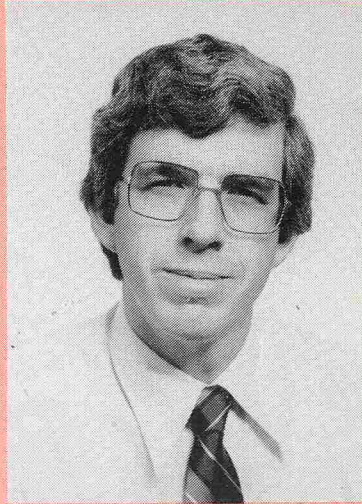


# REFORMATION TODAY'84



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# THE CAREY CONFERENCE FOR MINISTERS

JANUARY 8th-11th 1985

Swanwick, Derbyshire

Theme: Missionary Motivation

- |                      |   |   |
|----------------------|---|---|
| Peter Misselbrook    | — | The Theology of mission<br>in the Old Testament   |
| To be announced      | — | The Theology of mission<br>in the New Testament   |
| Tom Nettles (U.S.A.) | — | (1) The missionary example of<br>Luther Rice & Adoniram Judson<br>(2) The mission theology of the<br>founding fathers of the<br>Southern Baptist Convention |
| Eryl Davies          | — | The doctrine of eternal<br>punishment   |
| Victor Budgen        | — | The supremacy of Scripture<br>and prophecy  |

Please note that the above outline is general in character and may change according to the direction of the speakers, who may by their own request be replaced if their workload forbids the degree of preparation required for the conference.

For details please write to:  
John Rubens, 10 Glebe Road, WELWYN, Herts.  
Tel: 043 871 6803

# Editorial

## *Missionary motivation*

In the brief sketch, *Why Andrew Fuller?* Tom Nettles reminds us that God used a tiny handful of men, and two in particular, Fuller and Carey, to reinspire and redirect the whole Baptist world toward missionary vision and effort. Such an emphasis is long overdue. From our ranks there are those who have left or are preparing to leave for what we call the mission fields. Included in that category is France, Switzerland, Italy, Belgium, Germany and Austria. It is only when we are gripped by the truth of the Scriptures that we will be ready to make the sacrifices required for missionary service. It will be helpful if you pray that the 1985 Carey Conference will be used to increase missionary incentive. It is customary for missionaries on furlough to share details of their work and we look forward to that.

## *Generous giving — do you tithe?*

Why is it that the Mormons and others who are inspired by a false zeal are able to 'out-give' evangelicals? Why is it that they can mount and support great programmes? Why is it often the case that those enthused with a proselytising spirit of gaining adherents for their party are more sacrificial and more generous in their giving than Reformed Christians? It does not take much to see that some churches fall miles below the tithe level. Even when allowance is made for all the different factors which may reduce the level of giving it is still embarrassingly obvious that the support of the home ministry and of missionaries is left to the faithful few. Even more embarrassing is the fact that it is often the lower income earners that are the consistent titers and the generous givers.

How can we explain this? One reason is the decline of old conservative evangelical standards when all new converts were taught to tithe their income in a disciplined manner. When a soul is full of thankfulness for the generous spilling of the blood of Christ they are ready not only to give their money but their lives also. Once a discipline has been established as inviolable then the effects of that discipline will follow and be evident even in times when the soul has become dull or lukewarm. In other words the giving is kept up to standard even if the devotion is not. There is more merit in that than in universal decline. Likewise it should be the inviolable rule of life to attend the prayer meeting even though the feelings and inclinations are not that way disposed. It is often that very habit of attendance that proves the means of blessing and revival. Likewise it is often the very habit of generosity that brings the giver into contact with the recipient who proves to be a source of spiritual revival.

One reason for the decline in tithing is the view that it is an Old Testament idea. We are now sophisticated, say some, and no longer in bondage to such laws. The result of this thinking is precisely the mean and stunted level of giving with which many churches are cursed. Abraham tithed to Melchizedek who was a type of Christ. We are all the children of Abraham by faith and ought to tithe to our Christ who is now our reigning priest after the order of Melchizedek.

If our high priest now says to us 'you have robbed me in tithes and offerings' (Mal. 3:8), are we going to repudiate him by saying that he cannot talk to us in Old Testament terms? Or shall we reply, 'I do not believe in tithing! — I believe in offerings'? But what if our offerings are so mean and stingy that they fall shamefully below the Old Testament? Here we boast of our New Testament enlightenment but cannot even begin to match the giving of the Old Testament saints! That is ludicrous! It is surely much better to tithe as a discipline and after that is established see how we can go beyond that level. 2 Corinthians chapters 8,9 can assist us in that respect. If all earners in our more prosperous churches would match their Old Testament counterparts those churches would have three to four times their present level of giving! We might challenge them and ask why it is that the Old Testament saints with less light gave more than these who claim to have more light?

Another hindrance to the generous spirit of the Lord's work is the criticism that it is not used efficiently. There may be disagreement with the deacons as to the allocation of funds — too much on one thing, too little on another. Let us face it, we will never have complete agreement on the allocation of funds. Happily civil governments do not tolerate tax evasion. We can't

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Front Cover: *Dr. Tom Nettles writes on Andrew Fuller. It should not be difficult for readers to distinguish the one from the other!*

withhold tax payment because we do not agree with government expenditure, or not pay our rates because we don't agree with the local council.

A church may have a mediocre minister but even then it is better to give than not to give. A church may spend more than some members like on the building and property but it is much better to give generously and have premises which honour the Lord. Many are the shabby church properties which are a disgrace to our Faith. A cure for the disease of not giving because of our criticisms or disagreements is to remember that our Father in heaven is very generous in giving generously to all, even to those who hate him.

#### *A 48 page issue*

Not all our readers will necessarily value about 15 pages devoted to Articles of Faith and a Church Constitution. The only way to maintain variety in the materials presented has been to increase the overall size.

#### *The 'framed' comments in the constitution*

The word 'framed' is employed for want of a better term. The comments which appear in boxes and which are printed in italics are added as a commentary or a guideline. This is a most helpful way of making a difference between that which lays down what must or must not be done, and that which modifies or cautions against too rigid an interpretation. For instance some have become quite rigid and doctrinaire about church government. We need to remember that if the Spirit is lost then all is lost. Better a church be governed by a spiritual committee than by men who are called by the correct title but lack the gifts or abilities. We should aim at what is Biblical—but we can only do that if we have the mind of Christ. There are many good reasons why we should have Covenants, Articles of Faith and a Church Constitution, but these can never make up for the absence of the Spirit of God. The same is true of Scripture. It is good to read the word, but better when we love to do so and enjoy it.

Recently the Cuckfield Baptist Church elected unanimously to adopt this constitution, deemed an improvement on the one published in *R.T.* several years ago.

#### *The Origin, Growth, Prosperity and present crisis of the Southern Baptist Convention*

Tom Nettles whose work on Andrew Fuller appears in this issue of *R.T.* is preparing an article with the above title for the next issue. The Southern Baptist Convention is by far the largest Baptist grouping in the world today. The founding fathers, W. B. Johnson, Basil Manly senior, J. L. Dagg, P. H. Mell, Richard Fuller, J. P. Boyce and J. A. Broadus were men of powerful free grace conviction. The early years were times of thrilling power and growth but gradually doctrinal standards have been sacrificed on the altar of expediency. This will be traced out for us and it is our aim to prepare the next issue in a way which will be of special interest to the Southern Baptists. They have 6,000 missionaries and about 30,000 full-time workers representing 30,000 churches. To dispatch a free copy of *R.T.* to every one of these is a very ambitious undertaking. We will go as far as we can depending on the information and guidance of our friends in Texas, Florida, the Carolinas and other areas.

#### *John Gerstner*

John Gerstner recently spent several weeks in London. Dr. Gerstner retired as Professor of Church History from Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. His scholarship has focused on Jonathan Edwards. This protracted work has borne fruit in many helpful books and essays on Edwards. By 1990 Dr. Gerstner hopes to have completed a three volume work on the theology of Jonathan Edwards. This should be especially appealing to English and American Baptists because of the influence of Edwards' theology upon the minds of the founders of the Baptist Missionary Society in 1792. Dr. Gerstner culminated his visit to London with a scintillating lecture at the Westminster Fraternal on the Evangelistic preaching of Jonathan Edwards. A most stimulating discussion arose from the Edwardean concept of 'seeking' as outlined by Dr. Gerstner. All the issues of duty-faith and duty-repentance arose in the discussion as well as the nature of the offer of salvation to sinners. Gerstner's knowledge and depth of insight in these areas holds promise of great benefit to modern evangelicals who would be willing to learn from his God-given precision in these matters.

# Why Andrew Fuller?

Revolution seems to come in bunches. The last quarter of the eighteenth century was saturated with revolutions of a world changing nature. American and French upheavals produced different kinds of democratic attempts at government. The one was greatly tempered by the moral restraints of a recent Calvinistic awakening. The other came with a vengeance upon a society fragmented by an intolerant rationalism. Permanent changes in the New World, England and Europe were born out of their social, moral and economic labour pains. Though the history books focus almost entirely on those admittedly formative and pivotal events, another revolution of remarkable proportions, often ignored by the powers of this age, rippled through a significant sector of the kingdom that will have no end. The shot heard around the world in this spiritual offensive was fired from the pen of Andrew Fuller (1754-1815) an English Particular Baptist. The sound that entered the minds of God's people came from Fuller's book, *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation*. The skirmishes leading to and vesting significance in Fuller's salvo proceeded from what was known as 'The Modern Question'. Is unregenerate man under spiritual obligation to repent of sin and believe in Christ upon hearing the Gospel? — and, paralleled to that, Is the Gospel minister to call upon such sinners for evangelical faith and repentance? And a modern question it certainly was! Not until 1706 had the world even heard that such obligation could be called into question. The man who first asked the question, Joseph Hussey, a Congregationalist minister, admitted that he found no authorities before him who prompted him to ask it, but God had saved this special work for him to complete the Reformation!

As a result of Hussey's misguided confidence, great consternation had reigned for 80 years in evangelical Protestantism and in Baptist and Congregational life in particular. Some had become staunch defenders of Hussey's new-found orthodoxy and made certain that they never called upon any sinner to believe savingly since, according to Hussey, Christ himself had never done it. Others resisted many elements of Hussey's thought but found themselves cast into a very cautious stance regarding the manner in which they addressed sinners lest they encourage them so much that they become presumptuous. A third group opposed Hussey's position but found themselves unable to mount any effective counter-offensive.

In addition, Deism and Socinianism presented such destructive threats

to Christian orthodoxy that much of the most intense and creative energy was spent in defending and repairing the fortress of essential Christianity. The Doctrines of Grace also were under attack (again!) and Calvinists were cautious lest they do or write anything that appeared to acknowledge a chink in the armour of Calvinism. So jealous were they, and rightly so, of God's honour and glory in salvation, that many simply viewed the discussion of human responsibility to evangelical faith as fraught with the appearance of compromise of God's sovereignty.

Who was Andrew Fuller and what made him qualified to tackle the issues of the day? Fuller, a Baptist preacher, served as pastor of only two churches, Soham and Kettering. Having received little formal education he, nevertheless, pursued learning on his own energy and became one of the clearest and most forceful writers and thinkers of his day. Both Princeton and Yale desired to honour him with a doctorate, but he refused to receive them. For approximately 23 years he served as secretary of the Baptist Missionary Society.

Those facts, in themselves, do not necessarily point to a man who would be a revolutionary figure; so, why does Fuller make so much difference? What made his contribution effectual for revival among Baptists, or would there still have been one, humanly speaking, without him? Just as there was no Reformation except the one that, for all practical purposes, began with Luther, so there was no Baptist Awakening except the one in which Fuller played a formative role. We assuredly cannot exhaust the factors that contributed to this but several stick so close to the surface of the phenomenon that they are obvious.

*Factor 1:* Jonathan Edwards had a great impact as an uncompromising Calvinist who supported the First Great Awakening in America. In addition, he became its foremost spiritual analyst. Theologically and philosophically he presented impeccably coherent and compelling arguments for the congruence of man's helpless responsibility with God's just sovereignty. Here was a thinker around whom Fuller and his friends could rally and find a consistent, biblical theology which did not merely tolerate but demanded practical response. Edward's influence first drove Fuller and associates to pray for revival and became so pervasive that by the end of Fuller's life some complained, 'If Sutcliff and some of the others had preached more of Christ and less on Jonathan Edwards, they would have been more useful.' Fuller replied, 'If those who talked thus preached Christ half as much as Jonathan Edwards did, and were half as useful as he was, their usefulness would double what it is.'



*Factor 2:* Fuller did not ignore the broad issues of the day. He accepted the challenge of Deists and Socinians, thoroughly mastered their writings and fired off replies so perceptive and to the point that his opponents found their arguments clearly emasculated. For Fuller, no contradiction existed between a revival/missions type Christianity and a polemical stance toward the vital theological issues of the day. Neither of these involvements caused him to minimize the usefulness or necessity of the other. Biblical thoroughness was the key.

*Factor 3:* Fuller remained a staunch Calvinist. He didn't feel compelled to modify or apologize for the Doctrines of Grace but rather celebrated them as his and every sinner's only hope for salvation. He identified his position with that of Calvin and the orthodox divines of the Synod of Dort. 'I reckon strict Calvinism to be my own system,' said he. He succeeded, therefore, in bringing most of the Orthodox along with him into the great effort for the propagation of the Gospel among the heathen.

*Factor 4:* He was willing to take pressure from Arminian and hyper-Calvinist alike without forsaking or compromising the particular stances that made both critical of him. He could not cast aside free and sovereign grace for, aside from its being biblical, he was convinced that the only thing that made the Christian differ from the non-Christian was the distinguishing pleasure of God. Nor could he cease urging all sinners to repent of sin and flee to Christ, for they must or perish eternally. Biblical equilibrium kept Fuller standing.

*Factor 5:* Fuller, providentially, was part of a group which supported and complemented his gifts. William Carey would not have gone to India apart from Fuller's support; nor would Carey's *Enquiry* have had any effect had it not been for Fuller's *Gospel Worthy*. By the same token Fuller's work would have been like trying to walk with one foot up in the air had Carey not caught the vision of a perishing world and God's providential arrangements for its evangelizing. John Ryland Jr., John Sutcliffe and Samuel Pearce also played important roles in the unfolding drama. Fuller was surrounded with 'many brethren in the Lord'.

So, God's providence placed a special man in a special time with special gifts and a special support group. Fuller's influence altered the course not only of English Baptist history but of American Baptist history as well.

*Tom Nettles is professor in Church history at the Mid-America Bible Baptist Seminary. He is spending a year in England devoted to research. The following material is from a book he has written with the title 'By His Grace and for His Glory', in which he traces out the fortunes of the doctrines of grace, first in English Baptist history, and second in American Baptist history. In the latter he shows how the founding fathers were mighty in these truths, but then came the slide so that within a few years free grace became a cinderella, and, then after a while, locked in a dungeon not to be tolerated at any price. There is tremendous potential in the section on America and we intend to do all we can to arouse a great crusade to have Cinderella liberated and restored to her throne. With this in mind we look forward to a series telling of some of the former worthies and their magnificent grasp of the truth.*

*Presented here is the first half of a chapter on Andrew Fuller. The second part shows how decisive Fuller was on all aspects of sovereign grace including particular redemption. But we must not publish it all as we want you to buy the book when it is published!*

## **Andrew Fuller and Free Grace**

The nineteenth-century Baptist historian, David Benedict, wrote a delightful book in 1860 entitled *Fifty Years Among the Baptists*. In describing the various changes that occurred within his five decades among Baptists, he included a chapter on 'New phases in the doctrinal creed of the Baptists'. This chapter narrated the effects of what he called the conflict between the 'Gillites' and the 'Fullerites'. He reports that the followers of Fuller were considered Arminians by the Gillite men; however, Benedict acknowledged that their theologies differed but little in the areas of election, perseverance, depravity, the Trinity, etc. Nevertheless, their differences on atonement are drawn very strongly. Benedict reports:

The Fuller system, which makes it consistent for all the heralds of the gospel to call upon men everywhere to repent, was well received by one class of our ministers, but not by the staunch defenders of the old theory of a limited atonement. According to their views, all for whom Christ suffered and died would certainly be effectually called and saved. These conflicting opinions caused altercations of considerable severity for a time, among the Baptists, who had hitherto been all united on the orthodox side. The Gillites maintained that the expositions of Fuller were unsound, and would subvert the genuine gospel faith. If, said they, atonement of Christ is general in its nature it must be so in its effects, as none of his sufferings will be in vain; and the doctrine of universal salvation will inevitably follow this dangerous creed (p. 141 *Fifty Years*).



H. C. Vedder writing in 1907 in *A Short History of the Baptists*, maintains less reserve in his discernment of the differences. Obviously unsympathetic with thoroughgoing Calvinism, Vedder characterizes Fuller's contributions in the following way:

Fuller boldly accepted and advocated a doctrine of the atonement that, until his day, had always been stigmatized as rank Arminianism, viz., that the atonement of Christ, as to its worth and dignity, was sufficient for the sins of the whole world, and was not an offering for the elect alone, as Calvinists of all grades had hitherto maintained. Along with this naturally went a sublapsarian interpretation of the 'doctrines of grace', and this modified Calvinism gradually made its way among Baptists until it has become well-nigh the only doctrine known among them.

Such statements could be misleading and make Fuller appear less Calvinistic than he was. An examination of Fuller's theology demonstrates his unswerving alignment with historic Calvinism in theology and methodology.

His doctrine of Total Depravity gives eloquent testimony to his commitment to historic Reformed Theology. From his understanding of its fundamental importance to all other doctrines, his biblical defence of it, and its implications for preaching the gospel one can see that Fuller places the doctrine of Total Depravity in the position of a *sine qua non* in theology.

All divergences from orthodox Protestantism have as their root, according to Fuller, some relinquishment of this doctrine. 'I never knew a person verge toward the Arminian, the Arian, the Socinian, or the Antinomian schemes, without first entertaining diminutive notions of human depravity, or blameworthiness' (Fuller, *Works* 2:662). In short, this is a subject which 'affects all the great doctrines of the gospel' (674) and as a 'fundamental principle in religion' it becomes the rock on which 'almost all other principles are founded' (666).

In his exposition of the doctrine, Fuller's transparent sincerity and earnestness stand out in the initial questions he asks 'Is it true?' Based upon that question, which arises in the midst of a dialogue between Gaius and Crispus, Fuller presents five evidences, all of which arise from biblical authority.

First, biblical passages expressly teach that man hopelessly pursues a course alien to God and will never turn from that course apart from the effectual and irresistible power of God. Fuller had such confidence in the clarity of Scripture that he considered this truth to be self-evident; therefore, his demonstration of this doctrine sometimes consists of several verses of Scripture together. 'And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually' (Gen. 6:5). 'God looked down upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, that did seek God. Every one of them is gone back, they are

altogether become filthy; there is none that doeth good, no not one' (Psalm 53:3). 'Both Jews and Gentiles are all under sin; as it is written, "There is none righteous, no not one." Destruction and misery are in their ways, and the way of peace have they not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes' (Rom. 3:9-18). 'The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God neither indeed can be' (Rom. 8:7). Fuller added other Scripture passages to these as an irrefutable assertion of the doctrine of total depravity.

A second line of biblical evidence which clearly enunciates this doctrine as true rests upon those Scriptures which 'declare the utter impossibility of carnal men doing any thing to please God' (*Works* 2:665). 'To be carnally minded is death; . . . the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God neither can be. So, they that are in the flesh cannot please God.' Man in his present condition *cannot* please God. If nothing that unregenerate man does has the possibility of pleasing God, then he is sinful in his very nature; and the first motions of every action, as well as the actions themselves, partake of his sinful nature. Fuller would not even allow 'amiable qualities' of efforts at the attainment of virtue pass under any other nomenclature than that of an 'unmixed course of evil' (*Ibid.*, p. 665).

Third, that the sum of the law may be reduced to the commandments of love to God and love to neighbour precludes any measure of obedience in unregenerate man. A man away from God has not the love of God in him; and where God is not loved supremely, creatures are either disregarded or regarded for less than the best reason: 'Such love, therefore, has no virtue in it, but is of the nature of sin' (*Ibid.*, 665). Fuller illustrates this truth by telling a story of an ill-begun voyage:

A ship's company rise against their officers, put them in chains, and take the command of the ship upon themselves. They agree to set the officers ashore on some uninhabited island, to sail to some distant port, dispose of the cargo, and divide the amount. After parting with their officers they find it necessary, for the sake of self-preservation, to establish some kind of law and order.

To these they adhere with punctuality, act upon honour with respect to each other, and propose to be very impartial in the distribution of their plunder. But while they are on their voyage, one of the company relents and becomes very unhappy. They inquire the reason. He answers, 'We are engaged in a wicked cause!' They plead their justice, honour, and generosity to each other. He denies that there is any virtue in it: 'Nay, all our equity, while it is exercised in pursuit of a scheme which violates the great law of justice, is itself a species of iniquity!' — 'You talk extravagantly; surely we might be worse than we are if we were to destroy each other as well as our officers.' — 'Yes, wickedness admits of degrees; but there is no virtue or goodness in all our doings; all has arisen from selfish motives. The same principles which led us to discard our officers would lead us, if it were not for our own sake, to destroy each other.' — 'But you speak

so very *discouragingly*; you destroy all *motives* to good order in the ship; what would you have us do? — ‘REPENT, RETURN TO OUR INJURED OFFICERS AND OWNERS, AND SUBMIT TO MERCY!’ — ‘O, but this we *cannot* do: advise us to any thing which concerns the good order of the ship, and we will hearken to you!’ — ‘I *cannot* bear to advise in these matters! RETURN, RETURN, AND SUBMIT TO MERCY!’ Such would be the language of a true penitent in this case; and such should be the language of a Christian minister to sinners who have cast off the government of God (Fuller, 2:673).

The fourth evidence of depravity gathers up the Scriptures which teach the necessity of regeneration. If a man could, in his present condition, do anything even partially in harmony with God’s law or any part of their duty toward God, then a reformation, rather than regeneration would be in order. But, men are ‘essentially depraved’ and ‘the whole fabric must be taken down’ (*Works* 2:663, 665). The Scriptures that teach that man must be born again, that old things must pass away and all things must become new indicate that a mere ‘improvement of principles already inherent in man’ will not suffice; for no ‘degree of virtue in the carnal heart, . . . [nor] anything . . . pleasing to God’ is present that might be ‘cultivated and increased’ (*Works* 2:665).

Fifth, Fuller distinguishes between the nature of the deeds done by a saved person and those done by one not yet born again. Promises are made to those who ‘love God’ and ‘obey him’, who ‘do good’ or ‘do righteousness’ or give a cup of cold water from the proper motivation. These Scriptures give no place to degrees of righteousness in the dispensing of rewards but make promises to every degree of it. The distinction in view relates to the nature of the righteous act. ‘Hence we may certainly conclude that unregenerate men have not the least degree of real goodness in them, or of any thing that is pleasing to God.’

Two important implications spin off from Fuller’s view of total depravity. One, depravity presupposes moral duty of an absolute sort. Two, though man is still a free agent, his will is in bondage to the inclinations of his rebellious heart.

First, if no absolute moral duty rests upon all men without exception, the concept of depravity becomes meaningless. This moral duty expresses itself in the revealed laws of God. All men are required to love God with mind, soul, heart, and strength. To require the opposite would require wickedness, meanness, and misery; to require less is to require duplicity, a divided heart, a partial enmity to God and each other; to require nothing results in ‘anarchy and confusion . . . and cold, and darkness, and misery’ (p. 659) and removes the possibility of God judging the world. But the giving of an absolute law that demands complete obedience renders any deviation from that standard a sinful act by its very nature. ‘There can be no evil in sin, but in proportion to the goodness of that law of which it is a transgression’ (661). In Fuller’s system, God and his law are so united, ‘that non-subjection to one is enmity to the other’ (660). Thus, one sees that depravity, or enmity against God by nature, can only

be defined in the light of an absolute moral duty, eternally binding upon the creature man, expressed in the decalogue and summarized in the two great commandments of love to God and love to our neighbour.

Second, man's will is in bondage. This fact, however, does not reduce man's responsibility nor his free agency. The following dialogue between Gaius and Crispus gives expression to Fuller's philosophical defence of this legitimate distinction:

G. No one can conceive of a power of voluntarily acting against the prevailing inclination, for the thing itself is a contradiction; and a power of changing it is no less absurd. If a person goes about to change his prevailing inclination, he must, in so doing, be either involuntary or voluntary. If the former, this can be no exercise of free agency; if the latter, he must have two opposite prevailing inclinations at the same time, which is a contradiction. And if it were not a contradiction, he still does no more than follow his inclination; namely, his virtuous inclination, which he is supposed to possess, to have his vicious inclination changed. If freedom from the influence of motives, of power to change one's inclination, be essential to free agency, the Divine Being himself is not free. God, as all must allow, possesses an immutable determination to do what is right, and cannot in the last degree, or for a single moment, incline to the contrary. His conduct is necessarily and invariably expressive of the infinite rectitude of his will. The same, in a degree, might be said of holy angels and the spirits of just men made perfect. So far from being free from the influence of motives, or having a power to change the prevailing inclination of their hearts, those motives which, by reason of the depravity of our natures, have but little effect upon us, have full influence upon them, and constantly determine them to the most ardent pursuit of righteousness.

C. And yet you say they are free agents?

G. If God, angels, and saints in heaven be not free agents, who are?

C. But this is moral *liberty*.

G. True; but the same reasoning will apply to moral slavery. If an unalterable bias of mind to good does not destroy free agency, neither does an unalterable bias of mind to evil. Satan is as much a free agent as Gabriel, and as much accountable to God for all he does.

In his development of this distinction, Fuller is convinced that he is opposing the 'Arminian notion of free-will'. He argues against the Arminians without reserve for they suppose a man may act contrary to or even change a prevailing inclination. By doing this, they claim a part, 'yea, the very turning point, of salvation.' Such a view assumes that the sinner only needs helps or assistances 'granted to men in common, to enable us to choose the path of life'. But in reality, 'our hearts being by nature wholly depraved, we need an almighty and invincible power to renew them, otherwise our free agency would only accelerate our everlasting ruin' (Ibid., p. 658).

### *Unconditional Election*

Fuller believed that acceptance of the true doctrine of total depravity naturally implied the rest of the Calvinistic doctrines. A. C. Underwood misrepresents Fuller in his oft-quoted evaluation of Fuller's contribution: 'He was the man who dealt the mortal blow to the system which held that it was impossible for any but the elect to embrace the Gospel and that it was therefore useless to invite the unconverted to put their trust in Christ' (Underwood, p. 161). The natural tendency of such a statement is toward concluding that Fuller opposed the doctrine of unconditional election. Such is absolutely not the case. James E. Tull is much nearer the truth when he admits — 'Fuller remained a staunch Calvinist' (p. 88 *Shapers of Baptist Thought*). This judgment is true in every area of anthropology and soteriology, the two great doctrines by which Calvinism is defined most distinctly.

He places one of his most succinct and compelling arguments for unconditional election in the mouth of Crispus. Crispus, under the influence of Gaius, has been gradually convinced of the truth of the doctrine of total depravity. In a series of statements, he addresses the natural implications of such a view.

Fourthly, If your views be just, the doctrine of *free* and *unconditional election* may be clearly demonstrated and proved to be a dictate of right reason. If men be utterly depraved, they lie entirely at the discretion of God either to save or not to save them. If any are saved, it must be by an act of free grace. If some are brought to believe in Christ, while others continue in unbelief (which accords with continued fact), the difference between them must be altogether of grace. But if God make a difference in time, he must have determined to do so for eternity; for to suppose God to act without a purpose is depriving him of wisdom; and to suppose any new purpose to arise in his mind would be to accuse him of mutability. Here, therefore, we are landed upon election — sovereign, unconditional election.

Though such a treatment from logic compels the careful thinker to Fuller's conclusion, Fuller did not rest such an important doctrine upon mere argument, no matter how cogent and coherent. Divine revelation itself unceasingly calls us to glory in a salvation that has arisen from the mere, unconditional pleasure of God.

Engaging in a written debate with Dan Taylor, leader of the New Connexion of General Baptists, Fuller set out to demonstrate that Universal grace was not necessary as a foundation for universal exhortations to repentance. In the documents which resulted, *Reply to Philanthropos* and *The Reality and Efficacy of Divine Grace*, Fuller maintains that all men are obligated to obey God. This holds true whether the objecting obedience is the decalogue or the command to repent and believe the gospel. If grace assumes no merit, obligation exists apart from it. Universal Grace cannot be the foundation for universal obligation or it ceases to be grace, but debt. A part of his total argument rested on the absolute and unconditioned nature of election. 'Whoever are saved are indebted to

sovereign and efficacious grace for their salvation' (2:544). The apostolic manner of addressing the churches compels such a conclusion:

The apostles addressed *all* the believing Ephesians, Thessalonians, etc. as having been 'chosen in Christ' before the foundation of the world, that they should be holy; as '*chosen to salvation* through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth'; as 'elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit unto obedience'; as being 'saved and called with a holy calling, not according to their works, but according to God's own purpose and grace, given them in Christ before the world began'. But if *SOME* were saved in consequence of such a purpose in their favour, and *OTHERS* without it, the apostles had no just ground to write as they did, concerning them all, without distinction. When we are told that 'as many as were ordained to eternal life believed', this implies, as strongly as any thing can imply, that *no more* believed, and were saved, than such as were ordained to eternal life. Christ returned thanks to his Father that he had 'hid these things from the wise and prudent, and revealed them unto babes. Even so Father,' said he, 'for so it seemed good in thy sight.' And again, we are assured, by the apostle Paul, 'The election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded.'

According to 1 Peter 1, obedience in all its parts 'is that of which election and the sanctification of the Spirit are the proper causes'. By election men are chosen to obedience and by sanctification they are fitted for it. But obedience includes evangelical obedience, or faith, and therefore election must be the cause of our obedience and therefore precede it 'since the cause always precedes the effect' (2:466, 467).

Another strong defence of election Fuller presents arises from its symmetry with the ideals of practical Christianity. Fuller strongly advocated the systematization of doctrine in order that the Christian might understand the 'various connections in which acknowledged truths are introduced in the Scriptures, and the practical purposes to which they are there actually applied'. Assuming that election is a 'matter clearly revealed in the word of God', he sets out to show its marvellous practicality (3:808).

In one of its connections, election declares the source of 'salvation to be mere grace, or undeserved favour, and to cut off all hopes of acceptance with God by works of any kind'. Such is the meaning of Romans 11:5,6 which speaks of the remnant according to the election of grace. The clarity of Paul's language there clearly excludes any cause in salvation except electing grace. By this doctrine saints learn that only the grace of God has made them what they are; sinners cease to rely on their own righteousness and learn that they must cast 'themselves at the feet of sovereign mercy' (3:808).

Second, the doctrine of election 'is introduced in order to account for the unbelief of the greater part of the Jewish nation, without excusing them in it'. God, by his own sovereign design, has clearly drawn a line between Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau, demonstrating that his saving purpose had always

been individual and sovereign. Even so, he has left great numbers of Abraham's descendants to perish in unbelief. The objections Paul anticipates afford 'irrefragable proof that the doctrine maintained by the apostle was that of the absolute sovereignty of God, in having mercy on whom he would, and giving up whom he would to hardness of heart' (Ibid.).

According to Fuller, men in every age bring this same objection to the doctrine of sovereign election. On the one hand the pseudo-Calvinists, as Fuller named them, allowed sovereignty to eliminate man's duty and responsibility since he is unable to believe without sovereign grace. Therefore, men should not be called upon and exhorted to repentance and faith. It is a matter of sober irony that the hyper- or pseudo-Calvinists ran arm in arm with the Arminians in this; for though the idea is expressed in different ways, both groups assume that man has no duty apart from grace. The Arminians made universal grace the ground for universal duty to believe; thus, they deny by implication the unmerited character of grace. Fuller spoke against both of these by affirming two truths: the universal duty of all men to repent and believe, thus rendering the universal dispersion of the gospel necessary; and the absolutely unmerited and sovereign character of grace, thus ascribing salvation solely to the will of God.

Third, the doctrine of election shows 'the certain success of Christ's undertaking, as it were in defiance of unbelievers, who set at naught his gracious invitations'. Far from prohibiting universal invitations, election encourages them and guarantees that they will not be universally unsuccessful. When our Lord upbraided Bethsaida and Chorazin for their unbelief, he immediately prayed, 'I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight.' Though the cities in which great deeds had been done remained recalcitrant in their sin, Jesus will not be devoid of followers. Though the builders reject the rock of ages as useless and find him to be a stumbling stone, he will infallibly be made the head of the corner. Those whom he fed through the miracle of the bread did not see his true nature and did not truly believe; in fact, many of them left him and followed him no more. Jesus, however remained unshaken for he was assured that 'All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out' (John 6:37), (3:809).

Not only does the doctrine of election serve to give coherence and clarity to other elements of divine truth, it is effective in producing proper Christian experience. This doctrine 'is of a humbling and holy tendency'. When the whole difference between the saved and the lost rests in sovereign grace, the pride of man is abased. In every other system, the sinner makes himself to differ, and thus, may 'find whereof to glory'. Some may allow themselves to be unable to repent and believe without the *aid* of the Holy Spirit, but maintain that these same aids are given to all men alike; therefore, faith, instead of being the 'gift of God' issues forth as 'the effect of our having improved the help afforded, while



others neglected it'. In this way, the turning point of our salvation is attributed to our own virtue.

Fuller continues, 'But election, while it places no bar in the way of any man which would not have been there without it, resolves the salvation of the saved into *mere grace*'. This view of salvation tends to 'humble us in the dust'; therefore, it is usually 'the last point which a sinner yields to God'.

A sinner's submission to election means relinquishing 'every other claim and ground of hope from his own good endeavours, and falling into the arms of sovereign mercy'. Because the sinner finds rest to his soul in this doctrine, 'he will not be less, but more attentive to the means of salvation than he was before. His endeavours will be more ardent, and directed to a better end. Then he was trying to serve himself; now he will serve the Lord' (*Works*, 2:752).

Flowing in the stream with depravity and unconditional election, the doctrine of effectual calling, or irresistible grace, blends with them perfectly in the theology of Fuller; in fact, he hardly ever expounds one without relating it to the others. So it is in his *Reply to Philanthropos*.

Section 1 of the *Reply* sets out to discuss 'Whether our regeneration is prior to our coming to Christ' (2:461). Fuller's answer sets forth at least seven reasons that regeneration must precede faith. First, and sufficient in itself, Fuller claims 'The Scriptures not only represent salvation as being "through faith" but they ascribe *faith itself* to the operation of the Spirit of God'. Into one paragraph, he weaves several scriptures which he feels demonstrate this point: John 6:44,45,65; Galatians 5:22; Ephesians 1:19; Colossians 2:12; Ephesians 2:8; John 1:13. Thus, for regeneration to come out based upon any action of ours would not only violate the idea inherent in the concept, but would run opposite the 'express testimony of Scripture' (2:463).

### *Conclusion*

Andrew Fuller was consistent in all his teaching on sovereign grace. He not only championed the cause of foreign missions, but strongly defended the doctrines of grace. The modern foreign mission movement was founded upon thorough-going commitment to the absolute sovereignty of God.

# The Glory of the Church as seen in Ezekiel

The book of Ezekiel displays the glory of the Church in most vivid and powerful ways, negatively in the removal of the glory of the Lord from Jerusalem, and positively in the promises made to restore that glory in future times. Ezekiel is not a book well known. It is a neglected prophecy yet one which is central, full of majesty, of movement and of gripping interest. Once the theme is grasped it is not a difficult book. More than any other book of Scripture Ezekiel stands between the breaking down of the Old Covenant and the introduction of the New. Jeremiah was contemporary with Ezekiel but far more than Jeremiah, Ezekiel looks into the future. He concludes by describing the ultimate victory of Christ's church and the New Jerusalem. In his visions he runs parallel with John and the Revelation. Similar claims can be made for Daniel but Daniel's apocalypse (Daniel chapters 7-14) looked forward to the period from the restoration to the coming of Christ. That provided comfort and guidance for God's people living in that time just as the Revelation instructs and comforts us concerning this last epoch in which we live before Christ's second advent and the winding up of all things. Certainly Daniel sees beyond that to the reign of Christ over all (Dan. 7:27) but by comparison Ezekiel provides arsenals of information about the New Covenant age in which we now live.

In order to profit well from our subject we need first to refresh ourselves with the structure and background of Ezekiel. Secondly we will see why the glory departed, and, thirdly, survey those promises made by God through Ezekiel to the effect that he would greatly enrich the church with his glory.

## *1. Ezekiel, the man, his times and his book*

The son of Buzi, Ezekiel was a priest who was taken into captivity in 597 B.C. After a brief siege the armies of Nebuchadnezzar had captured Jerusalem. The young king Jehoiachin and 'all the officers and fighting men, and all the craftsmen and artisans — a total of 10,000', were carried into exile (2 Kgs. 24:14). This was the people to whom Ezekiel ministered; skilled, intelligent but unspiritual and unrepentant (Ez. 2:7ff.). Ezekiel was married, and lived in his own house by the river Chebar near a place called Tel Abib. He was called to the ministry at the age of 30, five years after going into exile. His wife died in the same year that Jerusalem was destroyed in 587 B.C. which means that Ezekiel was widowed at the young age of 35.

As we learn from the last chapter of Jeremiah, Zedekiah proved an incompetent and unwise leader. He rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar who besieged the city and then after a terrible famine ruined and decimated it. According to Ezekiel a

third of the people died by famine or plague, a third by the sword, and a third was scattered to the winds (ch. 5).

Tablets which were translated by an Assyriologist in the 1930's reveal that the Babylonian administration regarded their captive king Jehoiachin as the rightful and true heir of the throne. Ezekiel never refers to Zedekiah as king and the Babylonians showed no patience with his nonsense. When they captured him they slaughtered his sons in his presence and then gouged out his eyes (Jer. 52:10, 11).

Ezekiel appears to have enjoyed freedom of movement in Babylon. He would have been familiar with the staggering wealth and prosperity of the city as well as its idolatrous culture, its industries and not least with its vast fortifications and world famous hanging gardens. Communications were maintained with Jerusalem but there is no evidence that Ezekiel ever returned there at any time. His knowledge of events transpiring in Jerusalem was God-given and by that means Ezekiel was able to enact out in the most graphic and effective ways by his body, models, and even by using his own house all that was going on. Most important of all he proclaimed the meaning of God's judgments. Vividly did he impress upon his fellow captives the severity of the anger of Jehovah and the destruction of the people and their capital city. He encapsulated in himself an effective mass-media. He was a kind of 3D visual aid or TV news; for what we learn from our television and radio sets and by our daily newspapers with their photographs, they learned from watching Ezekiel and hearing his expositions. In this regard chapters 4, 5 and 12 are particularly striking. The prophet was an elaborate model maker. On one occasion he shaved off his hair and burned part of it. He lay on his side for long periods. He dug through the walls of his house. In language and style he was the John Bunyan of his times using colourful metaphors and impressive allegories of speech. For instance Jerusalem is an abandoned infant, a beautiful woman, a vile prostitute, a restored wife (ch. 16).

It helps greatly to think of the book in two parts. Part one has to do with preaching repentance by driving home the lessons of judgment in every conceivable way. Part two has to do with the promises of restoration. Part one has to do with the glory departing. Part two has to do with the glory which would return. In very general terms the division comes at chapter 36 from which point future restoration is predicted in detail. Historically the dividing line is the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. Up to that point the message centres on repentance. After the fall of the city the message is repentance mixed with much hope and encouragement.

## *2. The glory departs from Jerusalem*

That Israel had not been completely forsaken was assured to Ezekiel in his call. This calling came through the sight of the immense whirling wheels. There is nothing to be found anywhere else in Scripture so elaborate, and nothing to be compared with the *merkabah*, the Christ-throne of Jahweh. The four living

creatures that surround the throne described in Revelation chapter 4 are similar to the creatures in Ezekiel's vision. The glory of this vision is uplifting and inspiring. Sharing this sight with Ezekiel can only do our souls good. Many are deterred by the complexity of it. We must not be put off by that but rather take a look at this sight as though it was before us now.

First see an immense cloud with flashing lightning and surrounded by brilliant light. In the centre of this cloud is a fire like glowing metal and in this fire there are four living creatures. Like men, each has four wings, but under the wings they have arms and hands. Their faces are most extraordinary in appearance and combine the qualities of a man, a lion, an ox and an eagle. These creatures move like lightning. Beside each one is a wheel with another wheel intersecting it. Do not forget that the cloud with fire and flashing light from which these creatures and wheels emanate is immense. The wheels are high and awesome and move as the creatures move. The facility for the wheels to move at speed in any direction, up, down, forward, backward, is limitless but there is always order for in moving they face one direction and go straight ahead until the next move. The whole scene speaks of divine omniscience, of seeing and knowing all things because the living creatures which are like burning coals or torches have their entire bodies covered with eyes. One of the wonders of creation is the beautiful symmetry of the eyes of some insects which number many thousands but these creatures are completely full of eyes (Ez. 10:12). The whirring wheels, high and awesome have their rims full of eyes all around.

I have often tried to draw this vision or depict it in diagrammatic form but have given up in despair. Perhaps the best way of visualizing the sight is to see the cloud coming from the horizon increasing in size and momentum until the four living creatures are really close by and the wheels towering above you in immensity. The sound rises to a crescendo when the four living creatures come near. It is the sound of their wings like the roar of rushing waters, like the voice of the Almighty, like the tumult of an army.

What does this elaborate and majestic vision mean? The key to interpretation often lies in a parallel passage. This we find in Revelation chapter 4. There we have the worship of heaven described. Heaven is not disorganised. It is a world in which there is a throne of administration. We read that 'the centre, around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and at the back. The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle' (Rev. 4:7, Ez. 1:10-11). I believe the commentator Swete is right when he suggests that the 'four forms suggest whatever is noblest, strongest, wisest and swiftest in animate nature'. These angels should not be thought in terms of the literal lion or eagle but as reflecting marvellous qualities which are often seen in creation.

The overall impression of the tremendous vision given to Ezekiel is of the holiness and majesty of Jahweh, and also of his omnipotence and omniscience.

The two attributes of power and knowledge harmonise perfectly and are in constant employment acting with lightning speed. Without digressing at this point it is worth noting that in the life of Christ the two attributes of deity that often flashed from him were omnipotence and omniscience. With Ezekiel and the vision given to him there is the assurance that even though this was a time of awful judgment and pain, the demise of Jerusalem, yet there was nothing in that judgment outside the control of Jahweh. At the same time as the exercise of sovereign judgement there was the exercise of the all-power of God to care for the exiles. This all-seeing power would be exercised by the Lord there in Babylon to begin to bring them to a new heart and build them up for that time when the Commonwealth of Israel would be restored, this time in preparation for the coming of that very one who was seen by Ezekiel on the throne.

Let us try to get closer to this person. If we view the whole vision we see that most enthralling of all as the vision advances and recedes is the expanse above the wheels which is like sparkling ice. Over the expanse is a throne of sapphire upon which a man is seated. From his waist up he is like glowing metal full of fire. A brilliant light surrounds him. His radiance is like a beautiful rainbow but very bright.

He who sits on the throne is the Lord of glory. He is the One who commissioned Ezekiel, who spoke to him personally from his throne of sapphire, but who also came near to him and lifted him up by a lock of his hair and transported him to Jerusalem (8:1-3ff.).

The omniscient One commissioned Ezekiel to preach to a nation of unrepentant exiles, hardened transgressors no better for their experience of exile, a people impudent and stubborn. Ezekiel used more than twenty Hebrew words for sin in his endeavour to bring them to a sense of their guilt. Though they were hardened, obstinate and unyielding, Ezekiel was not afraid of them. The Lord of the Chariot throne would make Ezekiel's forehead like the hardest stone, harder than flint.

Ezekiel's great task was uncompromisingly to impress upon the exiles the full significance of the wrath of God upon them and the departure of the glory of God from Jerusalem. That city was subject to inexorable destruction. Relatives and friends of the exiles were bound up in the tragic events of the siege, the famine and the mass executions to follow. Ezekiel was to interpret to his fellow captives the meaning of vials of wrath that fell upon Judah and its capital. To that he gave himself wholeheartedly, enacting out the events like the famine as though he was actually present. The object of preaching always is to bring about repentance, a change of heart.

The *merkabah* or Chariot throne was the symbol of God's glory. That glory was with Ezekiel and all who would ally with him. The departure of the glory of the Lord could not be more impressively symbolised than in the tenth chapter. The

detestable abominations and idols in the temple had been shown to Ezekiel by vision as clearly and in such detail as if he was actually present (ch. 8). The chariot throne moved to the Temple and then the glory of the Lord departed from over the threshold of the Temple. This abandonment by God of his own Temple spelled its certain doom. From now on the executioners would take over. The parallel in history is the destruction of that same city in A.D. 70.

When those who have been much favoured deny their knowledge of God and constantly resist the truth and the overtures of God through his prophets he responds with judgment. False prophets who try to whitewash the wall of their own false doctrine are especially the subjects of wrath. 'So I will spend my wrath against the wall and against those who covered it with whitewash' (Ez. 13:15). The New Testament counterpart of judgment upon the sons of privilege who deliberately keep on sinning after having received a knowledge of the truth 'is the same fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God' (Heb. 10:26ff.). No sinners in hell have more remorse than those who had heaven in the ears, in their homes, in their churches, in their land and in their hands, yet spurned it, and the God who reasoned with them to accept heaven as theirs.

How can the severity of the desolation that was Jerusalem's be explained? The fearful curses of Mount Ebal enunciated in Deuteronomy chapters 28 and 29 describe the punishment due to violators of the covenant. That covenant was a relationship of love. Israel had forsaken the covenant beyond remedy. Ezekiel was the prophet who drove home the dreadful reality of that fact. Idolatry and the deliberate placing of the idol of jealousy (Ez. 8:5) in the holy place of the Temple was the ultimate snub which aroused the indignation of God. Hosea sums up the whole matter, 'I cared for you in the desert — they became proud; then they forgot me. So I will come upon them like a lion' (Hos. 13:5-7).

Supremely is Ezekiel the teacher of human responsibility. Ezekiel chapter 18 is a grand overture on this theme. Privilege confers responsibility. Sin against the light is the worst sin. Rebellion against God is like witchcraft. It is evil. Church sins are the most culpable transgressions because they cannot be excused on the grounds of ignorance. Ezekiel anticipates the New Testament teaching on universal personal responsibility to repent: and the judgment of every creature (Acts 17:30, 31) when he affirms that every Israelite will stand on his own before the Judgment seat (18:30).

### *3. The glory restored to the Church*

Sovereign or free grace is a truth dimly understood by Christians. This means simply that God is resolutely determined to save people when they have absolutely no will, desire or ability to save themselves.

The story of unfaithful Jerusalem is told in Ezekiel chapter 16 which at the same time is a history of the covenant of grace — an excellent place for beginners who

do not know what that means. The prophet likens Jerusalem to an infant thrown away on the rubbish heap. Its umbilical cord is uncut and it is unwashed in its blood. That is where and how God finds sinners! He has compassion upon them and raises them up to life. Jerusalem was found like that. She was washed and clothed and became a beautiful woman, a queen. But then she became a brazen prostitute. She despised her marriage vows and broke the covenant. Therefore she was cast out. But that was not the end. God's determination to be gracious in salvation is so great that he would make a new covenant, one which would deal with the heart out of which comes all the issues of life.

Ezekiel's message is a watershed. His ministry marks the end of the era of the Old Covenant. From now on the emphasis would be on a New Covenant which would eventually be sealed by the blood of Christ. Through Christ the glory would return to God's people.

The promises of a restored glory centre in the person of the good and great shepherd who would come to care for his people (Ez. 34:23). This same shepherd would be like David. He would be a king over them and he would pastor them. All his people would be united to him in an everlasting covenant which will never be broken because his laws would be written in their hearts and minds. Their stony heart would be removed. The Holy Spirit would be put within them and they will be careful to keep his laws (Ez. 11:19, 36:26, 27). That this new covenant was operative before the coming of its mediator (Heb. 9:15), can be seen clearly from Jeremiah 32:36-41. The exiles would return with a motivation springing from a new heart. Their glory will be seen in their being cleansed from all impurity and idolatry (36:25) and also in the healing of all their divisions (37:17).

The glory will have its beginning when the Lord raises them up spiritually and physically from all the nations where they had been scattered and gives them a heart to desire to return and reestablish the Commonwealth of Israel and build again the city that had been burned and erect her walls that had been broken down (36:24ff. and ch. 37).

This glory will be restored and displayed before all the nations that had gloated over the fall of Jerusalem (ch. 25:35 and 36:36). From this restored people the Messiah would come (34:23). He will save them from all their enemies irrespective of their force and numbers (ch. 38, 39). To them will belong the immeasurable blessings of revival, 'for I will pour out my Spirit on the house of Israel, declares the Sovereign Lord' (Ez. 39:29). The 'pour out' is a prophetic perfect tense meaning 'I have poured out my Spirit', expressed in that way to emphasise certainty.

What does all this mean to us? It means that we are the heirs of Israel's God. We are the sheep of Christ's pasture. We are the people of the new Covenant. We are those who have been born again and who have the commandments of peace



written in our hearts. To us is committed the message of reconciliation. We implore all those among us who are not reconciled to God to repent and turn to him and receive his mercy. We as the church form the only assembly of people on earth who have the keys of heaven. To us is committed the privilege of proclaiming liberty to the captives. The invitations of the Gospel are to sound out from us. Brothers and sisters, are not these glorious honours, the unique privileges of the glorious body of Christ?

And if that were not enough we are assured in the closing nine chapters of Ezekiel that a new vast and eternal city is in the making in which God will live in his glory. Ezekiel describes the new temple of his vision being filled with the glory of the Lord (43:5, 6). The foundation of that glory is the presence of God himself. Ezekiel's book ends with the words Jehovah Shammah — THE LORD IS THERE. That is the essence of eternal life (Rev. 21:3, 4).

The glory of any church is the Lord's presence. Only sin can destroy this glory so essential for any church's wellbeing and prosperity. May it be said by all the people of this land concerning this church — *The Lord is there!* May that be our glory while we are in this world in which case we can be sure that it will be so for ever and ever in the New Jerusalem, for the Lord is there!

## COVENANTS OF A REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH

### *Preface*

Since 1851 Zion Baptist Chapel, Cuckfield, has used a booklet of covenants and articles. These were substantially the same as those used from the inception of the church in 1772. Every member joining the church has been given a copy. The last page consisted of a membership card giving details of name and address, the date of baptism and the date when received into membership, duly signed by the minister who gave a suitable text to the incoming member.

The articles have been incorporated into the new constitution, but here we provide the covenants which are abridged and stated in contemporary English. No Scripture references were provided in the 1851 edition. A suitable passage upon which the whole might be based is Hebrews 10:19-25, especially where it says, 'And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds'.

What foundation do we have in Scripture for the idea of covenanting together? A reply could be given on the basis of Ephesians 4:1-6. The unity there described is so entire and compelling that it could be said that when we are in union with the Trinity we are in union with each other. God triune has

expressed his relationship to us by way of covenant (Heb. 8:8-13, 9:15). This new covenant has its obligations. We are to be faithful as God's people and serve one another from our hearts which have been renewed (John 13:14). A great part of that service is how we relate to our fellow believers and show our love to them. The new covenant has a new commandment that we love one another (John 13:34,35). We should not be afraid to spell out in practical terms what that means. Especially is this important for those who are beginning. Responsibility has to be taught.

On the basis then of such Scripture passages as Hebrews 10:19-25, 1 Corinthians 12:12-26 and Ephesians 4:1-6, as well as many other instances such as Philippians 1:9, Colossians 3:12-14, 1 Peter 4:8 and Acts 2: 42-47, the covenants are now presented.

### *The covenants*

A pledge to give ourselves to each other.

We profess our deep humiliation for all our sins and also our faith in our Lord Jesus Christ who has become to us our prophet, priest and king. We profess our belief that the head of the Church has called us to be united together in a local church and thereby glorify him by our love and unity together, this at the same time being designed to be an effective witness in the area (John 17:20-23).

Our Chief Shepherd has given us laws and ordinances which he requires us to express together that we might grow together spiritually according to Ephesians 4:15,16.

Therefore we do solemnly join ourselves together in a holy union and fellowship, promising, as the Lord enables us, to submit to all the disciplines of Scripture that he requires of us which are necessary for our peace and comfort as a local church and which are spelled out as follows.

#### *1. Holiness of life*

We own together that holiness of life is imperative and that this is something that we strive for together (1 Pet. 1:13-22). Therefore we promise to watch over each other especially in conversation and discourage tendencies which are not appropriate to the Gospel. Holiness is not only negative in mortifying evil but positive in fulfilling the law of love (Gal. 6:2). This means that we pledge ourselves to love and good works and with humility and affection to encourage each other thereunto (Heb. 10:24).

#### *2. The importance of prayer*

We acknowledge together the very great importance of prayer and especially corporate prayer. Our concern is to pray for each other, for the welfare and increase of our church, for the presence of Christ in it, and for the pouring of the Holy Spirit upon the ministry and work of the church locally and in efforts made to further missionary endeavour.

### *3. Mutual encouragement*

We recognise that it is through much tribulation that we enter the kingdom of heaven (John 16:22, Acts 14:22). Therefore it is important for us to support each other, bearing with one another's weaknesses, failings and temptations, exercising gentleness, compassion and patience with each other. Especially do we wish to support those who suffer and together pray for and assist them in their times of trial. We accord with the principle of encouraging those who may become lukewarm to attend all the meetings of the church.

### *4. Maintaining the unity of the church*

The history of the Church from the beginning shows that it has always been the purpose of the adversary to promote division. We observe therefore the paramount need to keep the unity that has been given to us in Christ (Eph. 4:3-6). This means that we will endeavour to avoid all causes and causers of division (Rom. 16:17,18). Unity can be broken when error enters to divide the flock, but unity is destroyed also when believers sin against each other. We resolve therefore to maintain that principle laid down by our Lord in Matthew 18:15-17.

### *5. Support of the ministry*

Together we own the responsibility of supporting financially the work of the church and especially our pastor (or pastors) (1 Cor. 9:14). So long as he is faithful to the Gospel and to the doctrines of grace as outlined in our constitution we covenant to be loyal to him and not forsake him, praying for him that his life be consistent with the Gospel and that he will be able to fulfil all the duties of his calling to the glory of our Saviour.

To those who choose what pleases the LORD and who hold fast to his covenant he gives within his temple and its walls 'a memorial and a name better than sons and daughters; . . . an everlasting name that will not be cut off' (Isaiah 56:4-5).

# ARTICLES OF FAITH AND CONSTITUTION OF A REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH

*The expression Reformed Baptist had its origin mainly because of reference to the 1689 London Confession of Faith and is the name used by new churches in the U.K., Australia, New Zealand, U.S.A., Canada, South Africa and other parts of the world.*

## DEFINITION AND PURPOSE OF THE LOCAL CHURCH

1 A local church is a fellowship of born-again followers of Jesus Christ whose profession of faith shows itself in holy living and good works.

2 A local church may be recognised where:

- (a) the whole of God's Word is preached and practised;
- (b) the two sacraments established by Christ's authority, namely baptism and the Lord's Supper, are correctly administered; and
- (c) the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ is seen in scriptural church government through the leadership of elders.

3 The purpose of the local church is:

- (a) to provide for the united worship of God in prayer and praise;
- (b) to provide for the fellowship and nurture of God's people through teaching and pastoral care;
- (c) to be God's instrument in gathering in his elect through the preaching of the gospel; and
- (d) to be salt and light in the unbelieving world.

*1-3 is stated as the ideal situation; it is not intended to be exclusive: that is, there may be local churches which fall short of these standards.*

*Statements (a) to (d), dealing with worship, instruction, evangelism and holy influence, lay the foundation upon which the remainder of the constitution is built.*

# ARTICLES OF FAITH

4 The church adopts as a summary of our faith the 1689 *London Confession of Faith*, as republished in 1975 under the title *A Faith to Confess*. This Confession of Faith gives a concise statement of biblical doctrine. In no way is it equal to the infallible authority of the Word of God. A brief summary of what we believe follows:

## *The Scriptures*

5 The Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments were given by inspiration of God, and are the infallible and authoritative rule of all saving knowledge, faith, and obedience.

All Scripture is in its original autographs the very Word of God, and is therefore without error and utterly reliable with regard to fact and teaching.

2 Tim. 3:16  
2 Pet. 1:21  
John 10:35

Since the Scriptures form our only source of authority there is no need to add to them by apostles and prophets, since they, with the miraculous signs given them, were provided to establish the foundations and seal the revelation of God's Word.

Dan. 9:24  
2 Cor. 12:12  
Eph. 2:20,21  
Heb. 2:4

## *Doctrine of God*

6 There is but one God, the Maker, Sustainer, and Ruler of all things, having in and of himself all perfections and being infinite in them all. To him all people owe the highest love, reverence, and obedience.

Col. 1:15-17  
Heb. 1:3

## 7 The Trinity

God is revealed to us as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, each with distinct personal attributes, but without division of nature, essence, or being.

Matt. 28:19  
John 1:14, 18;  
14:9-11; 15:26  
1 Cor. 8:6  
2 Cor. 13:14  
Gal. 4:6

## 8 Creation

God created all things from nothing. Adam and Eve were created by God after his own image in perfect righteousness. The account of creation in Genesis 1 and 2 is historical, not mythical: hence evolution is a theory contrary to the teaching of Scripture on creation.

Heb. 11:3  
Ps. 33:6  
Jer. 32:17

## 9 Providence

God from eternity decreed all things that come to pass, and perpetually governs all creatures and events. However, he is in no way the author or approver of sin,

Is. 46:10  
Eph. 1:11

nor does his decree in any way diminish or violate the responsibility of men.

Jer. 1:13-15

### *The Fall of Man*

**10** Our first parents, Adam and Eve, by disobedience lost the righteousness in which they were created and became corrupt. The guilt of Adam's first sin is imputed to all men, who, being his descendants, are born in a sinful state and condition, called *original sin*. From this corrupt nature all transgressions proceed, all men being wholly inclined to all evil, and that continually, and opposed to all that is spiritually good in the sight of God. Therefore, although completely responsible to do so, man is unable of himself to repent of sin and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord.

Gen. 3:11-13

Rom. 5:12-21

Gen. 6:5  
Jer. 17:9  
Rom. 3:10-18

Rom. 8:6-8

This is by no means to deny that a vast amount of virtue prevails through the common grace of God; yet man is essentially alienated from his Creator.

### *God's Grace and Our Salvation*

#### **11 The Mediator**

Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, is the divinely appointed Mediator between God and man. Having taken to himself human nature, yet without sin, he perfectly fulfilled the law, suffered, and died upon the cross for the salvation of sinners. He was buried, rose again the third day, and ascended to the Father, at whose right hand he ever lives to make intercession for his people. He is the only Mediator, Prophet, Priest and King of the Church, and Sovereign of the universe.

Matt. 1:23; 1 Tim. 2:5-6  
Jn. 1:14; Phil. 2:7  
Heb. 2:14; 4:15; 7:26  
2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Cor. 15:3-4  
1 Tim. 3:16; Acts 1:9-11  
Heb. 1:2-3; Rom. 8:34  
Acts 3:22  
Heb. 5:5-6  
Ps. 2:6  
Eph. 1:22

#### **12 Election**

Election is God's eternal choice of some persons to eternal life — not because of foreseen merit or faith in them, but because of his mercy in Christ. Those who have been predestined to be saved are called, justified, sanctified and glorified.

Eph. 1:4,11; 2:5  
2 Thess. 2:13

2 Tim. 1:9  
1 Pet. 1:2  
Rom. 8:30

#### **13 Effectual Calling and Regeneration**

By his Word and his Holy Spirit God calls us into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ. In so doing he enlightens our minds and renews our wills and affections by the Holy Spirit.

Jn. 3:3-8; Eph. 4:23,24  
Col. 3:10; 2 Thess. 2:14  
1 Pet. 1:3,23  
1 Jn. 1:3

## 14 Repentance

Repentance is a saving grace. The repentant person, by the Holy Spirit, is convicted of the evil of his sin and humbles himself for it, with godly sorrow, hatred of it, self-abhorrence, and a purpose to endeavour to walk before God so as to please him in all things.

Luke 18:13-14; 24:46-47  
Acts 2:37-38; 5:31; 20:21  
1 Thess. 1:9

## 15 Faith

Faith is a saving grace by which we receive and rest upon Jesus Christ alone for salvation as he is freely offered to us in the gospel; by which also we believe the Word of God to be true and seek to appropriate its teaching to ourselves.

Eph. 2:8  
Rom. 10:9-10, 17  
Rom. 4:3  
Heb. 11:6

## 16 Justification

Justification is an act of God's free grace whereby he pardons our sins and accounts us righteous in his sight. This is based not on anything we have done but only on the righteousness of Christ imputed to us and received by faith alone.

Rom. 3:20-30; 4:5; 8:33  
Luke 18:13-14

## 17 Adoption

For the sake of his only Son, Jesus Christ, God has been pleased to make all justified persons sharers in the grace of adoption, by means of which they are numbered with, and enjoy the liberties and privileges of, the children of God.

Jn. 1:12  
Eph. 1:5  
Rom. 8:15-16  
1 Jn. 3:1

## 18 Sanctification

Those who are united to Jesus Christ are by regeneration renewed in their whole nature after the image of God, and are set apart by God to share in his holiness: this is definitive sanctification. But because of the remaining effects of the former corrupt nature there is a progressive aspect to sanctification, whereby the Holy Spirit, indwelling the believer, promotes true holiness of life.

2 Cor. 5:17  
1 Cor. 1:2; 6:11  
2 Cor. 3:18  
Gal. 5:16-18  
1 Thess. 5:23  
Phil. 2:12-13  
Jn. 17:17  
1 Pet. 1:2

## 19 Perseverance

Those whom God has accepted in the Beloved and sanctified by his Spirit will never totally or finally fall away from the state of grace but will persevere to the end.

Rom. 8:30  
Phil. 1:6  
Jn. 10:27-29  
Heb. 10:39

## *The Church*

20 The Lord Jesus Christ is the Head of the Church, which is composed of God's elect in every age. According to his commandment, Christians are to gather in local churches. To each of these churches he has given

Matt. 28:18  
Rev. 1:13; 2:1



authority and responsibility for administering order, discipline, and worship. The officers of a church are elders and deacons.

## 21 Baptism

Baptism is an ordinance of the Lord Jesus Christ obligatory for every believer, by immersion in water in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. It is a symbol of union with Christ in his death, burial and resurrection. It signifies the washing away of sins and is a prerequisite to church membership.

Matt. 28:19  
Acts 2:38,41  
Rom. 6:3-4  
Col. 2:12  
Acts 22:16  
1 Cor. 1:13

## 22 The Lord's Supper

The Lord's Supper is an ordinance of Jesus Christ, to be administered with the elements of bread and wine, and to be observed by his Church until he returns. It is in no sense a re-sacrifice of Christ. Its purpose is to commemorate Christ's death, to confirm the everlasting covenant in Christ's blood, and to strengthen union with Christ in his love as well as union and communion with each other. If there is unforgiveness between members this should be removed before coming to the table.

1 Cor. 11:23-26  
Luke 22:19-20

## 23 Evangelism and Missions

It is the duty of every church and every Christian to extend the gospel to all men everywhere. As faith comes by hearing the Word of God, we are to seek by all methods sanctioned in the Word of God to persuade men to seek Jesus Christ and his salvation.

Matt. 28:18-19  
Rom. 10:14-17  
1 Cor. 9:22

24 Whereas the apostles were extraordinary officers of Christ and endowed with supernatural gifts for the establishment of the Church, elders, being the ordinary officers of Christ until the end of time, are to rely on preaching and teaching for the discipling of the nations.

## *The Christian Life*

### 25 The Law of God

God has commanded us to love him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, and to love our neighbours as ourselves, which is the summary of the Ten Commandments, and which especially expresses the moral law of God. This law, together with the precepts of Scripture as a whole, provide the Christian with a guide for life.

Mark 12:30-31  
Rom. 13:8-10  
Matt. 5:17-20  
Ex. 20:1-17

## 26 The Lord's Day

The Lord's Day is to be kept holy. It is given for our benefit, which we obtain through resting from our normal occupations and by giving ourselves to the worship and service of God. To neglect public worship for the pursuit of worldly pleasure or gain is sin.

Ex. 20:8  
Mark 2:27  
Is. 58:13-14  
Acts 20:7

## 27 The State

Civil government is ordained of God and it is the duty of Christians to obey those who have the rule over them in all matters consistent with the teaching of Scripture. Christians are also to pray for their rulers.

Rom. 13:1-7  
1 Pet. 2:17  
1 Tim. 2:1-2

### *Things to Come*

## 28 The Return of Christ

We believe in the visible, personal and bodily return of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Matt. 24:27,30  
Acts 1:11  
1 Thess. 4:16  
Rev. 1:7

## 29 Resurrection

The bodies of men after death return to dust but their spirits return immediately to God – the righteous to rest with him, the wicked to be reserved under darkness until the judgment. The bodies of all the dead, both just and unjust, will be raised.

Gen. 3:19; Ec. 12:7  
Acts 13:36; Luke 23:43  
2 Cor. 5:1-10  
Phil. 1:23  
1 Cor. 15:35-54  
1 Thess. 4:13-17

## 30 The Judgment

God has appointed a day in which he will judge the world by Jesus Christ, when everyone shall receive according to his deeds. The wicked will go into everlasting punishment in hell with the devil and his angels. The righteous, with glorified bodies, will live and reign with Christ for ever.

Acts 17:31; Heb. 9:27  
Rom. 14:10,12; 2 Cor. 5:10  
Matt. 25:31-46; Mark 9:48  
2 Thess. 1:7-10  
Rev. 20:10-15; 22:3-5

# CHURCH CONSTITUTION

### *Eligibility*

1 The qualifications for membership are:

- (a) Profession of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.
- (b) Evidence that this profession is genuine seen in a scriptural experience of conversion, baptism by immersion following repentance and faith, willing submission to the teaching and government of the church, and consistent Christian living.

2 Applicants must have been in regular attendance at the services. No one may be received automatically by transfer from another church. Applicants may not be members of a secret society such as the Freemasons. No one may apply for baptism apart from the consideration of church membership.

### *Procedure*

3 At least two elders will interview the applicant and will report to the eldership as a whole. Applicants recommended for membership will be asked to study this Constitution and discuss any points about which they may not be clear. Each applicant will be asked to give to the church an account of his faith.

*If the church lacks elders then two church officers or two senior members should fulfil this function.*

*Young converts with limited teaching may be unclear about some of the details. Such should not be debarred from membership for that reason. The matter is really covered by the clause on willing submission to the teaching and government of the church (1(b)).*

4 The application will then be left in abeyance for two weeks to allow members to fulfil their duty of making known to the elders any information which throws light on the application. If there is no serious objection in the opinion of the elders, baptism and membership (or, in the case of those who have previously been baptised, membership) will proceed as soon as possible at the end of the two-week period.

### *Responsibilities and Privileges*

5 Members will normally be expected to be present regularly at services for public worship, especially the two Sunday services, the Lord's Table, one of the weekly prayer meetings, and church meetings. Attendance is not only a duty but a privilege given to us by our Lord Jesus Christ. If members are unable to attend church meetings they should convey their apologies to the church officers.

Heb. 10:25  
Acts 2:42

6 The responsibility of praying together with other members of the church on a regular basis must be clearly established for membership to be a reality.

Acts 2:42; 4:24;  
12:5,12; 13:3  
Matt. 18:19-20

**7** Regular proportionate giving to the Lord's work according to our means and out of a spirit of generosity is a mark of a true worshipper, and is pleasing to God. Tithing of one's substance is commended as a guideline to giving.

1 Cor. 16:2  
2 Cor. 8:1-15; 9:1-15  
Heb. 13:16; Rom. 12:13  
Mal. 3:8-11

*The emphasis should be on willingness rather than compulsion, which in no way diminishes the believer's responsibility.*

*The attention of members is drawn to the advantages of covenant giving.*

**8** Elders, being ordained by the Holy Spirit to rule and pastor the flock of Jesus Christ, are to be honoured and the flock are to submit to their spiritual authority.

Acts 20:28; 1 Cor. 9:14  
1 Thess. 5:12-13;  
1 Tim. 5:17-20  
Heb. 13:17; 1 Pet. 5:1-4

**9** Members are to work and pray zealously for the welfare and the coming of the kingdom of God and seek by all possible means to promote the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Rom. 12:11  
Phil. 1:27  
1 Cor. 9:19-23

**10** Members should undertake all Christian service connected with the church in consultation with the elders and other members rather than acting independently.

Acts 13:1-3; 14:27  
Rom. 12:3-10, 16  
1 Cor. 12:12-27

*If the apostles themselves submitted to co-operation with the local church how much more the members?*

**11** Members should seek to avoid all causes of division in the body and strive to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. All members are to discern their place in the body of Christ and honour one another above themselves.

Rom. 14:13; 1 Cor. 1:10  
Eph. 4:2-3; Phil. 2:1-4  
Col. 3:12-14; Heb. 12:15

**12** Members are to promote holiness, edification and love among themselves, by praying for one another, by spurring one another on towards love and good deeds, by admonishing one another, by showing hospitality, by bearing one another's burdens, by forgiving one another. Members are to pray particularly for elders and deacons in the discharge of their duties.

Rom. 12:10-13; Gal. 6:1-2  
Eph. 4:32; 6:18-20  
Col. 3:16; Heb. 10:24-25  
1 Pet. 1:22; 4:8

**13** The behaviour of believers in the community must accord with that wisdom and discretion which commends the gospel of Christ.

Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Cor. 6:1-6  
Col. 4:5-6; 1 Thess. 4:11-12  
1 Tim. 6:1; Titus 2:5-8  
1 Pet. 2:12-17; 3:15-16

### *Church Discipline*

**14** Discipline arises out of the responsibilities of church membership. Its purpose is to uphold the glory and rule of the Lord Jesus Christ in his church, to maintain its purity here on earth, to sanctify each member, and to reclaim and restore those who err.

Heb. 12:5-12  
Rev. 3:19  
1 Cor. 5:12  
Gal. 6:1

How Discipline is to be Administered:

**15** Any action is to be carried out in the spirit of Christian love and humility. It may involve anguish of heart and many tears.

2 Cor. 2:4

**16** Matters of personal offence should be settled by members according to the procedure laid down in Matt. 18:15-18.

**17** Any member who wilfully neglects the responsibilities of church membership, who falls into doctrinal error or into open sin will be subject to the discipline of the church as exercised by the elders. Disciplinary action may take four forms according to the seriousness of the case:

1 Tim. 1:3

(a) Admonition and rebuke, either private or public.

(b) Suspension from the Lord's Supper.

(c) Suspension from the privileges of church membership such as attendance at business meetings, leading meetings or taking classes.

(d) Exclusion from membership. If, after a reasonable length of time, there is no evidence of repentance the elders will recommend to the church that the offender's name be removed from the membership roll.

*Flexibility regarding the time factor is necessary, to cover the variety of circumstances which gives rise to disciplinary action.*

**18** The church should pray for the repentance and reconciliation of those under discipline. When restoration is made it may be appropriate for a testimony to be given to the church (see 3).

**19** The church officers should encourage unity with other evangelical churches and the mutual recognition among the churches of Biblical procedures with regard to

discipline so that these are not made of none effect to the dishonour of Christ.

**20** In some cases of discipline great discretion is required and therefore the elders are not obliged to give the church all the details. At church meetings on these matters the elders will inform the church of their proposed action, and will invite members to approach them to gain further information or make their opinions known.

#### *Termination of Membership*

**21** Scripture recognises disciplinary action or integration with another church as the only grounds for termination of church membership.

*The isolation of believers of themselves on frivolous grounds is to be regarded as a sinful breach of the responsibility insisted upon in the Scriptures.*

**22** The list of members should be checked at least once a year. Those who have moved from the area should be encouraged to integrate with a local church.

## **GOVERNMENT OF THE CHURCH**

**23** The Lord Jesus Christ is the sole Lord over his Church. He governs his Church by the Word of God. His government is exercised in particular churches through elders who apply the Word of God by their teaching and ruling, or by a pastor. Such leadership is only possible as members are persuaded by the Scriptures of its Biblical validity.

Acts 14:23  
1 Tim. 3:1-7  
Titus 1:5-9  
Heb. 13:17  
1 Pet. 5:1-5

**24** Deacons are appointed to care for the administrative and practical affairs of the church.

1 Tim. 3:8-10.

**25** A church, therefore, is comprised of a company of believers, some of whom are acknowledged as elders, others as deacons. Elders and members commit themselves to each other in a loving and permanent bond.

**26** All elders and deacons must subscribe wholeheartedly to the 1689 *London Confession of Faith* and to the Constitution of the church.

*Elders and Gifts in the Church*

**27** The qualifications for eldership are set out in the Scriptures, particularly in 1 Tim. 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. These passages, which form the guide to recognising elders, are to be read out and explained to the church whenever someone is being considered for eldership.

*If there are no elders then the deacons are to lead.*

**28** Elders are subject to each other, none having superior authority, although differences in function are to be expected according to the variation in gifts and abilities within the eldership.

*In session the elders share parity but in practice some may be much more active than others. Flexibility is imperative for the harmonious working of the eldership.*

*Appointment*

**29** It is the Holy Spirit who raises up and equips men with a variety of gifts and it is the responsibility of the church to recognise and encourage these.

Acts 20:28; Eph. 4:7,11  
Rom. 12:6,8  
Acts 13:1-3; 1 Cor. 4:17

**30** The elders in particular should labour to prepare God's people for works of service. They should be watchful to encourage potential elders by recognising those who have the necessary grace and abilities and who are already functioning in the use of their gifts. Such should be brought before the church for recognition.

Eph. 4:12

**31** From the date of this recommendation a period of one month will be left to allow time for any objections to be raised or questions asked, after which period another meeting of the church will be convened to consider the matter further and, if appropriate, to vote on the recommendation made by the elders.

**32** The appointment of an elder shall be publicly ratified and he will be set apart for his duties by the prayer of the gathered church.



**33** The church shall be responsible to provide for the support of any elder set aside to devote himself to the ministry. Provision should be made for his retirement.

1 Tim. 5:17-18  
1 Cor. 9:9,14

**34** If an accusation against an elder is made, the directions of 1 Tim. 5:19-20 are to be followed. The other elders are to approach the matter with great caution, firmness and impartiality.

1 Tim. 5:21

**35** The church officers are subject to the same disciplines as outlined in **14** to **18**. If an elder falls into serious error or heresy he must be removed from office.

*There are minor issues in the 1689 Confession of Faith over which there are differences of interpretation. By serious error or heresy is meant the denial of vital and central issues like the authority of Scripture, the doctrine of hell, or the doctrines of grace, the last especially being emphasised in the Trust Deeds of the church.*

**36** An elder unable to fulfil his commitments for legitimate reasons such as declining health and ability should relinquish his office. Such retirement must be ratified by vote at a meeting of the church.

**37** An elder must not forsake the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made him an overseer, and so should not extend his activities without prior consultation with the eldership. If an elder is called to another sphere of labour this should be according to the goodwill and support of the church which should endorse his abilities for the same and not encourage ventures for which the appropriate gifts are lacking.

Acts 20:28  
Titus 1:5

Acts 13:1-3

### *Functions*

**38** The function of elders is to exercise shepherd-like care over the church. This involves:

Acts 20:28  
1 Pet. 5:2-4

- (a) giving themselves to prayer, the ministry of the Word and the nurture of souls;
- (b) regulating all gatherings for public worship;
- (c) interviewing applicants for membership;
- (d) maintaining discipline;
- (e) administering the sacraments and supervising admission to the Lord's Table;

2 Tim. 4:2  
Titus 2:1

(f) recommending to the church additional elders or deacons;

Titus 1:5  
1 Tim. 3:8  
1 Tim. 3:14-15

(g) leading and overseeing the church in all its ministries and functions, including local evangelism.

### *Deacons*

**39** The qualifications for deacons are also laid down in the Scriptures, particularly in 1 Tim. 3:8-13 and Acts 6:1-6. These passages are to be read out and explained to the church whenever someone is being considered for the office of a deacon.

### *Appointment*

**40** As with eldership, the ability to serve as a deacon is a gift of the Lord Jesus Christ to his church. Those who are to serve as deacons will be chosen from the men who display the necessary gifts and abilities. The elders have the responsibility of recognising when the need arises for deacons to be appointed, and accordingly to make recommendations to the church. The procedure for appointment to this office is the same as that for eldership (**31 to 32**), as also is the procedure for removal from office (**35 to 36**).

Rom. 12:6-7  
Eph. 4:12

### *Functions*

**41** Deacons are called

(a) to relieve the elders so that they are able to fulfil their calling (see **38**);

Acts 6:2-4

(b) to a ministry of mercy towards those in physical need, especially any such within the church;

(c) to administer the business and practical affairs of the church. All accounts are to be properly audited;

(d) to maintain the church premises.

### *The Sacraments*

**42** Baptism and the Lord's Supper are the only two sacraments.

Matt. 28:19  
Acts 2:41  
1 Cor. 11:23-26  
Luke 22:19-20

**43** Baptism by immersion is to be administered only to those believers who are becoming members of the church or of some other gospel church.

**44** The Lord's Supper is to be celebrated fortnightly or as often as is considered advisable by the church. Those eligible to commune at the Lord's table are principally, though not exclusively, members of the church. The

elders may admit to the Lord's table visitors of worthy reputation. No one may be invited to the Lord's table without the knowledge of the elders.

### **Church Meetings**

**45** Where the church is gathered together in his name, the Lord is present. Therefore all meetings should be conducted in a spirit of worship and unity. Matt. 18:20.

**46** The elders should summon the church for all matters of importance, such as considering the appointment of officers, the hearing of testimonies in support of applications for baptism and church membership, matters of discipline, the settling of doctrine, the organisation of evangelism or the sending out of missionaries, and major practical matters.

**47** The elders or church officers call all meetings of the church. They will give public notice at both the morning and evening services on the two Lord's days prior to the day fixed for the meeting, stating the whole of the business intended to be transacted at that meeting. They will also appoint a chairman for each meeting.

**48** For all church meetings a quorum of 50% of the membership entitled to vote is required for a vote to be taken. No vote is to be received except the person be present.

**49** Nothing shall be brought before the church at church meetings except through the eldership or church officers.

**50** Every church meeting shall begin and end with prayer.

**51** Meetings must be controlled by the chairman who should encourage the members to speak but once on the same subject, unless they are required to explain the matter further.

**52** All the business and activities of the church are to be reviewed at an Annual General Meeting. This is to be held as early as possible in the year, when all the financial accounts are to be presented to the church.

**53** Some matters in the church meeting are confidential and when specified members are not permitted to speak of these matters except to fellow members. Anyone breaking this trust will be liable to discipline.

**54** While the meetings of the church are strictly private, the elders may allow others to hear the testimonies of applicants for membership.

**55** An appointed secretary shall keep minutes of the meetings held. These minutes should be kept up to date.

**56** When the elders deem it necessary a vote will be taken. Those entitled to vote are members who:

- (a) have attained the age of 21 years, and
- (b) have been members of the church for at least 6 months, and
- (c) have been present at the communion of the Lord's Table at least once in the 6 months prior to the meeting.

*The Trust Deeds (paragraph 8) stipulate requirements relating to age and presence at the Lord's Table for entitlement to vote.*

A two-thirds majority vote of the members present and entitled to vote at the meeting will be required to carry any motion.

*In special circumstances, such as the calling of a minister, the planting of a new work, a building programme, or the support of a missionary, the membership may decide before voting to agree to a higher percentage to ensure solid support.*

*Gordon Fee is Professor of New Testament at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Massachusetts. This article by Prof. Fee was published by The Sword and Trowel, P.O. Box 1659, Plano, Texas 75074. The article applies equally to South Africa where the movement is known as Rema, a wealth and health cult which is exceedingly virile and which has brought division to many churches especially those of Charismatic persuasion. As far as we know the South Africans have done nothing in print to refute the idea. Hence this material should be particularly helpful to them.*

## The 'Gospel' of Prosperity – an Alien Gospel

Gordon D. Fee

American evangelicalism as a whole, is currently being infected by an alien 'gospel' – the cult of prosperity.

In its more brazen forms it simply says, 'Serve God and get rich'. In its more respectable – but pernicious – forms it builds \$15 million crystal cathedrals to the glory of affluent suburban Christianity. Or it says, 'God wills your prosperity'.

The pitch goes like this: 'It's in the Bible; God says it; so think God's thoughts; claim it, and it's yours'.

Not all who propagate this 'gospel' do so as boldly, nor are they necessarily enemies of Christ; nonetheless their message consists of a dangerous twisting of God's truth which seems to fit the American dream far more than the self-sacrificial discipleship taught by Jesus and exemplified in Paul.

The basic problem with this teaching lies right at the point which the evangelists themselves consider to be their strength – the interpretation of Scripture.

Indeed, much they are saying has Biblical truth in it, which is precisely

why so many well-meaning people fall into the trap. Thus one hears, among other things, that putting material things ahead of God is sinful; that God loves the affluent as well as the poor; that true prosperity is spiritual as well as financial; and that prosperity should not be an end in itself, but a means to helping others.

These and many other things are truly said; who can fault them?

The fault, of course, lies not with such isolated truths, but with the bottom line. It always comes back to one continual reaffirmation: God *wills* the prosperity of every one of his children, and therefore for a Christian to be in poverty is to be outside God's intended will; it is to be living a Satan-defeated life.

And usually tucked away in this affirmation is a second: Because we are God's children, we should always go first-class – we should have the biggest and best, a Cadillac instead of a Volkswagen – because this alone brings glory to God. (A curious theology indeed, given the nature of the Incarnation and the Crucifixion.)

But these affirmations are *not* Biblical. The basic problems here are hermeneutical; i.e., they involve questions as to how one interprets Scripture.

The most distressing thing about their use of Scripture is the purely subjective and arbitrary way they interpret the Biblical text. Thus in one of the more popular books we read: 'We are putting the Word of God first and foremost throughout this study; not what we *think* it says, but what it *actually* says'.

This is nobly said; but what does it mean? Implied is the hint that interpretations that differ from the author's are based on what people think, not on what the Bible says. But also implied is the truth that good interpretation should begin with the plain meaning of the text.

The *plain meaning* of the text, however, is precisely what these teachers do *not* give us, text after text.

Let it be understood that the 'plain meaning' of the text is *always* the first rule, as well as the ultimate goal, of all valid interpretation. But 'plain meaning' has first of all to do with the author's original *intent*; it has to do with what would have been plain to those to whom the words were originally addressed. It does *not* have to do with how someone from a suburbanized white American culture of the late 20th century reads his own cultural setting back into the text through the frequently distorted prism of the language of the early 17th century.

Let us take, for example, the 'basic Scripture text' of the cult of prosperity: 'Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth' (3 John 2). Of this text we are told, 'John writes that we *should* prosper and be in health'.

But is this what the text *actually* says? Hardly!

In the first place, the Greek word translated 'prosper' means 'to go well with someone', just as a friend in a letter a few days ago said, 'I pray this letter finds it well with you'. (See, for example, the translation of 3 John 2 in the N.I.V.) This combination of wishing for 'things to go well' and for the recipient's 'good health' was the standard form of greeting in a personal letter in antiquity. To extend John's wish for Gaius to refer to financial and material prosperity for all Christians of all times is *totally foreign* to the text. John neither intended that, nor could Gaius have so understood it. Thus it cannot be the 'plain meaning' of the text.

Nor can it be a further meaning, intended by the Spirit, but one that bypassed John and Gaius. Such second meanings may be valid for prophecy, but to interpret the Epistles in such a way means that anything goes.

We may rightly learn from this text to pray for our brothers and sisters that 'all will go well with them'; but to argue from the text that God wills our financial prosperity is to abuse the text, not use it. One may as well argue that all subsequent Christians are out of God's will who do not go to Carpus' house in Troy in order to take Paul's cloak to him (2 Tim. 4:13), or that all Christians with stomach ailments are not to pray for healing at all, but rather to stop drinking water and to drink wine instead (1 Tim. 5:23). For these too are what the texts *actually* say, in the kind of interpretation these evangelists are arguing for.

It should be noted further that 'abundant life' in John 10:10, the second important text of this movement, also has nothing to do with material abundance. 'Life' or 'eternal life' in John's Gospel is the equivalent of the 'kingdom of God' in the other Gospels. It literally means the 'life of the age to come'. It is the life that God has in and

of himself; and it is his gift to believers in the present age.

The Greek word *perisson*, translated 'more abundantly' in the K.J.V., means simply that believers are to enjoy this gift of life 'to the full' (N.I.V.). Material abundance is not implied either in the word 'life' or 'to the full'. Furthermore, such an idea is totally foreign to the context of John 10 as well as to the whole of the teaching of Jesus.

In many instances the 'plain meaning' of other texts is totally ignored, or even subverted, because they run counter to the invalid interpretations of the basic texts. Such 'interpretations' are usually attributed to the Holy Spirit. More likely, however, they come from the evangelists' own free associations in 'meditation'. Otherwise the Holy Spirit, who inspired the original text with its plain meaning, is now found to be contradicting himself.

It should be noted further that this 'gospel' is also not Biblical in the larger sense of that word, in that it reflects a short-sighted view of the whole of Scripture. The selectivity of Biblical texts by these evangelists allows them to espouse a view *not taught anywhere in the New Testament*, and also carefully to avoid hundreds of texts that stand squarely in opposition to their teaching.

This process of picking and choosing only those texts that fit is most noticeable in their understanding of poverty and prosperity, which they themselves see as the conflicting realities. Thus, it is often argued that the 'traditional' Christian view is that prosperity is evil, and therefore that God would prefer us to be in poverty. Against this they argue that poverty is a curse (from Deut. 28:15ff.) and therefore *not* in God's will, whereas prosperity is his will.

This is further supported by 'conventional wisdom', which fails to take

seriously both the nature of the Fall and the reality of common grace.

Conventional wisdom sees life always in terms of *quid pro quo*, one thing in return for another. For every evil, there is a direct, specific cause. ('Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?'; Job's comforters; etc.) And for every good, especially every material blessing, there is also a direct specific cause. Some 'rules' that God has laid down are being followed.

But conventional wisdom is *not Biblical*. *Even though there are special times when God does protect his own, it is clear from the whole of Scripture that both the rain and the hail fall on the just and the unjust alike*. The Galileans whom Pilate killed and the 18 on whom the tower fell were not greater sinners, Jesus said (Luke 13:1-5).

Conventional wisdom is simply unreliable. The Fall has so permeated the created order that all people are affected by its consequences; and God has revealed himself as abounding in mercy — even to the sinner. Sometimes there seems to be no good reason why the wicked are 'blessed' while the good are not, or vice versa!

Furthermore, even though God has promised to vindicate his own, he has seldom promised immediate vindication. For example, in Hebrews 11: 32-39 some by faith saw great victories; but others *by faith were destitute*. But they are *all* commended for their faith.

And these words were spoken to encourage believers who themselves had 'joyfully accepted the confiscation of their property' (10:34, N.I.V.), but who were now about to lose heart. Immediate vindication, however, is not promised to them (10:35,36).

Conventional wisdom, therefore, cannot be made a part of the Biblical view of poverty and prosperity.

In the full Biblical view, wealth and possessions are a zero value for the people of God. Granted that often in the Old Testament — but *never* in the New — possessions are frequently related to a life of obedience. But even here they are seen to have the inherent double danger of removing the eye from trusting God and of coming to possess the possessor. Poverty, however, is *not* seen to be better.

If God has revealed himself as the One who pleads the cause of the poor — and he has throughout Scripture — he is not thereby blessing poverty. Rather he is revealing his mercy and justice on behalf of those whom the wealthy regularly oppress in order to get, or maintain, their wealth.

This carefree attitude toward wealth and possessions, for which *neither* prosperity *nor* poverty is a value, is thoroughgoing in the New Testament.

According to Jesus, the good news of the inbreaking of the Kingdom frees us from all those pagan concerns (Matt. 6:32). With his own coming the Kingdom has been inaugurated — even though it has yet to be fully consummated. The time of God's rule is now; the future with its new values is already at work in the present. We have been 'seized' by the Kingdom; our old values, the old way of looking at things, is on the way out; we are joyously freed from the tyranny of all other lords.

In the new order brought about by Jesus, wealth is an irrelevancy. If one does have possessions, he can use them in loving service to others; but if one doesn't have them, he shouldn't seek them. God cares for one's needs; the extras are unnecessary; the rich man who seeks more and more is a fool; life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.

It is precisely this same care-free attitude toward wealth and possessions

that marks all of Paul. He is a free man in Christ, who knows contentment whatever the circumstances. He knows both want and plenty, both hunger and being well fed. He 'can do all things' — which in this context clearly refers to being in need! — through Christ who gives him strength (Phil. 4:10-13, N.I.V.).

Thus he tells those who have nothing, to be content with food and clothing. 'People *who want to get rich* fall into temptation and a trap' (1 Tim. 6:6-10, N.I.V.).

But then he remembers those who *happen to be rich*. They are to treat their wealth with indifference; they must not put any stock in it. Rather they are to be 'generous and willing to share', for this is true wealth (6:17-19).

The point is, in the New Age prosperity is simply no value at all. How, then, can God will such a zero value for all his children?

The cult of prosperity thus flies full in the face of the whole New Testament. It is not Biblical in *any* sense.

Finally, besides being non-Biblical, the *theology* that lies behind this perversion of the gospel is sub-Christian at several crucial points. Since that requires another whole article of its own, I will here only briefly note several of the more readily observable theological weaknesses.

First, despite all protests to the contrary, at its base the cult and prosperity offers a man-centred, rather than a God-centred theology. Even though one is regularly told that it is to God's own glory that we should prosper, the appeal is always made to our own selfishness and sense of well-being.

In fact, the only one who could possibly believe this non-Biblical teaching is



someone who *wants* to; and the *only* reason one would want to is because of its appeal to one's selfishness. God does not exist for us; we exist for him. And faith in God is not to be measured from the point of view of human happiness. God, after all, is not someone faith employs with an eye to the benefits to be received. To make material enjoyment a goal of the Christian faith is to turn it topsy-turvy.

Second, this false gospel presents a totally false theology of giving. In the New Testament, as well as the Old, God's love and giving are predicated on his mercy. Therefore in their every expression they are unconditional. God loves, and gives, and forgives unconditionally — no strings attached.

The human response to divine grace is gratitude, which expresses itself in identical, unconditional love, and giving, and forgiving.

The cult of prosperity, on the other hand, tells us we are to give in order to get. It is by giving to the Lord, and to the poor, that we are guaranteeing our own prosperity!

Some of them candidly admit that they will give to the poor *only* on the condi-

tion that they are also given opportunity to tell the poor about Jesus. As noble as that end might sound, the means to the end is manipulative. It is evangelism tied to the apron strings of the American profit-motive mentality.

Third, such an Americanized perversion of the gospel tends to reinforce a way of life and an economic system that repeatedly oppresses the poor — the very thing that the prophetic message denounces so forcefully. Selling the needy for a pair of shoes — advocating a life-style that promotes the rich getting richer at the expense of the poor — still comes under God's judgment.

The *best* antidote to this disease, therefore, is a good healthy dose of Biblical theology. The way of the Cross, self-sacrificial love, which gives again and again without care for 'return on one's investment' — this is still the way that leads Home.

One may count on it: Any 'gospel' that will not 'sell' equally among believers in Ouagadougou, Upper Volta; or Dacca, Bangladesh; or Phnom Penh, Cambodia; as in Orange County, California; or Tulsa County, Oklahoma, is *not* the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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*Brian Beevers is an experienced elder in the Leeds Reformed Baptist Church which is led by Peter Parkinson. In this assessment we see something of the extent to which Restorationism is heterodox. We can understand why there has been deep concern when two of our well known evangelical leaders have given this movement credence by preaching at their rallies.*

## The Restoration Movement

A movement which is causing particular concern in the church today is the 'Restoration' movement. Reference has been made in *Reformation Today* to aspects of this movement. In this article I want to give you a summary of this teaching, and refer particularly to one of the leaders whom they consider to have a prophetic ministry. I will then make an assessment and come to some conclusions.

The movement has developed over the last 10 or 15 years, originating in the 'house-church' movement. In my own area of the country it began with a group in Bradford who meet in a building called Church House. It then spread by way of a house-group to Leeds, where there is now a large church called the 'City of God Church', which meets on Sunday in Leeds Town Hall. There are similar churches in many other towns and cities throughout the country.

The teaching of the movement is neopentecostal with a strong emphasis on the doctrine of the 'Baptism of the Spirit' as an experience subsequent to conversion, the evidence for this being speaking in tongues. This is regarded as a means of worship and prayer for every believer which 'bypasses the mind'. It is a devotional language which is God's gift for each christian, also referred to as the language of angels. A typical example of this teaching is contained on a tape of a message given by Larry Tomczak at the Dales Bible Week. The tape is entitled 'Baptism and Gifts of the Holy Spirit'.

However, the teaching does not stop there. Those in the movement believe that God is now restoring all the gifts and ministries referred to in the New Testament, including the ministry of apostles and prophets. Apostles are regarded as men with an especial anointing of God upon them. Each apostle is responsible for the establishing and oversight of churches in a certain region. These apostles are regarded as being in direct succession to Paul and they do not hesitate to apply directly to themselves the teaching which Paul gives about his own apostleship.

They also believe that God is raising up prophets who have a ministry of declaring God's word to his people today. They regard the utterances of such prophets as 'inspired but not canonical'. They do not regard such prophecy as consisting of inspired exposition of Scripture but as direct revelation from God. It must not contradict Scripture but it does supplement Scripture and it gives direct and necessary guidance to the church today.

They also have elders, pastors and teachers who have their ministries under the direction of the apostles and prophets. They have a 'pyramid' form of church order with a strong emphasis on 'covering' and discipline. Each member must be subject to and 'covered' by another member with regard to any important decisions which they may take. This role of 'covering' often

extends to the detailed running of the lives of believers.

They believe that in each city or centre of population there should be only one church, with perhaps about four in a place the size of London! The members of this church will also belong to a house-group in their area which has a very important role in their spiritual nurture and welfare.

The basic belief of the movement is that the Lord is now restoring the Church not just to the New Testament pattern but rather beyond it. This movement is seen as part of a world-wide movement which will result in a universal revival and the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is what they believe the Lord is 'trying to produce' in these days, to quote a phrase which they often use.

In preparing this article I have gained a lot of information from a series of tapes of messages given by some of their speakers to leaders and elders in the movement at the Dales Bible Week. This is a large family conference organised by the movement held each summer in Harrogate. These tapes were obtained from Harvestime House, Bradford. The movement also produces a monthly magazine called 'Restoration'. They are now producing a bible-study course called 'School of the Word'. One of their leading 'apostles' is Bryn Jones.

A leading 'prophet' is Dave Mansell, who is based in the London area. He delivered a message called 'God's Present Purpose' to leaders in the movement at the Dales Bible Week. In this address he gives various ways in which he considers that God is preparing his Church for the return of the Lord, these are:

a. The restoring of God's image in man.

b. The restoring of man's rule over creation.

c. The raising up of a prophetic people.

Here is part of the third section, which is the climax of the whole address.

When we come to look at restoration we need to see very practically how it happens. We see in the scriptures that God's way of bringing about his purpose is through his word whether the written word, the living word and the Lord Jesus made flesh or whether it is the prophetic word. The word of God is his creative tool. God could have created the world by any means he liked but he spoke, he said, 'Let there be light' and there was light, 'Let the earth bring forth' and the earth brought forth. God's way of bringing restoration about is that God's word, which is Spirit and life and not just syllables and sounds, is spoken and enters into us and transforms us. We were born again by the word of God, when we heard that word concerning the Lord Jesus, his death and resurrection for us. We heard that word and in receiving that word we were transformed. We need to be showing forth this word of God concerning salvation and restoration and moral likeness to God and moral government and rule and authority and the community of the redeemed so that it enters into men's hearts and they are changed. This comes, when you look at the Scriptures, from a prophetic word from the church. Part of the function of the church is to be those who speak the word and also to be a demonstration, a corporate expression of the word made flesh as it was in Jesus. God is anointing us so that we can speak the word of God but he is also changing our lives so that we are the expression of that word in the way that we live. Hebrews 1:1 says that in times past God spoke by the prophets and in these days he has spoken to us by his own Son who was the word. If Moses dealt with the world as typified by Egypt, Elijah dealt with the religious side, the priests and prophets of Baal. They were judged and God is going to remove false religion, false worship, wrong struc-

tures, dead forms. This is going to be restored by the power of God's word. The prophet like unto Moses comes first, Acts 3 and Acts 7, but then Elijah comes, Malachi 4, and also referred to several times by our Lord Jesus in the gospels, Luke 1:17. The coming of the Lord can be an escapist motivation but what is evident is that the coming of the Lord Jesus the first time and the second time is preceded by the raising up of a prophetic ministry to prepare his way. One thing we have lost, in these days, is a sense of the coming of the Lord Jesus. We want to keep this but not in some ethereal sense of escapism but the glorious goal that we are preparing the way for his coming to redeem the whole world from the bondage of corruption in the same way that John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus to come and redeem his people from their sins. What was in seed at the cross, we are preparing for the final winding up of the whole thing. Therefore this prophetic word of restoration involves the raising up of a prophetic people, people that are stirred by the Spirit of God to speak the words of God, stirred to live together in such a way that we are showing forth his praises. If we do not do that the Lord will not come. Why has he waited 2,000 years? Because there has not been that prophetic people, Acts 3:19,20. If the people had responded to their calling and their prophetic nature at that time the Lord would have come but we know that he has not come and we are here together as a result of that delay. It would be a disaster if we just ticked over in neutral for a generation. We want to be those who are bringing in the return of the Lord Jesus. We want to see him come and clear this mess up. The kingdom of God is going to bring glorious victory but it is not going to take over every single person. The forces of darkness are going to be ranged against us but Jesus is going to come and with the power of his might and the word from his mouth he is going to destroy them by the brightness of his coming. We must prepare for that, the word of restoration is not just meetings getting brighter and now we have apostles and prophets on the list but we are preparing

for Jesus, we are preparing the way of the Lord, we are getting the road made up and the things that have prevented the Lord from coming are the attitudes of heart, unrighteousness in relationships, contentment with the status quo, acceptance of sin in our lives. John the Baptist lost his head for saying 'repent'. This may sound to some a hard word and they will stumble upon that word but others will say that this is the word they have been looking for. We cannot coerce people, we want a prophetic word that stirs people to respond. In the Gospels Jesus says that John the Baptist is the greatest prophet there has ever been. He did no mighty works but his was the privilege of actually ushering in and preparing the way of the Lord. The corporate prophetic voice that God is raising up is the greatest thing that God has ever done. The least in the kingdom of God is greater than Elijah. We are preparing for a greater breakthrough than John the Baptist brought about. Matthew 11:14, Matthew 17:11 tells us that John the Baptist was Elijah. They also tell us that Elijah had come in John the Baptist and Elijah will come, not literal Elijah, not literal John the Baptist but that which is in the spirit and the power of Elijah. It is the same purpose and the same dynamic but now it is us corporately to envision, to speak the creative word, to stir up, to bring to repentance, to bring a word of spirit and of fire, of holiness, a word of separation and of restoration to the world. That is our calling. Our orders of service, our meetings together have no meaning whatsoever unless they are geared towards that goal and all that does not contribute is a stumbling block. This is a shattering word to many places. I am sure God will prepare their hearts. We are going to see the hearts of the fathers turned to the children, the attitude of the disobedient turned to the attitude of the righteous, because those people who rejected the ministry of John the Baptist rejected the coming of Jesus. Those that got John got Jesus, those that missed John missed Jesus and because of the importance of what we are in this time for the world we need to have a very solemn attitude towards our ministry

and our lives and our approach to people. If people do not hear this word at this time they are going to miss and be unprepared for the coming again of the Lord Jesus.

The error and folly in this lengthy quotation should be apparent, but it is worthwhile bringing out some points which occur here and in other teaching from the movement.

a. In the first section Dave Mansell contradicts the doctrine of the completeness and sufficiency of Scripture. He establishes from Scripture that God has spoken by his prophets and then concludes that such prophets are needed today. One could equally well argue for the continuance of priests and sacrifices today!

Particularly crucial here is Hebrews 1:1, which he does quote. This verse clearly teaches the finality of God's revelation to us in his Son. It does not say that God is still speaking to us through the prophets but that God has spoken. This final revelation we now believe is contained in his Word. God still speaks to us from his Word, by his Spirit.

We have no further need for prophets, indeed any who claim to be such must be false, for now we have the great prophet, the Lord Jesus Christ. He does indeed continue his prophetic ministry in the Church, but through the preaching of his Word. This is not new revelation but the expounding and applying of the faith once for all entrusted to the saints (Jude 3).

In this section he also gives an erroneous interpretation of Ephesians 2:20, which seems to be current in the Restoration movement. This is applied continuously as if the Church today is being built upon the present-day ministry of the present-day apostles and prophets. This interpretation cannot be sustained, the passive participle trans-

lated 'built' is in the aorist, which denotes a simple past event. How can a foundation be laid continuously? It has been laid once for all by Christ and the apostles and prophets. This interpretation detracts from the uniqueness of the twelve apostles, as is of course their intention!

b. Secondly, note the erroneous teaching about the return of the Lord. This is based on what Jesus said about Elijah in Matthew 17:11. Jesus does not say that Elijah will come before his return but rather that John the Baptist had already fulfilled that prophecy. By what stretch of the imagination can Mr. Mansell then interpret this as a corporate prophetic ministry to be raised up in the Church before the return of the Lord?

This section is really quite blasphemous. Firstly we have the statement that if we do not fulfil this prophetic ministry then the Lord will not come! To quote, 'Why has he waited 2,000 years? Because there has not been that prophetic people (Acts 3:19,20). If the people had responded to their calling and their prophetic nature at that time then the Lord would have come.'

This makes the sovereign purpose of God in sending his Son to judge the world dependent upon our activity; contrast this with Acts 1:7, see also Matthew 24:36. Also note the false interpretation of Acts 3:19,20, Peter called upon the people to repent, not to prophesy, and many thousands did so. In what way did the people fail to respond? See Acts 2:47, 4:4, 6:7 and 13:48.

On the same theme note the outrageous claims made such as, to quote, 'the corporate prophetic voice that God is raising up is the greatest thing that God has ever done. We are preparing for a

greater breakthrough than John the Baptist brought about.'

This is the height of delusion and would seem to fall into the category of the false prophets referred to by our Lord in Matthew 24, especially vv. 4,5 and 24-28. They are falsely claiming that his coming is imminent and that they are especially associated with his coming. This is a recurrent feature of sects!

c. Thirdly, let us note the sectarian claims and implications, especially in the conclusion but also throughout the whole message. After observing that those who rejected John's ministry also rejected that of Jesus, he goes on to say, 'If people do not hear this word at this time they are going to miss and be unprepared for the coming again of the Lord Jesus'. That is, if we do not accept and receive the 'prophetic ministry' in the Restoration movement then we will miss and not be prepared for the coming of Jesus.

This is a preposterous statement, without any biblical foundation. There are many warnings in Scripture about being ready for the coming of the Lord but to arrive at the position which he does can only be achieved by isogesis, not exegesis! Indeed, his whole treatment of Scripture throughout this section consists in misinterpreting verses to support unwarranted statements.

Finally, here are some general comments. The message which I have quoted was delivered at the Dales Bible Week in conjunction with much other teaching pertaining to the movement. The recording on the other side of the tape was a message by Terry Virgo, who was referred to by Erroll Hulse in issue No. 78. The message was given to elders and leaders in the movement. We can therefore take it to represent their accepted teaching. Many of the addresses

given by leaders of the Restoration movement are more guarded than this but at least we are indebted to Dave Mansell for coming out into the open and declaring just what they do believe. I believe that anyone with the slightest spiritual discernment will recoil from such blasphemous nonsense!

Tragically, this movement is at present making great progress and drawing in many people from other churches. As Reformed Christians we must do all in our power to expose it and to warn others about it. As I firmly believe that it is false, I believe that in due course it will come to nothing, see 2 Timothy 3:1-7. However, we must not underestimate the harm which it can do in the meantime.

I believe that many who are in the movement do not realise the implications of the teaching. They are very sincere and truly do accept the claims which are made. I consider that they are sadly deceived.

We must not let ourselves be carried away by the claims or apparent strength of such a movement, neither must we in any way compromise our position. Heresy flourishes when those who know the truth fail to maintain it resolutely. Sadly, there are those who call themselves 'Reformed' who are compromising in this way.

If we thoroughly know the Scriptures, and take note of all the warnings there about the danger of being led astray by 'all kinds of strange teachings', see Hebrews 13:8, also Ephesians 4:14-16, then we will not be deceived. I close with a quotation from the 1689 Confession of Faith, 'The supreme judge, by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and by which must be examined all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers,

and doctrines of men and private spirits can be no other than the Holy Scripture, delivered by the Spirit. And in the

sentence of Scripture we are to rest, for it is in Scripture, delivered by the Spirit, that our faith is finally resolved.'

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## **Why be negative? — a comment**

No preacher in his right mind wants to have a reputation for being negative. It is possible to point to preachers who increased their congregations by advertising controversial subjects in which, to be sure, either a leader or a system would receive a blasting.

Systematic preaching is one way to try to keep to the balance contained in Scripture. In that way it will soon be seen that it is impossible not to be negative. You can state the Ten Commandments positively but that is inadequate, just as it is insufficient to put a sign beside a dangerous precipice, 'to keep to this path is to be safe and happy'. That would be tantamount to murder. It is essential to erect a barrier and to put up a sign, 'anyone falling over the precipice will die'.

Hence our Lord warned, 'Except you repent you will perish' (Luke 13:3). He was scathingly negative about the Pharisees and Scribes (Matthew 23). His purpose in that was positive. He wished that the people be liberated from that cruel system.

Paul was alarmingly negative about the Judaizers. Let them be accursed! (Gal. 1:8). Why was he so unkind? Answer: he indicated by his terseness that salvation itself is forfeited once God's way of salvation is forsaken. This explains why religious controversy has sometimes raged fiercely. It is necessary to warn against any errors which undermine or supplant the Gospel or the Scriptures which support that Gospel. That is why Luther and Calvin were so hostile toward the traditions which had corrupted the Church. The Reformers were negative too about the Anabaptist Charismatics of their day. With our heritage, and the advantage of hindsight, we can see how misguided were both Protestants and Roman Catholics in physical persecution. We believe in freedom of conscience but not in silence which can be damning to souls. If those entrusted to our care veer in directions which could unhinge their faith then we must not hesitate to be as negative as the Scriptures are in places like Jude and 2 Peter 2. Just as it is essential to be negative with our children in warning them against the perils of poison, of fire, or of busy highways, so sometimes it is essential to warn against liberalism, sacramentalism, materialism or the new apostolicism.

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