

April - June 2019

# The Link

**NORTH ROAD CHAPEL**

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**BIDEFORD**

# THE LORD'S DAY

## Part 11

*“I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ. I was in the Spirit **on the Lord’s day**, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet, Saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: and, What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea.”* (Revelation 1:9-11)

(This book is sometimes referred to as the ‘Book of Revelations’. It is not – it is the Book of **the** Revelation, singular. The Revelation of Jesus Christ).

The previous two articles have considered the transfer of the Old Testament ceremonial Sabbath to the New Testament Lord’s Day Sabbath. Following on from the Resurrection and Pentecost, the Apostles moved almost automatically into this new day of Sabbath observance. This stood to reason: it was such an obvious, such a natural thing, after all the events which they had experienced. But let none think that this move to another day was of their fleshly thinking. No, indeed! Immediately after the Resurrection, these men were endowed with the Holy Spirit of Truth; they were the very foundation of the church: *“And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone”* (Ephesians 2:20). Just as these men had been commissioned by the Lord Himself, so in obedience to all that had been communicated to them, they must not only preach and baptise, but also establish New Testament order and worship. Without doubt this included the practice of the weekly assembling of the saints on the first day of the week; for as we move into the Acts of the Apostles and the

Epistles, we shall see that this was being done; it was common practice. When we read the Epistles, let us not forget that these churches were established before the New Testament was actually completed, therefore their authority and practice, which included the observance of the new Sabbath, came directly from these holy Apostles.

Consider the following examples: “*And we sailed away from Philippi after the days of unleavened bread, and came unto them to Troas in five days; where we abode seven days. And upon **the first day of the week**, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight.*” (Acts 20:6-7). This was 25 years after Pentecost. The New Testament was not written, but there was public assembling for preaching the Word and it was on the first day of the week.

“*Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon **the first day of the week** let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come.*” (1 Corinthians 16:1-2). This reference also belongs to the same time period, and it is perfectly obvious that amongst the true people of God the first day of the week had become the fixed day for church assemblies; that is, amongst newly-formed companies of believers.

We come now to another of the problems which arise with some: that is, the obvious continuance of the Jewish Sabbath in those early days. It has been seen that – to the disciples and the early believers who had been eyewitnesses to the happenings of that time – the new day was so obvious, that they slid right into the practice; it was all so meaningful, fitting and correct. To the many early churches which had been established consisting of large Gentile membership, there was no problem. They had turned to God from idols to serve the Living and True God, as is stated in 1 Thessalonians 1:9. Hence they followed right

on in the Apostles' doctrine and practice. Jewish ceremonies had no hold on them, neither attraction for them. But with the Jews it was different, and throughout the book of Acts we see the Jewish Sabbath continuing, as well as the first day of the week. What is more, we shall look in vain in the New Testament for the express prohibition of the Jewish Sabbath, or for a direct injunction for the Christian Sabbath. We must not forget that in all this we are dealing with a principle of one-day-in-seven for God. Whilst the New Testament order had been set up, and the great foundation work of the New Covenant had been for ever accomplished, yet at this point in history the temple was still standing, and Jewish worship was continuing.

There can be no doubt that for some years there was considerable overlap, particularly with churches comprised mainly of Jewish converts. In fact, immediately after Pentecost, it is recorded: "*And they, continuing daily with one accord **in the temple**, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart*" (Acts 2:46). "*Now Peter and John went up together **into the temple** at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour*" (Acts 3:1). "*But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and **went into the synagogue** on the sabbath day, and sat down*" (Acts 13:14). "*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). In these verses it is seen that, while the Apostles observed the first day of the week, they did not prohibit the Jewish Sabbath, but rather, made use of it. There are also records of circumcised Jews being baptised, and Jews observing both the Passover and the Lord's Supper. It is in the setting of this overlap period that 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; To them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law. To the weak*

*became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some*” (1 Corinthians 9:20-22). The ecumenist and liberal evangelical of today will take this verse and use it in any and every situation. He will have a drink with the man of the world, sit with the modernist, join hands with the Romanist, hiding behind these verses as being Biblical authority so to do. “[Such] *do err, not knowing the scriptures*” (Matthew 22:29). These words pertain to the Jews and to this very early period of the church before the Jewish order was overthrown. It is **not** a precedent. In fact, a close study of the epistles to the Romans, Galatians and Hebrews, reveals that these believers, who were still hanging on to the remnants of Judaism, soon ran into theological problems, and the Apostle had to step in with stern rebuke.

Come now to some statements given by the Lord Himself, which have relevance to this matter: “*And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple: and his disciples came to him for to shew him the buildings of the temple. And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.*” (Matthew 24:1-2). “*And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.*” (Luke 21:24). This happened in A.D.70 when Titus besieged Jerusalem. He razed the city, totally destroyed the temple, and scattered the Jewish people to the four corners of the earth. This took place 37 years after Pentecost. Thus, under the governmental hand of God, the Jewish centre of worship with its priesthood, its altars, its sacrifices and its Sabbath, disappeared as an organised institution. The gradual phasing out of the old economy was finalised; the Jewish ecclesia and their assemblies were finished. The Jews were dispersed and were subject to judicial blindness. Their hatred of true Christianity was also made manifest. Sincere Jewish believers gladly and openly separated from Judaism at this point. The observance of the Jewish Sabbath was a highly visible characteristic of that old

system, which they readily relinquished for the Lord's Day. And so the seventh day sabbath passed away without a struggle.

Thus far, the doctrine and practice of the early church during Apostolic times has been examined. In order to be thorough, and to see how the practice continued thereafter, it would be profitable to quote from some ecclesiastical historians concerning the early church fathers, in the period following on from the Apostles.

1) Ignatius, believed to have known the Apostle John personally, says: "Let us no more Sabbatize, but let us keep the Lord's Day".

2) Justin Martyr (A.D.100-160): "On the day we call Sunday is the assembly of all who live in the city and country, and the memoirs of the Apostles, and the writings of the Prophets are read".

3) Irenaeus (A.D.140-203), a man who sat under Polycarp, who in turn had companied with the Apostle John, says: "On the Lord's Day every one of us Christians keeps the Sabbath, meditating on the Law and rejoicing in the works of God".

4) Tertullian, at the close of the second century: "The first day of the week is the holy day of the Christian church assemblies and holy worship."

5) Dionysius (Third Century A.D.) says of Sunday, "Today we celebrate the Lord's Day".

6) Ambrose declares: "The Lord's Day is sacred, consecrated by the appearing of the Resurrected Christ".

7) Augustine (Fourth Century A.D.): "The Lord's Day was by the resurrection of Christ declared to be the Christian sabbath".

8) Athanasius (also Fourth Century A.D.): “The Lord Himself transferred the Sabbath to the Lord’s Day”.

This is sufficient evidence from history to give decisive testimony to the fact that the Lord’s Day, or the first day of the week, was considered by those of the early centuries A.D. to be appointed by the divine authority of Christ and His Apostles. Consider what blessing has accrued down the course of history from those early centuries to the generations who have “*remember[ed] the sabbath day, to keep it holy*” (Exodus 20:8); and contrariwise, what trouble and tragedy have followed in the wake of those generations which have profaned this hallowed day!

Let it be asked again, in view of the teaching of Holy Scripture and in the light of the witness of history: how can men say that there is no Sabbath in the New Testament age? Having now firmly established these things in our minds, the next article, God willing, will move into the practical teaching pertaining to this: man’s duty to the Sabbath and the great evil of Sabbath abuse. May God use it all to His glory.

W. H. Molland (1920 – 2012)

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“Be not deceived with strange doctrines, nor with old fables which are unprofitable. For if we still continue to live according to the Jewish law, we acknowledge that we have not received grace. For even the most holy prophets lived according to Christ Jesus. For this cause they were persecuted also, being inspired by His grace, fully to convince the unbelievers that there is one God, who hath manifested Himself by Jesus Christ His Son; Who is His eternal Word ... Who in all things was well pleasing to Him Who sent Him... Therefore, they who were brought up in these ancient laws, have come to the newness of hope, no longer observing sabbaths, but keeping the Lord’s day, in which also our life is sprung up by Him through His death...”

Ignatius of Antioch (circa. 35AD – 110AD) *Letter to the Magnesians*

## THE VISION ON THE LORD'S DAY

*“I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet, Saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: and, What thou seest, write in a book”* (Revelation 1:9-11).

We now come to John’s description of the first of his visions. It is, most appropriately and significantly, a vision of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and in His glorified humanity; for He appeared as one, *“like unto the **Son of Man**”* (Revelation 1:13). This was a *“revelation of Jesus Christ”* (Revelation 1:1) indeed, and such as the eye of mortal man had never beheld.

As to the circumstances in which this wondrous vision was seen, John mentions ... it was *“on the Lord’s Day”* (Revelation 1:10). Those who hold to the futurist system would make this mean ‘the Day of the Lord’. That is, they would understand John as saying that he was carried forward in the spirit into the future era in order that he might behold things which are to happen in that great and terrible day. So likewise the Seventh Day Adventists expound it; though for a different and obvious reason. But against this there is, first of all, the objection that it is a strained construction; and further, the expression is a different one from that which is everywhere used to designate the Day of the Lord (cf Acts 2:20; 1 Corinthians 1:8, 5:5; 2 Corinthians 1:14; 2 Peter 3:10; 1 Thessalonians 5:2). This difference must be regarded as decisive. But in addition, the vision which John beheld does not belong to the Day of the Lord. Beyond all question, and as all are fully agreed, the vision of Christ in the midst of the candlesticks is a vision of **this present [time]**, wherein the churches of Christ are set as lights shining in the spiritual darkness of the world. This is a fatal objection to the idea that *“the Lord’s Day”* is equivalent to ‘The Day of the Lord’.



On the other hand, it is known from early Christian writings that the first day of the week received the designation ‘the Lord’s Day’ from a time very close to the beginning of the era; and we have in this verse a proof that it had begun to be so designated ere the last of the apostles and scribes of the Bible had finished his labours.

“The key to the right understanding of ‘*the Lord’s Day*’”, says Hengstenberg, “is supplied by verse 5, where Christ is called: “*the first begotten from the dead*”, and by verse 18, where likewise reference is made to the resurrection as the pledge that He will quicken His people out of death. These passages prove (1.) that the Lord’s Day is the day of resurrection, that being the day on which Christ was manifested above all others as Lord (cf Romans 1:4); (2.) that it was so named not because of what the church should do on that day, but because of what the Lord did on it”.

Philip Mauro (1859 – 1952)

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“No doubt John had been meditating on the unforgotten events of that long-past day of resurrection, which he was observing in his islet by solitary worship, as he had often observed it with his brethren in Ephesus; and his devout thoughts made him the more capable of supernatural communications. Whether the name of the first day of the week as ‘the Lord’s Day’ originated with this passage, or had already become common, is uncertain. But, at all events, it was plainly regarded as the day for Christian worship. Solitary souls, far away from the gatherings of Christ’s people, may still draw near to Him; and if they turn thought and love towards Him, they will be lifted above this gross earth, and hear that great voice speaking to them, which rose above the dash of waves, and thrilled the inward ear of the lonely exile. That voice, penetrating and clear like a trumpet, gave him his charge, and woke his expectation of visions to follow.”

Alexander Maclaren (1826 – 1910)

# THE PERSONALITY OF THE LORD

[The] personality of our Lord [is] a truth but imperfectly realised, and yet of surpassing interest and preciousness. Each emotion of His nature, as it passes before the eye, will bring us into the closest contact with Christ as a distinct and real person.

There are teachers who speak of Christ as a traditional and historical being, and yet others as a visionary or ideal being – a mode of instruction well calculated to transport the learner far into the mysteries of cloudland. It may be true to a certain extent that our Lord is a historical being, for His whole life is history and history teaching by the purest, loftiest example, which has been defined the truest philosophy. His gospel has supplied the world with truth; His life, with history; and His character with a living model of every divine perfection and human excellence. But our nature craves for more than this. We want fellowship, not with a sentiment, nor with a tradition, nor with an [ideal], but with a real, living, **personal** being. We seek communion with, and sympathy from, a Saviour in alliance with our veritable nature; endowed with real, deep, holy sensibility; disciplined by personal sorrow like our own, and thrilling with a quick response to every note of, “the still, sad music of humanity”.

We must know Jesus as once tabernacling in the flesh, and dwelling among men as man – hallowing earthly spots with His presence – entering the dwellings of men – sitting with them at their tables – noticing and blessing their children – mingling in the scenes of domestic life – smiling upon our loves – sanctioning our marriage-feasts – healing our diseases – pitying our infirmities – weeping at our tombs – consecrating our loneliness and solitude; in a word unveiling a bosom the perfect reflection of our own in all but its sinfulness. Oh, it is this fact of our Lord’s personality that brings Him so near to us, blends Him so closely with our individual history, and which imparts to His presence

and sympathy a reality and preciousness so inexpressibly great and endearing.

Read in the clear, steady light of this fact, what meaning and what beauty appear in these inspired declarations concerning Him: “*Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same*” (Hebrews 2:14). “*Verily He took not on Him the nature of angels; but He took on Him the seed of Abraham*” (Hebrews 2:16). “*The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us*” (John 1:14). “*In that He himself hath suffered being tempted, He is able to succour them that are tempted*” (Hebrews 2:18). “*We have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities*” (Hebrews 4:15).

Such, my reader, is Christ, and such His sympathy with you! And in all the circumstances of your Christian life it is an instructive and consolatory thought, that your humanity is represented in heaven by the Head of all creation; that the Lord Jesus – “*the first born among many brethren*” (Romans 8:29) – is still clad in our nature, and occupies the central throne in glory, exalted “*far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come*” (Ephesians 1:21). From that elevation of dignity, glory, and power, encircling spirits hymning His high praise, there flows down to you a continuous stream of sympathy, grace, and succour; meeting your every circumstance, supplying your every want, soothing your every grief, and shedding the soft and cheering lustre of a personal presence on your homeward path to glory. And although we no more ‘know Christ after the flesh’ (cf 2 Corinthians 5:16) yet, dealing by faith with His personality, we may realise that we possess a Friend, a Brother, and a Redeemer, in whom are mysteriously yet truly united the **sympathetic nature of man** with the **infinite mind of God**.

Octavius Winslow (1808 – 1878)  
*The Sympathy of Christ with Man*

## SUPREME IN SYMPATHY

The attribute of sympathy was vital to the role of High Priest. The continual round of gifts and sacrifices that needed to be offered would scarcely have been maintained by an individual who cared not for the persons among whom he functioned, or disregarded their moral and spiritual condition. In connection with the Levitical priesthood of old, it is evident that Aaron, Eleazar and Phineas had a genuine concern for the people of the Hebrews over which they were instituted priests. They shared with them the same nomadic wilderness existence; they had a common desire to attain to Canaan at last, and knew how necessary it was that sins should be redressed and atonement made if ever that objective was to be reached. Moreover, being themselves mortal, sinful human beings, they were painfully conscious of the temptations and transgressions that assailed them, even in the desert; and needed daily to offer up sacrifice, first for their own sins, and then for the people's (cf Leviticus 16:6,11).

Yet in the case of the Aaronic priests, there was a limit to their understanding and patience – and in consequence of that, a limit also to their sympathy. They perhaps, could never rationalise the behaviour of Nadab and Abihu, the rebellion of the sons of Korah, the sins of Achan, or the immorality at Baal-peor. There were times when the perpetual murmuring of the multitude defied their comprehension, and Aaron was heard angrily to cry with Moses: “*Hear now, ye rebels*” (Numbers 20:10). And while their natural sympathies may have extended to the condition of their fellow-countrymen, they could have had little appreciation for the lot of Rahab the Canaanite, Ruth the Moabite, the widow of Sidon, Naaman the Syrian, and others whom the Lord was pleased to call from distant, heathen lands. Even the priesthood of Melchisedec, (who belonged to a different time and place, and provides a much better illustration of spiritual truth) was subject to the same limitations upon his sympathy, by virtue of being a mortal, finite man.

What then can be said concerning the priesthood of the Lord Jesus Christ – the believers’ Great High Priest (cf Hebrews 4:14) – and His sympathy towards those for whom He acts? It might be imagined that He, being incarnate God, and possessing two natures in one, is significantly removed from the ordinary course of humanity. Such verses as those that describe Him as: “*holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners*” (Hebrews 7:26) might be construed as placing Him at an unrelatable (and thus, unsympathetic) distance from normal human experience; but this would be an erroneous conclusion. The glorious descriptions contained in the Hebrew epistle include the fundamental criteria for a priest: “*For every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins: Who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way; for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity*” (Hebrews 5:1-2). That Christ fully met these qualifications is confirmed: “*Wherefore in all things it behoved Him to be made like unto His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself hath suffered being tempted, He is able to succour them that are tempted*” (Hebrews 2:17-18); with the happy consequence that henceforth: “*we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin*” (Hebrews 4:15).

The record of the Gospels shows something of the sympathy of Christ in action. There He is to be seen, communing with persons from all walks of life and tiers of society, from Pontius Pilate, prefect of Judea, to the exiled demoniac of the Gadarenes; and between these extremes are to be found members of the Sanhedrin, rulers of synagogues, centurions, fishermen, beggars, tax-collectors, publicans, ‘sinners’ of every hue, children, the aged and infirm, the blind, dumb, deaf, lame, the dying and the bereaved. With these, the Lord is observed to rejoice (cf Luke 10:21), to sigh (cf Mark 7:34), to weep (cf John 11:35); and in every

case, to every person, to say precisely those words that they most needed to hear.

However, certain objections might present themselves to readers' minds; and they may be inclined to ask: 'how can Christ, who came as a man, and was born among the Jews, and lived for just 33 years, in the First Century AD, possibly understand or sympathise with me? What experience had He of being a woman, or a parent, or old-aged, or of my nationality and ethnicity? What did He know of financial woes, the pressures of the modern workplace, or the ethical dilemmas of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century? More importantly, how could He, who did no sin, ever appreciate the fear, guilt, and shame associated with its commission?'

To begin to answer these questions, let the example of John 4 be considered, and an encounter which, the Scriptures tell us, 'must needs' have occurred. There the Lord entered into conversation with a woman of Samaria, a most incongruous and unlikely exchange for three reasons: first, that a man should publicly discourse with an unknown woman contrary to the social norms of the day; second, that a Jew should speak in friendly terms to a Samaritan, between which groups an ancient animosity still festered; and third, that anyone would associate themselves with this particular woman, whose notoriety preceded her. It confounded both the woman herself, and the Lord's disciples (cf John 4:9, 27). A greater contrast between persons could not have been contrived; and yet in the space of a few moments, the Lord brought to light the woman's material needs (v. 15), her sinful life and its consequences (v. 16), her own underlying prejudices (v. 20), and even her incipient faith (v. 25). He knew, and entered into the reality of, every single detail, prompting the woman's ultimate confession: "*Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?*" (John 4:29). Let the sceptical reader take note. However far removed, in practical terms, our lives may seem to be from that once lived by the Lord, the briefest personal conversation with Him would suffice to prove that He knows all things concerning us; that He is the Christ.

## Part I: HIS SYMPATHY AS GOD

It may be observed through the study of the Scriptures, that the sympathy of Christ towards men arises from a three-fold source. These will be considered in order. Firstly, He is sympathetic by virtue of His Deity. His Godhood, rather than reducing His appreciation of the human condition, or removing Him to a great distance, is the factor that increases His understanding and empathy for humanity to such a degree that He is supreme in sympathy for man. For being in very nature God, He is also:

### 1.) **Eternal**

If a gardener desired to grow a fruit tree from seed, it would be a labour of love over many years to cultivate the plant and raise it to maturity; in consequence of which his regard for it, and sentimental attachment to it, would be proportionally increased. Or to use another analogy: a man's natural life might extend to 70 years, and if he were to have a friend or relative who knew him well for the entirety of that period, it might be argued that the sympathy the one had for the other would be greater, by virtue of so long a time spent together. When dealing with the subject of Christ's acquaintance with mankind, it is not a question of years or decades, or even a lifetime; but **eternity**.

He knew a proportion of the human race before they had any being, for they were "*chosen ... in Him before the foundation of the world*" (Ephesians 1:4). He witnessed and effected man's creation from the right hand of God: "*Then I was by Him, as one brought up with Him: and I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him; Rejoicing in the habitable part of His earth; and My delights were with the sons of men*" (Proverbs 8:30-31). He beheld the Fall and its dreadful legacy: "*And I looked, and there was none to help; and I wondered that there was none to uphold: therefore Mine own arm brought salvation unto Me*" (Isaiah 63:5); saying in the fulness of time: "*Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of Me, I delight to do Thy*

*will, O My God*” (Psalm 40:7). Ultimately, with redemption’s work on earth completed, ascending back where He was before, He has not forsaken or forgotten mankind; prefacing His return to glory with the promise: “*Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world*” (Matthew 28:20) – and then, to be with His people for evermore! If sympathy is proportional to length of association, Christ’s could not be greater – for it is ‘from everlasting, to everlasting’. No mortal man could claim to have such sympathy as this.

## **2.) Creator**

If any reader has been engaged in a ‘creative’ activity – building, making or producing an item, perhaps to give as a gift, and maybe fragile in its nature, or having moving parts – then they will know the sense of anxiety with which it is passed over to the intended recipient. Will they handle it appropriately? Will it be used properly? Will it be suitably cared for? Because as the maker of the object concerned, one knows it intimately: its strengths and weaknesses, its capabilities and limitations. To see it ill-used, or subjected to undue stresses, provokes a sense of inward pain.

This is but a poor illustration of the mighty work of creation wrought by Christ at the world’s commencement: “*All things were made by Him; and without Him was not any thing made that was made*” (John 1:3). It defies the intellect of the greatest theologians to expound precisely how men are ‘made in the image of God’ – but Christ knows perfectly, for He did it. “*He knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are dust*”, and in consequence pitieth us as a father does his children (Psalm 103:13-14). He, the Maker, knows the true toll of sin upon body and soul; the full impact of the curse on humanity who incurred it, and is moved by these things. He is not a remote, unconcerned observer, but filled with personal interest and Divine emotion. He beheld all things to be ‘very good’ at their first creation (cf Genesis 1:31), was grieved at heart as a result of sin’s effects (cf Genesis 6:6), and rejoiced to bring Redemption’s plan into effect in the fulness of time (cf Hebrews 12:2) – for He has a ‘desire unto the work of His hands’ (Job 14:15). His



sympathy is still more enlarged since it is He who **sustains** the whole creation until now: “*by Him all things consist*” (Colossians 1:17); He ‘upholds all things by the word of His power’, and ‘bears up the pillars of the earth’ (cf Hebrews 1:3, Psalm 75:3).

### 3.) All-wise

It is the opinion of psychologists that a person’s ability to sympathise, or more particularly, to empathise (“understand and share feelings”) with another, requires there to be a thorough appreciation of the other’s state and condition. Empathy cannot exist where there is ignorance – which is why people generally have least sympathy for those whom they least know, or from whom they are furthest removed. The converse, therefore, must also be true: that where knowledge is greatest, and shared experience is fullest, there will be the highest possible degree of sympathy. “*O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!*” (Romans 11:33); indeed, He is the “*only wise God*” (1 Timothy 1:17). This attribute is equally applicable to all Persons of the Trinity – thus in Christ likewise, “*are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*” (Colossians 2:3). His comprehension of the human condition is perfect and entire; none could have greater sympathy than He has. The Psalmist grasped this, when he wrote: “*How precious also are Thy thoughts unto me, O God! How great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand*” (Psalm 139:17-18).

### 4.) Immutable

The attributes of the Godhead are a glorious theme for man’s contemplation – wondrous when viewed individually, and even more so when held together as a whole. Whilst no single facet of the Divine character can be promoted above another, it is true to say that certain aspects of God’s nature have a bearing upon every other. Holiness, for example, is one of these. Whatsoever detail of the person and being of God is considered, that feature of Deity is holy; without fault or flaw,

utterly devoid of any touch of sin; perfect. The Immutability (or ‘Changelessness’) of God is another such attribute. It can be coupled to any other known fact concerning Him, and adds thereto a greater light and glory. His power, His justice, His grace, His goodness – all these are unvarying, constant, and without diminution or decay. With Him is “*no variableness, neither shadow of turning*” (James 1:17).

What precious consequences this truth has in respect of the sympathy extended to us-ward from the Son of God! When fellow-feeling, or a sympathetic disposition, exists between two persons upon earth – themselves mortal, finite and subject to sin – there can be no guarantee of its continuance. The person expressing sympathy may grow forgetful or more distant, or undergo some change in character through the circumstances in life. The party towards whom sympathy was formerly being felt might manifest certain undesirable and unworthy traits, or cause some personal offence, and jeopardise the affinity previously enjoyed, or lose it altogether. But the sympathy we are speaking of involves incarnate God, who says: “*I am the Lord, I change not*” (Malachi 3:6); and in another place: “*Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of My hands; thy walls are continually before Me*” (Isaiah 49:15-16). If God could forget or deteriorate, He would cease to be God.

Still more comforting is the thought that God’s constancy is **not** dependent upon man’s. He will not change, or alter His course, in response to the fickleness and changeability of sinners. In short, the sympathy of Christ to men is not conditional. It cannot be forfeited by them, because it was never earned by them – it is the product of free grace. If a Christian anxiously enquires whether they, through personal failure and sin could ‘dis-merit’ or undermine the sympathy of Christ, let it be remembered – the Lord in His divine foreknowledge knew of that impending sin long before its actual commission, but loved the

sinner notwithstanding. Indeed, His eternal sympathy was engendered, not by virtue of man's worthiness, but by his unworthiness; not by the favourableness of humanity's condition, but by the severity of its plight: "*when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd*" (Matthew 9:36). He is sympathetic, not because the sinner's condition is enviable, but because it is pitiable.

## **Part II: HIS SYMPATHY AS MAN**

The sympathy of Christ then, is the product of eternity, in the heart of One who created the human race at the first, and has sustained it ever since; who is endued with infinite wisdom, and unchangeable in His disposition towards men. All these things are true in consequence of His Deity. It could be added – all these things would apply, independently of the incarnation. Here is another marvel: though the sympathy of the Son of God was already of the greatest, highest, deepest possible order – still He went further, "*made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men*" (Philippians 2:7). As though it were not enough for us to have elicited the sympathy of an Eternal, Creating, Sustaining, All-Wise, Immutable God, He condescended to be manifest in flesh, that we might also have His sympathy as a brother, friend, fellow-man and fellow-sufferer. "*Wherefore in all things it behoved Him to be made like unto His brethren*" (Hebrews 2:17). Great indeed is the mystery of godliness (cf 1 Timothy 3:16)! Being then 'found in fashion as a man', He further experienced:

### **1.) The Fall**

There is a common misconception, held by many, that Jesus Christ upon earth was the foremost specimen of the human race, and an object of physical and bodily perfection. Thus He has often been depicted by romantic (but misguided) artists, with a radiant 'halo', or shining visage, several inches taller than any other characters in the scene, with perfect

facial features, and in clothes untouched by the ordinary dirt and contamination of the world. They would even ‘gild the cross’ if possible, and try to make scenes of Calvary more dignified and aesthetically pleasing. Some adapt their theology along similar lines, and would claim that the Lord Jesus upon earth was entirely exempt from illness or disease, and prior to His passion, suffered no injury or harm. While such theories may seem to have their merits, they are contrary to Scripture.

Romans 8:3 clearly states that God ‘sent His Son in the likeness of **sinful** flesh’. The implications of these words must be considered. There were many contrasts between the First Adam (made in Eden), and the Second Adam (namely, Christ) – and this is one: The First Adam was formed in a state of earthly perfection, standing, in biological and material terms, as the prime example of all the human race. Not so Christ. He condescended to come in the likeness of **sinful** flesh – that is to say – like humankind were after several millennia of sin and the curse ravaging creation; greatly reduced in longevity, stature, strength, and ability. Had Christ appeared on earth in the similitude of our Edenic parents, He would have attracted the attention and adulation of all, especially those who glory in the flesh, or in appearance. They would immediately have made a god of the man. But the Scripture expressly states: “*He hath **no form nor comeliness**; and when we shall see Him, there is **no beauty** that we should desire Him. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from Him; He was despised, and we esteemed Him not*” (Isaiah 53:2-3). It can be said, without any dishonour being done to the Lord, that in His human body at the incarnation, He was unremarkable, and undesirable. None were ever attracted to Him by His physical or bodily characteristics. In fact, the very opposite is described: “*many were astonished at Thee; His visage was so marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men*” (Isaiah 52:14).

R. J. Steward

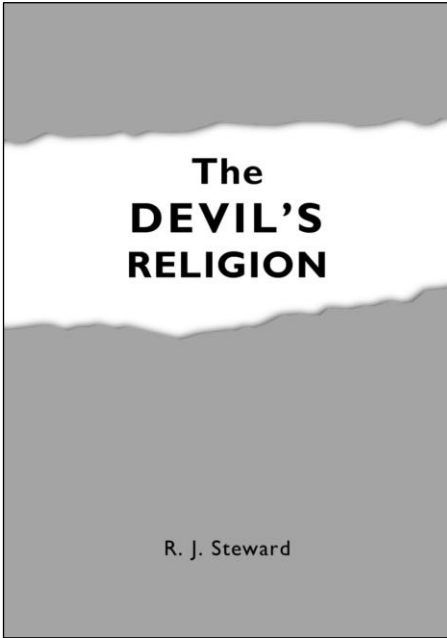
– TO BE CONTINUED –

## EDITORIAL

There is a well-known verse that reminds believers: “*There hath no temptation [trial, or affliction] taken you but such as is common to man*” (1 Corinthians 10:13), which may rightly be understood as a word of counsel to afflicted saints – that their sufferings are not uniquely severe. When under great pressure to yield to temptation, or give way under the burden of trial, it should encourage the despairing Christian to know “*that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world*” (1 Peter 5:9). The knowledge that, elsewhere in the church of God, other believers have experienced the same or worse adversity should silence the Devil’s insinuations and the soul’s frequent complaint: ‘there’s none so tried as me!’

But there is another, equally precious inference to be drawn from these words. Simply because particular experiences in life are common to the lot of humanity (like illness, bereavement, domestic or workplace difficulties) does not disqualify them from being heaven-sent trials in the case of the Christian. The fact that unbelievers may sometimes face similar circumstances does not ‘un-sanctify’ or reduce the significance of such events in the life of a child of God. When the Adversary whispers ‘this is not a genuinely spiritual trial’, or, ‘your godless neighbours had the same thing, and dealt with it on their own’, he can be countered with this verse. Every detail of the Christian’s pathway is ordered and appointed by God; nothing is to be discounted as inconsequential, just because it is commonplace or widely felt. Thus, in all the trials of life, of whatever nature or degree, the believer must: (1.) consider carefully to know whether the trial is an obstacle to overcome by faith; or the chastening hand of the Lord; (2.) pray that the situation might be made a spiritual benefit, and the Lord would ‘sanctify the deepest distress’; (3.) lay hold of all the glorious promises of Scripture pertaining to affliction. For even in the commonest of them: “**God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.**”

## NOTICES



Further to the publication of last quarter's Link magazine, much comment and interest has been expressed in the article entitled 'The Devil's Religion'. In consequence of which, this has now been published as a separate booklet, containing some additional material, and complementary pieces by J. C. Ryle and Thomas Manton. Comprising 14 pages in A5 format, it is available free of charge from North Road Chapel. Please contact the Secretary – details inside the front cover of this edition.

Readers are advised that the last thirty years of Link magazine back issues are now available to read and download on the church's website: [www.northroadchapel.org/the-link](http://www.northroadchapel.org/the-link). Printed copies of many issues dating back to the 1990s can also be supplied upon request.

### **ANNUAL BIBLE CONVENTION**

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

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

*Preacher* : Mr P. Mehrshahi  
( Cheltenham )

*a cordial invitation is extended to all*