

new covenant Voice

And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, (Behold me), here I am.

*Genesis 22:1
(margin)*

But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to GOD the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect and to JESUS the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel See that ye refuse not him that speaketh

HEBREWS 12:22-25

HEADCOVERING

GEORGE W. NORTH

This article is an edited transcript of ministry given at the Ladies Day Meeting at the Bracknell Fellowship in March 1989. It was followed by a Question and Answer session - copies of which can be obtained on request by sending a stamped addressed envelope to Emmaus Print Ministries.

HEADCOVERING

As you will know, I have been asked to speak on this subject. It is not a subject I normally take - I suppose I have only spoken on it about four times in my life. You will know that many years ago I wrote about it; my beliefs about the matter have not been changed or modulated or modernized. This morning, someone prayed, 'that we may receive Thy word'; let us consider it together.

It is not usual these days to do this, and the church that does so must understand that it is in a minority. You must understand also that in these things you are in a minority. You must understand also that those who baptize by immersion in water are a minority - even among evangelicals. Likewise those who believe that you should be baptized in the Holy Ghost are in a minority, and among all these, they who observe the truth of headcovering are in a still smaller minority. You must understand that this isn't a subject for women only, but for the whole church, both men and women are included in it. It is not an ordination for women specifically but for the whole church. The tragedy is that men try to shrug it off. It's almost like the attitude of many men where babies are concerned; men shrug them off: women have them.

GIVE NO OFFENCE

Let us together look at scriptures you may have already noticed. Firstly let us note that chapter divisions of the Bible are not inspired. Originally there was no such thing as chapterisation or versification of any of the books of the Bible.

Now turn with me to the 10th chapter of 1 Corinthians. In verse 32, Paul says, 'Give no offence either to the Jews or to the Greeks or to the Church of God'. The last phrase is the most important for us now - we are to give no offence to the true Church of God. Paul is not thinking of the church as a building, he is talking about the true Church which is Christ's body, and this is how he classifies the people of the earth: Jews, Greeks, the Church: There is nothing here about English, Americans or Zimbabweans, or Arabs. That is not the division that God sees amongst men. Ethnically you and I are either Jew or Gentile, but if we're members of the Church, we are neither. Nationality - British, American,

Canadian, whatever - no longer matters. Paul sums it up in the Acts when he says God has made of one all the nations of men on this earth. By regeneration God who made one so that we are of one has made us one. You and I are not to offend the Church. 'Offend' here means 'cause to stumble' (v 33) 'I also PLEASE all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many that they may be saved'. You and I are to seek the profit of all men, especially the Church and not cause the Church to stumble. But does not wearing a hat in church offend many members? Yes, but Paul does not quite mean that kind of offence, he means offence against the truth. It is not possible to keep the commands of truth and at the same time appeal against that truth. Jesus often offended people with the truth. He didn't care if He offended people by calling them swine, or whited sepulchres, if they were, that they were. That doesn't mean we are to go around calling people names, or causing offence for the sake of causing offence. To hide disobedience under the excuse, 'Well I don't want to offend Mrs. So-and-so, or go against what the elders of this particular church think', is wrong. We should question what part fear, or self-reputation has in this attitude.

HEADSHIP

In chapter 11, Paul goes on, 'Be ye followers of me, even as I am of Christ. Now I praise you brethren, that you remember me in all things and keep the ordinances as I delivered them to you'. 'But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of every woman is the man, and the head of Christ is God'. From this it is obvious that this subject is all about headship. Let us continue: 'Every man praying or prophesying having his head covered, dishonours his head'. What would you have thought of me if I had brought my hat with me this morning and sat here preaching to you with my hat on? You would have been excused if you had thought I had gone mad, or more generously than that, I was unwell, or I was deliberately dishonouring all the ladies present. (I was taught to raise my hat to ladies, by the way - I still do.) Much more seriously still, I would be guilty of deliberately dishonouring Christ. Would you think that this was absolutely out of order and reprehensible, or would you not? What would you truly have thought and perhaps said?

Years ago this was once brought home very forcibly to hearts in our church in Bradford. One of the elders came into the meeting one Sunday bringing a hat and when he stood up to preach he donned the hat. Everybody was astounded. After a moment or two, he said, 'Well, that is how I would think if a woman came into this meeting without a hat'. Let the lesson sink home! If I were to preach or pray or prophesy with my head covered, I would be dishonouring Jesus Christ, my Head. The man does not wear the hat because as well as

being the head of the Church, Jesus Christ is also his direct head. Paul continues, 'But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered, dishonoureth her head, for that is even all one as if she were shaven. If the woman be not covered, let her also be shorn'. Now, by any standards, that latter statement is an apostolic judgement, isn't it? It would certainly offend a woman most terribly if her head was compulsorily shaved. So we now see more clearly what he meant by giving an offence. She offends against God who set the divine order, she offends against the male, her head, she offends against all sense of propriety. 'But if it is shameful for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her be covered'. All too readily we accept alterations to the ordinances of God in our churches these days. I would regard it as a shame for my wife or my daughters (and to the whole family) if their heads were shaven.

COVERING

We now come to the much-used word 'covering'. 'For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God, but the woman is the glory of the man. For the man is not of the woman, but the woman of the man. Neither was the man created for the woman, but the woman for the man. For this reason the woman ought to have power (or authority) on her head, because of the angels. Nevertheless, neither is man without the woman, nor the woman without the man in the Lord. For as the woman is out of the man, even so is the man also by the woman; but all things of God', and so he goes on. He is telling about the order of creation: headcovering is a sign of that order. These things are what God says they are, not Paul's opinion or Jewish practises. What men may teach contrary to God's Word should not interest or influence us one little bit.

What is written in the Book counts, we shall all be judged on this when we stand before God, and since this is so unmistakably plain, He cannot but count us rebels if we do not obey.

A British Telecom communication arrived at our flat this morning. I read it through, and finished up not knowing what they were talking about, or getting at, though I'm sure they think they put it plainly. I made a guess at it, a good one I hope, and shall return it to them in due course. Unlike that, this passage is put quite plainly. The illustration brings out the seriousness of the matter so starkly to our minds that to ignore it can only mean that we refuse to see it. The contrast is set in what we would not usually wish to talk about very much in polite circles. This alone should make us realize that what Paul is bringing out must be a very serious matter before God. But those who take it seriously will be in a minority, and a dwindling one. Numbers do not count though, truth is not served or proved by majorities or minorities of believers.

At the beginning of this chapter we are bidden by Paul to follow him. This kind of exhortation is fairly rare in his writings. We ought therefore to regard this passage as being of some, if not special importance. Whatever his intention was by this, we may be certain he did not intend man to change the meaning of his words or imply that at this point he was

being Jewish instead of Christian.

There are those who say: 'This 'covering' is nothing else than another way of speaking about the hair'. Really! Let us read the passage according to that suggestion. Verse 4 - 'Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered with hair dishonoureth his head'. Oh no! Verses 5 and 6 - 'Every woman that prayeth or prophesieth without hair on her head dishonoureth her head ... if the woman has no hair let her hair be cut off'. What can that mean? It just does not make sense and yet Paul adjures us to follow him as he was following Christ. Were both he and Christ talking nonsense?

V:13. Paul now appeals to comeliness. Is it comely for a woman to pray to God without being covered with hair? V:15. If a woman have a long covering it is a glory to her, for her covering is given her for hair, to say the least it is very bad writing and does not make sense. Like all ordinations, headcovering was given to the Church as a sign, and to the woman was given the privilege of showing it before God and men and devils. It is not a relic of a past culture any more that water baptism is a relic of a past culture. Headcovering is no less an ordination than baptism and ought to be regarded as of equal significance and perhaps even of greater significance. For baptism testifies of something Christ did, whereas headcovering testifies of the order in the Godhead. Because of that order Christ came to earth and did what He did. Headcovering is not an example of male dominion or of male chauvinism. By insisting that his females be covered, the male is not declaring that he is the boss and that the female is inferior, it has nothing to do with that. The book says (v11): 'The man is not without the woman, neither is the woman without the man'. Without the women there wouldn't be any men on the earth, and without the man, there wouldn't be any women. Paul is going back to the order in creation, he is not enforcing mans ideas.

GOD'S ORDER

It is a fact that God made Adam first. Headcovering is our assent to and declaration of the fact that we believe in God and the order in God and in creation and God's order in creation. In the Bible Adam gets the blame (Romans 5:12) for letting sin into the earth - 'As through one man sin came into the world'. It wasn't Adam who started it though. It was Eve who took the fruit, it was she who handed it to Adam - poor weak creature that he was. Surely that must be a testimony that he loved her - he chose her - wrongly of course, but wasn't it proof, if proof be needed, that it was she who was in the leading and dominant position? Adam had to bear the blame though, and in the eyes of God that is where the main blame still lies in this matter of headcovering. Every man is responsible before God to make sure that his wife keeps her head covered when they come together with others in church. All sorts of questions can crop up about this, but though earnest, they can only be academic, and not one from a rebellious spirit. If a woman does not have a husband she is under her father's jurisdiction, she should obey his wishes. This is not to do with a particular man, but with a principle of truth. If she has no father she should consider herself to be under the elders' authority. There's order in God, an order in

creation and an order in the Church, for this reason there are also ordinances, and Paul is dealing with an ordinance here.

If the ordinance was the other way about, and the command and the custom was that the man should cover his head, I would not demur but wear my hat in the gathering without a murmur, but the privilege is denied men. To the ladies is given the privilege of bearing before God what He wants to see - namely the sign of the Church's submission to Him. Whether or not men want to see it is irrelevant, that has nothing to do with it. You that are parents look for signs of submission in your children do you not? The worst thing that can happen in your household is that there should be signs of rebellion against your authority among your children. Children are rebellious, a look, or even an attitude, can show it, they don't have to say, 'I defy you', you know it's there and it grieves you to the heart.

SUBMISSION

In the Church God is looking for all the signs of submission to His wishes and co-operation with Him: He is not seeking to enforce rules. No pastor of a church ought to enforce the rule that women wore hats, or some sort of covering on their heads, he should not find it necessary to do so. He should however require elders to agree with him on this matter, this found it would become customary in the church for the ladies to wear the covering. Paul says, (v16), 'But if any man (man, not woman you notice - the responsibility is placed on the man) seems to be contentious, we have no such custom'. In the natural order of things, a woman's hair is for her glory, so Scripture says. Lots of women think their hair is a nuisance. But in this matter it is not to do with anyones particular opinion, it has to do with what God did. He gave the woman her hair. Consider how much of our thinking and perhaps praying, is taken up with ourselves ... 'me, my family'. It's not that we shouldn't pray for ourselves at all, but think how constantly that goes on the year round. How many times do we think about and pray for God's work in other people? 'Me - my - our bills - our food - car - clothes etc.', women are much more taken up with this than men, and usually get a lot more worried about it than men do. Not that men should cut themselves off from it all, as if 'That is your concern not mine' - but this is a ladies meeting! Beloved, the Lord wants us all to see this, and practise it so that it should be the custom among us, then preachers would not need to preach about it.

In the order of the Godhead in eternity, and of mankind in creation and in relation to the Church as set out in this chapter, God is the head of Christ, Christ is the head of the man, and man is the head of the woman. The first part of the statement we need not to consider beyond this one point: though Christ the Son was born a human and was in all points entirely submissive to the Father, Christ was at that time as always co-equal with Him. Jesus of Nazareth was not an inferior god but the bodily manifestation of God. 'In Him dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead BODILY! By a transposition of ideas we may call Him the 'body' of God of which the Father is the head. In turn Christ is also the head of the man, who was created in the image of God. So He may

be regarded as the head of the man who is His body, in him the fulness of Christ should be displayed. In turn, man was by God's choice first in the order of human creation. In order, and she is the end of the order, woman becomes the body of her head the man. She was built up from the man, not made directly from the earth, she then is obviously the glory of the man. The Lord decided this order, neither he nor she had anything to do with that decision, ours is to obey and agree with all that has arisen from it. Our attitude should be, 'Yes Lord, that's the way it is, and anything else You wish we will do or be, as the case may be and will not fight you about it'. After all, some women might not like to wear a hat because it spoils their coiffure!

KNOW THE TRUTH

The Lord wants us to see His word of truth, and say, 'Lord, ask me to do anything You want. I'll do it'. And in days when men are pushing God further and further out, (and so many churches are doing just that) it is time that He and His wishes should be brought more and more into the centre. Beloved, once you come to the point where you see this truth, and you don't obey it, then you can do nothing else but decline spiritually. Now, if a person has never known this truth, the Scripture declares that God closes His eyes to the days of ignorance, but once in the place of knowledge, God expects us all to act on that knowledge, and respond to it. The obedient must expect unpopularity thought. My wife and I have been in meetings where amongst all the persons present she has been the only one with her head covered. This is not a matter of doing what a church believes or of wanting to please men, but of doing what God says; and pleasing Him. Because people may say, 'You don't need to do that here, we don't believe in it' it doesn't let you or me off. No man can grant absolution for disobedience. Beloved, let us keep the divinely natural, moral and spiritual order, shall we?

Pointing further to the natural order, Paul points out that nature itself adds its 'voice' in support of the spiritual order. He seems amazed that children of God either cannot hear or choose to ignore the testimony. Verses 15 & 16: In this passage he takes up the word he uses in Chapter 1:11 - it can scarcely be doubted that this matter of headcovering is one of the contentions to which he refers. There is great contention in the churches as we enter the last decade of the twentieth century, and this is not one of the least. Contention over this matter is to fly in the face of both the spiritual and natural order, and Paul warns us about it. If a man has long hair it is a shame to him - if a woman has long hair it is a glory to her. Contentions and divisions are either based upon heresy or lead to it, or tend toward it. When heresy becomes customary the group is no longer a church. 'I hear that there are divisions among you, and I partly believe it. For there must also be heresies'. Is it possible that refusing to practise headcovering in a meeting could be incipient heresy? God says it's incipient heresy. All heresy springs from rebellion, not from ignorance, but from truth rejected and error accepted. God closes His eyes to ignorance. Everyone can get led astray at the beginning, and get on the wrong track quite unwittingly, but if we're the Lord's children, He soon makes clear to us what is wrong. Going back to the first

chapter, we see that Paul is talking about a true Church: verse 10, 'Now I beseech you, brethren, by the Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgement'. That is a real spiritual kind, or quality, of church. Perhaps all Christians ought to ask themselves whether or not they are in a true spiritual church. Do not think that to deviate a hair's breadth is heretical and brings disaster, it does not. God is not a kind of super detective with a magnifying glass looking for and magnifying every tiny thing. He does want things right though. Let us beware of having, or seeming to have, things perfectly right outwardly, while being as rotten as a rosy apple sometimes is at the core. Let us not swing to extremes on this, but have things both inwardly right and outwardly right. Being inwardly right do we not, surely, want to bring everything into line with this?

BEFORE ANGELS

In some quarters there is a strange practise of putting something on the head to take communion, or to pray or prophesy. How strange. Most prophecy arises and flows spontaneously, deliberately planned prophecy is seldom true prophecy. Only very occasionally should a person go to a

meeting deliberately planning to prophecy, spontaneity is the life spring of all true ministry. Just to cover the head when prayer is anticipated is a fallacious practise. Paul does not say observe headcovering when praying or prophesying ONLY, he is just nominating two aspects or practises of the church which are more outstanding than others. he is not exempting singing. Aren't hymns to a large extent prayers, isn't all part of the larger worship? This attitude reveals a spirit that says, 'I'm only having to do it because God says so or these people think I should' ...or something like that - which might make God weep. Once we clear from our minds the erroneous idea that headcovering is nothing other than an infliction upon the female of an outmoded custom, it will be easier to bring the whole thing into spiritual properties. The woman has been chosen by God to bear upon her head the sign of the whole churches subjection to Him: and not only before Him but before the world and before angels. Paul does not explain the reason why he introduces angels into church matters with reference to this. If all the women of a local church refuse to keep the ordinance, it means that the whole church male and female are in disobedience. When a church gathers there are at least twice as many persons present than are visible to the human eye.

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THE HOLY SPIRIT IN CHRISTIAN ACTION

GEORGE W. NORTH

In days when so much is taken for granted it is easy for things to be called what they are not. Presumption in such case can be mistakenly substituted for assumption, and the wilderness accepted as green pastures because of sheer ignorance. It is better to define terms.

I suppose there can be no greater demonstrator of Christian Action than Jesus Christ Himself. Given the pattern of His life, and accepting His clearest statements upon the subject, we may readily eliminate popular conceptions in favour of truth and proceed to certain knowledge of the power above mentioned.

Within the first century A.D. the complaint of the risen Christ was that the Church had left both its 'first love' and its 'first works'. Doubtless they were still calling their works Christian action, but the Lord said if they continued thus He would remove their candlestick. According to Christ, works or action are either irradiated light or intensified darkness. The matter under consideration is, therefore, serious.

FIRST WORKS

It can scarcely be doubted that up until the age of thirty, Jesus of Nazareth visited the sick, helped the poor, behaved

Himself wisely, and dutifully virtuous and prayerful. Who can doubt that He was loving and generous in all the variety of pious behaviour and laudable action accepted as Christian today? But apparently this was insignificant and warranted no special mention in Holy Writ. It was all done before the Christian era began, and Jesus continued in it in all simplicity of heart throughout His life. This manner of life, vital though it is and involving much sincere activity on the part of countless numbers, cannot properly be called Christian Action, it is the indispensable background for it. As yet, the true Light was not known to man.

It was by His experience at Jordan, from which He emerged a seemingly changed person and went straight into a life of public ministry that the true Light began to dawn on men and Christian Action in the face of world need was settled for ever. It was the power of the Holy Spirit coming upon Jesus which resulted in Christian Action - but during His life on earth Jesus Christ only began this activity. Although by the cross He finished the particular work of redemption His Father gave Him to do, He never completed Christian Action (as the first verse of the Acts of the Apostles clearly shows). He was cut off from this ministry, by premature death incurred in the cause of laying down His life for sin. In resurrection He promised His disciples power from on high

- a heavenly endowment - that they might continue the works He had begun to do but had left unfinished. When this promise was fulfilled in them these men and women went into action with amazing world-changing results.

THEY LIVED IN HIS NAME

Now the object of all this activity was to attract and draw men to Christ. The disciples were not told to be workers for a church, 'be witnesses unto Me', He said. Life was to be one long proof that Jesus was Who He was (Rev. 1:13,18) and that He was as active for the salvation and blessing of men's lives as in the three previous years' labours. Excepting redemption they did all His works. In those days all Christians' actions were done in His Name; they could be, for the workers lived in His Name and entirely for His work in the earth. They did what He would have done, in the same way He did it, and for the same reasons with the result that people could see no significant difference between their works and those of Jesus of Nazareth. All of which points to the fact that these people moved in life and power little known among us today. Examination of the facts reveals this to be a direct result of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon them by the enthroned Christ. They were a spirit-filled and empowered people, indwelt and possessed entirely by God.

The Person of the Holy Spirit indwelling the believer in Jesus' Name is the logical outcome of Calvary. Being purchased, I must be possessed; being possessed, I shall have power; having power, I shall perform. Christian Action is the result of a process as scientific as it is divine. The Acts of the Apostles, indeed of the whole early Church, is a record of authentic Christian action. It was all directed by the Holy Spirit toward the conversion of the world and the glorification of Christ who before His departure promised 'power (only) after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you'. As with Himself the desires of youth had to await the oncoming of the Spirit, so too had they to tarry until they were endowed with power. Their Lord sent them His own enabling so that they could do His work.

BY THIS POWER ALONE

Much that is being done in the name of Christ today could as well be done by the educationalist, sociologist, psychologist or welfare worker, who need profess no allegiance to Christ nor require the power of the Holy Spirit in order to do it. But quite distinctly from these commendable people and their works, the Church of Jesus Christ is His instrument for the propagation of His Gospel in the world. For this their supreme task they need that heavenly endowment which is the power of God unto salvation. The Lord Jesus never led anyone to believe it was possible to function in His Church but by the Holy Spirit, and He made making the indispensable qualification and enabling for this nothing other than power from on high. In and by this power alone the early church functioned. When in process of time this ceased to be so their work became second-rate. One wonders in what strata of works the twentieth century Church is functioning. It is quite certain that nothing but a wholesale return to first century power can meet present needs, which

remain basically unchanged from those of our forbears. This power is the personal divine ability of the Holy Spirit, the same yesterday, today and forever. Being present with us He will act in the same way in the modern as in the primitive Church.

The activities of man, however well-meaning and well-organized or well-named, are quite inadequate and completely pagan apart from the power of the Holy Spirit. And the works of the Holy Spirit are so plainly written into the New Testament that no-one need be left in any doubt as to what they are. So, in order to establish our claims to be true descendants and inheritors of the New Testament Church, we must be prepared to furnish proofs other than mere academic arguments and historic ordinances, for the Kingdom of God is not in word but in power. Paul said his preaching was in demonstration of the Holy Spirit and power, that man's faith might stand in the power of God. Patently the fruit, gifts, power and ministries of the Spirit of God alone can result in the kind of action God would call Christian. Wherever these are, the Church is and functions aright.

THEY DARED ALL

It was by such action that churches of people sprang up all over the Middle East during the first century A.D. These all were comprised of men and women born, filled, empowered and used of the Spirit. That they may or may not have had special social, cultural or educational advantages was irrelevant, but they each had a personal experience of the new-creating power of God. Apart from this they had no part or lot in the Church. Each one, from revered Apostle to the 'least' member, played his or her part in turning the world upside down. They built no places for worship, or education, or healing, but lived only for the realization of Christ's desires among men. Obedient to Him, they dared all for His sake, and found all power to meet all the demands such living created.

Perhaps the plea of united hearts recorded in Acts 4 best sets forth the earliest Christian concept of action. Intending this, it is not surprising that God gave them increased power to continue in the same vein as Jesus of Nazareth. And so long as they kept heart-pure on this point all proceeded as originally inaugurated by God. Thus the drastic action detailed in Acts 5, with its consequent results in greater works still. Paul said he was commissioned by the risen Christ to turn men from the power of Satan unto God. Powerless men, however lofty their ideals, cannot do this. Power does not lie in the realm of man's intellect but in men's spirit. After three years of training and demonstration under the greatest Teacher of all, the apostles yet needed the power of the Holy Ghost. And if till then they were so lacking and unfit, where does the present generation stand?

CHRIST'S WORK

How much that passes for Christianity today would remain should Peter or Paul (or, for that matter, any one of the least of the early Church) reappear among us, is open to question. Certain it is that much would be destroyed by the re-introduction of original power, for so much which passes for this is powerless man's pious attempt to meet

overwhelming need. Of course it is worse than useless to pluck up and destroy this if better things cannot be planted or created in place of the discarded forms. On the other hand, preoccupation with second or worse-rate things is a sure way to be unfitted for primary action such as the world needs at this hour. At the heart of the matter lies the command of Christ to be endued with power from on high. Can a person ignore this and be said to be an active Christian? By whose authority and by what standards? Christ's work done in Christ's Name, by Christ's power in Christ's way, is Christian action; the rest is man's.

The Holy Ghost is the One sent directly from the Father through His Son Christ Jesus to carry out the present Christian programme. He will empower all who will seek Him to this end, forsaking all else to do God's will. Where He is so honoured the Holy Spirit will come and glorify Jesus Christ in the humblest believer. And Jesus Christ can only be glorified as he is set forth in power through humans to meet human need. This is that of which He spake saying, 'ye shall be witnesses to Me'. Christian action is by this, and this is that, and when that happens the world will know and believe.

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FOOTWASHING

GEORGE W. NORTH

It is believed by some that footwashing ought to be received by the Church as a true ordinance of Christ, and practised among us as a means of grace. Footwashing is not thought of or advanced by them as an ordinance equal in spiritual meaning to baptism or communion, but they believe it has significance and should be accepted for what they claim it to be, namely an ordination of the Lord. This being so, we ought to define what is meant by the use of the word ordinance: the word means (a) decree, rule, rite, ceremony. By this definition it would mean that the Lord decreed, meant and made the rule that foot washing must be practised or 'kept' in the same way that baptism and communion are either practised or celebrated by the Church. If this is so, footwashing is a rite made obligatory upon us by none other than the Lord Jesus Himself. However, careful examination of scripture reveals that this is not the case, whereas in the cases of baptism and communion we find that the Lord commanded the apostles to incorporate both these ordinances into their ministry.

AN EXAMPLE

There could be no doubt about the ordinance of baptism; in plainest words the Lord told them to go into all the world baptizing ... unto the consummation of the age; baptism is an age-abiding ordinance. Taken up by Jesus as being practised under the Old Covenant, by John the Baptist; it was transferred by Him from the old into the new, and established therein as a basic rite therein. In the case of the communion, the Lord made no equivalent statement, but He distinctly charged His disciples to 'do this in remembrance of me'. There is a possibility that this could be interpreted in a circumscribed manner and made to mean that the Lord only intended those then present to do it as long as they lived, and that upon their decease the practice should end. However, it is clear from Acts chapter two verse forty-two that the apostles did not think so, for they innovated the 'breaking of bread' in the Church. Further to this, in order to corroborate what He had formerly given in commandment to the first apostles, the Lord raised up another apostle, namely Paul, to whom He also gave the same charge. When writing about this in his first letter to the Corinthians, this apostle settles the issue with

these words, 'I have received of the Lord ... as often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup ye do show forth the Lord's death till he come'. Nothing could more simply reveal the age-abiding nature of the ordinance, it shall be done 'till He come'.

When searching for some similar kind of commandment and supporting scripture concerning footwashing, nothing is to be found except these words, 'If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another's feet, for I have given you an example that ye should do as I have done unto you'. In his Gospel, Mark reports Jesus as telling His disciples to follow the man bearing the pitcher of water to his house and there to prepare the Passover in the guest chamber. Later the Lord arrived with the rest of the apostles, and with mixed emotions, together with them, ate the legal Passover supper. Singularly no further mention is made of the water until after the supper is ended. Then the Lord rose, laid aside His garments, girded Himself with a towel, poured water into a basin and washed His disciples' feet, finishing off the process by wiping them with the towel. After that He spoke the memorable words above quoted, exposed and expelled the traitor Judas, and then instituted His supper.

CLEANSING

Had footwashing taken place before the Passover, the Lord would have been following a common enough practice, but it is clear that this was not the case, for we know that Jesus washed their feet after the Passover meal. This may seem to invest the loving ministration with sacred meaning, for it was done just preceding the communion, as it is now called, and seems to be connected with it. The reasoning which could be advanced to sustain claims that the Lord's action was intended to convey permanence may be stated as follows: if the Lord wished us to believe that footwashing was only a social benefit bestowed upon honoured guests by an ordinary host, the time to do it was preceding the Passover when they came in, dusty and dirty, from the streets. Because it was not done then, but was reserved until immediately preceding the Lord's special supper, it must have some special

significance quite out of the ordinary which He purposely gave it. This being so, and coupled with the remarks Jesus made about it, the ministrations must be regarded as having been permanently ordained by Him in the same way as are baptism and communion. If not, why did the Lord so pointedly act and say such things? This indeed does seem to invest footwashing with an almost sacramental meaning, elevating it to the status of an ordinance - but not quite. When compared with baptism and communion, footwashing is found to be lacking in the four fundamental elements vital to any practice, and which alone qualify it to be classified as an ordinance, namely: (1) True symbolic affinity; (2) clear decree; (3) Church practice; (4) Apostolic corroboration.

1. Both baptism and communion are clearly symbolic in nature. There is no difficulty in defining the symbolism of baptism; the water represents the Holy Ghost, the baptizer is the Lord Jesus, the act of plunging into the water burial in His grave, the emergence from the water the resurrection, the fact of total immersion the testimony that the one baptized is born of God and has the Spirit and, from that moment, is in the Spirit. In the same way it is perfectly simple to define the elements of communion: the bread represents the body of Christ, the breaking of the bread the breaking of the body; the wine represents His blood and the cup the New Testament in His blood. When we turn to footwashing no such clear definable symbolism and universally recognized interpretation is to be found. Footwashing was practised by all men as an ordinary social courtesy; it was, is and will remain exactly what it proclaims itself to be, an exercise in washing feet. But by no stretch of the imagination can baptism and communion be called social courtesies. Each of them was specially instituted from heaven. They cannot be confused with normal practises of hygiene or made into neighbourly gestures or social customs, they are as distinct from such things as God could make them. Baptism is not ordinary washing, nor is communion an ordinary meal (see 1 Corinthians 11), but footwashing is as ordinary as ordinary; it has no fixed symbolism or special meaning, for the Lord never gave it any. Men may have given it emphasis and invested it with some fairly obvious meanings, such as daily cleansing from daily sin, or special ceremonial cleansing preceding communion, but all in vain. Footwashing is not symbolic cleansing, it is actual cleansing from actual dirt, whereas baptism and communion, in all their practice and meanings, are symbolic ONLY.

REFRESHING

2. Both baptism and communion were decreed by the Lord Jesus in these clearly stated words of command, 'Go ye ... baptizing ... unto the end of the age': 'This do in remembrance of me'. On the other hand, footwashing was only enjoined upon the apostles in words of exhortation following an example: 'Ye ought ... ye should ... happy are ye if ye do'. The Lord's words concerning baptism and communion can only be interpreted as, 'You must', they are a command; His words about footwashing need no interpretation - 'Ye ought'. In other words, the Lord quite consciously ordained baptism and communion, but just as consciously did not ordain footwashing. He decreed baptism and communion to be ordinances because the truth they symbolize is so fundamental that, without it, clearly the

Church could not be, or continue to exist. They represent matters which are necessary to the beginning and maintenance of life. Baptism sets forth the method and occasion of new birth; communion sets forth and names the life into which we are born and must continue to live. The Lord deemed it to be necessary that these things should be permanently enacted in and by the Church in symbolic form, so He ordained them into it, but not so footwashing.

BUT NO ORDINANCE

3. Following the Gospel of John, except for a reference made by Paul to Timothy, no mention is made of footwashing throughout the rest of the New Testament. This one isolated text concerns widows, and is part of a list of duties to be required of them if they wished to qualify for church membership. In common with everything else mentioned there, it has no sacramental connotations or value, although it clearly shows that footwashing was a common enough social practice among the saints at that time. When the Church was inaugurated on earth in the beginning and it was absolutely necessary that the correct foundations be laid for future practice among the saints, footwashing is not mentioned. Baptism is insisted upon and so is communion, but there is no mention made of footwashing. It is possible that footwashing took place among them, but is left unmentioned because it has no significance in the life of the Church; it bears no fundamental meaning beyond the simple love of polite neighbourliness.

4. As formerly pointed out, the basic things of original Church practice which were given to the original apostles were corroborated and later enlarged upon by the apostle Paul. He received direct from the Lord the same information that had formerly been given to those who were apostles before him. This being so, it is again plainly significant that, although he deals at length with both baptism and communion, he omits to mention footwashing at all. It is possible to argue that this is so because footwashing was commonly held among them to be an ordinance of such plain meaning that it needed not to be mentioned, that although there may be controversy about baptism and communion, there was certainly none about footwashing. However, this is rank assumption and most unlikely, for throughout his writing the apostle is found to be most particular to discharge his duty and fulfil his calling upon all points for which apostleship was given him. One of the greatest of these was the fact of revelation. He was most careful to pass on what he claimed he had personally received from the Lord for the fulfilment of his office and the establishment of his ministry as the chief apostle to the gentiles. It may therefore safely be asserted that he would not have been so careless or negligent as to omit to communicate any vital ordinance necessary to the churches over which he was given oversight and concerning whom he must render an account to God. Stewardship was a vital matter to him, and although it cannot be established that his epistles are meant to be accepted as full statements of all the doctrine he taught, it is almost impossible to believe that so important a matter as a vital ordinance should not be plainly written down by him as such. Upon these findings we may safely say that footwashing is not an ordinance of God for the Church.

EDITOR

P=Poor

The Bible does not teach that the possession of wealth is evil in itself, but that greed and the desire to become rich are sources of spiritual danger and of social misery. 'The love of money is the root of all evil' (1 Tim.6:10). To the Old Testament prophet riches were always a problem. The ancient Hebrew concept of truth taught that prosperity was an evidence of divine favour (Ps.1:3f). Against this kind of view the book of Job makes its proper protest. The psalmist is perplexed by the success of the wicked and the misfortune of the godly (eg Ps.37 & 49, and also Psalm 73 - compare these readings with Job 21:7ff). It is important in our understanding of the Bible that the words 'poor' and 'rich' have in many contexts a religious and ethical content rather than an economical one. This thought is expressed in the New Testament. Jesus teaches in Luke 6:20 'Blessed be ye poor', expressed in Matthew's gospel as 'poor in spirit' (ch.5:3). Jesus is using these phrases to describe a class of pious, hard-working, humble-hearted people who look to God and do not put their trust in political schemes or material prosperity - 'theirs is the kingdom of heaven'. In Jesus' own day, the rich would be represented by the wealthy Sadducean high-priestly families, a worldly group of people who made much gain of their control of the Temple. The class situation in New Testament times, in relationship to true poverty varied, simple devout people whether like the priestly Simeon in Luke 2:25 looking for the consolation of

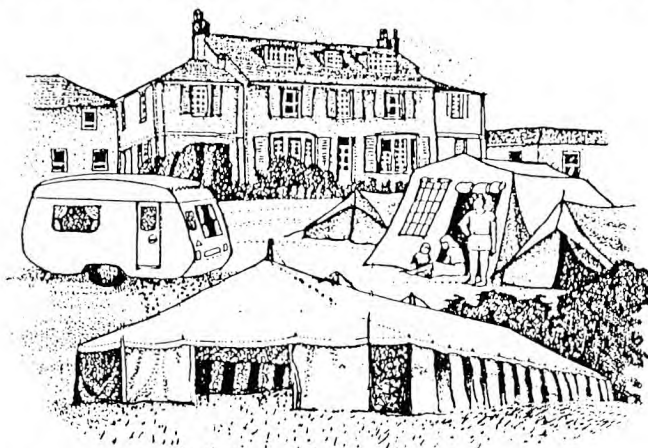
Israel, or the working people, as the disciples were, and the family of Jesus Himself. Joseph of Arimathaea, though a rich man (Matt.27:57), 'was good and righteous'. The publicans, who were Jesus' friends, were wealthy men - Zacchaeus promised half his goods (Luke 19:8). It was not the possession of riches or ones attitude towards them, and the use of them which is the special object of Jesus' teaching. This is true of the Bible as a whole: Jesus is concerned with men's motives and heart, whether rich or poor (Luke 12:33f; Luke 12:16-21). A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of his possessions. Jesus taught an indifference to possessions, 'consider the ravens ...' etc. (Luke 12:22-34). Anxiety in these matters betrays a lack of trust in God. It is because riches have such a tempting alternative to trust in God that a rich man is in mortal danger. One rich man was counselled by Jesus to give to the poor all that he possessed (Mark 10:17-22). Nobody can be saved by the virtue of his own effort or importance, rich or poor. In giving, Jesus stresses the motive once again (Matt.6:2-4; Luke 21:1-4).

It is in Jesus Himself that the church's example of the Biblical ideal of the 'poor man' who trusts only in God is truly found.

Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might become rich' (2 Cor.8:9).

Editor

SUMMER FELLOWSHIP CONFERENCE



27th JULY - 3rd AUGUST 1991

If you require further information, please contact:

Summer Conference Secretary, 34 Radford Road, Leamington Spa, Warks. CV31 1LZ, England

CHURCH GOVERNMENT

GEORGE W. NORTH

The present misunderstanding afflicting the churches about church government has, in common with so many of our modern ills, arisen from a total failure to grasp the implications of the New Covenant. This in turn has arisen from widespread incomprehension of what the New Covenant is, and therefore leading to lack of conviction about it. Belief in the New Covenant is right and good, but is insufficient to give full understanding of it. Faith must lead to knowledge and knowledge to understanding and understanding to wisdom and wisdom to definition and definition to application and here Love must take over lest judgement become the instrument of destruction. Under no circumstances may definiteness be allowed to become authoritarianism or it will harden to pride and boastfulness, and self-destruction; and how shall God find pleasure in that?

The secret of God's success by the New Covenant is that He places it in His children; no one can be a child of God unless God has inscribed the New Covenant in the heart. The life God has planned for us is both initially and constantly derived from Him personally: for this God is primarily responsible. On our part we are personally and directly responsible to God alone, not to any other. Responsibility to any other person or group of persons is only secondary and mostly indirect. Attempts on the part of any other person to assert authority over or interfere with another person's direct communion with and communication from God is an infringement upon personal liberty and should be regarded as unwarrantable interference. No person holding office in a church should be regarded as a law-maker or a law-giver, he is not, and he may not apply law or execute it contrary to any individual's sovereignty or against his or her will in matters spiritual.

It cannot be too strongly or precisely emphasized that the first duty of any person holding office in the Church is to recognize that it is in truth God's Church. We must thoroughly understand that in the same way as the Church is the Church of God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit - so also is the local church in which he functions God's Church. This means that the three highest Officers in the church are the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. Each of them holds His office very clearly and regards Himself as personally responsible for the welfare of every member. The Father created each member in Christ, together they are His family; Christ bought the Church and brought every member of it to life in one body through death and resurrection; the Holy Ghost applies the work of Christ, gives birth to, and supervises the life of, every precious child of God. There are also many other offices and ministries in which the Holy

Three combine, co-operating in and on behalf of the Church in its many members; all these are the sole prerogative of God. Let everyone, especially office-bearers in the churches, understand that the blessed Trinity will not brook any interference with their sovereign rights in and over every individual as well as in and over the whole Church.

In the exercise of their offices and powers office-bearers in a church must recognize and submit to the divine Three for they only bear office in the Church for this purpose. Until a man has learned by long submission and obedience to God the way the Holy Three order and guide and instruct their charges he may not hold office, for if he is ignorant of God's methods within himself he cannot know God's ways with others. To attempt to apply what is considered to be truth to others solely upon the ground of office-bearing, or by the operation of spiritual gift is to court disaster both for the person concerned and for the church so unfortunate as to have such a person over it. Such a person can do no other than become legalistic and authoritarian in his judgements and will most certainly do more harm than good. Lacking the true power and authority of God he will forsake love and gentleness for harshness and personal force. Criticism will arise from his mean spirit and judgement will be made without mercy, whereas even under law God said He would have mercy upon the people and that it would triumph over judgement.

In this world's legal systems there are more Advocates and Counsels than Judges and Magistrates. Advocates, Counsels and Barristers know as much about law and are as capable of administering it as are Judges and Magistrates, but they do not judge and pass sentences on people. Judges judge, Counsels counsel, Advocates advocate; each fulfils his office and does not trespass into another's; let us learn from this. It should be a very rare occurrence for an office-bearer of God's churches to pass sentence upon a brother or sister, he had better give counsel than pass judgement. Self-judgement is highly commendable, but judgement of others should be avoided if at all possible, and only be made if unavoidably necessary; sentence should be passed only in extremity and then only in great grace and humility.

Whenever difficult or unsavoury situations arise within churches and help is sought, or if a situation arises which necessitates intervention by any office-bearer, men and women under the New Covenant should be first counselled to look to the law written within. If not neglected, their own consciences and the anointing each child of God has, are more than sufficient to correct and instruct and lead

everyone aright. Paul's statement to the Romans and John's to the brethren on these principles of action and life are clear enough indications of God's thought and will about these things. He has perfected within man the way for every man to be counselled, commanded and led by Him personally; the governing bodies elected by Him within churches on earth are only established to be as a final tribunal. Paul says that those who have not the law are a law unto themselves, their own consciences being their instructors, accusers and judges. The human law of conscience in every child of God is of divine origin and is very real and powerful; when to this is added the unction of the Spirit it is a sufficient instrument of knowledge for all the purposes of God. Only sin against it by wilful disobedience can render it inoperative and make outside judgement necessary. Those persons making inquiry or seeking counsel of an elder or other office-bearer must be turned first and insistently to their own God-given means of knowing God's will within them. Under no circumstances may any man or body of men, whatever position he or they hold, usurp the position and

person of God or attempt to over-ride or out-talk the oracle within anyone.

In the New Covenant every one of God's children has the law of God placed within the heart and written in the mind by the same hand. Consequently everyone knows God and does not need anyone to teach them this basic knowledge. If the unction of the Spirit is habitually heeded and the conscience kept clear, the heart and mind will seldom, if ever, have need of correction or the life come under judgement from without. God is not only the great God of the whole Church and all the churches, He is also the God of every individual in them. This is why the Church is what it is. It is tragic that we should be plagued in this day, either with overbearing men in office, who know not the sovereignty of God and of the individual, or with men who are too weak to hold the office others have thrust upon them. This whole state should be rectified forthwith, lest what is bad should be made worse and the situations created thereby become well-nigh irremediable.

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STARS AND ANGELS

GEORGE W. NORTH

In the book of the Revelation, given by Jesus to John, He connects stars and angels. The angels of the churches, He says, are stars held in His hand. There is great mystery here. The whole of the book according to its title is the Revelation of Jesus Christ, and He signified it to John in its entirety by His angel. So the prophecy came. It was not the actual Son of Man standing in the midst of the lampstands, nor was it He who was speaking, nor was it His voice that sounded like the voice of many waters. The one in the midst of the candlesticks was 'like unto the Son of Man'. There was no deception here. The angel was not impersonating the Lord, he was appearing for the Lord. Because he was entirely taken over by, indwelt by, and used of the Lord, he was a perfect representation of the Lord to John, but John knew he was not the Lord, but only like Him.

Herein lies a most marvellous truth at which our souls should wonder. John, when he heard and saw this wondrous revelation of sound and sight, fell as one dead at the feet of him, yet by that one's own later statement, as well as by his own inward knowledge, the apostle knew that this was not actually the one and only Lord Jesus Christ in His own essential and unique Godhead. The angel spoke of himself in the first person singular, and the voice speaking out of his mouth said, 'I am', but he was not God, yet as truly as truly the Lord Jesus was there in the midst. How could this be? If there was no impersonation taking place, and no deception being practised, and John was in no way mistaken, what was happening? To use the words of Nicodemus,

'How can these things be?' The answer to that question can only be correctly given from a true understanding of the scripture and of the ways of the Lord revealed therein.

MINISTERS TO GOD

When speaking of fallen angels, Jude uses a suggestive phrase - 'The angels which kept not their first estate', indicating that they forsook that for which they were originally created for something lesser and lower. Angels have many functions; God created them for a great variety of reasons, first to minister to Himself and then to man. The Bible furnishes us with many instances of the kind of services they render to God and man, but it seems that the chiefest functional ability of some, if not all, of them, is to represent God to men. God so created them that he is able (at will) to indwell them so completely, to the point of identity even. At such times the angel speaks as though he is God, referring to himself as though he were God, using His powers and accepting worship as God. In the case mentioned previously, John falls at the feet of the one who was like unto the Son of Man. Such an act would have been idolatrous had not the Son of Man been there. Later when John fell down to worship at the feet of the angel, he told him not to do it. 'I am thy fellow-servant' he said. In this instance it was obvious that the one speaking was an angel and at that time was not so taken over by the Lord as to be like Him, but was functioning in his own capacity as an angel.

It may be that there is one special angel who alone is 'the angel of the Lord', and that he is the one in whom God reveals Himself. This may be the kind of thinking which caused the mistake to be made concerning Peter when he was released from prison by the angel. The miracle was so unbelievable that they said of him, 'it is his angel'. Plainly they believed that angels and men can appear identical. From the remark it seems they not only thought an angel could assume Peter's personality, looks, mannerisms, speech, shape, size etc. to the point of absolute identity, but that the angel was his own special angel. It is certain that if a man can be taken over by an angel, angels or one special angel can be taken over completely by God. It appears that angels are fully adaptable to God's requirements, so that at will He can transform them to any degree He wishes to do whatsoever He wishes.

INDWELT BY GOD

Satan is an illustration to us of this, he is transformed into an angel of light, the better to do his will among men. By transformation, persons are so changed that they almost cease to be themselves any more. This is literally what happens to a man by death and resurrection. Paul knew it, 'Christ liveth in me', he said, 'I am now living by the faith of the Son of God'. Transformation of the mind will cause a man to think that of himself. It is not fantasy, it is actual. He will not think more highly of himself than he ought to think, he will think soberly, so that he does not usurp God's place. He will not become a heretic or a fanatic, nor be self-deceived or mad, but humble, lowly, meek; a slave owned, taken over, indwelt, used by his Lord. It will be his delight. This does not mean that his outward form is changed so that he becomes temporarily or permanently another being. The change is entirely inward, quite another thing from what we are investigating. Nevertheless, although the outward remains the same in this case, the principle and fact of change is established. Seeing that we are thinking of God and angels who are spirit beings with power to appear in visible bodies, the principle of spiritual change is more significant.

Perhaps there are not so many differences between men and angels, for John calls the heavenly beings men, but one of the differences is that whereas angels can be indwelt by God, they do not indwell God. It would seem that the manifestation of God in, as and through angels is only temporary and to an immediate end. The Old Testament scriptures furnish many examples and instances of this from Abraham's day onward. There can be no doubt that one of the reasons they were created was for this express purpose. Their personalities spontaneously and easily adapt to God's needs, requiring no time for development or adjustment. Just as immediately as they are possessed and transformed, so can

they be dispossessed and become themselves again. Presumably during these latter times it would be utterly erroneous for them to say and do things and use language about themselves and others in the same way as they could while being indwelt. It could well be that something of this nature was the cause of Lucifer's fall. What a real step to pride this could be! On the other hand, just as God indwells men, so men indwell God. 'I in Him, He in me' is not only marvellous spiritual truth, it is the exact estate into which we are brought. The indwelling of God in men however, is not the same as in angels, nor unto the same ends. Whereas there is no growth factor involved in the possession and indwelling of angels, there is in men. The privilege of total possession unto immediate transformation and transfiguration is not granted to men. Development in association with growth has to take place; formation of character in the school of the Spirit is God's aim in us. This takes time.

THE GODHEAD SHONE FORTH

The events which took place on the mount of transfiguration are an indication of the vast difference between the immediacy of the change which angels undergo upon possession and that which is normal in man. The Lord Jesus was transfigured before the eyes of the apostles. They were privileged to observe the instancy of change which took place in Him as the Godhead shone forth through His manhood. It was a most revealing and instructive sight, but it was only the first half of a two-part miracle. The second half followed in sequence as the process was reversed and the Lord stood with them again as they had always known Him. This incident illustrates a method God employs with heavenly men, but not ordinarily with human beings. Possibly some degree of it took place in Moses when he spent time with the Lord on Sinai. How much transfiguration he underwent we cannot tell. Whether his face was allowed for a while to retain what had for eighty days happened to his whole body is conjectural. Presumably the effects of it eventually disappeared from his countenance altogether, but however it worked out in the end, there can be little doubt that he experienced a certain amount of transfiguration. This though is quite unusual, and even though at difference times others have been taken over by the Spirit for God's purposes, Moses' experience is unique in scripture.

During this present age of regeneration, God, by His Spirit comes into men in order to transform them spiritually so that from new birth onwards by a gradual process they may develop into mature sons. This is their 'first estate' and must never be 'left', that is, forsaken.

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By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure.

Heb.11:17-19

THE LOVE OF GOD

GEORGE W. NORTH

Probably the most wonderful thing ever to dawn upon a man's understanding is that God LOVES him, and possibly the next greatest thing to this in order is that God has always loved him, and will love him, for ever. Long before a man believes that God is, before ever he hears His call and feels himself being drawn to God, God has loved him. Realization of this is wonderful, convincing the heart that God IS love, loving without strain or effort but naturally, doing everything for love's sake. EVERY person God draws to Himself is called to enter into what God has provided for him in Christ; love could grant nothing higher. 'Walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called', says Paul: every loved one is called to prove the breadth and length and depth and height of love surpassing all understanding. This is our vocation.

So strongly does Paul feel this, that he pleads with us about it, adding two things more, equally important: 'in love', and 'keep the unity of the Spirit'. We may therefore read his heart cry to us as, 'Walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, in love, thus keeping the unity of the Spirit'. No-one loved and drawn and called by God can ever doubt that this unity is love, for it is love which has united him to God. God is the unity from which all creation came and upon which it is based, it IS because of love. Love is the uniting bond which keeps the Holy three together as one, abiding in unity and peace, and it is into this blessed life that the individual is called. The call, though primarily unto the One who called, is also a call unto and into one whole church; this love is unto the miraculous. As in the world, in the church there are many callings, but to us, God's children, there is only one Calling. This fulfilled in us, other callings within the church and named by Paul, must be fulfilled. These must be fulfilled in course of fulfilling the first and greatest calling and only as we do these can we achieve this. Each person must understand that none of us is allowed to choose which calling he or she wants; no-one can be what God has not called us, the calling is of God entirely, it is a gift from Him, and humbly received and properly used it will make us more Christlike. Above all else, as sons of God, the one thing we each must be is love; there can be no exception to this.

UNITY WITH GOD

When God called us, He did so in hope as well as in love, which hope Paul includes in a prayer; worded like this, 'that ye may know what is the hope of His calling': it is the apostle's intense desire. God CALLS us His sons when we ARE His sons, never before, and He THINKS of us as His sons before we actually become sons of His love in experience - this is, 'the vocation wherewith we are called'. The great hope of His calling is that we should realize this, and in that realization should become one with Him in heart to make HIS calling OUR calling. Paul speaks of this in these

words, 'even as ye are called in one hope of your calling'. Apart from this it is entirely impossible to walk worthy of Him or of the calling: it is His, it must become ours.

This is a very high calling indeed, a calling to unity with God for the fulfilment of ALL His hopes, and having prayed that the eyes of our understanding should be opened, Paul proceeds to help us a little toward full comprehension of the truth. Because He has made us sons, God hopes that we will fulfil all His wishes: surely no-one should think Him unreasonable in this. Some of these hopes we can only discover by waiting upon Him in deepest communion: apart from this, these are undiscoverable. Paul does not, because he cannot, mention these; for they are very personal, therefore he addresses his letter to the saints in general; he speaks to us all. If desire be lacking in any of us, what Paul writes is unattainable, he still presses on though. 'Be ye therefore followers (imitators) of God as dear children and walk in love as Christ also hath loved us and hath given Himself an offering and a sweet savour to God for us'. God hopes that we will take Him as our example and imitate Him in all things. What high ideals these are, the blessed Jesus could not have been asked to do anything higher: this is exactly what Jesus did. 'If we have heard Him (Christ) and have been taught by Him', we have learned that He only teaches us the truth as it is in Jesus. This then is the basis of all His teaching, and because this is so, are able to imitate God our Father. The degree to which we succeed in this is the governing factor in our growth rate. We are able, 'to grow up into Him in all things'. If we are to accomplish this we must be love.

LIKE UNTO HIMSELF

God has not struggled throughout eternity to become love and at last be love, He is love and shall forever be love. He desires and has expressed His hope that now we are His sons, we should be like Him. Into this we are called, and because it is He who has called to this, we are able to attain unto the great 'imitation', copying Him as Jesus did. (At this point the reader should turn to John Chapter 5 and carefully read verses 19 and 20, and verses 30 and 31). Could anything be more wonderful? All God's calls are His commands, and the desires He expresses as hope should be received as laws. We CAN do His will, He knows we can, He has planned that we should, and Christ Jesus has set us the most perfect example. This is the mystery of His will made plain; the great and high calling is no longer a mystery, God has revealed it to us. Alongside the eternal purpose still hidden in Christ for us, and all the other mysteries of His will not yet revealed, lies this that He HAS made plain to us. In all things, to the fullest extent possible, and to the utmost of our power, we are to be as God in the earth. Before the foundation of the world, He predestinated us to Himself in eternal sonship that

we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, like unto Himself. All is, 'according to the good pleasure of His will', in which He made us 'acceptable in the beloved', giving us the inheritance of sonship in Him.

We have this inheritance now: we only await the fulness of it - we could not have this and still live on this earth. The knowledge of the fulness of this inheritance is granted us that by this grace we should strive to attain to the fulness of God's purpose for us here. We have been made heirs of all which as yet still lies unrevealed in His heart for us, that by what is revealed we should be prepared for all that which is planned and reserved for us as our ultimate destiny. This lies beyond our present powers of comprehension; by faith we apprehend it though, that like Paul every one of us should be reaching out, toward those things which lie before, pressing on to the ultimate. Beyond the pointers given in scripture we do not know what we shall be or what we shall do following the Lord's appearing and our gathering together into one, that still lies hidden in God. He has kept this concealed in order that we should be relieved of the necessity to concern ourselves unduly with the future age and our final destiny. God wants us free to concentrate on our PREdestiny, which is to succeed in living as His sons in this present age. What is made very plain is that this life is linked with that future age, indeed the ages of the ages yet to be.

HIS FAMILY

Salvation in this age is largely the experience in this life of the powers of the age to come. These were brought into this world by the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, and lived out before all. There is therefore no reason at all why any of God's children should fail to realize to the full all that He has planned for us here before we enter into destiny: if we realize our PREDESTINY to the full, we shall. The inheritance each has obtained in Christ is as adequate for each son as it was for Him. God is a generous Father, by Christ Jesus He has supplied all our present need according to His riches in glory. There is no ground for excuse, God has utterly committed Himself, having invested His all in Christ and placed us in Him that we should attain unto it, He expects it of us.

The Lord glories in His inheritance in the saints, they are His family. When God created Adam and Eve He gave them powers of reproduction, and placed them on the earth they should inherit from Him. His plan was that they were also to inherit children they would produce from themselves. These, being reproductions of themselves, would also inherit from them all their parents powers and abilities. God intended that what their parents had, would become the possessions of their children. From this we may learn that as God likewise produces children they are no less His inheritance, than children are man's inheritance. The only reason why God originally gave power to men to beget man was that though they were man's children, they should be children of God. Our eyes being open to this we know what Paul means when he speaks about 'the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints'. God counts His children His wealth, they are a source of pleasure and delight to Him, He glories in them, with the exception of the death of His Son, they are the greatest of all His miracle. Children are His workman-

ship, His choice ones, His family, His new creation, born for wonderful reasons unto wonderful things. In them are bound up all His hopes in this age and in them He has vested all His wealth for this age and for the ages to come.

THE LIKENESS OF JESUS

According to His election, God has given each of His children an inheritance. He has become to us as the Father of whom Jesus speaks in the parable, 'Son thou art ever with me and all that I have is thine'. All this wealth of blessing is in the heavenlies and it is ours that we should appropriate it and use it: doing so we become it. The saints are 'the riches of the glory of His inheritance', His loved ones, in whom is invested all He has. Our Father has blessed us with EVERY spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ. As truly as the Lord said to His own in the upper room, 'Ye shall know that I am in the Father and ye in Me and I in you', so it is; we are in Christ in the heavenlies. There are no horizons here. As this great hope of His calling becomes our hope, according to the divine will we should inherit all that is ours and live on this earth as God's sons, developing in the likeness of Jesus. God has set no limits to this, Jesus is the pattern, His Father is our Father, His life is ours and as dear children we are to be imitators of God. We shall then realize and know, 'the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints', for we shall increasingly understand what these are.

God brought in this era wherein He planned to beget human sons, by first begetting Jesus the Son onto the earth. By doing this the Father inherited all the riches of the fulness of God in the Son in human life. It was a perfect arrangement: all the Father's fulness and riches were in His Son bodily, and all the Son's riches of glory were in the Father. How much of this the Son laid aside when He became man we may one day be allowed to see, but not now. In order to become man the Son stooped very low. From the moment He became a human being, all His latent Godhead developed in another nature and in a different form from that in which He had always been. The miracle is that He accomplished this without eternal loss: by eternal standards all has been great gain, the riches of glory according to which all the riches of the glory of God's children is calculated. With awe-inspiring humility He transcribed the riches of glory into humanity, and became the great Saint of Nazareth.

THE MIRACLE OF RESURRECTION

The marvel of grace is that before the foundation of the world, and according to the good pleasure of His will, God chose us in His Son. The prospect of all this is so glorious that it could be a little daunting even to the most optimistic and courageous spirit. The immeasurable breadth and length and depth and height opened up to us, were it not all of love supreme, could strengthen into fear lest we should fail to attain unto the revelation. We need not faint in our minds though, all power is made available to us, power as immeasurable as love, 'the exceeding greatness of His power to usward who believe according to the energy of the strength of His might which He inwrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead'. Having first planned and then done so much for us, God will not leave us in despair of reaching all he has given. The vision can be realized, the

heights attained to, the end readily gained, the exceeding great power in which God worked in Christ works in us. All is by the strength of His might, our part is to believe correctly and respond to Him. He who raised Christ from the tomb, working wonders in Jesus' dead frame, also inwrought us into Him. By the strength of God's might, the corpse warmed with life, became animated with power, materialized from within the graveclothes, and left them discarded on the cold rock. Untying the napkin which was about His head, He folded it neatly, placed it in a place by itself, and left the tomb.

The miracle of resurrection was enacted on earth. To men it was the most outstanding of all miracles, but not to God. The physical miracle was as nothing compared with the spiritual miracle which accompanied it. At the same time He inwrought into Christ the entire company of the Church, soon to be named, 'the Church which is His body'. This amazing miracle is the finest example of the exceeding greatness of the power of God directed to usward. We incline to look upon the outward miracle and think only of the resurrection of the human body, perhaps imagining the spectacle, and rejoicing in the splendour of it; but truly that was the least part of it. By far the greater part of the miracle lay in what God did IN Christ when He raised Him from the dead. At that time, the unseeable creation of all whom He had chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, was wrought in(to) Him. It is of this great work Paul is speaking when He says, 'we are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus'.

THE MIRACLE OF GRACE

By His death the Lord Jesus destroyed the old creation. He did this for all men as being just one man. We were not in Him then, He died alone. He lived separate from sinners and died separated from God. We were not in Christ making sacrifice for our sin on the cross. Sinners cannot expiate sin either for themselves or others. True it is that God chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, and that we were in Him then, in eternity past, but it is also true that before coming to this earth He emptied Himself of all His former honours and glories, including us. We ceased to be in Him then, nor were we in Him at any time after that till He had endured the cross and had descended into the lower parts of the earth. He had a Messianic commitment to fulfil and by that descent He in part fulfilled it. Not till He rejoined His body on the third day was the whole body of saints inwrought into Him, and He rose in the triumph of that. During those earth-years we were outwith the Lord; 'My Father dwelleth in Me' He said, but no-one else did. Not even the twelve (or lastly the eleven) who God gave Him were in Him; they were with Him but not in Him. Just before His death He spoke to His Father about these, 'Thine they were and Thou gavest them me and I have kept them in Thy name; of the men Thou hast given me I have lost none save the son of perdition ... keep these Thou hast given Me'.

So leaving them safely to His Father He went on alone to fulfil His Father's will for Him at Calvary. He hung there, sacrificing Himself to God to redeem us, and there He died. His body lay in the tomb alone, not even He was in it, it lay awaiting His return to it from His Messianic mission; then the miracle that together with His death ranks among men as the

greatest miracle of all took place. Entering the tomb in all His mighty strength, God, His Father, summoning all His exceeding great power energized that body and wrought in Christ the greatest work of the resurrection, namely an amazing new creation of myriads of spirits. When Father begat His Son from the dead He also begat all His sons from the dead. At His quickening they were quickened: with Him they rose, and with Him ascended the heavens and were made to sit together with Him in the heavenly places in Christ that they should enter into and enjoy endless ages of learning and understanding the wonders of grace. These are the Church which is His body, the company by which He is identified, in whom He dwells, and over which He is the Head: this is the ultimate miracle of grace. Precisely because Jesus did all these things alone we must exercise faith in order to have them. In God's will and of His creating all is ours, but we cannot have and experience them apart from faith. Truly we are saved by grace, but only through faith.

TAUGHT OF HIS STANDARD

We are to believe according to this standard. Those who do shall know and prove the exceeding greatness of His power, which is 'to usward'. This power which inwrought us in Christ must inwork in us also. Our faith must not be geared to weakness but to power. The demonstration to which we are pointed as an example is the greatest display of all God's energies. The strength and power and might that have been revealed through that death and resurrection, is the greatest ever known or shall ever be known throughout the ages of the ages. 'Believe according to that', says Paul. Whenever you believe, or about whatever you believe, believe like this, for true faith is nothing less. Be large and all-embracing, think big, be convinced of truth and believe wholeheartedly, God loves us with all the love of His eternal being. 'Ask and think according to the power that worketh in you'; God is able to do exceeding abundantly above all man's powers of apprehension and expression; remember we have been included into the greatest of all miracles. Our total inadequacy has been replaced by an all embracing power - the eternal creative ability of God. This power which worked in the dead body of Jesus, bringing it to life, and at the same time creating us in Him, is the same power which works in us. There is nothing God cannot do in us if we soberly believe according to this.

But let no one think wildly, all must be done according to what God has in mind. Everything springing from eternal love is according to divine law, that is, God's purpose. His purpose and His law are one, Law is the expression of purpose. God purposes and says a thing and what he says is law, a fiat, an ordination. According to His desires He purposes and all His desires rise from love and righteousness. His love to individuals is based upon and bestowed according to His love for all. No one's good is sacrificed in order that others may be blessed. It is true that we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren, but it is not true that God will neglect us in order to bless others at our expense. The principle of self-sacrifice for the benefit of others is eternal in God, but is not exacted of us. Demand and exaction must not be confused with command and example. Every one of us must understand that it is not possible for anyone to achieve the heights of God's love in himself, or in the church,

or in the world, unless he or she lives sacrificially: God will enable this, but God will not enforce it. The Spirit within will both point and lead to this end, but we must enact it. The power that works in us will accomplish in us and through us that which is natural to God. He will convert our entire nature and bring us to ask for this from our own hearts, because being taught of God, the mind will think in these terms.

THE POWERS OF THE NEW CREATION

Think of it, the creative power which worked in Christ during the moments of resurrection is exactly the same power which worketh in us. This is staggering. But once the mind becomes accustomed to thinking on these levels there is nothing incongruous about it. Obviously if God wished His people to be what He wanted, and that each should achieve his or her calling in Christ, He had to make available to them the same powers which operated in Him. These are the powers of the new creation, and are as natural to new creatures as are the powers of this present creation in earth creatures. Moreover in Christ there has not been a fall; there has been no modification or weakening of these laws and powers through sin, they are exactly the same as they were originally. Jesus as much as said so when he said, 'If you had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye might say to this mountain be removed and be ye cast into the depths of the sea, and it would obey you'. That is an astounding statement: it is also a true statement of simple fact; He was referring to the powers of the new creation.

The Lord never told anyone to move mountains, He was talking about possibilities. Faith is the law of creation. Mountains were created, placed and established where they stand by faith, therefore if the same living faith ordered its' removal, it would obey. There is nothing to it in Christ's eyes. We would call it a miracle, but that is only because of our finiteness and lack of knowledge. Unless taught of God, creation's spiritual laws are unknown to us, but we are born of God to discover them. Primal creation was an exhibition of love and righteousness. Faith can only work by love; love is both its precedent, and its operable power; without love faith cannot work. Faith is also the instrument of love; it exists in company with love for its instrumentation, that is, love's demonstration according to what is right and good and for love's purpose. Righteousness may be defined as that which is characteristically right and good and necessary and permanent. Whenever we speak of one of the attributes of God we speak of a part of His wholeness - without which He would not be God. Whichever virtue or power or attribute of God is being emphasized, or is in operation, all are employed in that working. In fact it is this alone which makes the virtue - power - attribute, whichever it may be - what it is. Were any one of the other virtues lacking, it would not be God at work. The whole makes that one what it is, all of God is in all he does, each attribute is an exhibition/application ministry of love.

ALL THE FULNESS OF GOD

The range of Paul's first prayer is great and wonderful, and the range of his second prayer is more wonderful still.

Yet in it he does not appear to cover so much ground. In the first he proceeds according to the law of addition, building up his request by the use of the simple conjunction, 'and'; his theme is faith. In the second his method is slightly but significantly different, the conjunction only appears once. His thought this time is of growth, development by expansion, the theme is love. The first prayer is comprehensive, ranging wide over the ground of revelation and faith; the second is intensive, concentrating pointedly on God. First the vision is opened up, then the vision is narrowed down. The theme of love is precious to Paul. He had to speak of faith; it was vital that he should, in any case who can withstand the Spirit of inspiration? God willed and moved Paul this way. But the ultimate is not revelation and wisdom for faith to lay hold of, it is love to comprehend unto complete fulness in God. The second is impossible without the first, but the knowledge gained by wisdom and revelation is intended to lead us to the comprehension of the love of Christ with a view to being filled into all the fulness of God. Christ's love surpasseth knowledge. However extensive the knowledge gained of hope and inheritance and power, gained by faith, all is abortive of true life unless we pass into love. To know of an inheritance, and a power, and a calling, and a hope, all apprehendable by faith and not to love is to fail of all.

God's hope was only possible of fulfilment on the ground of His own generosity. He knew that unless He made His own power available to us He need entertain no hope of us attaining unto what He desired. We could not be expected to imitate Him if we were forever limited to the inferior powers of our own humanity. By His own powers He could be Himself, He could also be a perfect man, but He could expect us to be neither except He help us. He does not expect us to be better men, He expects us to imitate Him; what a high calling! That in obedience to Him and to that a man becomes a better man, is inevitable, but our aim must not be that, lest Lucifer's sin beset us, and we be left with nothing but vanity. All God's children are called with this high calling in mind. He does not set up any man and say be like him, imitate him, mould your life on this pattern. Instead He calls us to Himself, 'I am the example', He says, 'be as I am, copy me'.

For this reason Christ was born. He came to exemplify the kind of life God intended humans to live. He who was made flesh lived as a man to show us how man may live by the powers of God, and yet only be man. Wonderful though this is, it is but one facet of that love wherewith He loved us - when we were not even alive but dead, completely unconscious of being loved, unaware of it and unresponsive to it. Herein is love. Only as we come to full knowledge of this love in experience can we claim to be filled with all the fulness of God. Fulness is progressive. In man it is expandable as well as expendable; in God it is eternally full. May the God who is rich in mercy according to the great love wherewith He loved us even when we were dead, now we are alive, cause us to grow in all His immeasurability.

THE EVERLASTING COVENANT

GEORGE W. NORTH

The Everlasting Covenant is that covenant made by God in God for God between the three persons of the eternal trinity. Into this covenant men are chosen and invited to enter. Throughout the mileniums, God has granted dispensations for ages in which He has operated on behalf of Himself and men according to purposes then revealed. During these times He has worked and still works under or through a covenant brought into being and established for His particular purpose He had or has in mind for that period and those people. He always works according to the covenant then in being. There are various covenants revealed in scripture; each one is an adaptation of the Eternal Covenant and designed by God to bring men into the power and effect of The Eternal Covenant according to His eternal purpose for them. The Eternal Covenant is essentially futuristic and transcendental in being and substance, and at all times greater than the particular covenant God makes with men in any age. Each of the dispensational covenants made with men by Him is an adaptation of The Eternal Covenant not yet revealed in its fulness. This is why throughout the past ages individuals have been able to outstrip their contemporaries, and reaching forth unto the things which are before have entered into relationships with God and understandings of truth and enjoyment of blessing above their fellows - Jesus did and has.

The two chief covenants made by God between Himself and men have become the subject matter for the two

books of the Bible, the Old and New Testaments. Moses mediated the Old Covenant, Jesus mediates the New. John records that the Law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. Jesus said, 'This cup is the New Covenant in My blood' - which nicely explains the major difference between the two covenants. The Old Covenant was not in Moses veins, he simply wasn't God, but because the Eternal Covenant of God was in Jesus' blood, so also was the New Covenant in His veins. He was and is God.

John speaks of the temple of the tabernacle, the place of the testimony in heaven being opened. Paul says he spent his time of missionary service on earth declaring the testimony of God. There are those spoken of in Revelation who have the testimony of Jesus. Paul was caught up to Paradise and heard much there - too great to utter. In the New Covenant the Law which formed the basis of the Old Covenant is written in the heart thereby eliminating the need of further animal sacrifice. Abraham had the Law written in his heart, hence he could act like the Father - this was the promise confirmed in Christ.

The Eternal Covenant has to do with priesthood, the Kingdom of God and the New Creation. The greatest transgression is to contravene the Eternal Covenant.

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BIBLE STUDY

JOHN'S GOSPEL (3)

TREVOR HODSON

SOME NOTES ON DETAILS AND PATTERN

John's gospel contains much specialist knowledge of Hebrew language, the geography of Galilee, Samaria and Judea, details of places in Jerusalem and a wealth of information about Jewish culture and festivals. This has led many people to suppose the first readers of the gospel were either Jewish, or, churches where a large number of Jewish believers were mixed in with Gentile Christians.

It's not surprising then, that John introduced a third pattern into his gospel: **JEWISH FESTIVALS**, and this became a lovely opportunity to teach both Gentile and Jewish believers what the festivals were pointing to, and how they were fulfilled in the person of the Lord Jesus.

THE FESTIVALS AT THE HEART OF THE GOSPEL

John referred in detail to 4 different festivals:

The Feast of the Passover 2:13, 6:4, and 13.1
The Sabbath 5:16
The Feast of Tabernacles 7:2
The Feast of the Dedication 10:22

As we have seen in the previous studies, John does not include detail simply to add interest or colour to the story! These festivals were the backdrop or scenery to what Jesus taught. In many instances the main point of what the Lord was teaching would be missed, or would lose its full impact, if we didn't consider what was happening at that time in the life of this very religious people.

THE FEAST OF PASSOVER

The first festival mentioned in the gospel is Passover in Chapter 2:13.

We must remember that the Feast of Passover, together with Tabernacles and Pentecost, are 'Pilgrim' festivals. This means that, if possible, all Jews should celebrate these festivals at the Temple in Jerusalem (see Exodus 23:17).

This had an important outworking in Jesus' ministry:

At the pilgrim festivals He had a huge ready made congregation of Jews and God-fearers (Gentiles who had found something of the LORD, like the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8:27) from all over the Roman Empire: from as far away as Iran and Libya (see Acts 2:9-11). When John sets parts of the Lord's ministry at a 'pilgrim' festival, we know that this teaching would have been quickly spread through the known world.

ALL EYES ON THE TEMPLE AT PASSOVER TIME

The Passover was the season when all male Jews living in or near Jerusalem had to appear at the Temple, bringing an offering of a young lamb. Groups of men were allowed into the court of the Temple where the altar stood. Each man killed his lamb, while the priests caught the blood in bowls and threw it at the foot of the altar. The lamb was then taken home and roasted for the Passover meal (see Exodus 12). It can be seen from this that pilgrimage to the Temple was an important point of this festival.

We can now begin to see why John supplies this detail followed by the Lord's declaration:

'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up' (2:19).

In saying this, Jesus foretells His death and resurrection, and, at Passover time, when all eyes were on the Temple, declares Himself to be the true Temple.

(The original language takes us one step further. Greek uses one word for the outer Temple (Hieron) and one for the inner Temple (Naos) which has the Holy of Holies at its centre. Jesus uses this latter word and declares HIMSELF to be the unique dwelling place of the presence of the LORD).

READY MADE SERMON NOTES!

Every Jewish festival leant itself in this way - to be a spring board from which the Lord could lead His hearers into the deep things of the Kingdom of God. Each festival had laws, customs, particular readings from scripture, and even set prayers, ALL of which, at different points in the gospel, Jesus uses to declare the good news!

THE TYPES AND FIGURES ARE FULFILLED

This can be seen in the second Passover mentioned in John's gospel (beginning at 6:4). At Passover time, Jews centre much of their festival on the theme of bread. On the morning of the Passover Eve, there is a search of every nook and cranny of the house to get rid of all traces of yeast (see Exodus 12:15). Special unleavened bread is made for the supper (Exodus 12:18) and one of the set readings is Psalms 113-118, which refers to God's care for His people in the wilderness.

Passover time is the backdrop for the miracle of the

feeding of the five thousand (6:5-13) but most importantly the time when Jesus declares:

'I am the living bread which came down from heaven' (v51).

And while the Jewish people meditated on feeding on the bread and lamb (Exodus 12:8):

'Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His blood, ye have no life in you' (v53).

So in the midst of the great remembrance of deliverance, Jesus shows Himself to be the Great Passover, no longer in an outward geographical sense, but in a real inward and spiritual sense of deliverance from the Egypt of sin. The true Bread and Lamb is come ... the types and figures are fulfilled!

THE ANSWER TO PASSOVER PRAYER

The prayer book for that season contains this invitation:

'This is the poor bread which our fore-fathers ate in the wilderness. Come hungry strangers and eat with us!' (from the Passover Haggadah).

Compare this with Jesus' invitation:

'I am the bread of life: he that cometh to Me shall never hunger' (6:35).

Jesus was even aware of the very prayers offered at Passover - but now came as the answer and fulfilment of these deep yearnings.

THE WEEKLY FEAST: SABBATH

A second festival is mentioned in 5:16. This is the weekly festival of Sabbath. From reading the Old Testament, we are led to understand that Jews keep the Sabbath for two central reasons:

1. To remember the day of Creation on which the LORD rested (see Genesis 2:2-3).
2. In obedience to the fourth commandment (see Genesis 20:8).

As generations have passed by, however, all Jewish festivals have become charged with meaning from the three tenses: past, present and future. By the time of Jesus, the Sabbath not only remembered the day the LORD rested but also spoke great promises for the future. Sabbath is a day of complete rest and it was believed that, when the Messiah came, the Sabbath of Sabbaths would begin - every day would become the Sabbath, all labours would cease and a new eternal age or aeon would begin.

(It is even believed that keeping the Sabbath as carefully as possible will speed up the coming of the Messiah!)

For Jews the weekly Sabbath is now a foretaste of that coming life.

LET US FIND THAT SECOND REST

Chapter 5 records how Jesus broke the regulations controlling this day (vv1-16) but the discussion which followed opens up some of the deepest truth of the New Covenant. To a people awaiting the promised Rest on the day that points to it, Jesus said:

‘He that heareth My word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, HATH everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but IS passed from death unto life’ (5:24)

Jesus’ message is plain: the Messiah is come, he who believes can enter into the promised Sabbath NOW! Only the Lord of the Sabbath Himself could bring this about, that we should be judged now, and that we should enter into all the benefits of heaven, the New Jerusalem life, now.

THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES

We know that chapters 7-9 of the gospel are set in September or October. John gives us a clue in 7:2:

‘Now the Jews feast of tabernacles was at hand’.

Again, we might expect that the Lord would use the customs and scriptures associated with this season to minister the good news.

Perhaps the strongest declaration of this chapter is found in 7:37:

‘If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink’.

Was this in any way related to the feast?

Like the April feast of Passover, Tabernacles was a time when Psalms 113-118 were sung by the pilgrims in Jerusalem. In Psalms 114 they remembered these words:

‘God ... which turned the rock into a standing water, the flint into a fountain of waters’ (Psalm 114:8).

Furthermore, the scripture portion from the Prophets for that season is Zechariah chapter 14, which connects the feast with God’s promise of rain (Zech. 14:16-18) and predicts the fountain of water in Jerusalem (see 14:8).

We do know that at that season a strange ceremony took place over the 7 days of the feast; reaching a climax on the 8th day (sometimes called Hoshanna Rabba - the Great Day - see John 7:37). This involved the high priest, day by day, drawing water from the Pool of Siloam, carrying it through the Temple precincts to the altar, and pouring it on to the altar. On the final day the water was poured and earnest prayers for rain were made.

This then, was the graphic backdrop to Jesus’ invitation: ‘If any man thirst ...’

Through the rituals and formulas, a solitary man held out a drink to them, the like of which had never entered into the heart of man.

THE FOUR GREAT LAMPS

Jewish writings of the time also speak of four huge lamps that were set up in the Court of the Women during the Feast of Tabernacles. These were so high that they had to be tended by priests using ladders! It was also said that there wasn’t a court yard in the whole of Jerusalem that wasn’t illuminated by them. The number 4 in Jewish symbolism often refers to the four points of the compass and has the idea of the whole world. Can you find any part of chapter 8 where Jesus may have used this event to illustrate His ministry?

THE FEAST OF THE DEDICATION

Chapter 10 of the gospel is set at the time of a festival that Old Testament students will know nothing of:

‘And it was at Jerusalem the feast of the dedication, and it was winter’ (John 10:22).

This feast takes place in December and is sometimes known as the Festival of Light, or in Hebrew, Hanukah. It is based on that portion of Jewish history which took place between the Old and New Testaments. Around 170BC Judea was in the hands of the Syrians, and in 167BC, the Syrian king: King Antiochus the IV, captured Jerusalem, and set up an altar to the chief Greek god. In 164BC the Jews, led by Judas Maccabeus, routed the Syrian forces, destroyed the altar, and re-sanctified the Temple. The Feast of the Dedication remembers the courage of these freedom fighters and the importance of the Temple, sanctified by God’s presence.

THE DWELLING PLACE OF GOD

Some commentators say that the sentence about the feast and winter is only a ‘weather forecast’, to show why Jesus was in the sheltered area of Solomon’s Porch!

When we look at the conversation that follows, we find Jesus speaking of His unity with God - in such a way that those present seek to stone Him to death (10:30-31). He then uses the theme of the feast:

‘Say ye of Him whom the Father hath SANCTIFIED, and sent into the world, ‘Thou blasphemest;’ (10:36).

At the time when the sanctification of the Temple is uppermost in the Jewish mind, Jesus again shows that by the Father’s sanctifying power He is the true Temple and ultimate dwelling place of the presence of the LORD. Whosoever has the indwelling Jesus has within himself that same presence of the LORD; all that the Jews had celebrated, esteemed, and hoped for.

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By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.

Heb.11:8

Emmaus Print Ministries



34 Green Lane,
Padgate,
Warrington,
Cheshire.

Telephone..... 0925 810345

Editor..... John Norris
Production..... Nigel Cannell

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