

October - December 2019

The Link

NORTH ROAD CHAPEL

BIDEFORD

THE LORD'S DAY

Part 13

“And all the people gathered themselves together as one man into the street that was before the water gate; and they spake unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded to Israel. And Ezra the priest brought the law before the congregation both of men and women, and all that could hear with understanding, upon the first day of the seventh month. And he read therein before the street that was before the water gate from the morning until midday, before the men and the women, and those that could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law. And Ezra the scribe stood upon a pulpit of wood, which they had made for the purpose... And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people; (for he was above all the people;) and when he opened it, all the people stood up: And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God. And all the people answered, Amen, Amen, with lifting up their hands: and they bowed their heads, and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground... and the Levites, caused the people to understand the law: and the people stood in their place. So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading.” (Nehemiah 8:1-8)

The last article commenced to look at the subject of the Christian's duty toward the sabbath, both public and private. It was established from the Scriptures that there is a Biblical imperative to observe it: firstly, because it is a sign; and secondly, for its sanctifying effects.

This article continues upon the same theme, with particular reference to the **public worship of God**. Throughout this study it has been seen that men in all ages have made use of this occasion for the solemn assemblies of the Lord's house. Public worship is a vital part of sabbath observance. A 'holy convocation' was a part of sabbatical worship under

the Mosaic economy. The psalmists, the prophets and the reformers of the captivity, dwell much upon the public ordinances of the Temple, the House of Prayer and the Courts of the Lord. The very first reference to the Lord Jesus' conduct on the sabbath is that: "*His custom was*" to attend the synagogue (cf Luke 4:16). After His resurrection, on numerous occasions He appeared to His own on "*the first day of the week*" (cf Mark 16:9, John 20:19). The early Christians of New Testament times, in like manner, assembled on this day (cf Acts 20:7), so the creation principle of one-day-in-seven was perpetuated. They prayed, they preached, they taught, they observed the Lord's Supper; and the Spirit of God through the writer to the Hebrews enforced the mandate, by stating that assembling together must not be forsaken or set aside (cf Hebrews 10:25) – it was for all time to come.

Man, as a social creature, who is seen and known of his fellows, cannot bring a stronger witness to the world than to correctly observe the sabbath; ceasing from all else and setting aside its hours completely for God. It is a sign and a monument to God and Truth. Thereby, the Mighty Creator is acknowledged, the Glorious Redeemer is honoured, and by it the saints are sanctified. A cessation from earthly duties and gathering for corporate worship – where the Risen Christ has pledged that He will be in the midst – is a glorious foretaste of Heaven; that coming day when earthly toil is forever laid aside and the saints of all ages gather around the Throne. In the midst of that vast throng which can never be numbered will stand the Lamb. Worship then will be spontaneous, full and lasting; for it will not be interrupted by a further six days of labour. No! This is the eternal sabbath of rest which remaineth for the people of God (cf Hebrews 4:9), with its unending bliss and ceaseless praise. In nothing does the Church on earth so nearly approach the Church above as in the harmonious and devout exercises of public worship. Its assemblings must be 'Bethels'; corporate gatherings should prove to be nothing less than the House of God and the Gate of Heaven (cf Genesis 28:16-19).

But to achieve this happy state requires the diligence of all who attend. The following points will therefore be highly practical in nature, concerning behaviour in the public gatherings, and the manner in which the Lord's people are to participate.

1.) Preparedly There should be due preparation of heart. All known sin should be confessed before assembling. There should be nothing amiss betwixt our souls and God, and nothing unpleasant between fellow believers. *“Let a man examine himself”* (1 Corinthians 11:28) – that is a trenchant word. The home, the domestic scene and business relationships are all matters which must be kept right.

2.) Expectantly We should come in a spirit of **expectancy**, waiting to hear what the Lord God will say unto us, as in the case of young Samuel: *“Speak Lord, for Thy servant heareth”* (1 Samuel 3:10).

“I am listening Lord for Thee,
What hast thou to say to me?” (Havergal)

Are those oft-sung words really true of the saints, every time they come together?

3.) Punctually Gathering should be early and unhurried – there is no excuse for being late attenders (except, of course, should an emergency arise). People who rush into the House of God are ill-prepared and need to discipline themselves, for they not only do themselves a disservice, but also mar the tranquillity of the atmosphere for others. Anything that disturbs the peace of the assembly is to be avoided. Before the Lord observed the Passover, He sent certain of His disciples on ahead to the Upper Room and said *“There make ready”* (Luke 22:12). Later the Scripture says: *“And when the hour was come, He sat down and the twelve apostles with Him”* (v. 14). This is all written for instruction; and is an example of right order and behaviour in believers' solemn assemblies.

4.) Reverently Having assembled in good time, there should be **reverence**. The whole week is available for conversation. Upon entering into the public assembly, there should be a bowing of heads and hearts before the Lord. There should be a prayerful commending of oneself and the solemn exercise about to commence, into the hands of God the Holy Spirit; not immediate whispering and conversation. “*Be still, and know that I am God*” (Psalm 46:10) says the Lord. “Holiness becometh His house (cf Psalm 93:5), not chatter.

These things being said, there should never be a cold, frigid or unfriendly atmosphere in a fellowship, but rather a warm exchange of greetings as the saints gather, and leave. Let every brother and sister strive to speak to one another at some time during the sabbath meetings. It would be improper to leave immediately, or stand aloof after the service. The local church is a family – what kind of a family is it where members seldom speak to each other? When visitors come, let there be diligence in welcoming them, and showing real warmth and Christian love. This, not with undue haste as soon as the benediction is given, but after a sufficient space of time, at a convenient place in the Chapel.

5.) Conformably There should be not only a willingness, but an absolute readiness to apply the Word of God to oneself. Never should one’s concern be about its application to others, at the expense of listening and looking for that which applies personally. Then receiving it in grace as before God, it must be acted upon; whether it be rebuke, exhortation, warning or encouragement; “*receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls. But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves*” (James 1:21-22).

“Master, speak! And make me ready,
When Thy voice is truly heard,
With obedience glad and steady
Still to follow every word.”

(Havergal)

6.) Corporately There must be personal **identification** in all that takes place. Public worship is not private devotion. Prayer in the closet is private; reading of the Scriptures at home is individual and private; but when the saints gather together, they are no longer individuals; now as a body, they cannot act in an isolated or independent manner. When the members of the body are present, they must all function as one – following and being carried along with all that is taking place, and identifying with it at the close. If a brother prays in public, he is not praying for himself; he is the voice of the body and is leading the company of saints in worship, confession and intercession. It would be a great shame not to involve oneself in such an activity. To assemble together is not an idea or whim of man; local churches are of God’s design and appointment.

A Practical Demonstration

If believers truly appreciate what a corporate gathering is, they are bound to say ‘Amen’. Indeed, something is amiss if there is not a solemn and audible response from every brother and sister to the one leading them in prayer. Likewise at the reading of Holy Scripture, when the minister or preacher closes his Bible and says words like, “may God bless to us all the reading of His Holy Word”, why should not all the people do as they did in Ezra and Nehemiah’s day and say ‘Amen’? Is there not agreement? Then the redeemed of the Lord must say so. Apathy or silence in response to public prayer and reading can only be a grief to the Head of the Body, who presences Himself with them. Why is there not an **audible** ‘Amen’ from every believer present? The preacher is not in the pulpit to ‘say his piece’. He is the voice of the local body, and all the members of that body should identify with it.

The same applies after the Word has been ministered. Why are brethren and sisters so reticent to concur with the declaration of the eternal Truth of Holy Scripture? Both the Old Testament and the New Testament make it abundantly clear that in the public gatherings of God’s people there must be unity in purpose, all functioning with one heart and voice.

This is why unknown tongues were forbidden of Paul in Corinth. ‘How then can the gathered church say ‘Amen’?’ he asks (cf 1 Corinthians 14:16). In public worship, all must be done decently and in order (cf 1 Corinthians 14:40); all must be to edification, and understandable to the believers assembled, being intelligently and devoutly followed by them. Then must they assent by audible and solemn response at the close by saying ‘Amen’, which means ‘How true, how true’. If a brother or a sister cannot say this, then they should seriously consider their position and why they are a member of a local body of believers at all. How would Ezra or Paul regard the stony silence in some chapels today, where an ‘Amen’ is hardly ever heard?

It is a fact that the audible ‘Amens’ of response are practised by some in liturgical services as a parrot-like exercise. In other places, it is uttered continually and noisily in a distracting and mindless chant. But abuses of the word in some quarters must not prevent its proper use by true believers. The audible ‘Amen’ at the close of every invocation of the Almighty is absolutely Scriptural, and something is seriously remiss if it is disregarded. Some might protest, and say, ‘the sisters only give mental assent, or at the most an inaudible whisper’ – what unbiblical nonsense! The Word of God forbids a woman to teach or to lead in worship; it never forbids her to assent and to give her wholehearted support to the brother who is leading in worship. Indeed, it demands that she should. It is all the **people**, not all the **men** that respond! (cf Nehemiah 8:6). If it is inappropriate for a sister to join in a corporate ‘Amen’, then by the same argument neither should she participate in the singing of hymns.

Surely, no member of the local church comes merely to listen? Do any have such a low view of the local church that they regard themselves only as ‘spectators’? Membership of a local church demands true identification. This is why attendance at the gatherings is so vital. To be absent means that the collective voice is weakened. On the day of Pentecost, Peter did not stand up of himself and express a personal

opinion. No! He stood up ‘with the eleven’. It was corporate; all were identified. Even the cynical onlookers knew this when they said: “*These men are full of new wine*” (Acts 2:13); they did not say ‘this **man** is full of new wine’. The public knew that it was a corporate witness; though one spoke, all the disciples were engaged; they were acting in union. This is the proper form and order of a local church and its witness.

Consider again the passage with which this article commenced: “*And all the people gathered themselves together as one man into the street that was before the water gate; and they spake unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded to Israel... And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people; (for he was above all the people;) and when he opened it, all the people stood up: And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God. And all the people answered, Amen, Amen, with lifting up their hands: and they bowed their heads, and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground*” (Nehemiah 8:1, 5-6). Here is Biblical instruction for corporate gatherings: “*Blessed be the Lord God of Israel for ever and ever. And all the people said, Amen, and praised the Lord*” (1 Chronicles 16:36). “*Blessed be the Lord God of Israel from everlasting to everlasting: and let all the people say, Amen. Praise ye the Lord*” (Psalm 106:48).

Brethren and sisters, heed and obey this instruction. Ezra had been authoritatively declaring God’s truth. Whole-heartedly and unreservedly all the people said, ‘Amen, Amen’, meaning ‘how true – this is what we all believe’. They had to identify; they could not hold back; it was as much their concern as it was Ezra’s. God has ordained that His witness on earth should primarily be corporate, and He created and set apart one day in seven for this very purpose. This article has been intensely practical and free of veneer or camouflage upon the issue. Then let every reader suffer the word of exhortation, and may it bear fruit that shall be seen **and heard**.

W. H. Molland (1920 – 2012)

MAN-MADE CLIMATE CHANGE

“Cursed is the ground for thy sake” (Genesis 3:17)

The past half-century has witnessed the dramatic rise of a new religious system. This movement has its own code of right and wrong, and associated doctrines of guilt and redemption. It has its venerated texts, its prophets and exemplars, its preachers, and teachers. It has many adherents: from the nominal, through the active, to the extremist and radical. Many gatherings and conferences are maintained, at local, national and international levels, for like-minded persons to assemble together, and further their cause. It blends with its teachings a heady mixture of science, philosophy, humanism, paganism and pantheism. Eschatology (‘the study of last things’) is its principal dogma – it has a very clear concept of the end of the world. In view of this, it also has its own Soteriology (doctrine of salvation) and propounds an extensive system of ‘salvation by works’, for individual and global deliverance from the coming catastrophe. It is a proselytising religion, anxious to broadcast its message, widen its congregation, and obtain political influence; and also unafraid of resorting to illegal or violent means in pursuit of its aims.

The movement in question is commonly called ‘**Environmentalism**’; and while its advocates would hotly deny any religious connotations or associations, one only needs to examine the manifestos and policy statements of major ‘green’ organisations to observe the similarities. They do not hesitate to describe themselves as ‘ideologies’ or ‘social movements’, and speak freely of their ‘beliefs’. Their language closely resembles that of a statement of faith, an ecclesiastical affirmation or creed. But this is a system entirely devoid of God, and based instead upon evolutionary principles. For many in the present day, it provides a popular surrogate for true religion; and in numerous points it comes into open conflict with the teaching of Holy Scripture.

Almost as worrying as the rise of this new sect are the responses of God's professed people in reaction to it. The diversity of 'Christian' opinions expressed fall into two broad categories.

On the one hand, there are those who have embraced the message of Environmentalism wholesale, and adopted its precepts without hesitation. To such persons we feel bound to point out some of its more glaring errors. The so-called 'forces of nature', and the scientific laws that underpin them, are all still subject to the sovereign control of Almighty God (cf Job 37, 38). The human race will not become extinct by reason of climatic or meteorological changes. The world will not end by any means other than God's Divine prerogative, or at any time other than that of His appointing (cf Mark 13:32). Its termination will not be hastened, nor deferred, one moment by man's activities. The Bible plainly states that at the Saviour's Second Advent, when He returns to make an end of all things, and rolls up the present material creation like a discarded garment (cf Psalm 102:25-26), there will be a remnant of humanity, "*which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord*". There is a measure of comfort to be derived from these words (cf 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18).

At the opposite extreme are those Christians who take the line of complete denial, and refuse to accept anything that is said by the scientific community in respect of the state of the planet – or more particularly – to deny that any of the observed changes to the environment could possibly be caused by the behaviour and practices of men. This position is also erroneous, and needs to be addressed in the light of God's Word – perhaps more urgently, because of its growing popularity among supposedly orthodox Christians. It is hardly commendable for professed believers to be found alongside those wilfully ignorant scoffers who protest that: "*all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation*" (cf 2 Peter 3:4-5). The facts of the matter are quite the reverse. 'Man-made climate change' has a long and troubling history, well documented in the Bible.

PRACTICAL EXAMPLES

There are plenty of instances in the record of Scripture where the activities of man are seen to negatively impact the natural world. There is the case of the Philistines who blocked up wells, preventing irrigation of the land and watering of sheep and cattle, forcing Isaac to move his herds to other places (cf Genesis 26:12-17). Among the violent outrages perpetrated by Abimelech the wicked son of Gideon was the ‘sowing with salt’ of the ruins of Shechem, so that even the vegetation would be destroyed (cf Judges 9:45). When the Israelites overthrew Moab, it is told how, “*they beat down the cities, and on every good piece of land cast every man his stone, and filled it; and they stopped all the wells of water, and felled all the good trees*” (cf 2 Kings 3:25) preventing cultivation of the ground or the gathering of a fruit harvest for years to come. Other passages describe the intentional damming or diverting of rivers, sometimes used as a military strategy to inflict drought upon an enemy: “*And they shall turn the rivers far away; and the brooks of defence shall be emptied and dried up: the reeds and flags shall wither. The paper reeds by the brooks, by the mouth of the brooks, and every thing sown by the brooks, shall wither, be driven away, and be no more*” (Isaiah 19:5-7). Those who suggest that the environment is somehow impervious to the ravages of man are patently wrong. Biblical and secular history are full of evidence to the contrary. Man has proved capable of permanently and irreversibly destroying his body, his fellow man, and his own eternal soul, by sinful devices. He is more than able to wreak havoc upon the planet itself.

However, there is another more serious aspect to man-made climate change which both the environmentalist and the ‘denier’ fail to register; namely – **the judgmental purposes of God**. What if the Lord, in consequence of the wickedness of man, should determine to bring deleterious changes to pass in the earth – either punitively, to penalise sin; or preventatively, to limit and curtail iniquity? The Lord would be within His Divine rights, and in conformity with His own Word, were He to act in this fashion. As the Hebrews of old were warned: “*if ye shall*

despise My statutes, or if your soul abhor my judgments... I also will do this unto you... ye shall sow your seed in vain... I will make your heaven as iron, and your earth as brass... your land shall not yield her increase, neither shall the trees of the land yield their fruits” (Leviticus 26:15-16, 19-20); *“The Lord shall make the rain of thy land powder and dust: from heaven shall it come down upon thee, until thou be destroyed”* (Deuteronomy 28:24). These verses speak of adverse climatic changes, Divinely wrought, but instigated because of the sinfulness of man. The Scriptures are replete with examples both at a local and a global level.

THE DAYS OF ADAM

The world in which we now live is not the world as God created it. Indeed, imagination fails to comprehend a perfect, sinless creation from which death and decay, harm and hurt, were entirely absent. But the Divine assessment of ‘very good’ (cf Genesis 1:31) applied only for a limited time. Adam – who stood as federal head of the whole material creation – fell into sin; the consequences of which were huge and terrible. Of greatest moment were the spiritual implications for his soul: in that day he became dead in trespasses and sins, and condemned all his descendants to the same condition. From that instant also, his physical body was under the penalty of mortality and death, and began to age and die. However, the repercussions went much further, as the Apostle describes: *“For the creature [creation] was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same ... For we know that the **whole creation** groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now”* (Romans 8:20, 22).

Unwittingly, unwillingly, the whole created world was made subject to sin and the ‘bondage of corruption’. Immeasurable and irreversible changes were effected around the entire planet, of which the springing forth of thorns and thistles were one of the most apparent (cf Genesis 3:18). Dying flora and fauna must also have quickly become evident: *“By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin”* (Romans 5:12); death

passed upon all created things; death reigned from the time of Adam's sin, even over the animal and vegetable species, that could not be said to have 'sinned after the similitude his transgression' (cf Romans 5:14). The motivating cause, the responsibility, is clear – God said unto Adam: “*cursed is the ground for thy sake*” (Genesis 3:17). Here is man-made environmental change on an awful scale.

THE DAYS OF NOAH

In the millennium that followed the sad events of Eden, the world was grievously afflicted by the effects of the Fall, but still a very different place from that with which we are familiar today. Life expectancies were vast, human productivity and capability was equally great, and 'biodiversity' – the number and variety of species in existence on earth – was at an all-time high. However, another change was about to come. Sin had not remained stationary in that period, but waxed worse and worse: “*And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually... The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth*” (Genesis 6:5, 11-12). In consequence of which came the Flood.

Forty days of rain, the complete inundation of all land masses, and a year of prevailing waters, effected a radical transformation upon the globe. “*All the fountains of the great deep [were] broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened*” (Genesis 7:11); “*And every living substance was destroyed which was upon the face of the ground, both man, and cattle, and the creeping things, and the fowl of the heaven; and they were destroyed from the earth*” (Genesis 7:23). This was 'mass extinction' on a scale unthought of by secular biologists – innumerable creatures perished, and afterwards, human life expectancy fell to a modest 120 years (cf Genesis 6:3). The earth would never be the same again. Its shape and form were utterly changed, with 70% of its surface remaining covered in water.

What, or who, was the cause of these dire events? God makes it clear when He says, in the same language as in Eden, that the curse of the Flood came, “*for man’s sake*” (Genesis 8:21); they brought it upon themselves. “*Hast thou marked the old way which wicked men have trodden? Which were cut down out of time, whose foundation was overflowed with a flood*” (Job 22:15-16).

THE DAYS OF LOT

The Scriptures describe, in Genesis 13, one of the beauty-spots of earth, famed for its luxuriant verdure which abundantly supplied numerous city-states: “*And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered every where . . . even as the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt, as thou comest unto Zoar*” (Genesis 13:10). Within a short space of time a dreadful transformation occurred, and the region became: “*the breeding of nettles, and saltpits, and a perpetual desolation*” (Zephaniah 2:9). Geographically, it corresponds to the area known today as the Dead Sea basin – aptly so named – being almost totally devoid of life, and physically the lowest tract of land on earth, at 400 metres below sea-level. Here, the prosperous towns of Sodom, and Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboim once stood. Now, “*the whole land thereof is brimstone, and salt, and burning, that it is not sown, nor beareth, nor any grass groweth therein*” (Deuteronomy 29:23).

Why did God precipitate such a cataclysm upon the land? “*Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah [was] great, and because their sin [was] very grievous*” (Genesis 18:20); because, “*the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the Lord exceedingly*” (Genesis 13:13). There was the gross immorality with which the place became synonymous (cf Jude 7) and other, oft-overlooked companion vices: “*this was the iniquity of . . . Sodom, pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness was in her . . . neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy*” (Ezekiel 16:49). Once again, sinful humanity is found to be the root cause.

THE DAY OF THE LORD

The contemplation of the Lord's former judgments naturally leads to a consideration of judgment to come. "*As it was in the days of Noah... Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot... Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed*" (Luke 17:26, 28, 30). It is not within the scope of this article to attempt a thorough exegesis of the allegorical visions of Revelation. However, if anything is to be understood from that book, it surely is this: that before the end of time, conditions upon Earth will severely deteriorate, especially in the natural world; including grass and trees, seas and rivers (cf Revelation 8).

The parallels drawn to the Flood are solemnising and instructive: "*by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished: But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men*" (2 Peter 3:5-7). In the case of that former destruction, the way of effecting it was already present. The antediluvian globe seems to have originally possessed great bodies of subterranean and atmospheric water (cf Genesis 1:6-7, 2:6, 7:11, 8:2) and by means of bringing both these volumes violently to the surface, God inundated the planet. 'In the same way', says Peter, 'there are reserves of fire kept in store for a future judgment'. This should give every human being pause for thought concerning the fragility of their existence, 'standing above fire and beneath fire'. They live upon a perilously thin film of ground, a few miles deep, floating uneasily upon molten rock of incredible temperatures, which occasionally breaks out in volcanoes and earthquakes. And above is the Sun, many times hotter, casting upon the Earth every hour more energy than its populace consumes in a year, its otherwise devastating effects mitigated only by the invisible thickness of atmosphere. The instruments of God's wrath are already on hand. "*Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be?*" (2 Peter 3:11).

THE NATURE OF JUDGMENT

As is often the case, two extremes are to be guarded against. For Christians to read ‘judgment’ into each and every turn of the weather, meteorological phenomena or natural disasters, is an erroneous course. The Lord may send such circumstances for a variety of reasons: “*He causeth it to come, whether for correction, or for His land, or for mercy*” (Job 37:13). To imagine that those most immediately affected are the deserving targets of special retribution, is also wrong: “*Suppose ye that these... were sinners above all... because they suffered such things? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish*” (Luke 13:2-3).

Conversely, to shut one’s eyes, refuse to acknowledge the sovereign hand of God, and fail to heed the warnings sounded by these events, is folly in the extreme. “*All these are the beginning of sorrows*” (Matthew 24:8). It is a master-stroke of Devil to deceive men into thinking that there is nothing going on, and no such thing as Divine judgment. “*They have belied the Lord, and said, It is not He; neither shall evil come upon us; neither shall we see sword nor famine*” (Jeremiah 5:12). The Adversary’s next ploy, should this deception fail, is to convince men that whatever is happening, they are not the ones to blame; that the solemn message is not to them. This mindset is evident everywhere.

If God should choose to manifest His judgments through changes in climate, Christians cannot expect to be exempted from its effects. The punitive three-year drought and famine sent in the time of Elijah not only affected the idolatrous majority in Israel, but also the Lord’s servant himself, a widow in Zarephath, godly Micaiah, the prophets in hiding, and perhaps 7,000 others who had not succumbed to Baalism. Nevertheless, it is remarkable to note how these persons were spared; not from, but through, the midst of these afflictions. As Noah and Lot also proved: “*The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations*” (2 Peter 2:9). “*Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the Lord delivereth him out of them all*” (Psalm 34:19).

TWO ERRORS REFUTED

Amongst those supposed Christians who continue to deny that human activities may have a damaging effect upon the planet, two portions of Scripture are commonly wrested from their context and used as a defence. One is the Lord's words spoken to Adam: "*Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth*" (Genesis 1:28). This, it is claimed, gives authorisation for modern man to do as he pleases, exploiting earth's resources – animal, vegetable and mineral – even to their complete consumption or eradication. This faulty interpretation fails to give the words any proper definition, limitation or extent. It fails to recognise that this instruction was given in man's innocency, before the Fall and the entrance of sin. It fails to hold in balance the other directive, that man was 'to dress and to keep' the land he was given. It ignores when the Lord says: "*I am God, even thy God... every beast of the forest is Mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. I know all the fowls of the mountains: and the wild beasts of the field are Mine... for the world is Mine, and the fulness thereof*" (Psalm 50:7, 10-12). The earth is the Lord's. Man is but a short-lived tenant. Let him behave accordingly.

Another misused verse is this, given to Noah: "*While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease*" (Genesis 8:22). These words had a very particular relevance: God was promising not to bring again global destruction, and a suspension of natural cycles, as had been the case during the Flood. The earth would not cease to rotate on its axis, or stop orbiting the sun; the physical laws of cold and heat would not be revoked. To take it as a guarantee of world-wide, perpetually favourable climate is evidently wrong; the waste-howling wildernesses of Saharan desert, the barren regions of the poles, the countless droughts and floods, failed harvests and famines of history all prove otherwise. This covenant is also given a time-limit: 'while the earth remaineth'. It will not continue for ever.

A CHRISTIAN ATTITUDE

It is sad to reflect that many of the instructions and recommendations being promulgated by the Environmental Movement would not be necessary, if the Church had been more faithful in preaching and practising the truth of the Bible. Certain ecological problems might not even have arisen. For the Scriptures are not silent on such matters; but instead of honestly declaring and applying its precepts, Christianity (usually in an unbiblical collusion with the state, and national interests) has often wrongfully defended mass industrialisation, exploitative practices and wanton consumerism. God's Word might not speak explicitly of the conservation of resources, waste reduction or recycling – but it goes to a deeper and more fundamental level, condemning covetousness, greed, the pursuit of mammon and the heaping up of earthly treasures. This needs to be taught and practically applied from the pulpit.

Contained within the Old Testament Law, once appointed for the Hebrews, are numerous details that indicate the mind of God towards His material creation, and the responsibilities of man in this connection. The principles that they illustrate are worthy of continued emulation. For example, this rule was given for the conduct of siege warfare: *“When thou shalt besiege a city a long time, in making war against it to take it, thou shalt not destroy the trees thereof by forcing an axe against them: for thou mayest eat of them, and thou shalt not cut them down (for the tree of the field is man's life) to employ them in the siege: Only the trees which thou knowest that they be not trees for meat”* (Deuteronomy 20:19-20). There was not to be complete deforestation, even in a legitimate campaign.

The principles of husbandry and crop-rotation are also prescribed. Fruit trees were not to be harvested until the fourth year, and used for human consumption only in the fifth (cf Leviticus 19-23:25). All agriculture was suspended every seventh year so that the land could have a 'sabbath' and lie fallow; only that which self-seeded or propagated could be eaten

(cf Exodus 23:10-11, Leviticus 25:3-7). Even under normal circumstances, field margins were not to be reaped, and harvesting techniques were conservative: “*And when ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not wholly reap the corners of thy field, neither shalt thou gather the gleanings of thy harvest. And thou shalt not glean thy vineyard, neither shalt thou gather every grape of thy vineyard; thou shalt leave them for the poor and stranger: I am the Lord your God*” (Leviticus 19:9-10).

Laws relating to animal life show a similar concern. The weekly sabbath applied also to draught animals and beasts of burden (cf Deuteronomy 5:14); those used for threshing purposes were not to be muzzled but permitted to feed of the grain (cf Deuteronomy 25:4); an animal that suffered an accident was to be immediately assisted (cf Luke 14:5); those that strayed swiftly returned, and any that struggled under a load at once relieved, regardless of their provenance (cf Exodus 23:4-5). Due care was even to be exercised in the case of wildfowl used for food. A parent bird was not to be taken simultaneously with its young, or eggs (cf Deuteronomy 22:6-7). All this legislation was given in illustration of the same basic principle: “*A righteous man regardeth the life of his beast*” (Proverbs 12:10). Animal welfare is commensurate with righteousness.

THE IMAGE OF GOD

Surely the foremost example and last word upon the subject should be the nature and works of God Himself, in Whose image man is made, and Whom Christians are taught to emulate: “*Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children*” (Ephesians 5:1). The Lord did not bring His creation into being, and thereafter ‘leave it to its own devices’, or abandon it to the mercy of physical laws and biological imperatives. He remains intimately involved: “*The eyes of all wait upon Thee; and Thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest Thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing*” (Psalm 145:16-17). It is God Who, with utmost care, clothes the flowers and grass of the field (cf Matthew 6:30) and witnesses the fall of the least sparrow (cf Matthew 10:29).

The Book of Jonah displays the operation of this Providence in remarkable ways, and also gives a profound application for our instruction. Five times God's hand is seen, working through the material creation, and animal kingdom. "*The Lord sent out a great wind into the sea*" (Jonah 1:4), which overtook the disobedient runaway prophet aboard ship, and caused him to be thrown overboard. Furthermore, "*the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah*" (Jonah 1:17), whereby he was miraculously saved, and delivered again to land. Some time later, having preached the Word in Nineveh with convicting and converting effect, Jonah sat disconsolately upon a nearby vantage point, hoping that the Lord would still send destruction upon the formerly wicked city. But He did not. "*The Lord God prepared a gourd*" (Jonah 4:6) under whose spreading leaves the prophet sheltered from the sun. Then, "*God prepared a worm*" which devoured the gourd; and in quick succession, "*God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah*" (v. 7-8). The prophet protested angrily at the workings of Divine sovereignty, and his hopes, first raised, then dashed. "*Then said the Lord, Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night: And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?*" (v. 10-11).

The message of God's object lesson is this: to be concerned more for the welfare of a plant, and the state of the weather, than for the salvation of souls and their deliverance from wrath to come, is a reprehensible reversal of priorities. Let the Lord's people give first attention to that which is of utmost importance. But those who know and fear the judgments of God will not neglect its implications for the natural world. Even the Ninevite herds were of concern to the Lord. May His supreme example inspire, instruct and identify true Christians today.

R. J. Steward

CHRIST THE CREATOR

We must not forget that even the lower orders of Creation were made by Christ and for Him. They were needed by man – and man was necessary to the completeness of Christ’s plan of Salvation – so the lower forms of creatures are links in the chain that could not be spared. There is a wonderful sympathy between the various portions of Creation, as the Apostle Paul tells us, “*For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body*” (Romans 8:22-23). Treat all creatures kindly, then, as far as you can, for the great Creator’s sake. I would not have a sparrow needlessly killed, nor even a worm trod on that might be spared. My Lord and Master made them all – and when I look at them, I see traces of His wonderful wisdom and power! And when I see how bountifully He provides for them, I note the tokens of His goodness and care. He opens His hands and satisfies the desire of every living thing! There is not a little bird that picks up a seed by the roadside that was not created by Christ and for Him! And, perhaps, answers its end better than some of you who lift your brows to yonder heaven only to defy your Maker! There is not an animal upon the common, nor a lion in the forest, nor a fish in the sea, nor a fowl in the air that was not made by Him – and that does not in some way promote His glory...

Try, beloved friends, wherever you are, to see all things in the light of Christ. I think this will teach you not to look with scorn upon any of the things that are around you. See how the Lord Jesus has purged all things for His people so that they shall no longer be common or unclean. That lovely river, those fertile valleys, that dense forest, yonder snow-clad Alps and everything else that Christ has created... sun, moon and stars all shine to His praise and glory!

C. H. Spurgeon (1834 – 1892)

EDITORIAL

There are times when the Biblical principle of separation from the state and a complete abstention from the political scene (cf 2 Timothy 2:4, 2 Corinthians 6:17, 1 Peter 2:11), proves its worth. Never more so, it might be suggested, than at the present time when across much of the world, the west in particular, there is turmoil and upheaval, 'provocation and confusion of face' in places of secular government. One feels a genuine grief for those who pin their hopes, or lend their loyalties, to any political system or philosophy. Such tumultuous times are sovereignly ordained, "*to the intent that the living may know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will, and setteth up over it the basest of men*" (Daniel 4:17). Alas that so few see it, even when played out before their very eyes.

Those Christians who foolishly presume to know God's secret will in these matters, and dare to pray in support of one or another faction, or legislative outcome, would be better to revise their supplications, thus: "*pray... that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified, even as it is with you: And that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men: for all men have not faith*" (2 Thessalonians 3:1-2). Despite numerous claims to faith or Christian values, the modern political scene, in any country one cares to mention, is devoid of Biblical truth; because 'all men' (the masses of humanity, at all levels of society) 'have not faith' (are unbelieving sinners). The Word of God is threatened in every quarter, its precepts are variously ignored, compromised, suppressed or denied, by every political party; which are ultimately concerned only with wielding power by the consent of a godless, God-hating world.

True believers should pray for freedom of religious expression, and deliverance from the wicked devices of all worldly leaders, confident that this pattern prayer comes with an attendant promise: "*But the Lord is faithful, Who shall stablish you, and keep you from evil*" (v. 3).