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The Link

NORTH ROAD CHAPEL

BIDEFORD

THE LORD'S DAY

Part 17

“The way of peace they know not; and there is no judgment in their goings: they have made them crooked paths: whosoever goeth therein shall not know peace. Therefore is judgment far from us, neither doth justice overtake us: we wait for light, but behold obscurity; for brightness, but we walk in darkness . . . For our transgressions are multiplied before Thee, and our sins testify against us: for our transgressions are with us; and as for our iniquities, we know them; In transgressing and lying against the Lord, and departing away from our God, speaking oppression and revolt, conceiving and uttering from the heart words of falsehood. And judgment is turned away backward, and justice standeth afar off: for truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter. Yea, truth faileth; and he that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey: and the Lord saw it, and it displeased Him that there was no judgment.” (Isaiah 59:8-9, 12-15)

Several previous articles have considered the Biblical truth of Sabbath observance. From the Scriptures, practical instruction has been obtained regarding the use of these hallowed hours. Last time in particular the Sabbath was seen as an ensign to be flown, and a landmark that man dare not remove. It stands as a monument to God and His truth for all time. This article will examine the seriousness of violating His holy day, and the inevitable consequences of setting aside God's Law.

The Sabbath-breaker is a bold transgressor — a most brazen offender. By his very disregard of the day he is denying God His sovereign right to be worshipped, revered, honoured and obeyed. The man who flouts God's day has no true fear of God before his eyes. However plausible that person's speech, however affable they may seem, no truly God-fearing man or woman will lightly esteem the Sabbath. The Sabbath is a badge; it is a sign of true Christianity; it is a monument in the world. It

is also a proof of sincere godliness in a man or a woman, when they are diligent in their observance of the Lord's Day.

Nehemiah reports his experience: "*Then I contended with the nobles of Judah, and said unto them, What evil thing is this that ye do, and profane the sabbath day?*" (Nehemiah 13:17). There are a great number of Christians who will say, 'you cannot enforce Sabbath observance upon unsaved men and women; they are unregenerate; even if they did give some kind of honour to this day what would it avail?', and so on. Is this argument valid? Indeed, is there any ground at all for such thinking?

By way of answer, let some further questions be asked. Is it right to insist that men shall not murder their fellows – should it not be left to them to please themselves? Is it an offence to steal – why should people not be allowed to help themselves to anything and everything? What is wrong with adultery – why such restriction? Why impose these prohibitions – is man not a free-will agent who makes his own decisions? The fact of the matter is that these moral commandments all belong to the Law of God, and are incumbent on all humanity. And Sabbath observance stands among them.

Those Christians who argue about the validity and necessity of the Sabbath prove that they have already dispensed with the Law of God. Some, in pseudo-spiritual wisdom, claim to have replaced it with 'grace'. Failing to identify and distinguish the Moral Law from the Jewish ceremonial system, they have demolished and destroyed the very foundations of an ordered society. "*The way of peace they know not; and there is no judgment in their goings: they have made them crooked paths: whosoever goeth therein shall not know peace. Therefore is judgment far from us, neither doth justice overtake us: we wait for light, but behold obscurity; for brightness, but we walk in darkness.*" (Isaiah 59:8-9). Is not this the state of things around us today? Why? Because "*there is no judgment*", no law,

no yardstick; the standards are gone. Begin to offend in one part, and the whole Law of God is shattered.

For many generations, the Old Testament in its entirety has been repudiated by large sections of Christendom, through the error of 'Dispensationalism'. In consequence of this, many other fallacies – like evolution, higher criticism, and a revival of the old Antinomian heresy – have swept in. The invention of extreme Dispensationalism was one of the most cunning and subtle inventions ever thought up by the Great Adversary. With diabolical skill he planted these pernicious seeds in the minds of some religious leaders of the early nineteenth century (amongst them, Edward Irving, the forerunner of the Pentecostal movement, and John Nelson Darby, a stalwart of the early Brethrenism). This took root and grew as it was propagated by men like C. I. Scofield and other prominent scholars. But the origins of this grievous error can be traced back still further: to Rome, where it is found in the theories and writings of a Jesuit called Francesco Ribera, who popularised this line of thought in the 1580s. It was promulgated by another Jesuit scholar, Manuel de Lacunza in his book entitled "The Coming of the Messiah in Glory and Majesty", popularised in English by Irving in 1826, and through the Albury Park prophetic conferences. Thus, in both the Pentecostal and Brethren denominations, Dispensationalism took root, with its rigid prophetic outline and rending asunder of the Scriptures. These denominations have in turn detrimentally influenced mainstream 'evangelicalism' with their errors.

The false doctrines of Romanism enveloped Europe (and much more of the globe) in dense darkness and superstition for many centuries, until in the 1500s God moved in sovereign power, causing many of its heresies to be exposed. Truth that had been for so long suppressed, blossomed forth again. But to imagine that this was an end of the story is short-sighted in the extreme. The danger to the true church still remained. Not perhaps overt persecution and disruption, but the bringing in of old errors and novel theories, and methods of interpretation, which on the

surface seem acceptable, but in fact undermine the very foundations of Truth. For want of discernment and watchfulness, many have fallen prey to these insidious attacks, and have embraced Universalism, Pelagianism, Arminianism, Antinomianism and Dispensationalism, to name but a few.

It is often the case that error is more convenient to believe than the Truth. It is very easy to say ‘the Law does not apply’; ‘we are under grace’. Hence, the evangelical wing of the church in the main has ceased to preach the Law of God. The very custodians of God’s holy, eternal Law have cast it out, and claim it is not applicable in our day. With what result? “*Like people, like priest*” writes the prophet (Hosea 4:9); “*Truth is fallen in the street*” states Isaiah in our reading (Isaiah 59:14). Truth will soon disappear from a nation if it has been omitted from the Church. The dreadful state of the land today is the result of the Church’s failure to preach the Law. Is it any wonder that Sabbath observance is practically nil in Britain today, when leading Evangelicals have for several generations failed to preach it? Little more than a ‘come to Jesus’ message is ever given to the world. This spineless preaching has utterly neglected the righteous claims of God upon His creatures. This lawless so-called gospel has eroded the very foundations of society. The Creation institutions are practically extinct in the nation today. Yet the Law of God is binding upon all mankind! Instead – what is seen? No Sabbath – a brazen defiance of the Creator’s claims upon His own Creation; adultery, robberies, violence on every hand; moral breakdown of the most heinous kind, at which men scarce turn a hair; corporal and capital punishment gone; law and justice so watered down that there is no longer any deterrent.

The charge for this, to a very large extent, lies at the doors of God’s people. Given the state of the church, it is little wonder that lawlessness is on the rampage. What saith the Scriptures? “*And judgment is turned away backward, and justice standeth afar off: for truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter. Yea, truth faileth; and he that departeth from evil*

maketh himself a prey: and the Lord saw it, and it displeased Him that there was no judgment.” (Isaiah 59:14-15). Without the Law, there is no knowledge of sin (cf Romans 3:20). Then let the Law be heralded forth!

The godly example of Nehemiah is worthy of emulation: “*In those days saw I in Judah some treading wine presses on the sabbath, and bringing in sheaves, and lading asses; as also wine, grapes, and figs, and all manner of burdens, which they brought into Jerusalem on the sabbath day: and I testified against them in the day wherein they sold victuals. There dwelt men of Tyre also therein, which brought fish, and all manner of ware, and sold on the sabbath unto the children of Judah, and in Jerusalem. Then I contended with the nobles of Judah, and said unto them, What evil thing is this that ye do, and profane the sabbath day? Did not your fathers thus, and did not our God bring all this evil upon us, and upon this city? yet ye bring more wrath upon Israel by profaning the sabbath. And it came to pass, that when the gates of Jerusalem began to be dark before the sabbath, I commanded that the gates should be shut, and charged that they should not be opened till after the sabbath: and some of my servants set I at the gates, that there should no burden be brought in on the sabbath day. So the merchants and sellers of all kind of ware lodged without Jerusalem once or twice. Then I testified against them, and said unto them, Why lodge ye about the wall? if ye do so again, I will lay hands on you. From that time forth came they no more on the sabbath. And I commanded the Levites that they should cleanse themselves, and that they should come and keep the gates, to sanctify the sabbath day. Remember me, O my God, concerning this also, and spare me according to the greatness of Thy mercy.*” (Nehemiah 13:15-22).

Note that the breakdown in Sabbath observance was in all sections of the community:

1) Farmers, distillers, those in the food trade: “*In those days saw I in Judah some treading wine presses on the sabbath, and bringing in sheaves, and*

lading asses; as also wine, grapes, and figs, and all manner of burdens, which they brought into Jerusalem on the sabbath day: and I testified against them in the day wherein they sold victuals.” (v. 15)

2) Fishmongers and hardware dealers: *“There dwelt men of Tyre also therein, which brought fish, and all manner of ware, and sold on the sabbath unto the children of Judah, and in Jerusalem.”* (v. 16)

3) Nobles and the upper echelons of society: *“Then I contended with the nobles of Judah, and said unto them, What evil thing is this that ye do, and profane the sabbath day?”* (v. 17)

4) Merchants and traders: *“So the merchants and sellers of all kind of ware lodged without Jerusalem once or twice.”* (v. 20)

5) Even the spiritual leaders: *“And I commanded the Levites that they should cleanse themselves...”* (v. 22)

There was universal failure to properly observe the fourth commandment. If this is not an exact portrayal of contemporary society, then surely words have lost their meaning.

In past studies it has been shown that Pharisical formality is wrong. Essential work with the needy (whether man or beast) must be done; indeed, it is dishonouring to God to fail in such duties, and errands of mercy. It is right and just to do good on the Sabbath. But these missions for good must not be enlarged or stretched beyond the mandate of Holy Scripture. As one old preacher said: “If your ass falls into the ditch on the Sabbath, then you must get it out; but if it keeps falling into the ditch on the Sabbath, then it is time either to get rid of the ass, or else fill in the ditch”. There are many things today that cause Sabbath breaking, which should be got rid of; many ditches to be filled in and practices blanked off that are not in keeping with the Sabbath.

Today, there is practically unlimited Sunday trading and business. Look at the leisure and pleasure-seeking that goes on; and in this there are vast

numbers of Christians who see no evil. They go to a morning service and the rest of the day is theirs for ‘recreation’ – “*Profan(ing) My Sabbaths*”, is what the Almighty calls it (cf Ezekiel 22:8). The Sunday papers, the car, the eating house, sports fixtures, pastimes, social visitations – ‘just innocent pleasure and perfectly legitimate’, they argue. Is it? Does this come within the context of Sabbath observance? It does not – very, very far from it. This is the removal of an ancient landmark, as old as Creation itself. It is the demolition of a sacred and vital monument. “*Remove not the ancient landmark, which thy fathers have set*” (Proverbs 22:28), “*Remove not the old landmark*” (Proverbs 23:10).

The church is principally and primarily at fault. How can professing Christians of this age preach the fourth commandment? Speaking generally, they cannot. The solemn indictment of eternal God is: “*For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them*” (2 Peter 2:21). In this as in all other things, judgment must begin in the House of God (cf 1 Peter 4:17). This Law is entrusted to the Church, which is responsible to declare it to all men. But how can the people of God do so, in the state they themselves are in today? Brethren and sisters, we should pray for them from the depth of our being: “*O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God*” (Hosea 14:1). Until this happens, there will be no improvement in the land.

It is not the case that Christians must get into politics; it is not for the people of God to secure positions of authority, and attempt to change national law. It is not even about joining societies that bring pressure to bear upon the governments – no! None of these things are the God-ordained way of declaring His Holy Law. The means whereby divine truth is to be made known to men never varies; it is the same in all ages. As in Nehemiah’s day, so today: “*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 . . . So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading” (Nehemiah 8:2-4, 8). The appointed method is the foolishness of **preaching**.

Many will protest: ‘what is the good of that in our day? Who is there to listen? No-one wants preaching today; this will never touch the people’. Let such faithless gainsaying be rejected. There can be no doubt that if every pulpit in this country was reading the Law of the Lord, and giving the sense thereof; thundering forth its demands and bringing it to bear upon society; and if all such preachers had their congregations standing with them, attentive to hear, identifying with all that was being declared and **living it out**, it would have a profound effect upon the nation.

The minority of true Christians in any given country may be vastly outnumbered by the overall population, but let that remnant return to the old paths, and practise obedience to the mandate of Holy Writ, and their significance and effect will soon be felt. Salt is never used in large quantities (cf Matthew 5:13). It may take a lot of meat, vegetables, flour, etc., to prepare a meal, but not a lot of salt is required. So in matters spiritual: God does not require great amounts; just a sprinkling will soon make the whole more savoury. But if His people continue to fail in their witness, society will continue to corrupt. This is inevitable if the salt has lost its savour. Then ultimately, divine retribution will be meted out, and the governmental arm of God put forth. No nation, however powerful, however free, however prosperous, can resist this, or stay the inevitable consequences. Where are the Babylonians, the Medo-Persians, the Grecians, the Romans, all the former great empires? They have vanished. What happened to Nebuchadnezzar, Caesar, Alexander? They likewise perished and are now only names on the pages

of history. The much-vaunted British Empire has gone the same way. God's Word reveals how the fall of nations is directly connected with the sinfulness of their societies. The greater their privileges, the greater their accountability, and the greater their fall when it comes.

Consider the ante-diluvian world that perished. God gave them 120 years to repent, but they only scoffed – the flood came and destroyed them all. The cities of the plain ended similarly and “*suffer(ed) the vengeance of eternal fire*” (Jude 1:7). Look at the seven nations of Canaan. The eye of Almighty God is never taken off the affairs of men. Sometimes He in sovereignty and patience allows things to continue for a while, before final judgment comes (cf Genesis 15:16). If men will not repent, their sin is allowed to run its course, ere they reap a full harvest of iniquity.

The same pattern is evident in Britain today: the ghastly crop of sin is ripening. The cup of divine wrath is filling up. The fall will be great because of her great privileges. Think of it – every parish in the land had a church. Much of their teaching was erroneous, nevertheless for long centuries past, the Bible was read, the commandments were taught and generally (in past days) applied. Upon this basis, the laws of the nation were formulated. The country was enhanced by innumerable non-conformist chapels. Almost every street in a town, at one time, could boast of a place of worship. Then think of the volumes of Christian literature, countless thousands of theological works, and mines of spiritual teaching. Consider also the giants of the faith whom God raised up within these shores! Ponder the ministry and influence of men such as Watson, Manton, Bunyan, Whitefield, Ryle and Spurgeon. This is the spiritual heritage – but what of it today? It is despised and trampled under foot. How great is the guilt of this people! For how much longer the attribute of God's patience will be extended to this land cannot be guessed, but this is clear: except the people repent, the hand of God must fall heavily upon them, and all will suffer accordingly. This does not relate to the eternal punishment of sin – that is a separate and even

more serious matter – but to the retributive justice of God in time. In such circumstances, the church is not exempted.

God is patient and longsuffering, but His goodness has not led impenitent man to repentance (cf Romans 2:4-6). God is not mocked. Except there be repentance, the harvest must be reaped. The hour is late; the measure of iniquity is well-nigh full. What saith the Scriptures? *“The Lord's voice crieth unto the city, and the man of wisdom shall see Thy name: hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it”* (Micah 6:9). *“O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the Lord”* (Jeremiah 22:29).

W. H. Molland (1920 – 2012)

“Saints are sometimes tempted to return to the country whence they came out; they are half inclined to renounce the things which they have learned, and to conclude that they never were taught of the Lord at all. Alas, old Adam plucks us back, and the devil endeavours to drive us back, and were it not for something sure to hold to, back we should go. If it could be proved to be, as certain cultivated teachers would have us believe, that there is nothing very sure; that although black is black it is not very black, and though white is white it is not very white, and from certain standpoints no doubt black is white and white is black; if it could be proved, I say, that there are no eternal verities, no divine certainties, no infallible truths, then might we willingly surrender what we know or think we know, and wander about on the ocean of speculation, the waifs and strays of mere opinion: but while we have the truth, taught to our very souls by the Holy Ghost, we cannot drift from it, nor will we, though men count us fools for our steadfastness. Brethren, aspire not to the charity which grows out of uncertainty; there are saving truths and there are ‘damnable heresies’; Jesus Christ is not yea and nay; His gospel is not a cunning mixture of the gall of hell and the honey of heaven, flavoured to the taste of bad and good. There are fixed principles and revealed facts.”

C. H. Spurgeon (1834-1892)

HE ENTERED INTO A SHIP

Take Christ on board thy little ship,
Trust thou in Him alone.
Push from the shore, fear not the waves
That break with sullen moan.
Although thy vessel trembles sore
With angry tossing, more and more,
Still, though the waters raging be
And do increase,
Yet be at peace,
For Christ is with thee on the sea.

If 'midst the howling of the storm
Thou canst not hold the helm,
Have courage, for He will not let
The waves thee overwhelm.
Yet though the waves surge very high,
The thunder roll, the lightning fly,
Thy ship in safety on will sail.
Up-heaving crest
Will be at rest
When Christ is with thee in the gale.

Awake, awake! Be watching aye,
Hope, trust in Him and pray;
And Christ, the Lord, in His good time
The tempest will allay.
The storm is silent at His voice,
Therefore, oh, timid child, rejoice!
The wildest, loudest waves will cease
At His command;
And in His hand
He holds the rainbow of our peace.

J. C. R. Sturm (1816 – 1896)

A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH

Over recent months, waves of protest and counter-protest have swept through many countries, accompanied by civil unrest and indefensible extremes of behaviour. The popular rallying cry and slogan of these movements has been of the format "...Lives Matter", prefaced with an identifying characteristic of the group concerned, whether of nationality, ethnicity, or colour. It is a tragedy indeed, and a dreadful consequence of the Fall, that man should impose a relative scale of worth upon the lives of his fellow-men, and then act upon it in practical or violent ways. Such prejudice and persecution has been in evidence since the days of Cain and Abel; and the same solemn charge of God rings out with universal condemnation upon all subsequent generations of humanity: "*What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto Me from the ground*" (Genesis 4:10).

The Holy Scriptures have much to say on the fundamental nature of man, both in regard to vital differences, and essential similarities.

Equality in Birth

Anthropologists and sociologists would claim that the unequal course and outcomes of people's lives are largely predetermined at birth. We understand a little of what they mean: the place, parentage and poverty or prosperity into which a child is born are likely to have a significant impact upon his life thereafter. But at the same time, there are many unifying features in the delivery of a new-born into the world, common to all mankind. If a babe could be isolated from every external factor, including those that preceded birth, and a wholly objective view was taken, then the shared characteristics of helplessness and hopefulness, vulnerability and possibility, become apparent. "*For we brought nothing into this world*" (1 Timothy 6:7); "*Naked came I out of my mother's womb*" (Job 1:21). In light of which truth, Job asks a searching question about persons of a different social category from his own: "*If I did despise the*

*cause of my manservant or of my maidservant, when they contended with me; What then shall I do when God riseth up? and when He visiteth, what shall I answer Him? **Did not He that made me in the womb make him? and did not One fashion us in the womb?***” (Job 31:13-15).

Equality in Humanity

There is no clearer example of racial antagonism in Bible history, than that which continued to be promoted by the Jews against all other nations of the world – collectively called ‘Gentiles’. This background makes the words of Acts 17 even more striking, as Paul (by birth, a thoroughbred Jew), speaking to an entirely Greek or Gentile audience in Athens says: “*God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that He is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; Neither is worshipped with men’s hands, as though He needed any thing, seeing **He giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; And hath made of one blood all nations of men** for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after Him, and find Him, though he be not far from every one of us: **For in Him we live, and move, and have our being;** as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also His offspring*” (Acts 17:24-28).

This was no ‘new doctrine’, but rather the consistent teaching of God’s Word. Five hundred years previously, the prophet asked: “*Have we not all one father? hath not one God created us? why do we deal treacherously every man against his brother?*” (Malachi 2:10). Whilst the nations, tribes and tongues of the world are of ancient date, ‘from the beginning it was not so’. “*God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them*” (Genesis 1:27). What colour were Adam and Eve? What was their nationality? They were of all ethnicities, and none. These details were immaterial to the fact that they were made in the image of God. And this truth applies to all their descendants. All live and move and have their being, equally, through God.

Equality in Sin

The common ancestry of all humanity is a double-edged sword. On one hand, it proves the folly of inter-racial hostility; on the other, it condemns all mankind to a shared heritage of sin. “*By one man sin entered into the world . . . by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners*”; “*they are all under sin; As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one*” (Romans 5:12, 19, 3:9-12). This is not a legacy to be celebrated. Looking upon the pre-Flood society, at that time still undivided by ethnic or linguistic differences, “*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*” (Genesis 6:5). There are no distinctions to be made along demographic lines – Total Depravity is total in its application to all the human race. No man or woman living can deny, nor escape, their Adamic pedigree. Regardless of its colour or hue, “*that which is born of the flesh is flesh*” (John 3:6) and this fact alone disqualifies all men from the presence of God, for: “*flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption*” (1 Corinthians 15:50). “*The scripture hath concluded all under sin*” (Galatians 3:22).

Equality in Death

The unifying feature of sin carries with it another dire consequence: “*By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned . . . by one man’s offence death reigned by one*” (Romans 5:12, 17). While social commentators may focus upon different life expectancies and healthcare outcomes, the inescapable fact remains: “*in Adam, all die*” (1 Corinthians 15:22). Whether a person’s lifespan is a matter of days or decades, it is still fleetingly brief on the grand scale of time and eternity. “*Man that is born of a woman is of few days and full of trouble*” (Job 14:1). Here is a universal certainty, and great leveller of men. All are equally under sentence of

death, and equal in the act of death. They depart, naked as they came, taking nothing with them (cf Job 1:21, 1 Timothy 6:7, Ecclesiastes 5:15-16). Physical differences and practical attainments are of no consequence: “*how dieth the wise man? As the fool*”; “*There is no man that hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit; neither hath he power in the day of death*” (Ecclesiastes 2:16, 8:8). Whatever the other circumstances of a person’s life may be, one thing is sure: “*it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment*” (Hebrews 9:27). Which introduces a further point:

Equality in Judgment

The pejorative and adverse categorisation of people by their personal attributes, commonly called ‘discrimination’, goes by another name in the Scriptures: ‘respect of persons’. Holy God is entirely free from such partiality: “*the Father . . . without respect of persons judgeth according to every man’s work*” (1 Peter 1:17). There is thus perfect equity in His administration of justice. And the entire human race will at last be called before the bar of Divine Justice, without exception or exemption. “*For we must **all** appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that **every one** may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad*” (2 Corinthians 5:10). In and of themselves, no-one will be able to plead anything meritorious or mitigating: “*Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in His sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do*” (Hebrews 4:13). All humanity is equal here – equally culpable, equally without excuse – “*that every mouth may be stopped, and **all the world** may become guilty before God*” (Romans 3:19).

Equality in Salvation

A remarkable Old Testament verse reads: “*we must needs die, and are as water spilt on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again; neither doth God respect any person: yet doth He devise means, that His banished be not expelled from Him*” (2 Samuel 14:14). The picture thus far has been one

of universal condemnation and a shared doom. Sad indeed if this were all that could be said. Yet God, who is rich in mercy, has provided a means whereby He – still maintaining perfect righteousness and equity – may deliver a remnant of humanity from destruction: the way of salvation. If this saving work was administered on the basis of any human attribute or qualification – be it parentage, nationality, morality, erudition, or even the ability to ‘choose to be saved’ – then God might be charged with the worst of all inequality and unrighteousness. But none of these things apply. Instead: “*by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God*” (Ephesians 2:8). Salvation is unconditional and free – it is the fairest and most equitable method of all, worthy of God Himself. All humanity therefore, is equal:

(1.) in their **need** of salvation. The words of Christ are conclusive: “*He that believeth not is condemned already ... That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again*” (John 3:18, 6-7). The only possible escape from the universality of sin, and the curse inherited from Adam, is to be transplanted into another family altogether; to be born anew. None are part-saved at birth; none have a natural advantage. This need does not admit of degrees; it is total, entire, and imperative.

(2.) in the **way** of salvation. The Lord does not pander to the whims and peculiarities of men, and provide a variety of ‘culturally-appropriate’ means; He will not accept devotions to a false god in lieu of faith in Himself; He will not allow proud man to choose a way of his own devising. “*I am the Door*”, saith Christ; “*I am the Way ... no man cometh unto the Father but by Me*” (John 10:9, 14:6); “*Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved*” (Acts 4:12).

(3.) in the **cost** of salvation. The lengths to which the Saviour went to achieve redemption’s plan are necessary for every sinner individually and

personally. He, the Good Shepherd, is depicted as going out and searching for one sheep at a time, and suffering all for the sake of each. A hymn expresses it well:

“Teach me that if none other had sinned but I alone,
Yet still Thy blood, Lord Jesus, Thine only, must atone.”

(Bennett)

The ransom-price of a sinner cannot be met by anything in this world, which is why salvation necessitated the Lord from Heaven. The rhetorical question “*what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?*” (Matthew 16:26) does not have a different answer dependent on nationality, or any other criteria.

(4.) in the **application** of salvation. It is not the case that some are more welcome than others, or ‘more saved’ than others; that some are saved temporarily, and others permanently. And ethnicity is irrelevant: “*For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon Him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved*” (Romans 10:12-13); “*Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with Him*” (Acts 10:34-35).

Equality in the Church

These Biblical verities regarding salvation must find practical expression in the church upon earth. A striking feature of the early New Testament church and the gospel it proclaimed was that nationalistic and racial divisions were completely transcended (cf Acts 2:5-12, 1 Peter 1:1-2). As Christ declared: “*all ye are brethren ... for one is your Father, which is in heaven*” (Matthew 23:8-9); the whole Christian family in earth and heaven bears His name (cf Ephesians 3:14-15). Throughout church history, this matter of integration and fellowship has not come easily, being often hindered by earth-bound, ‘tribal’ attitudes. Thus the Holy Spirit by the apostles gives repeated instruction, with explanation: “*seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds* (including

ethnicity, cultural identity, etc) and have **put on the new man**, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him ... where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all ” (Colossians 3:9-11). It is a tragedy to witness so many local churches determined to segregate and divide their fellowships in every way possible: age, gender, employment status; and in more multicultural congregations, by language or nationality. These things ought not so to be. Every child of God has renounced their former, earthly line of descent, and shares a new and heavenly one with all their fellow saints. True spiritual unity in the bond of peace will only be enjoyed as we acknowledge that “*there is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all*” (Ephesians 4:3-6).

New Life Matters

Viewed from a Biblical perspective, there is but one great distinction, which places all humanity into one of two categories: “*Then shall ye ... discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth Him not*” (Malachi 3:18). It is the absence, or presence, of **new life**. This is the ‘one thing needful’. Understanding this enables the true meaning and value of human life to be grasped. This infinitesimally short mortal existence is the preface to eternity. It is the only opportunity given to humanity in which to find deliverance and life everlasting: “*behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation*” (2 Corinthians 6:2). Since this present life is a very ‘limited day’ the urgent message of the gospel is: “*To day if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts*” (Hebrews 4:7). Mortal life matters insofar as it is a preparation for the life to come. Those whose comprehension of existence, whose hopes and aspirations are confined solely to this life are ‘of all men most miserable’; but in the gospel is found ‘promise for the life that now is, **and** of that which is to come’.

Christians concerned with the furtherance of the gospel and the salvation of their fellow man will realise the preciousness of human life, and brook no obstacle to convey the message of salvation. No man-made barriers or distinctions can be allowed to impede the declaration of truth. Paul's testimony and example was: *"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. And this I do for the gospel's sake, that I might be partaker thereof with you"* (1 Corinthians 9:20-23).

For a regenerate man or woman, this present life is a unique opportunity for the exercise of faith and prayer, and enduring hardship for the Lord, as they are called to: *"present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God"* (Romans 12:1). They can declare with the apostle: *"the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me"* (Galatians 2:20). They realise why this life matters – but also, being blessed with a spiritual perspective, how to hold it in balance with eternity. *"Neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy"* (Acts 20:24), was Paul's testimony. And to give the last word to the Saviour: *"He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal. If any man serve Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there shall also My servant be"* (John 12:25-26).

R. J. Steward

“...when we begin to grope after God if perchance we may find Him, something strange and wonderful happens. As we draw near to the ancient Source of our being, we find that we are no longer learned or ignorant, modern or old-fashioned, crude or cultured, white or colored;

in that awesome Presence we are just men. Artificial distinctions fade away. Thousands of years of education disappear in a moment and we stand again where Adam and Eve stood after the Fall, where Cain stood, and Abel, outside the Garden, frightened and undone and fugitive from the terror of the broken law. ... the soul of man does not change fundamentally, no matter how external conditions may change. The aborigine in his hut, the college professor in his study, the truck driver in the bedlam of city traffic, have all the same basic needs: to be rid of their sins, to obtain eternal life and to be brought into communion with God. ... Be it remembered that the great essential facts have not changed. Men are still what they were and the Son of Man is forever who and what He was. He calls to the eternal in us. Deep calls unto deep, and the call, if it is heard at all, is heard by that in us which is neither savage nor civilized, old nor young, Western nor Oriental, but simply human and once made in the image of God.”

A. W. Tozer (1897 – 1963)

A Short
History of
North Road
Chapel

The image shows the front cover of a booklet. The title is written in a purple serif font. At the bottom, the church's name is printed in a smaller purple font, with a horizontal line above it.

NORTH ROAD CHAPEL
BIDEFORD

A brief historical overview of the cause of truth at North Road, Bideford was prepared to accompany the church’s website. This has been expanded to include additional information, illustrations and photographs, and is now available in booklet form, free of charge, from the church secretary. A5-format, 42 pages, colour illustrations.

“For ask now of the days that are past, which were before thee...”
(Deuteronomy 4:32)

EDITORIAL

A sad feature of 2020 in the life of many churches has been the number of persons ‘forsaking the assembling of themselves together’ for dubious reasons. Some are absent from their churches in protest **against** measures and safeguards being enforced; some are absent in protest at a **lack** of measures and safeguards being applied; still others are absent in protest at the unreality or unsuitability of alternative service arrangements, or online meetings. Whatever the individual arguments may be, the outcome is the same – and highly self-injurious.

There are many absentees who, in former times, would have boasted of their loyalty and determination to attend – whatever the opposition, the difficulties, or the cost. But God has not required such extremes of self-sacrifice; only some temporary and minor inconveniences. To such persons we ask, in borrowed words: ‘if the Lord had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? How much rather then, when He saith to thee, do some small thing?’

In the goodness of God, improving circumstances in the United Kingdom have enabled the restoration of public gatherings, with some conditions. There is a possibility that this situation may change, and assembly again become legally or morally unwarrantable. If so – what a tragedy for those who missed the opportunity for corporate worship while it lasted! The same principle applies more generally: “*for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth*” (Proverbs 27:1). There is a finite number of sabbath days appointed for this earth; there is an even smaller number to be experienced in an individual’s lifetime. None can tell how far through that gracious allowance they have already run; none may say how many Lord’s Days remain to them. Then let believers ensure that they spend every one, to the utmost of their ability, to the glory of God; and upon this point, cast not away their resolve, ‘for it hath great recompense of reward’.