

January - March 2020

The Link

NORTH ROAD CHAPEL

BIDEFORD

THE LORD'S DAY

Part 14

“Thus saith the Lord, Keep ye judgment, and do justice: for My salvation is near to come, and My righteousness to be revealed. Blessed is the man that doeth this, and the son of man that layeth hold on it; that keepeth the sabbath from polluting it, and keepeth his hand from doing any evil. Neither let the son of the stranger, that hath joined himself to the Lord, speak, saying, ‘The Lord hath utterly separated me from His people’: neither let the eunuch say, ‘Behold, I am a dry tree’. For thus saith the Lord unto the eunuchs that keep My sabbaths, and choose the things that please Me, and take hold of My covenant; Even unto them will I give in Mine house and within My walls a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters: I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off. Also the sons of the stranger, that join themselves to the Lord, to serve Him, and to love the name of the Lord, to be His servants, every one that keepeth the sabbath from polluting it, and taketh hold of My covenant; Even them will I bring to My holy mountain, and make them joyful in My house of prayer: their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon Mine altar; for Mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people. The Lord God, which gathereth the outcasts of Israel saith, Yet will I gather others to him, beside those that are gathered unto him.” (Isaiah 56:1-8)

The subject currently under consideration is the Christian's duty to the Sabbath, both public and private. Having previously addressed the question of public worship, we now leave the corporate aspect and come to private and domestic affairs relative to the Sabbath. The words of the fourth commandment are: *“Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy*

stranger that is within thy gates: For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it” (Exodus 20:8-11). This is not only a public matter; it is also a family and a domestic commandment. The head of the household is answerable for every one who is under his roof. He is to see to it that everything within his control is so arranged that the Sabbath can be observed, unfettered. A man is not to be rigid in his own observance and careless with regard to his children – he must train them also, explaining to them its hallowed meaning, and guiding them into true obedience. Neither must a man rigorously observe the Sabbath himself, yet impose labour upon his employees. If they are in the service of man six days, let it be arranged that they can serve God on the seventh. Of necessity, there are certain occupations that must be attended to on the sabbath; indeed, it would be dishonouring to God and inhumane if they were not done. This has been amply covered in previous sections.

The great blessing of the hallowed day of rest is for all the race. Men and women are responsible before God in their households to ensure that dependents are not deprived of this gift and opportunity through mismanagement, or a failure to properly order one’s affairs. In these matters, headship is to be evidenced. It is committed to the head of a household to promote the sanctification of this day to all under his roof. In the measure in which he so conducts his affairs, he wears the badge of the God whom he fears. The head of the house must not, like Eli, fail in this matter of governance. Eli, being fully aware of the behaviour of his sons, only ineffectually complained to them, whereas their conduct toward holy things demanded much more forceful handling. “...*his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not.*” (1 Samuel 3:13).

In sharp contrast to Eli, comes the example of Abraham, concerning whom it is written that he, “*command(ed) his children and his household after him*” (Genesis 18:19). Joshua also said, “*as for me and*

my house, we will serve the Lord” (Joshua 24:15). In the ordering of the Sabbath, the situation in the home is as vital as public worship. “*Six days shall work be done: but the seventh day is the sabbath of rest, an holy convocation; ye shall do no work therein: it is the sabbath of the Lord in all your dwellings*” (Leviticus 23:3). Away with the liberal attitude, so prevalent in these days, which imagines that attendance at a morning service is adequate Sabbath observance. Or that, if morning and evening meetings are held, the intervening hours of the day are a free-for-all. Such have no true conception of the real meaning of the day.

It is instructive to read how godly homes were conducted in past generations on the Sabbath day – no vain conversation, no idle visits, no worldly reading – rather a putting aside of all material thought and a concentration upon the spiritual; being exercised in constant prayer and the examination of one’s own heart; quiet meditation upon the Lord and all His benefits; intercession for children, family and friends; reflection and musing upon the preached Word. In short, **communion with God** – continual, unbroken communion. This is what Sabbath observance meant to men of true piety in a bygone age, and this is what the Word of God means when it says that the Sabbath is to be a holy convocation in our dwellings. How far modern Christendom has drifted from this!

A careless heart, unprepared in private, is not likely to benefit much from the public worship. Similarly, the exercise of corporate gathering and the instruction given there, will not abide with those who do not meditate and pray over its truth in private. Surely this must be the meaning of the words uttered by the Apostle John when he said: “*I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day*” (Revelation 1:10). All day! It is not just to enjoy a morning service, or to feel how good it is to get out in the evening. No! To be in the true Spirit of the Sabbath is to hallow **all** its hours. It is continuing communion, a day of concentrated spiritual engagement.

Furthermore, the fourth commandment not only concerns the individual, their families and dependents – but there is also a responsibility to ‘the stranger within the gates’. In other words, a godly influence is to be exerted on all with whom association is had, or contact is made, on the Sabbath. The instruction is even extended to irrational creatures, “*thy cattle*”. They are only fed and watered on God’s holy day. Essential duties are not neglected – the sick are to be cared for, livestock is to be fed – but no commercial enterprise, even upon the part of strangers, is to be countenanced. How lamentably have these commandments been violated! How very far is the so-called ‘sophisticated’ and ‘modern’ world from the state decreed by God. He specifically instituted a day of rest and calm, when material concerns are superseded by the spiritual – and this was designed for the **whole** of creation. This institution was incorporated in the Decalogue, a divine law for all men of all ages; a law which demands one day in seven for God; a day when all commercial pursuits are to be suspended; a day when even nature around us catches something of the hush and repose, as the hustle and bustle of life is calmed. It should be a day when statesmen’s chairs are empty in Cabinet, the lawyers’ offices closed, the travellers halt in their journeys, the shops draw their blinds, factories close their gates, no scholars attend their studies, no sports facilities are available, warehouses are barred and bolted, the fever of life is stilled, and the roads are empty. This is the pattern of a true Sabbath. Where on this planet can it be found? Alas, it cannot be. But this is what God’s law requires; and His law is the standard by which men will be judged in a coming day.

Nevertheless, let this question be asked to Christians: are the strangers within our gates – that section of human society which is acquainted with us – witnessing true Sabbath observance in our conduct? Are the Lord’s people keeping the Lord’s day holy in the Lord’s appointed way? How many Christian businessmen are there, who would not open on a Sunday, yet in secret do their accounts and plan the next week’s work between morning and evening services? How many supposedly

orthodox Christians spend Sunday afternoons in pleasure, leisure, recreation or sport? How many lounge around reading a Sunday paper, thus occupying their mind with earth and not with heaven? To set aside all these things is not a burden, nor onerous for a true child of God. Indeed, if he is in a healthy state of soul, these words will be true of him: *“One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in His temple”* (Psalm 27:4). *“Blessed is the man that doeth this, and the son of man that layeth hold on it; that keepeth the sabbath from polluting it, and keepeth his hand from doing any evil... Even them will I bring to My holy mountain, and make them joyful in My house of prayer”* (Isaiah 56:2,7).

To continue further on this same line, looking further at Isaiah chapter 58: *“If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from **doing thy pleasure** on My holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable; and shalt honour Him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words: Then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord”* (Isaiah 58:13-14). Here, the true spirit of Sabbath observance is set out in plain and simple terms. On this day there is a conscious cessation from doing one’s own pleasure – amusement, past-times, worldly company, social visitation, feasting, unspiritual reading. *“Speaking thine own words”* – what does this mean? Secular or earthly conversation. Topics of conversation on the Sabbath should not be earth-bound, for such talk mars the impression of the spiritual. There are six whole days provided for earthly concerns. The Sabbath is for doing God’s pleasure; it is to be highly esteemed and *“honoured”*; it is above all others days, *“holy of the Lord, honourable”* (v. 13). This is a day for thinking upon His bounty, His longsuffering mercy, His unsearchable goodness, His unfathomable love, His matchless grace, His awful purity, His intrinsic holiness, His wondrous providence, His eternal redemption – where does one stop? If there is a true knowledge of God and a genuine appreciation for the meaning of the Sabbath, there will be neither time nor inclination for lesser things. Indeed, the hours of the Sabbath will

not be long enough. The true Christian lives from one Lord's Day to the next, eagerly awaiting the first day of the next week, and as its hours dawn, feels as one going into the King's palace, right into the banqueting house, "*unto God my exceeding joy*" (Psalm 43:4). This is true Sabbath observance.

"Then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord" (Isaiah 58:14). Yes, there is delight in such an exercise. The Christian derives great pleasure and joy from this day, as in filial love he keeps the fourth commandment. Not in the spirit of fear or bondage, but in the spirit of adoption, crying 'Abba, Father' (cf Romans 8:15). It is a glorious day; its hours are full of happiness. Even children and 'strangers' will catch the strains if it is correctly ordered – not in a cold, formalistic way, which Christ Himself condemned – the Lord's day rightly observed is a happy day for all the family, both in the home and in the church. Alas that there has been 'a great gulf fixed' between young and old in these matters. It was never so in past generations, and it is not Biblical. The whole family should be engaged in the observance of a full-orbed Sabbath. The family should be together both in the home and in the church, and not segregated. Sadly today, in many churches, the young children have a very short spell in the main service, before being herded out into a play room, where other church members are on duty to amuse, interest and generally act as 'nannies'. Nowhere in Holy Writ is there a hint of such a practice – it is giving children a very wrong impression of corporate worship and of a Biblically structured church. From earliest days they need to be brought along, so they may absorb the atmosphere of reverence and quietness, and with the necessary parental correction, learn to sit still. This is good training in any case, has never done any child the least harm, and stands them in good stead for the future. Of course, in the infant stage, there are times when little ones have to be taken out to avoid distraction in worship; that is another matter to which parents should be sensitive. But the principle of a 'family pew' is right, and profitable, and God-honouring.

W. H. Molland (1920 – 2012)

THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT

“Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.” (Exodus 20:8-11)

There has perhaps been more difference of opinion respecting the requirements of this, than of any other commandment. The human heart earnestly pleads for lawlessness. Men are much accustomed to yield to public opinion around them. The fear of being esteemed singular is a snare to thousands. He who is not prepared to stand in a minority of one with a majority of millions against him, will not keep a good conscience respecting the Lord’s day.

It is clear that this commandment not only requires something, but that it requires it in a very urgent manner. This is expressed by the word **“Remember”**, the most solemn form of memento used in Scripture. By the same word Moses calls upon the Israelites never to forget their redemption from Egypt (cf Exodus 13:3). It is the strongest form of calling attention to a matter (cf Deuteronomy 24:9, Joshua 1:13). It is found in many parts of Scripture, as the word expressive of our wishes respecting the divine providence over us, as when men ask God to remember them, where the prayer evidently is that God may have them in His thoughts and so in His holy keeping. Then we have another word: *“Remember the Sabbath day to **keep** it holy”*. This word expresses great vigilance, as of a guard over his prisoner; as of a tiller of ground over his garden; as of a shepherd over his flock. We must see to it that we do not let this commandment slip. In some of its forms the same word is often rendered ‘beware’ and ‘take heed’.

We are to remember the Sabbath day before it arrives and prepare for it. We are to remember and keep it when it shall arrive. We are to remember it when it is gone, and humble ourselves for the imperfect manner in which we have kept it. In looking into books of Moral Theology written by authors in the church of Rome, nothing strikes one more painfully than that this one day set apart by God to be observed to the end of time, is put on a level with other days appointed by mere human authority. Thus the old sin is committed of 'setting their threshold by My thresholds and their post by My posts', and their days by the Lord's days (cf Ezekiel 43:8).

This command is as careful to render the observance of the Lord's day practicable, as it is to enjoin its observance at all. It says, "*Six days shalt thou labour and do all thy work*". Some have raised the point, whether this last clause is a command or a permission. It is not necessary to enter into that question. No human power can make it unlawful for men to pursue their industrial avocations during the six secular days. The New Testament plainly discourages the attempt to fill up the calendar with holidays (cf Galatians 4:9-11, Colossians 2:16-23). Even days of fasting or thanksgiving are not holy days; but they are a part of secular time voluntarily devoted to God's service. And if we are to perform these things at all, we must take some time for them. Yet none but God can sanctify a day so as to make it holy. The attempt to do this was one of the sins of Jeroboam (cf 1 Kings 12:33). If the clause, "*Six days shalt thou labour*" is merely permissive, it is still enough for us. For who dare take away the liberty which God has here given us? Let us then consider particularly what it is for us to keep the Sabbath holy. It should be begun, and as far as circumstances permit, occupied with the duties of devotion. These are either private or public, personal or social.

I. THE PRIVATE DUTIES OF RELIGION

These are chiefly: 1.) Devout reading of the Scriptures. 2.) Prayer. 3.) Praise. 4.) Meditation. 5.) Self-examination. Into each of these we should enter heartily. We should pour out our souls before Him. We

should give our minds free scope. We should rejoice in the opportunity to admire His glory and to think upon His name. If we have no heart for the secret duties appropriate to the Sabbath, it is probable we shall find it a burden on our minds, and its public duties a task. Coleman¹ says that in early ages, “the several members of a Christian family were accustomed to rise very early in the morning, and address their thoughts to God by silent [interjections], by calling to mind familiar passages of Scripture, and by secret prayer.” Basil the Great² says, “One must arise before the twilight of the morning, to greet with prayer the coming day... Let the sun at his rising find us with the word of God in hand... Let the day begin with prayer... Let the child be accustomed early in the morning to offer prayer and praise to God.” This is said indeed of every day. It is peculiarly appropriate to the Lord’s day.

II. THE SOCIAL DUTIES APPROPRIATE TO THIS DAY

Besides prayer, praise, and the study of God’s word, in which two or more may join, these consist very much in an interchange of pious sentiments and in edifying discourse (cf Luke 24:13, 15). If we are bound to have our speech seasoned with salt, that we may minister grace to the hearers at all times, much more at times by God Himself set apart for our edification.

III. FAMILY RELIGION

The prophet Jeremiah puts prayerless families and the heathen in the same category. If God’s wrath falls on the latter, it will certainly descend on the former. The language the prophet uses is truly startling: “*Pour out Thy fury upon the heathen that know Thee not and upon the families that call not on Thy name*” (Jeremiah 10:25). Such families are truly heathenish in their dispositions and practices.

Perhaps there never was a godly pastor who did not feel that the cultivation of family religion was very important to the success of his ministry and to the progress of true piety; and who did not regret the

neglect of it as a sad injury to the cause of God. But what is the cultivation of family religion? It consists:

1.) In a devout reading, hearing, and studying of the Scriptures.

The word of God is able to make us wise unto salvation, and Timothy knew it from a child. We should acquaint ourselves and all our household with the sacred volume, because it is the word of God, because it is as fit to be read and spoken of in the family as anywhere else, and because we are specially commanded to teach all its truths to our children in the most familiar manner (cf 2 Timothy 3:15, Deuteronomy 4:9, 6:7, Psalm 78:4).

2.) A portion should be spent in praising God for His mercies.

Where it can be done to edification, families should sing God's praises. If it is impossible to sing them, it is well even to read some sacred hymn.

3.) To these should be added prayer, including adoration, thanksgiving, confession and supplication.

4.) Religious conversation guided and conducted by the head of the family, consisting of familiar explanations. This commandment also requires Scripture and catechetical instruction. In these endeavours to maintain domestic piety, all the family as far as possible should unite. Some may be too young; others may be sick; but none should be absent, except for good cause. Servants should be kindly invited to unite with the rest of the family, and comfortable seats should be provided for all. What a blessed sight is that, when the pious head of a family, "with solemn air", says, "Let us worship God", and then devoutly reads the Bible, and sings the praises of the Most High.

"Then kneeling down to heaven's eternal King,
The saint, the father, and the husband prays;
Hope springs exulting on triumphant wing,
That thus they all shall meet in future days;

There ever bask in uncreated rays,
No more to sigh or shed the bitter tear,
Together hymning their Creator's praise,
In such society, yet still more dear,
While circling time moves round in an eternal sphere.”³

Great care should be taken that this family religion should be attended to at the most fitting time; and not at hours so early as to make it necessary for the members of a household to neglect their private devotions in the morning, nor so late in the evening as to render it certain that children and others will be drowsy, and of course, unedified. That this whole matter may be truly useful, family worship and attention to family religion, should be:

1.) Stated and regular. No light or trivial cause should be allowed to postpone or hinder it.

2.) It should be **decorous, orderly, quiet, and serious.** If it fails in this respect, it can scarcely edify any one. All trifling behaviour should be carefully avoided.

3.) It should be **cheerful**, and not austere and morose. God, who loves a cheerful giver, no less loves a cheerful worshipper. Everything said and done should be suited to secure attention, and to awaken an interest in the service.

4.) Therefore, **tediousness should be avoided.** A wise man regardeth both time and judgment (cf Ecclesiastes 8:5). Where exhaustion begins, edification ceases. It would often prevent weariness if there was more variety in conducting Sabbath day instruction and worship. Prayers, expositions and remarks should be short and comprehensive.

5.) But we should **avoid both the appearance and reality of being hasty**, and of attending to this matter as though we were desirous of finishing it as speedily as possible.

6.) Family instruction and worship should **take proper notice of family mercies and afflictions**. Such are continually occurring. But we should be very careful not to wound the feelings of even the youngest or most ignorant. It is seldom well to lecture one member of a family for personal faults in the presence of others.

7.) In this matter, widows who are the heads of families should remember that they are held responsible for the order and religious education of their households, even as if the family had never had another head.

8.) It is sometimes asked what should pious wives and mothers do, when the husband and father are absent? The correct answer is, take his place and see to it that God is honoured in the house.

9.) But what shall wives and mothers do, when husbands and fathers, even when at home and well, decline to give proper religious instruction, and to conduct family worship? In answer, it may be stated that it is not the duty of the wife to assume the husband's place, and therefore she may not in his presence, with an air of authority over him, convene the family and give instruction. But though she is not the head of her husband, yet with him and under him she is the head of the rest of the family, and she ought to assemble her children and servants in some suitable apartment, and there teach them, and unite with them in suitable acts of devotion. This course has often been followed by the happiest consequences.

10.) As the great object of all religious instruction and worship is to please God and secure His blessing, so let great care be taken, that whatever is done be **sincere, humble and fervent**. A heartless form is idle; yea it is worse. Be zealous, not cold.

The following considerations show **the propriety and obligation of family religion:**

1.) The very heathen, who profess and practise any form of religion, do, without exception, maintain some form of domestic religion. Though they call not on the name of Jehovah, yet they call upon their gods, and teach their children to do the same. This certainly argues a strong presumption that family religion is a dictate of nature. It is only in countries nominally Christian that we find men failing to cultivate some form of devotion at home. The presumption, therefore, would be fearful against any system, which should be found fit only for temples or churches, because it would fail to meet the serious convictions and wants of men.

2.) The condition of every family calls for such instruction and devotion. We are very ignorant. Every appliance is necessary to diffuse light into our darkened understandings. Every family has wants, which should lead it to unite in prayer. Every family has mercies, which demand a united song. Every family has trials, where each should shed with the rest the tear of sympathy. Afflicted souls can find no better way to staunch their bleeding wounds than thus to unite in solemn acts of worship. Sometimes a household is threatened with some dire calamity. Then what is more proper than united petitions to Him, who is Lord of all, to avert the dreaded evil?

3.) The maintenance of domestic religion has a happy effect on the peace and order of families. If one is absent, or sick, or peculiarly afflicted, how it awakens and strengthens proper affection in the rest, to speak of that one, to utter words of kindness to him and to pray for his return or deliverance! How many little heart-burnings and jealousies are thus extinguished! How sweet is the sight, when old and young quietly and lovingly meet, and put away all else, that they may speak, and hear, and think, and pray, and praise, before the Father of their spirits! There can hardly be an unamiable, disobliging family, whose habit is to make common confession of sin, common acknowledgments of mercies, and

common supplications for needed blessings, attended with the correct understanding of God's mind and will. They may lack much that the world calls courtliness. But of that politeness which consists in 'real kindness, kindly expressed', such a family can hardly be destitute. There is real love there. Every act of joint devotion strengthens it. Temptation may assail it. It may even be temporarily interrupted; but it will seldom or never be destroyed. Such bonds as these are the ligaments of the whole social system ... Anything, therefore which serves to promote the peace, order, thrift, and happiness of families, must be a great blessing to all their members. The best 'normal school' in the world is a well-regulated family. There, the first lessons of government, law, literature, science and religion are taught to purpose. A nation made up of such families can never be despicable. It is an alarming fact that during the nineteenth century, infidelity has directed its most formidable enginery against the family institution and against family religion.

4.) The primitive church, and indeed every thriving evangelical church has set us an example in this matter, which it cannot be safe to despise. Church history informs us that after their private devotions, the members of the family in primitive times met for united prayer, the reading of the Scriptures, the recital of doctrinal and practical sentiments and mutual edification generally. This indeed, to some extent, was done every day. Each day was also closed by similar devotions. But the Lord's day abounded in them.

5.) This maintenance of family religion is eminently useful. It has nearly every advantage attending every possible method of teaching. It gives a little at a time and repeats it often. It is varied in its modes. It cuts up ignorance by the roots. Prideaux⁴ says: "The excessive ignorance I have met with in some who offered themselves for holy orders is to be attributed in a great measure to the neglect of family devotion. For while religion remained in families and God was daily worshipped, children were early bred up by their parents, and instructed in the knowledge of Him. And the principles of Christianity thus instilled into them continued to grow up with them into further knowledge, as themselves

grew to be further capable of it. Thus young men carried some knowledge of religion with them to the universities”.

6.) Family instruction and worship are of great importance in promoting pure and undefiled religion in the world. When Richard Baxter ⁵ settled in Kidderminster, there were but few devout families. Consequently, iniquity abounded. But as the spirit of religion revived, so did family worship, until at last, in some whole streets, not one family was found where God was not honoured by even daily worship. Thomas Scott ⁶, the commentator, was very successful in leading his children and servants to Christ. He thus describes his general course with his family: “The grand secret of my success appears to have been this, that I always sought for my children as well as for myself, in the first place, ‘the kingdom of God and His righteousness’”. He says, “[he] had not attempted a great deal in the way of talking directly to [his] children, and drawing them forth to talk upon religious subjects; but much indirectly, by explaining the Scriptures, and by conversation in the family, especially by the improvement of passing events, of occurrences relating to their own conduct and that of others, as the occasions of religious remark, teaching them to take a religious and Christian view of whatever took place”.

7.) Besides the solemn passage already cited from Jeremiah, other Scriptures show that pious men did not neglect family religion. Of Abraham, God said: “*I know him, that he will command his children, and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment*” (Genesis 18:19). Joshua said: “*As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord*” (Joshua 24:15). David says: “*I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way. When wilt Thou come unto me? I will walk within my house with a perfect heart*” (Psalm 101:2). Solomon says: “*The curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked: but He blesseth the habitation of the just*” (Proverbs 3:33). See also Acts 10:2, and all those passages of Scripture which speak of praying, always praying, always with all prayer and supplication, praying everywhere, praying without ceasing, etc.

Let family religion be maintained in all its purity and power, cost what it may; but this has never been done where families have slighted the holy Sabbath. Stowell [writes]⁷: “It may be seriously questioned whether any one duty is so lamentably neglected among all classes of professing Christians, as the domestic observance of the Sabbath”.

William S. Plumer (1802 – 1880)

[Other persons and works referenced in the article are:

1.) Lyman Coleman (1796 – 1882) *Ancient Christianity Exemplified*; 2.) Basil, Bishop of Caesarea Mazaca (329 – 379); 3.) Robert Burns (1759 – 1796) *The Cotter’s Saturday Night*; 4.) Humphrey Prideaux, Dean of Norwich (1648 – 1724); 5.) Richard Baxter (1615 – 1681); 6.) Thomas Scott (1747 – 1821); 7.) William Hendry Stowell (1800 – 1858)]

“The cultivation of family religion is an important element in the spiritual enjoyment of the Lord’s Day ... There is no heavenlier picture on this side the stars than a home where love to God fills every heart ... Here indeed is a spot where Eden’s blessedness combines with heaven’s Sabbath joy.”

William Spiers (circa 1890)

“And to Thee, O most glorious and gracious Creator and Redeemer, I humbly return my unfeigned thanks, for the unspeakable mercies which I have received on Thy day; and much more for so great a mercy to all Thy churches and the world: and craving the pardon (among the rest) of the sins which I have committed on Thy day, I beseech Thee to continue this exceeding mercy to Thy churches and to me; and restore me, and other of Thy servants, to the privileges and comforts of this day, which we have forfeited and lost; and let me serve Thee in the life and light and love of Thy Spirit, in these Thy holy days on earth, till I be prepared for, and received to, the everlasting rest in heavenly glory. Amen”

Richard Baxter (1615 – 1681)

THE GLORY A DEFENCE

*“And the Lord will create upon every dwelling place of mount Zion, and upon her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night: for upon all **the glory shall be a defence**. And there shall be a tabernacle for a shadow in the day time from the heat, and for a place of refuge, and for a covert from storm and from rain.”* (Isaiah 4:5-6)

The fiery-cloudy pillar granted to the Hebrews during their wilderness wanderings was a provision perfectly suited to their needs. For so large a company (perhaps two million persons at the outset) to be preserved in an inhospitable desert for a period of 40 years was nothing short of miraculous – and here was a part of that miracle. Amongst the greatest practical hazards to the people were the difficulties of navigation in the trackless wastes; the extremes of temperature – intense heat in the daytime, and freezing cold at night; the perils of complete darkness after sunset in that isolated region; and also the vulnerability of a vast, slow-moving caravan of pilgrims to attack from enemy forces. The divinely-bestowed pillar removed all these problems at once. It was a source of shade during the day, and of light and heat at night-time. It was the means whereby the timing and direction of the people’s travels were dictated (cf Numbers 9:15-23). It was an inestimable advantage to them in conflicts with their foes; simultaneously advantaging the Hebrews and thwarting the Egyptians (cf Exodus 14:19-20, 24), and acting as a great deterrent to many other would-be assailants, which ‘heard the fame’ of it (cf Numbers 14:14-15).

This pillar was one and the same with the glorious presence of God, sometimes called the ‘Shekinah’ glory. The Lord manifested His nearness in the cloud and fire, and spake unto the people from it (cf Exodus 13:21, Numbers 12:5, Deuteronomy 31:15, Psalm 99:7). Exactly how long this physical demonstration of the divine presence was granted is not specifically stated, but it began at the time of the first

Passover in Egypt, and continued throughout the following four decades in the wilderness – perhaps ending at the same time as the gift of manna, upon arrival in Canaan (cf Joshua 5:12). It persisted, “*throughout all their journeys*” (Exodus 40:38), despite their frequent sin and unworthiness of such a provision (cf Nehemiah 9:18-19).

This was not the last time that the supernatural pillar would be seen, however. The Lord appeared in a similar way at the dedication of the Temple built by Solomon (cf 1 Kings 8:10-11). The same cloud was beheld by the prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel (cf Isaiah 6:4, Ezekiel 10:3-4). There can be little doubt that the cloudy pillar once more descended, upon the scene of the Lord Jesus’ transfiguration before His disciples (cf Luke 9:34-35). But in all these instances, there was a single cloud in one specific place. The preciousness of the text before us, is that Scripture speaks of a cloud upon “*every dwelling place*”, upon a plurality of “*assemblies*”; concluding with the promise that, “*upon all the glory shall be a defence*” (cf Isaiah 4:5-6). Here is an unmistakable prophecy concerning the New Testament age; a coming time, “*when [we] shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father ... But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth*” (John 4:21, 23); when the presence of God rests upon a great number of dwellings and assemblies, found in every nation, tribe and tongue – ‘where’re His people meet’.

How is the Lord’s glorious presence seen in the gathered companies of His people? There is no billowing cloud or raging fire upon which the natural eye may fix itself; no sensory evidences of Deity. In the absence of which, some have vainly attempted to fabricate ‘glory’, in the form of grandiose buildings, gilded décor, stained-glass windows, vast choirs, elaborate rituals, sights, sounds and smells. For those who are truly sensible of the greatness of God, none of these things will suffice.

“We ask no bright shekinah-cloud to glorify the place;
Give, Lord, the substance of that sign: a plenitude of grace.” (Harris)

Within the gathered church, there **is** a visible demonstration of the glory of God: the saints themselves. Every one that is called by His name is created for His glory (cf Isaiah 43:7); the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon them (cf 1 Peter 4:14). How, then, are they to declare the glory of God, and show it forth in their gatherings? There must be: **(1.) a knowledge of God's glory.** Every Christian must have a proper comprehension of the being and nature of God, and in the measure that they know Him, they will serve Him aright. A glimpse of God's glory motivates worship (cf 2 Chronicles 7:3), inspires prophets (cf Isaiah 6:1-8, Ezekiel 1:28), makes apostles (cf John 1:14), and takes away the sting of death (cf Acts 7:55-60). Let us learn to pray with Moses: *"I beseech Thee, shew me Thy glory"* (Exodus 33:18)! **(2.) A jealousy for God's glory.** Since this is a matter of great concern to God (cf Isaiah 42:8), so should it be for His people. If rightly instructed, they will never suffer the glory of God to be supplanted from their churches by lesser objectives; and never permit His glory to be misplaced upon mere men. **(3.) A reflection of God's glory.** For all the dramatic evidences of God's glory upon Sinai – the fire, smoke, tremors and trumpets – there was perhaps none so affecting to the people as the sight of Moses' radiant face when he returned (cf Exodus 34:29-35). This phenomenon is not confined to the patriarch. As the Lord's people, empowered by His Spirit, begin to resemble Him, *"we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord"* (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Some Christians imagine that the 21st Century church's strength is to be had in numbers; or that its future will be ensured by modernity, popularity, recognition or notoriety. They are all wrong. *"The glory shall be a defence"*. God's glory – an understanding of it, a desire for it, the expression of it, the unmistakable presence of it – is the only means whereby the Church will chart her way, have light in darkness, shade from heat, a covert from storms, a shield from foes, and ultimately arrive in safety at the promised Canaan.

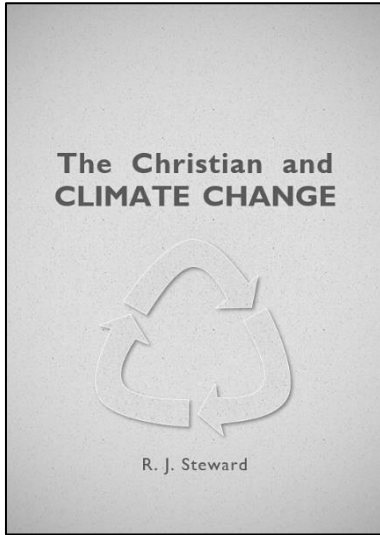
R. J. Steward

EDITORIAL

Some sections of Christendom preach a so-called ‘**Prosperity Gospel**’. At the extreme are those cultish and fraudulent denominations that offer unlimited material wealth and riches to their adherents, if only they have enough faith (and give sufficient donations to the organisation and its leaders). However, the same mindset permeates many churches to some degree. Christians think they have a very clear idea of what constitutes a ‘blessing’, or conversely, an ‘affliction’. And there is a tendency to think of those ‘blessings’ (health, wealth, happiness) as the gifts of God, and tokens of divine favour; whereas ‘afflictions’ (sickness, need, sorrow) – while acknowledging divine sovereignty in them – are regarded as wholly negative experiences; as God’s disfavour, His chastening hand, or the attacks of Satan.

A ‘prosperity gospel’ is hardly ‘good news’. To tell a worldly man that it is a good thing to receive good things, is to state the obvious, and preach nothing more than the humanists’ message. The truly ‘good news’ of Scripture lies in the complete reversal of carnal thinking. *“Blessed are the poor ... Blessed are they that mourn ... Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst ... Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake ... Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for My sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad”* (Matthew 5:3,4,6,10-12). Such are the well-known words of Christ’s ‘Beatitudes’, but one wonders to what extent they are believed, even by Christians. How many could honestly say, with Paul: *“we glory in tribulations”* (Romans 5:3)? How many heed the instruction: *“be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel”* (2 Timothy 1:8)? It is a noble exercise; for although the flesh recoils at the prospect of hardship, this is the route to heaven (cf Acts 14:22). *“For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory”* (2 Corinthians 4:17). May God by His grace enable us to preach and practise this ‘**Adversity Gospel**’!

NOTICES



Publication in last quarter's Link of the article "Man-made Climate Change" was favourably remarked upon by several of our readers. In response, we are pleased to offer this item separately, as a 13-page, A5-format booklet.

Also, two evangelistic tracts written by Mr W. H. Molland have been reprinted. These are "**A Message From God To You**", based on the account of the brazen serpent in the wilderness (A6, 12 pages), and "**In Search of What?**" regarding Job's

statement, "*Oh that I knew where I might find Him*". (A6, 9 pages). Both are appropriate for distribution among unbelievers. All this literature is available free of charge from the Church Secretary.



Preliminary Announcement

ANNUAL BIBLE CONVENTION

Saturday 6th June 2020 D.V.