DAY

## Part 10

*“And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye be come into the land which I give unto you, and shall reap the harvest thereof, then ye shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest unto the priest: and he shall wave the sheaf before the Lord, to be accepted for you: on the morrow after the sabbath the priest shall wave it... And ye shall count unto you from the morrow after the sabbath, from the day that ye brought the sheaf of the wave offering; seven sabbaths shall be complete: even unto the morrow after the seventh sabbath shall ye number fifty days; and ye shall offer a new meat offering unto the Lord... And ye shall proclaim on the selfsame day, that it may be an holy convocation unto you: ye shall do no servile work therein” (Leviticus 23:9-11,15-16,21).*

In the previous issue we began to look at the change of the sabbath to the first day of the week in the New Testament. It was necessary that the change be made; for the sabbath of the Jewish economy had certain aspects of the Ceremonial and Judicial Law connected with it, which, when the New Covenant was brought in, were abrogated. That sabbath bore testimony to the Hebrews' former deliverance from Egypt, but now under the New Testament order, Gentiles were involved as well as Jews. It was of necessity that a change be made, the Jewish ceremonial sabbath set aside, and the first day of the week observed. For the first day of the week was the occasion on which the resurrected Christ appeared unto His own, thus manifesting the completion of His work. This change in no way injured the fourth commandment of the Decalogue, for that command was simply a re-statement of the principle of one-day-in-seven for God, instituted at Creation. So Christ, as Lord of all things and Lord also of the sabbath, did not violate that principle by the re-ordering of events at this particular time.

It is no coincidence that the first day of the week became known afterwards as ‘the Lord’s Day’. This is the Christians’ sabbath; the sanctified day for the New Testament age. It will be shown in future articles, God willing, how this transition was gradually confirmed by the authority of the Lord and His Apostles; but before going further, reference must be made to Christ’s resurrection. Just as the Eternal Counsels of God fixed the hour of Calvary, the Resurrection also was timed to perfection. There was an exact period during which the Lord’s body was to be in the grave: it was three days and three nights. Theologians and commentators have played with figures and words to the point of being ridiculous in order to make the death of Christ and His resurrection fit into a so-called ‘Good Friday’ and ‘Easter Sunday’. Both days are of pagan origin, and to have brought them into Christianity is a most grievous matter. We shall not go into a detailed examination of those arguments in this article; sufficient to know that Christ rose when the Jewish weekly sabbath was past.

Holding all the relevant Scriptures together, it is reasonable to conclude that the Resurrection, though unobserved by human eyes, took place as the first day of the week commenced. This surely is the meaning of Matthew 28:1: “*In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week*”. Very early in the morning the tomb was vacated; and as daybreak came, so the Lord began to reveal Himself, appearing first to Mary Magdalene, and then to others. The point to be registered in all this is that the risen Christ did **not** appear to His disciples on the Jewish sabbath (which He might as easily have done) and thus have men to commemorate His mighty work on that day. No! In the foreordination and perfect timing of Almighty God, it was to be on the first day of the week – the day which saw the Old Covenant sabbath pass, and the New Covenant age ushered in. On which day the Mediator of that Covenant, Who had effected a better sacrifice, making one sacrifice for sin forever, appeared unto His own in resurrection power, having conquered sin, death and hell. **This** is the day of commemoration for New Testament believers.

Let this question be asked: where was Christ on the Jewish ceremonial sabbath? Answer: in the grave. Could the sabbath of the New Covenant ever have been reckoned from **that** day? It is unimaginable to think of the early followers of the Saviour assembling for praise and worship on that day – it was the darkest sabbath of their whole lives. They had trusted Him as their Lord and Master, but He had been crucified; He in Whom all their hope and trust had been placed was dead and buried. What is more, the Jews had been mainly responsible for it. That last Jewish sabbath was no sabbath for the disciples – it was a day of sorrow and dejection; anguish and consternation filled their breasts; the kingdom for which they longed had just faded away as fantasy. How could the bride rejoice when the Bridegroom lay buried? However, while the disciples were unconscious of it, even as they mourned, Christ was laying the foundations of a new creation; and that work having been completed, He arose! Then did He appear unto His own. It was the day **after** the Jewish sabbath, and He constituted the first Christian or New Testament sabbath on that day.

All four Evangelists mark the day and record its happenings with great joy and delight. The Lord Jesus Himself set His seal upon the day by appearing unto His followers on five occasions:

1. Mary Magdalene (John 20:14-18)
2. The women returning from the tomb (Matthew 28:8-10)
3. Peter (Luke 24:34, 1 Corinthians 15:5)
4. Two on the Emmaus Road (Luke 24:13-15)
5. The disciples in the upper room (John 20:19)

Matthew reports: *“In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre”* (Matthew 28:1). This verse is very meaningful: *“the end of the sabbath”* – the fading out of the ceremonial system – *“as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week”*. The same thought is conveyed by Luke: *“Now upon the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came unto the sepulchre, bringing the spices which they had prepared, and certain others*

*with them. And they found the stone rolled away from the sepulchre*” (Luke 24:1-2). The old sabbath had rolled away, and the first day of the week brought with it a more blessed and glorious age. Why? Because the stone was removed; the grave was empty: *“this Jesus hath God raised up”* (Acts 2:32); *“once in the end of the world hath He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself”* (Hebrews 9:26). He had accomplished it; the everlasting covenant had been ratified; the old Ceremonial Law with its Jewish sabbath must pass away. The Word of God states that these things only served, *“unto the **example** and **shadow** of heavenly things...But now hath [Christ] obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also He is the mediator of a better covenant”* (Hebrews 8:5-6). The Word continues: *“He taketh away the first, that He may establish the second”* (Hebrews 10:9). As the old Ceremonial Law was taken away and the better covenant ushered in, so the old sabbath was phased out and the first day of the week took its place. It was such an obvious thing, it appeared so natural, that the writers of the Gospels never questioned nor debated it.

To go further: *“Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you. And when He had so said, He shewed unto them His hands and His side. Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord”* (John 20:19-20). Note the number of times that reference is made to ‘the morning after the sabbath’, ‘the first day of the week’, and ‘the same day’. The Holy Spirit is focusing all thought and attention upon **this day** – the first day of the week. The Lord appeared to ten disciples on this occasion (Thomas being absent). What a dreadful sabbath they had endured on the previous day! Their every hope it seemed had been blasted, they continued to fear for their lives, and the thought of Jewish observances was far from them. They spent much of the first day of the week also behind bolted doors in stark bewilderment. Then that evening came Jesus and stood in their midst – He showed them His hands and His side and said *“Peace be unto you”*. Verse 20 understatedly describes the

disciples' gladness when they saw the Lord. What a contrast to the previous day! On the old sabbath their Lord was lying in a tomb, but **this day** He was alive – they rejoiced, they were glad! This was their 'sabbath' now.

Notice again the connection with the words of the Psalm: "*The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner. This is the Lord's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes. **This is the day** which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it*" (Psalm 118:22-24). These ten disciples, as they were confronted with the resurrected Christ on the first day of the week, were overjoyed. This was a sabbath in very truth. They began to see something of the meaning of Psalm 118 that evening, as Peter himself later testified (cf 1 Peter 2:7).

One week later they were assembled again; not on the Jewish sabbath but on the first day of the week: "*And after eight days again His disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you*" (John 20:26). 'After eight days' is an expression sometimes used in Scripture to denote 'a week to the day'. As the disciples came together again, so the Lord visited them once more. Of course He did – it was His day. There was no hint, much less any rebuke, that they had got the day wrong, or that their meeting was erroneously timed. Indeed not! The risen Lord at His first appearance in that room had breathed on them the Holy Ghost (cf John 20:22), Whose very purpose and influence was to guide them into all truth (John 16:13). The apostles were to be the foundation stones of the New Testament church; hence it should be no surprise to see them led into this new order, which was the outworking of God's eternal plan. Thus is seen the phasing out of the ceremonial order involving the Jewish sabbath, and the establishment of the Lord's Day. One old writer has succinctly summarised it like so: "The old day was buried with Christ and the new day rose with Him".

One further reference that is also pertinent to the subject is this: “*And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place*” (Acts 2:1). Nothing in the Divine purposes of God ever goes wrong. Every detail goes through with absolute precision, and is timed to perfection. The hour of Crucifixion was according to the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God. The Resurrection would be three days later. Another forty days, and the Saviour would leave earth in His bodily form, ascending to the right hand of God. Ten further days would elapse before the Holy Spirit was sent at Pentecost. All these momentous events were timed to the minute.

Just as Christ’s death, resurrection and ascension were prefigured in the Old Testament, so too were Pentecost and the Lord’s Day; for the old system foreshadowed the new. Leviticus 23 is a vital chapter here, in which is set out the Feast of the Passover, the first fruits, then the wave offering at Pentecost (the name denoting ‘fifty days’). In that chapter timing of these events is laid out; the number of days between each, and the day from which the count was to be made: “*Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye be come into the land which I give unto you, and shall reap the harvest thereof, then ye shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest unto the priest: And he shall wave the sheaf before the Lord, to be accepted for you: **on the morrow after the sabbath** the priest shall wave it*” (Leviticus 23:10-11). “*And ye shall count unto you from the morrow after the sabbath, from the day that ye brought the sheaf of the wave offering; seven sabbaths shall be complete: Even unto **the morrow after the seventh sabbath** shall ye number **fifty days**; and ye shall offer a new meat offering unto the Lord*” (Leviticus 23:15-16). Fifty days were to elapse from the offering of the firstfruits until the Feast of Pentecost. Both ceremonies occurred on the day after a sabbath, i.e. the first day of the week in Jewish reckoning.

Connect with this passage a New Testament Scripture: “*But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept*” (1

Corinthians 15:20). When did Christ become the firstfruits? At His resurrection – corresponding with the old Jewish offering of firstfruits, and on the first day of the week. When did Pentecost take place? Exactly seven weeks later: “*And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place*” (Acts 2:1). Which day was this? The first day of the week, the morrow after the Jewish sabbath, fifty days after the Resurrection. It had been prefigured in the Old Testament, and on this day all the believers were gathered together in one place. It did not appear in any way strange to them; this day was so obvious, and now it had fully come, in that the Holy Spirit was sent down from Heaven to baptise and indwell them all. Thus the New Covenant era dawned with a new day – the Lord’s Day, the New Testament sabbath, the sanctified day of this age. It all came in so naturally; like a tree shedding its autumn leaves and bursting into its new spring foliage; so the old sabbath receded and gave way to the new.

W. H. Molland (1920 – 2012)

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“On Thee, at the creation, the light first had its birth;  
On Thee, for our salvation, Christ rose from depths of earth;  
On Thee, our Lord, victorious, the Spirit sent from Heaven,  
And thus on Thee, most glorious, a triple light was given.

Thou art a port, protected from storms that round us rise;  
A garden, intersected with streams of paradise;  
Thou art a cooling fountain in life’s dry, dreary sand;  
From thee, like Pisgah’s mountain, we view our promised land.

Thou art a holy ladder, where angels go and come;  
Each Sunday finds us gladder; nearer to Heaven, our home;  
A day of sweet reflection, thou art a day of love,  
A day of resurrection from earth to things above.”

C. Wordsworth (1807 – 1885)

## THE CALLING OF ELISHA

*“So he departed thence, and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen before him, and he with the twelfth: and Elijah passed by him, and cast his mantle upon him”* (1 Kings 19:19)

Elijah found him behind the plough. It is not without meaning that this is mentioned in the history. Here then we have a pleasing picture of a man, who, notwithstanding the gifts with which he was endowed, continued lowly in his own eyes, and led a humble and unassuming life. How many, gifted like him, would have thought themselves too good for the plough, and born to a sphere of life above that of a simple farmer; would have persuaded themselves that they must not withhold their talents from mankind, that they must go forth into the field of public labour, to enlighten and guide the world. But such thoughts did not enter the mind of Elisha. His pretensions went not beyond his plough and his husbandry; he saw his vocation in these quiet and rural occupations, and well satisfied with this, he ‘minded not high things’.

How much more amiable and beautiful is such a disposition than the opposite one, which is now so frequently met with among Christians? ‘Labour for the kingdom of God’, is become the watchword of the day; we certainly rejoice at it, but with very mingled feelings. There is too much vanity and self-complacent pushing forwards, which, alas! may be seen on this field of activity. No sooner does anyone imagine he has found himself possessed of talents and gifts ever so small, than he hesitates not to regard himself as a pillar of the church of God. The condition and calling in which he has been hitherto, is no longer the proper one for him. He immediately begins to think, if not to talk, of a higher station, to which he imagines himself born.

We ought undoubtedly to let our light shine before men: but then everyone should do so in the situation in which Providence has placed

him. Nor does God intend, by this command to let our light shine before men, to refer simply to the office of the ministry, or to any official teaching in His church. It is not merely thy lips, Christian, but thy life, which is to be the lamp. It is thy general character and conduct which are to edify thy brother and glorify God. He intends that all thy thoughts, words, and works should silently testify that thou art born of God, and that the peace of God rules in thy heart. Then it is that thou throwest around thee that gracious radiance which the Saviour means when He bids thee 'let thy light shine before men'; then it is that thou preachest the gospel, as the power of God unto salvation, more effectually than can be done by thy words. And remember that those spiritual lights have the purest radiance which are the least conscious of their own brightness; and that those divine flowers diffuse the sweetest fragrance which make the least display.

That excessive pressing of religious men into public notice, which characterizes the present day, is only another sign of the spiritual poverty of the times. There is a great dearth of truly great and noble spirits in our modern Christendom. No eagle pinions at present soar in our firmament; hence the smaller birds, the minds of inferior cast, having no living standard by which to discern their own littleness, are emboldened to regard their own modicum of talents and endowments as an evidence of a divine vocation to great and exalted things. Happy would it be for Zion were that vain activity, which is not of God but of the world, confined to the world itself, and not obtruded within her sacred enclosures. Happy would it be for her people, were there not so mournfully prevalent among them an idolatry of worldly instrumentality and mere human talents!

Why is it that God so frequently calls home His most excellent servants and evangelists, in the bloom of life, from their useful labours, but – as one purpose at least – to secure them from the peril of that idolatrous admiration with which these mortals are wont to be extolled, in what are called the religious periodicals; and to let the survivors know, that

the pillars of the temple are not flesh; that wisdom does not die with any creature; and that none but Himself is the basis, the support, and the builder up of His kingdom.

When Elijah has found Elisha, he takes his prophet's mantle from off his own shoulders, and throws it over those of the son of Shaphat. What must have been the feelings of the plain and unassuming husbandman upon this occasion! For he well understood this significant action, and could view it as nothing less than a consecration to the prophetic office, and a call to be the assistant, follower, and representative of the Tishbite. It is to be lamented, that, in the present day, the Christian ministry is too exclusively and systematically confined to persons who have undergone a certain mode of education; which was never the case with the church in its purest times. May God raise up and put forth amongst us more of those who are taught rather by the unction of the Spirit of God, than by the mere external apparatus of scientific institutions! Not that these are to be despised or neglected; far from it! but they furnish, after all, only the exterior of a Christian minister's qualifications.

After Elijah had cast his mantle over his successor, he went away without uttering a word; and this he appears to have done to render more impressive the meaning of his symbolical action. Elisha well understood it. He lays the reins on the necks of his oxen, leaves them standing with the plough in the midst of the field, and hastens after the man of God. We do not find that he either resisted the call with a variety of objections, or made many words about the too great honour done him, or about his own incapacity for the office; no, the matter was briefly and speedily settled. He thought not about himself, but about the heavenly Caller, and His power and grace. He leaves in God's hands the dignity and burden of his office, and receives the prophetic commission with the same equanimity as he had taken in hand the plough or the mattock. Oh lovely simplicity, and serenity of a humble and child-like spirit!

F. W. Krummacher (1796 – 1868)

## THE DEVIL'S RELIGION

Whatever statistics one cares to read, there is a common consensus that church attendance in the United Kingdom has fallen sharply. Ten percent or less of the adult population attend a place of worship with any degree of regularity. There has also been a rise in those who describe themselves as having 'no faith', with many young people even denying the historical existence of Jesus of Nazareth. Yet at the same time, between 50% and 60% of the population continue to '**identify as Christian**'. Looking at the abysmal state of society, and the rows of empty pews in our chapels, we could perhaps be forgiven for asking 'where are they all?' Here is a strange contradiction: the country is full of persons who call themselves 'Christian', but are never to be found in a church or chapel building; who do not know the Bible; who do not pray; who do not even have faith. There are those who, whilst owning the title of 'Christian' (or even holding ecclesiastical office) deny the reality of God, the inerrancy of Scripture, the deity of Jesus Christ, His virgin birth, His substitutionary death, His resurrection, or His ascension back to Heaven. There are self-professed 'Christians' who do not believe in a day of judgment, or Hell, or Heaven, or a life hereafter. And as for the claims of God and His Word upon their present lives, conduct and behaviour – this is refuted outright. What manner of 'Christianity' is this?

In these days of such pretension and false profession, when the title of 'Christian' is glibly appropriated by so many, let some searching questions be asked: what is a genuine Christian? What is real Christianity? These queries could be answered by means of positive example; by comparison with the patriarchs and apostles of old in their exercise of the faith – but in the course of this article, a very different approach will be taken. The benchmark will instead be Satan. For the Scriptures have much to say concerning the Adversary of God and men, and his understanding of truth. Let nominal 'Christians' test themselves

by this measure: what do they have, more than Satan has? What is their religion, more than the Devil's religion?

### **Faith in God**

The common retort of titular 'Christians' when challenged as to the reality of their claims, is this: 'Of course I'm a Christian – I believe in God!' This at least has a ring of orthodoxy, and corresponds with the opening statements of many historical creeds and confessions. Surely this must be accepted as proof of genuineness? In the early First Century, the Apostle James regularly encountered those who made hollow professions of faith, to whom he gave this salutary reproof: "*Thou believest that there is **one God**; thou doest well: **the devils also believe***" (James 2:19). Here is a striking fact: the Devil believes in God. For him, the existence and being of God is not a matter of conjecture, but an established fact. Furthermore, the Devil is a monotheist – he believes in one God. Unlike many alleged 'Christians', he knows the polytheism and relative religion of the ecumenist to be a lie.

Indeed, the Devil, it might be said, meets the 'minimum requirement' established in the Hebrew Epistle: "*he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him*" (Hebrews 11:6). Concerning the second clause, a glimpse of the Devil's operations in the world is given in the opening chapters of the Book of Job, in which this exchange is overheard: "*Then Satan answered the Lord, and said, Doth Job fear God for nought? Hast not Thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? Thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land*" (Job 1:9-10). Satan knows by bitter experience that God is boundlessly good and gracious to those who call upon His name. Those so-called 'Christians' – who reduce God to a mythological figure or a philosophical construct; who argue about the pronouns used in relation to Deity; who deny His dealings with men; who doubt the efficacy and power of prayer, and thus cease from it – have stooped lower than the Devil.

## Fear of God

Concerning fallen spirits and their comprehension of God, James gives a further detail: “*the devils also believe, and tremble*” (James 2:19). This disposition of fear is borne out by those encounters between the Son of God and devils, recorded in the Gospels (cf Mark 1:24, Luke 8:28, 31). Their knowledge of God – His power and authority, His holiness and justice – has this effect upon them. It is a sad indictment of many persons who claim to ‘believe in God’, that the thought is of so little consequence, and produces no result. Surely the very word ‘God’ denotes omnipotence and dominion; One Who has created all things, and sovereignly controls all that He has made and is therefore worthy of all reverence and praise? “*Who shall not fear Thee, O Lord, and glorify Thy name? for Thou only art holy*” (Revelation 15:4). The Scriptures state: “*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom*” (Proverbs 9:10) – from which it is evident that many professed ‘Christians’ have not even begun, nor yet progressed as far as the devils.

## Creation

To cast doubt upon the veracity of God’s Word has always been a tactic of Satan, with his timeless and insidious question: “*Yea, hath God said...?*” (Genesis 3:1). So successful has he been in this, that multitudes of people, ‘Christians’ amongst them, write off large sections of the Bible, deny its authenticity, criticise its historical accuracy, or categorise it as irrelevant to themselves. Nowhere is this more apparent than the opening chapters of Genesis, which are at best reduced to an ‘origins myth’ or Hebrew poetry, and at worst, excised completely. It must be noted however, that the Devil was there. Himself a created being, afterwards rebelling against God, he began at once to assault the works of God, starting in the physical Garden of Eden. To this extent it can be said that the Devil is a creationist. The supernatural generation of this present universe is known to him. While many ‘Christians’ boast of taking a more rational or scientific interpretation of Genesis, the Devil surpasses them. He knows ‘that the worlds were framed by the word of God’ (cf Hebrews 11:3), and saw the unfallen first creation, at first hand.

## The Deity of Christ

A further insight into the Devil's theology is afforded by Matthew's account of the temptation of Christ. "*Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil... And when the tempter came to him, he said, If Thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread*" (Matthew 4:1, 3). While Satan had the audacity to use the word 'if' in his approach to the Lord, he is obliged also to acknowledge the title 'Son of God'. Indeed, it is clear from the exchange which follows that if Christ had not been divine, these temptations would have held no weight or meaning. There were none more aware of the true nature of the Lord Jesus than the Devil and his legions who sought to oppose Him. Numerous examples occur in the gospels, in which evil spirits, despite themselves, announce: "*Jesus, Thou Son of God*"; "*I know Thee Who Thou art, the Holy One of God*"; "*And unclean spirits, when they saw Him, fell down before Him, and cried, saying, Thou art the Son of God*" (Matthew 8:29, Mark 1:24, 3:11). There are churchmen and apologists who reduce the person of Christ to 'a man ahead of His time', 'a misunderstood revolutionary', 'an example of suffering and self-sacrifice', which they find more palatable than 'God manifest in flesh' (cf 1 Timothy 3:16). In this, they fall short of the Devil. "*Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son*" (1 John 2:22).

## Miracles

Another stumbling block for many nominal 'Christians' is the supernatural power of God, and the occasions upon which it has been made manifest in the world. The miracles wrought by Christ, the prophets and apostles are frequently explained away in terms of coincidence, meteorological phenomena, exaggeration, mass hallucination – in fact, any conceivable interpretation other than the Divine intervention of an omnipotent God. The Devil has no such problem: "*If Thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread... If Thou be the Son of God, cast Thyself down: for it is written, He*

*shall give His angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone*" (Matthew 4:3, 6). These temptations would have been empty and pointless taunts, had not Christ the means to accomplish the things described. Being endowed with no small power himself, the Devil does not balk at the notion of miracles, as so many 'Christians' do.

### **The Word of God**

Surprising as it may be to hear from the lips of the Arch-Deceiver the expression 'it is written' (cf Matthew 4:6), and a word-perfect quotation of Psalm 91:11-12, a further fact is thereby demonstrated: the Devil knows the Bible. He is able to quote, or mis-quote it as his purposes require. As his exchange with Eve shows, no sooner had God begun the declaration of His Word to humanity, than the Devil was fully acquainted with it (cf Genesis 3:1). This is in stark contrast to many 'Christians', who scarcely know the Book, or rarely read it, and certainly could not recall verses from memory. The Adversary also knows the veracity of that Word – that the penalty of spiritual death would follow immediately upon sin (in the case of Eden); and that God would most certainly fulfil His purposes through Christ for salvation (in the case of tempting the Lord) – else why make the temptations as he did?

Amongst those 'Christians' who do know something of the Bible, there are plenty who dispense with parts of it as being immaterial or inapplicable. Frequently are God's Law and His Commandments consigned to the Old Testament era, as though they no longer had any relevance to believers. While the Devil is doubtless the author of this error, he is not himself deluded by it. He knows the immutability of God's Law – that it is the only standard of righteousness; the blueprint of holiness, "*without which no man shall see the Lord*" (Hebrews 12:14); he knows the blessedness of obedience, and the consequences of transgression. If the Law of God does not stand, against what legal code is Satan the 'Accuser of the brethren' (cf Revelation 12:10)? If the Law

is revoked, and sin is no longer sin, then why does he continue to tempt the saints to commit sin? Because the Devil knows better.

## **Calvary**

Central to the Faith is the mighty work of Calvary; the vicarious and atonement-working death of the Lord Jesus. Yet even on this point, there are those ‘Christians’ who demur, and will have it to be no more than ‘a gross miscarriage of justice’, or a prime example of ‘suffering for one’s beliefs whatever the cost’. Of particular redemption wrought by blood, penal substitution, remission of sin, and the propitiation of Divine wrath, they know nothing. The Devil has a higher estimation of those great events, for he was there. Indeed, he was inciting and prompting some of the terrible things that were done on that momentous day; seeking, as he thought it lay within his power, to thwart the purposes of God and bring the plan of salvation to nought. The Lord Jesus said concerning His sufferings: “. . .*this is your hour, and the power of darkness*” (Luke 22:53), “*the prince of this world cometh*” (John 14:30). The Devil was there at Calvary, and knows exactly what befell. He is not under any illusion or doubt concerning it.

## **The Gospel**

As the Biblical record goes on to describe, matters did not transpire as the Devil had designed or desired, and by virtue of the death which He died, the Lord Jesus Christ accomplished the purposes of God in salvation and destroyed any vestige of power unto which the Adversary laid claim (cf Hebrews 2:14-15, 1 John 3:8). Which glorious truth has since been published abroad, and the gospel has gone forth declaring Christ, the way of salvation for sinners (John 14:6). But there are ‘Christians’ who deny the power of the gospel. Some do not preach it at all; whilst others, doubting the life-imparting efficacy of preaching alone, substitute instead all manner of worldly means, thinking thereby to convince and charm unbelievers. By contrast, the Devil knows the gospel’s strength, and labours hard against it: “*But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world hath blinded the*

*minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, Who is the image of God, should shine unto them” (2 Corinthians 4:3-4).* He knows that the glorious gospel is as a light shining in a dark place; dispelling the night of sin, turning blindness to sight and causing the lost to be found. If it were not so, why would he put forth his energies to silence or supplant it, and intensify the incredulity of unbelievers?

### **The Day of Judgment**

There is amongst ‘Christians’ a paucity of understanding, and much confusion in relation to the future purposes of God, ranging from those who deny the doctrine of eternal punishment, the existence of Hell, or a Day of Judgment altogether, to those who invent all kinds of fantastical theories of millennia and dispensations to come. While the Devil surely rejoices at such an abundance of unbelief and error, he himself has a dreadful cognisance of the truth on this subject: *“for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time”* (Revelation 12:12). From the time of his fall, to the inevitable summons of Divine justice, Satan knows there to be a very limited period, and its brevity is the stimulus of his diabolic purposes. This short season in which he is permitted to vent his fury against the works and people of God is not ‘free rein’, but merely an intermission before sentence is executed against him. For he, like all *“the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, [God] hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day”* (Jude 6). While ‘Christians’ quibble and question, and fail to live in the light of its imminence, the coming Day of the Lord is a fearful prospect to the Devil, and a motivation to his malice.

### **Outward Piety**

One final sad contrast to make is this: rarely does one meet ‘Christians’ whose faith shines forth from them in an outward, evident way. Many are content to confine their external expressions of Christianity to the Lord’s Day, or the privacy of their own homes – but would hate to

appear 'religious' in public. Holiness is embarrassing to them. Piety is unfashionable. In some quarters, 'Christians' are actually taught to behave as much like the world as possible, as this (it is alleged) will facilitate the 'building of bridges' with unsaved persons and create evangelistic opportunities. A poorer excuse for ungodliness could scarcely be imagined; but such are the errors of the age. To meet an individual who is manifestly a child of God, with a radiant testimony, is an almost unknown experience. Concerning the Devil however, Paul describes how, on occasions: "*Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light*" (2 Corinthians 11:14). What a solemn condemnation! The Devil can give a better impersonation of godliness than many 'Christians' ever attain to in reality. He can simulate more artificial light than they produce of genuine effulgence.

Of the points considered thus far, this is the summary: The Devil, that great enemy of God and His people, both believes that God is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him. In consequence of that knowledge, he has a fear for God, and even a degree of subservience and obedience to Divine authority. He knows the veracity of God's Word, the truth of Creation and supernatural power, the perpetuity of God's Law, the deity of Christ, the reality of Calvary's work, the power of the gospel, the fact of judgment to come, and can even give an appearance of piety. All these he has – and yet remains the Devil. This much religion an individual may boast of – but remain no better than the Devil. Many false professors fall far short even of this.

## **Conclusion**

To return to the original question – what then are the distinguishing features of true Christianity, what are its hallmarks and unmistakable proofs? If none of the things previously listed suffice as evidence of genuineness – what else is left? Or to make the same enquiry another way – what is there that the Devil does not have, or cannot fabricate? Amongst them is included **faith**, which is the gift of God. Such things that Satan believes, he knows to be the case by first-hand experience, or

by ‘sight’ (if such a word is appropriate for a spirit-being). He has not come to those convictions by the impartation and exercise of God-given faith. Nor is it possible for the Devil to ‘believe to the saving of the soul’, for there is no saving or redemptive work provided for him in which to trust. Herein is a profound thought: though there was also a ‘Fall’ in the angelic creation (cf 2 Peter 2:4, Jude 6), and though the Fall on earth subjected the whole material creation unwillingly to bondage (cf Romans 8:20), a way of salvation and deliverance was made for none, except a remnant of the human race only (cf Hebrews 2:16). Thus a **personal** faith in Christ for one’s **own** salvation is the unique privilege and characteristic of a true child of God.

Likewise, those much-maligned and neglected aspects of the Christian life, namely “*fruits meet for repentance*” (Matthew 3:8) and “*things that accompany salvation*” (Hebrews 6:9) are a vital necessity. The context in which James makes his statement concerning the religion of devils is this: “*But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?*” (James 2:20). Whatever Satan’s perception of God, or comprehension of truth might be, this much is clear: he never hated sin, never eschewed it, never repented of it, never hungered and thirsted after righteousness, never loved that which is right, never did any good work. Nor ever will he. “*In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever **doeth** not righteousness is not of God...*” (1 John 3:10). Only the Lord is of power to look upon the heart and see its true condition; man is obliged to look upon the outward appearance (cf 1 Samuel 16:7). For this reason among others it is prescribed that: “*we should bring forth fruit unto God*” (Romans 7:4). Inward faith must, and will, always be accompanied by outward evidences of godliness; and by those **fruits** are the true people of God known one to another (cf Matthew 7:20). May God graciously deliver us from false profession, and, “*make [us] perfect in every good work to do His will, working in [us] that which is wellpleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen*” (Hebrews 13:21).

R. J. Steward

## EDITORIAL

With the entering in of a new calendar year, as plans are made for the coming twelve months, it is timely to remind ourselves of those words, also contained in the Epistle of James: “*ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that*” (James 4:14-15). One of the limitations of this finite, mortal life is that we glimpse our own existence through a very narrow window. The past is but dimly seen, and grows quickly more distorted with increasing distance. Of the future we see nothing whatsoever, not even the next instant in time that lies before us. Only the present is beheld, and that imperfectly. Despite this hazardous lack of visibility, humanity continues to rush headlong through life as though they possessed perfect sight, like blindfolded men racing upon a cliff edge. Christians are taught to be more circumspect (cf Ephesians 5:15).

For the Lord’s people, certain things concerning the future are assured: their preservation and perseverance to the end (cf Jude 24-25); the completion of the good work begun in them (cf Philippians 1:6); their heavenly destination at the last (cf John 14:3, 17:24); and the eternity of their salvation (cf Isaiah 45:17). But beyond these Biblical verities and promises, it is essential that they presume nothing about the morrow. Regarding Earth’s continuance, we are told only that ‘all these things shall be dissolved’ (cf 2 Peter 3:11); of the Lord’s return, that it will be as ‘a thief in the night’ (cf 1 Thessalonians 5:2); of our present life, that our days are determined, the number of our months is with God, a predetermined bound that we cannot alter (cf Job 14:5); of our portion of physical health and ability, that the outward man perisheth (cf 2 Corinthians 4:16).

Equally uncertain is the state and condition of the church upon earth in any given location. Particularly in the Western hemisphere, which has

enjoyed Christian liberty for a long season, it would be folly to imagine that this situation will obtain indefinitely. The Scripture says: “*in the world ye shall have tribulation*” (John 16:33); and, “*marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you*” (1 John 3:13). If we have not yet proved the truth of these verses, then we should expect to do so before long. The ongoing political turmoil in many places, coupled with the increased acceptance and promotion of evil in society, is an ominous portent for the faithful remnant of God’s people.

It should also be an incitement to greater endeavour. Christ Himself said: “*I must work the works of Him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work*” (John 9:4). The night of which He spoke was one of changed or adverse circumstances; when His enemies’ hour of advantage would come and the power of darkness (cf Luke 22:53); that time when He would accomplish the purposes of God, not by miraculous works or ministry, but by suffering. His servants should expect the same lot as their Master, emulate His example, and heed His words: “*Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you*” (John 12:35). The prospect of diminished freedoms and increased affliction in a coming day should move us to labour more fervently now. Like a hard winter made more arduous by idleness during harvest, so a time of oppression would only be exacerbated by the thought of missed opportunities when times were favourable. If future adversity is not to be intensified by regret for past apathy, we still have the present in which to amend our ways, and by the grace of God, to ‘labour more abundantly’.

*Preliminary Announcement*

## **ANNUAL BIBLE CONVENTION**

**Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> June 2019 D.V.**

*Preacher : Mr P. Mehrshahi*