

A
VOICE OF FAITH



TEN THINGS TO THINK ABOUT
short challenging essays to stimulate
the mind and heart

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CONTENTS

| | |
|---|----|
| RETURNING TO THE FOUNTAIN | 5 |
| COME BREATH OF GOD | 8 |
| WORRY – DID JESUS REALLY MEAN WHAT HE SAID? | 15 |
| DID YOU ASK A GOOD QUESTION TODAY? | 19 |
| GOD’S STRENGTH AND OUR WEAKNESS | 21 |
| BAPTISM – IN WHAT NAME? | 24 |
| HOW GOD TEACHES US | 30 |
| IT COULDN’T HAPPEN..... <i>OR COULD IT?</i> | 35 |
| HAVE HOLINESS SONGS BEEN BANNED? | 39 |
| THE 1947 SMITH WIGGLESWORTH PROPHECY | 43 |

RETURNING TO THE FOUNTAIN

*“For my people have committed two evils:
they have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters,
and hewn themselves cisterns - broken cisterns
that can hold no water.”*

(Jeremiah Ch.2 v 13)

Throughout the history of God’s people, there has been a recurring tendency to try and preserve rivers of living water in reservoirs. The principle differences between a bubbling spring or fountain and a reservoir or cistern, is that the former is fresh, living and will determine its own path, while the latter becomes stale, dead and contained in one place. Jeremiah spoke to God’s people His complaint that they had forsaken the fountain, the uncontrolled and uncontrollable life of God Himself, and instead were building containers in which they sought to gather and control the water.

It is appropriate therefore, that we who are called by God, should examine ourselves to see whether we too are living purely by the life of God or from something we have built ourselves.

Apart from the testimony of scripture, we have the record of history to check things with. It would appear that many churches, both individual and denominational groups, began in a time of renewal or revival, and it is understandable that those involved desired to preserve the work of God. If we experience an outpouring of God’s Spirit and a manifestation of His Presence, what could be more natural than trying to build something that will contain it and preserve it for ourselves and others? The problem is God is Spirit and, like the wind and water, He blows where He wills and flows where He decides to. Our natural tendency to try and preserve what He has done will often become a work of the flesh, and as such will eventually become counter-productive.

If we turn on a tap and bring a leaky cup to hold the water, when the tap is turned off, we will eventually be left with an empty cup and a memory that we try and re-create from our imagination. Our churches may be left with once splendid, but now decaying buildings, patterns and styles of church government and structure, or liturgies and forms (whether ancient or modern) which are repeated week by week. It is not that any of these things are necessarily wrong in themselves, any more than a cup or a reservoir is wrong when used rightly. It is when we put our trust and reliance in these things, rather than in God Himself, that the problems arise. We may begin to move into idolatry, which in its simplest form, is attributing life and worth to something that of itself is lifeless and worthless. The only way we can preserve life, is by living it and letting it go, so that it can be replaced by more life.

Jesus made it quite clear that anyone who tried to save or preserve their life would lose it. This is a principle that affects every aspect of our being. Jesus applied it both to nature and to Himself when He said; ‘except a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it stays a single grain’. It is built into the foundation of our worship as we ‘present our bodies as a living sacrifice’, and it is established forever as God’s method of bringing forth His new creation through the death and resurrection of His Son.

Many who were Christians in the late sixties and seventies, have seen and experienced the vitality of Holy Spirit initiated life, released into fallen and undeserving humanity. The great tragedy has been that many of us were so thrilled with God’s enlivening work in the Church, that we sought patterns and structures, which we thought would preserve it. Perhaps the most widespread, was some form or other of ‘Restorationism’, which sought to discover from the New Testament and from history, a model for the church. There is no such thing. The heaven of heavens cannot contain God and so we have been somewhat naïve to think that a mere shape or

form of church life might do so. The dwelling place of God is made out of living stones and, as it grows, it will constantly respond to the new life within it. Just as a family has a basic form, but changes every time a member dies or a new one is born, so too the Church will be constantly adjusting to release and manifest the life of those who are in it.

Unfortunately, some of the recently formed churches are copying the mistakes that we have made, and are doing little more than trying to build a shallow imitation of the church in the world, as if the kingdom is to be marketed through free coffee and doughnuts.

If we, like the people of Jeremiah's time, have forsaken the source of living water for reservoirs of our own building, the matter cannot be remedied by building better and more efficient reservoirs. There is nothing wrong with good techniques, sound forms of church life, better training or excellent music, (or coffee and doughnuts), but unless we are **first** drinking deeply at the fountain of life, they will achieve nothing more than an appearance of life that will be consumed in an instant when we all pass through the fire of God's judgement.

There are no special formulas, no secret techniques, no favoured denominations. God has centred all of His hope in one thing – or rather one person – Jesus. If we have surrendered our lives to Jesus and are joined to Him by His Spirit, receiving all that we need from Him as we live our daily lives in this world, then we have all that is necessary. That life is preserved by abiding in Him day by day and drinking of His living water. Anything else is no more than a cracked and leaking reservoir.

Come, Breath of God.

'Thus says the Lord God to these bones: "Surely I will cause breath to come into you and you shall live".'

'Prophecy to the Breath, son of man, and say to the Breath, "Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O Breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live".'
(Ezekiel Chapter 37, v 1 – 14)

I wonder what our reaction would be, if faced with a scene that looked like the aftermath of a long gone battle, where lying before us was a carpet of sun-bleached bones, God told us to prophesy life to the dead.

Make no mistake about it, Ezekiel's audience was dead. It is one thing to be faced with a body, which, though apparently not breathing, is still warm and so at least gives some small hope of resuscitation, but the people before Ezekiel had been reduced to dry bones. Not merely dry bones, but very, very dry bones.

God explained to Ezekiel that the bones were His people Israel, a people, who to all intents and purposes had lost all the life they once had.

Born and formed from a miraculous deliverance out of slavery in Egypt, Israel had received the inheritance of a good land, which, under the reigns of David and Solomon, had become the wealthiest kingdom on earth. At the height of its success, it had become the centre of trade for the surrounding nations, with gold in abundance and silver without measure. Its king was renowned for his wisdom, and its temple was a marvel of building engineering, fit indeed for the God who made heaven and earth.

About three hundred and fifty years later, the land was desolate; the temple destroyed and ransacked; the God ordained royal line finished, and the last core members killed in front of Zedekiah the king, before his enemies plucked out his eyes and bound him in chains.

Only the poorest of the poor were allowed to remain in the land, and foreigners were brought in to work the fields and populate the houses and cities that had escaped destruction. God's people, sons and daughters of Abraham, inheritors of the promises of God, were in exile in Babylon – the centre of the pagan world.

The Book of Lamentations gives us a record of the funeral dirge for Jerusalem, Zion, the City of God, and in Psalm 137, we have the heart cry of the exiles in mourning.

*By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down,
yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion.
We hung our harps upon the willows in the midst of it.
For there, they that carried us away captive asked of us a song;
and those who plundered us, required of us mirth,
Saying, 'Sing us one of the songs of Zion.'
How shall we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?*

Ezekiel, a priest, lived and prophesied among these devastated people. It is important that we realise why they were devastated, and what the future was that God was offering promising through this prophet. For whilst calamities happen to the righteous, and difficulties may face even those who walk in the way of truth, punishment only comes to those who are disobedient. The history of God's dealings with the nation of Israel has been recorded so that future generations can see, understand, and learn from the errors made and the sins committed.

The calamity of exile that came upon Judah (the remnant of Israel that remained after the dispersion of ten of the tribes) was not upon the righteous, but upon a people who had embraced sin and rebellion. God had chosen Israel, in order to give a fallen world a glimpse, albeit an imperfect one, of what a people under the rule of God could look like. Whilst God loved Israel with a fierce passion, His choice of them carried responsibilities with it. They were to live their lives in sole dependence on the one who had chosen them. They were not to enter into alliances with the world around them, and they were not to allow the idolatrous practices of the surrounding nations to creep into their expressions of worship.

However, because they disobeyed and did these things, they slid into immorality and began to mistreat one another. God raised up prophets to warn His people, but they chose not to listen, and after decades of speaking to them, God finally dismantled the City and its Temple previously given so that He could live among them. Their enemies, Assyria and then Babylon, were strong, but Israel's defeat was not because of their military might. God determines the boundaries of nations, not man. The loss was because God Himself unleashed the ungodly in order to discipline those called to godliness who had turned away from their calling. The result was a reversal of Judah's fortunes. The people delivered from slavery, were enslaved again. The nation which had inherited a country became landless foreigners, ruled by the world's systems, its politics and its values.

In 1 Corinthians Chapter 10, Paul reminds the Church that God's dealings with Israel are recorded as examples for us, in order that we should not desire evil things as they did, nor become idolaters as some of them were. It has become common practice in much of the church today, to emphasise the love of God toward us to such an extent, that we have become careless of the salvation He accomplished for us.

In one of the lesser loved passages of the bible, we are reminded that Christ, speaking to a New Testament church, said: *'As many as I love I rebuke and chasten.'* This was written to the church at Laodicea, which was described as lukewarm and in danger of making Jesus sick (*Revelation Ch 4 v 14-22*). Jesus Christ is designated in this passage as 'The Faithful and True Witness', emphasising that He means what He says. He states that the church thinks of itself as fine – more than fine even, for it saw itself as *'rich and wealthy and in need of nothing'*.

The most sobering part of this passage is not the view that Christ has of the church: *'wretched, poor, blind, and naked'*, (as terrible as that is) but the fact that the church was oblivious of its condition and of Jesus Christ's assessment of it.

In the days of Ezekiel, the way that God brought His people to a realisation of their sin and false hopes, was to bring their enemies against them and to place them under their control. Their enemies were the very nations that they had previously sought to impress and to make alliances with (See Isaiah Ch 30 and Ch 39 where the kings of Judah are rebuked for wooing Egypt and Babylon).

In some parts of the world today, Christians who are righteous are suffering, but this is as a result of their faithfulness in proclaiming Jesus as Lord. Their suffering will result in eternal reward. We need to understand why the churches not being persecuted are faltering and failing. In the UK, many churches could not survive without help from the world. It is only because they hold charitable status and can claim its benefits, especially tax relief, that they do not go bankrupt. However, the trust laws which govern charitable status, often impose restrictions that muzzle the clear and open proclamation of the Lordship and Messiahship of Jesus. Instead of demonstrating to the world that it is possible to live in reliance upon God alone, we go cap in hand to them for help.

However, it is not merely in the realm of finances that we often join with the world, there even appears a tendency in recent times to try and show off to the world and impress it with our treasures. Consider the parallel between Hezekiah (*Isaiah Ch 39*), and the practice of many churches to publish their *good works and deeds of mercy* online, in order to impress the ungodly. But Jesus said we are not even to let the left hand know what the right is doing.

There is nothing wrong with good counsel or with good counselling, but neither are a substitute for the cross, which God alone can make effective in our lives. Neither is there anything wrong with relating to people on a human level with children's activities, coffee mornings or drop ins, but that is often all they are, human relations. The kingdom of God can only be built by the King Himself through the activity of His Holy Spirit. If what we have to show at the end of our activities is identical to what a secular group would achieve, then we are probably not manifesting the kingdom.

The proof of the pudding is in the eating, or more scripturally, by the fruit they produce. As an apple tree can only, produce apples, the Spirit will produce spirit and the flesh will produce flesh.

Addressing the church at Sardis (*Rev Ch 3 v 1*), Jesus acknowledged that they had a name and a reputation for being alive, when as far as He was concerned, they were dead. So too, the people of Judah, had a semblance of life. They had settled into Babylon where, in spite of their longings for the past, they built houses, traded and started synagogue meetings. But God's description of them was a valley of bones. Very dry, dead bones. When Ezekiel began to prophesy to them, there was a great deal of movement, accompanied by a good deal of noise, but it remained the noise of death. Even when flesh formed on the bones, they were still dead – there was no breath in them.

Ultimately, it was only when God commanded Ezekiel to prophesy to the breath, the breath of life, and that breath entered into the corpses, that life came again. He was then instructed to speak to the whole house of Israel, and tell them that, even though they were dead, they would live again and be restored to their inheritance. At the end of the passage, God re-affirms that the recovery of His people will be entirely attributable to His action; He will restore them to life; He will restore them to their land. Then, speaking through the centuries to the coming of the New Covenant, He declares that He will put His Spirit within them, and they shall live.

God will do it. There will be a glorious manifestation on the earth of a united body of God's people moving in faith, holiness and power. However, we must acknowledge our poverty, the fact that we have lost possession of the promises of our inheritance and that we now live in a strange land.

The call is not to read more, pray more, give more, fast more, try harder, copy the latest idea and especially not to pretend that we are living in the fullness of the gospel. The call is to relinquish all efforts of the flesh, surrender, and look to God alone. To the Father who gave us birth, to the Son who is the living Word and to the Holy Spirit the Lord and giver of life. Life, as well as salvation, is through faith alone.

The letters to the churches in Revelation emphasise one thing above all others: *'Let him who has an ear to hear, listen to what the Spirit says to the churches.'*

God commanded Ezekiel to speak. God's method of restoration of His people has always, and will always, involve His word. The Holy Spirit waits for the word of God, speaks it into our ears and our hearts, and moves out to accomplish it. Inevitably, the word that comes to us will include a call to return to our first love of Jesus. It will include a call to return to walking by faith and not

sight, and it will include a call to ask God to have His way with us whatever the cost, whether that be joy or pain, ease and gain or heartache and loss.

*O breath of life, come sweeping through us,
Revive Thy church with life and power;
O Breath of life, come, cleanse, renew us,
And fit Thy church to meet this hour.*

*O wind of God, come bend us, break us,
Till humbly we confess our need;
Then in Thy tenderness remake us,
Revive, restore, for this we plead.*

*O breath of love, come breathe within us,
Renewing thought and will and heart;
Come, Love of Christ, afresh to win us,
Revive Thy church in every part.*

*O heart of Christ, once broken for us,
'Tis there we find our strength and rest;
Our broken, contrite hearts now solace,
And let Thy waiting church be blest.*

*Revive us, Lord! Is zeal abating
While harvest fields are vast and white?
Revive, us Lord, the world is waiting,
Equip Thy church to spread the light.
(Bessie P. Head 1850-1936)*

WORRY



OF COURSE I WORRY, MY
LIFE IS SO STRESSFUL I'D
BE WORRIED IF I WASN'T
WORRIED

In the hilly Galilean countryside,
Jesus spoke to His disciples

about worry. He was speaking to those who were His followers, but what He said was in earshot of the crowd pressing in to hear Him.

As far as we can tell from the verses preceding this occasion, the people had come from a very wide area, up to fifty miles or more away from where He was speaking. If they were representative of the areas they travelled from, the crowd would have included a fair mix of backgrounds. As always, there would have been rich and poor, the sick and the healthy, the beautiful and the not so beautiful and, unless it was a unique crowd, there would also have been the full range of optimists and pessimists. It was within the hearing of this fully representative mixed bunch that Jesus told His disciples not to worry. We know that for some people, even being told not to worry is enough to make them worried, so why did Jesus do this?

Jesus based his advice on two things. The first of which everyone probably agrees with.

You cannot change things just by turning them around in your mind, worrying, and getting anxious. Like it or not, Jesus is simply stating the obvious. We all know it to be true; worrying is a waste

of time because it doesn't achieve anything. When Jesus said that worrying did not work, He opened up the matter for discussion by asking if there was anyone who actually found it did: "Who among you", He asked, "can grow a few inches just by thinking about it?" Of course, no one responded by putting their hand up and saying, "I can!"

If that was all Jesus said, we would agree that it was sensible and true, but unremarkable – it is what anyone with a bit of common sense would have said. However, when we come to the second reason He gave, He moves onto different ground.

He said that his friends should not worry, because God would look after them. He identifies the 'them' as being God's people. He acknowledged that those who were not God's people, the Gentiles, were the ones who would worry. But He did not merely speak of God's people in a general sense, rather He referred to those who would make the kingdom of God the priority in their lives. This had always been the case, but having announced that the kingdom of God was imminent, Jesus was giving a fresh call to the people.

In spite of the clear teaching of Jesus that it is neither sensible nor necessary for His followers to worry, it does seem that many Christians do so to a greater or lesser extent. The general consensus appears to be that it is perfectly normal, right and proper to worry. The two common reasons being that it is human nature and that the amount of problems in 'MY' situation warrant it.

Because our human nature is flawed, it is quite true that it is natural for us to worry, and many, if not most of us, have a basketful of cares and concerns that are too heavy to carry. The issue though, is how do we fit that in with what Jesus was teaching, for He was surrounded by a crowd every bit as human, and every bit as loaded with care as we are?

Jesus went on to explain the key to the situation. It is when we have made the kingdom of God the first priority in our lives that God will look after us. Earlier, Jesus had taught His disciples how to pray. He had clearly said that it was legitimate to ask for a supply of daily bread (possibly one of the biggest sources of worry), but He set the place of this request after the requests that God's will be done and His kingdom come.

Jesus emphasised that God has concern for everyone and, as He says elsewhere, God sends the rain on the just and the unjust. God's overall provision is for all, even for the birds of the air and the lilies of the field. However, God's particular care for His people is more specific. For those who are serving God and not money or the things of this world: for those who have settled the fact that Jesus is Lord, God's care overrules everything else. It is not only that they need not worry - they should not worry.

So the issue at the heart of the matter is not how many worries we might have, nor how prone we are as an individual to give in to worrying. Wherever we come on that scale, we are likely to share the position with many others. Neither will we want to argue the point that worry is beneficial and needful in order to solve our problems. Few, if any will believe that. If we are Christians, the matter is clear. The facts are these:

1. It is in the character of God to care for His creation.
2. His will for our lives will incorporate that care and He will order our situations in a way that is for our best. (That does not necessarily mean it will be easy or happy.)
3. Because God has given us free will, we can choose to have the best – that is His will, which includes His care for us, or we can opt to go our own way and insist that we know better than He does.

From this, we can see that if we have totally yielded our whole life and situation to God, we can give up worrying for good. The alternative is to try and keep everything under our control – in which case, like it or not we will probably end up worrying ourselves to death.

Faith is not something we have to work up. Faith simply means holding Jesus to His word. If He said not to worry under the condition of making the kingdom our priority, then if we do that, He takes on the responsibility to ensure that God fulfils His part. Peter summarised what Jesus said into a short saying when he wrote his first letter to the churches: 'cast all your anxiety on to God because He cares for you'.

Sometimes when I go shopping for bulk items, one of my fitter friends will give a hand to carry stuff. I pile him up with all the heavy cans and cartons and then I can stroll to the car, confident that I am left only with as much as I can cope with. I would be daft to give all the heavy things over, only to keep trying to take them back again.

Whatever way we look at it, it is simply not sensible for someone who has totally yielded their life to God, to worry about things. That does not mean we do not have concerns, nor that we do not accept appropriate responsibility, but we certainly are not called to lie awake at night fretting about it.

DID YOU ASK A GOOD QUESTION TODAY?

The Nobel prize-winning Jewish physicist Isidore Rabi attributed his success as a scientist to his mother. He said that when other children came home from school, their mothers would ask them what they had learnt. Isidore's mother however, would confront him with the challenge "Did you ask a good question today?" In traditional Jewish Talmudic education the highest compliment that a teacher could give to a student was, "You raise a good question".

When the Nazi guards herded Jewish prisoners into the huts in the concentration camps, some apparently had an unwritten rule that they would refuse to answer any query or request that was made to them. They understood that the first effective step in dehumanising a person was to deny them the right to ask questions.

Historically, attitudes to those who have learned to think and to raise questions has varied. Four hundred years before Christ, the Greek scholar Socrates, who pioneered and championed the way of learning through asking questions, was sentenced to death by suicide because his method supposedly corrupted the young. But Socrates did not originate learning through asking questions. When God instituted the feast of Passover through Moses, part of the feast was to centre round responses to questions from the children asking what was happening (*Exodus chapters 12-13*). The Jews have maintained this practice ever since, and if there are no children, then an adult is appointed to fulfil the task.

One of the notable things about the ministry of Jesus was the part played by questioning. Sometimes Jesus posed the questions, and on other occasions it was those seeking or opposing truth. In either case, Jesus engaged with the questioners, either by answering or by setting a question in response. Jesus encouraged His disciples to seek, ask and knock in order to get the answers they needed.

In the church today, the attitude to asking questions varies, especially when it relates to what we do and why we do it. There is often hesitancy to ask any questions at all, sometimes due to the reluctance of leaders to respond to them. Accepting the fact that there has been a wide division of opinion regarding the value of asking questions, it would seem that the historical, cultural, and most importantly biblical precedents require us to at least seriously consider the matter: 'Is it right for us to ask questions?'

I believe that not only is it right to question what we do, but that we all have a responsibility to do so. Some churches discourage questions on the basis that God has given leaders to determine what we should be doing, and it is therefore a lack of faith in God to question what those leaders do. Those of us who are not Roman Catholics would probably disagree with Papal infallibility, so it is strange we sometimes credit infallibility to mere ministers, or elders. If we do not ask questions, that may be what we are doing.

In most types of churches or denominations there appear to be some leaders who discourage questions. Whilst some church structures and hierarchies seem to embody such a discouragement more than others, it does appear a fairly widespread practice. Perhaps it is a time to learn from history and to go back to scripture. Let us encourage everyone born of God to follow their consciences more regularly and to begin to question the many strange things that are creeping into our churches today.

Anyone who has even a passing knowledge of the way in which churches have turned into cults, will be aware that part of the process is a demand for 'loyalty', which has inevitably been coupled with a refusal by leadership to respond to questions from members. Conversely, a healthy church where individuals are brought into a mature relationship with Jesus, and where they are able to discern His voice for themselves, will usually be a church where questions are not only received but encouraged.

GOD' S STRENGTH AND OUR WEAKNESS

In his book, 'Journey Towards Holiness' Alan Kreider remarks on the fact that when the Israelites confronted their enemies, God often called them to be intentionally inferior in both numbers and weaponry.

The defeat of the Midianites by Gideon was a notable example where God reduced the numbers of soldiers from 32,000 to a mere 300. No one was left in doubt, it was God and not the people who accomplished the victory.

David and Goliath was another such encounter. One of the interesting things which we sometimes miss in the story, is that it took place in the period when Israel was moving from the bronze age into the iron age. In the bible account of the event, the Philistines were more technologically advanced than the Israelites, and they were already using iron tools and weaponry. The Israelites had to go down to the Philistines to get their own tools sharpened, as they were technically inferior to them in the use of iron. The Philistines still wore bronze armour, but their skill as iron workers meant that their chariots, spears and swords were, in the main, superior to those of Israel.

When David went down to the front line of the armies and said he would challenge Goliath, Saul and the Israelites started to equip him with the very best of what the bronze age could offer - the King's very own armour, but David did not feel comfortable in it. The passage indicates that it was not physically comfortable, but it is possible that David was not spiritually comfortable either.

He had declared that the battle was the Lord's, and so it was important that not only was this declared to be the case, but that it was seen to be the case as well.

David then did something that would have appeared as strange to his contemporaries as it does to us. Refusing the bronze armour and weapons, which the King had offered him so that he would be on as near to equal terms with Goliath as possible, David took a backward step. He kitted himself out with the weaponry of the stone age, centuries behind his opponent.

It is possible that if David had met Goliath on his own terms, he would have been cut to pieces and fed to the birds. The remarkable thing is that he won the battle with a leather sling and a stone, proving beyond all doubt that the victory was of God, and not because of his strength or the superiority of the equipment that he used. Through his work as a shepherd, God had equipped David with just the right experience for the contest.

David recognised that the battle belonged to God, and in his situation he was prepared to enter it as the apparent underdog in order that the victory should belong to God as well. If Alan Kreider is right, intentional inferiority may have been part of God's strategy for Israel.

It does sometimes seem that when fighting for the kingdom, churches today strive to ensure that they can meet the world on as equal terms as possible. Perhaps we should consider whether intentional inferiority might not be a strategy that still has a place in God's work for His people. Certainly, a brief study of the history of missions, particularly in the nineteenth century, will throw up numerous examples of apparently weak and ill-equipped people who made astonishing advances with the gospel. However, such examples are not so obvious today.

I would not suggest that we should refrain from using the best methods and techniques available. David was not hesitant nor incapable of using the new weaponry, for as soon as he had killed Goliath with his stone age sling, he grabbed Goliath's sword and used it against him to remove his head, and then later used it in the war against others of God's enemies. However, the story of David, other biblical examples, and the history of missions, all teach us that we must refrain from trusting in things, rather than in God, to match what the world is doing.

If the gospel is advancing through the primary method of the foolishness of preaching and the manifest convicting work of the Holy Spirit, then by all means let us back that up with all the resources available to us. However if we trust in those resources rather than in God Himself, we may find that we are fighting a battle of our choosing rather than God's.

This same theme is echoed in the testimony of Paul. In his second letter to the Corinthian Church, he tells them that he glories in his weaknesses so that the power of Christ may be seen in him. Paul's main weapon throughout his life was the preaching of the cross, which he acknowledges was considered foolish by the world.

God has put His treasure in jars of clay for a reason. The world needs to see God at work. Unbelievers will not be impressed when we simply try to imitate or out do them on their own terms.



Baptism – in what Name?

A brief look at the arguments for and against using particular words when baptising people

Before he returned to heaven, Jesus issued final instructions to His followers. Amongst these was one, recorded at the end of Matthew's gospel, which stated:

“All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Most Christians, for most of church history have treated the phrase ‘baptising them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit’ as a command to speak the actual words when carrying out baptisms. They have understood it as an instruction to use a verbal formula. Herein lies a problem. In the subsequent biblical accounts of baptisms, those who heard Jesus speak apparently did not use such a formula themselves. There is no record of any first generation followers of Jesus, using the expression, ‘in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit’, either at baptisms or indeed in any other activity they undertook. Where there is an intimation of words spoken at a baptism they were: ‘In the name of Jesus Christ’, ‘In the name of the Lord Jesus’ or ‘In the name of the Lord’. If we accept the biblical record of what Jesus said as true, we have two options:

1. Jesus did indicate the use of a verbal, Trinitarian formula. However, all of the apostles and the first generation of Christians either misunderstood or disobeyed him, and the church (or most of it) has now corrected the matter.

2. Jesus did not intend the use of any verbal formula. The apostles understood him correctly and most of us are mistaken.

The first option is not very satisfactory. Whilst there are many times in the gospels when Jesus' followers did misunderstand Him, their level of understanding improved dramatically after Pentecost, just as God had promised it would when the Holy Spirit was outpoured. Even if we believe they misinterpreted what Jesus said at the time of His farewell, it is surely not credible to insist that the first apostles and followers remained in error. This leaves us with the second option. There are no problems in choosing this from a biblical point of view, but it does leave us with the dilemma that most churches have a practice that does not fit the biblical record.

Taking the second option first, let us consider the possibility that Jesus did not intend his words to be taken as a formula.

There are several dozen occasions in the New Testament when the writers use or record the phrase 'In the name'. When this occurs, it is always linked to Jesus, Jesus Christ, Lord or Lord Jesus. These are in four main areas when it is used:

Relating to God — such as pray, give thanks, receive salvation.

Mission — such as preach, heal, offer practical service or receive persecution or martyrdom and baptising.

Spiritual powers — such as casting out demons or subjugating authorities to Christ.

The Church — such as identity as a group, dealing with issues, giving instructions, teaching, praying and service for each other.

They span the whole breadth of Christian life, service and death. On one occasion in Colossians, Paul said 'Whatever you do, in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus'.

When the term 'in the name' is used, it denotes one or both of two things. Either, identification with and/or with the authority of. It does not appear to require the use of a particular form of words in order to be valid. On occasions, words indicating identification and authority may be helpfully used, but the words themselves are not the authentication of the identification/authority which will stand, regardless of whether a specific formula is spoken.

During Paul's stay in Ephesus it was reported that God worked unusual miracles by the hands of Paul so that even handkerchiefs or aprons were brought from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out of them. His methods at Ephesus indicate that it is possible to move in the authority of the name of Jesus Christ without apparently using specific words or methods. By contrast, when in the same city, sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, invoked the name of Jesus over a demonised man their authority was not recognised because they were not followers of Jesus. The demon refused to come out and caused the man to attack them. Even though they had used an apparently correct form of words, they did not have the actual authority to back them up.

The true followers of Jesus acted on His authority and out of their identification with Him. God's affirmation of their actions was based on their position in Christ, not on whether they verbally declared that relationship in a particular way. Of course, they often, probably usually did declare it, but it was not essential. When we look through the New Testament record, we do not find repeated verbal formulas used all the time, but when a name was invoked, it was the name of Jesus not the Trinity.

If we are to understand Jesus' final instructions as a command to use a Trinitarian formula in baptism, we would have to do so in the face of substantial biblical evidence to the contrary.

On the several occasions when 'In the name' was used or encouraged to be used, including in respect of several baptisms, there is not a single incidence of this being linked to the Trinity.

Therefore, in order to side with what is overwhelming historical and present church practice, we must understand that all the first generation of Jesus' followers – to a man with no exceptions – got it wrong. This would not appear to be a reasonable option.

We therefore find ourselves in the situation of needing to evaluate Church practice. Whether it is intended or incidental, virtually every church gives the impression that part of the validation of the baptismal event comes from using specific words. In the majority of cases, this is the Trinitarian formula.

Some churches however, noting the evidence considered above, have opted for a Jesus only formula, often requiring a person be re-baptised if their original baptism was not done in this way.

It appears that these churches accept or reject a baptism as valid, merely based on the words used. However, if Jesus should not be understood as instigating the use of a Trinitarian formula, then He should not be understood as requiring a Jesus only formula either.

The issue cannot simply be a choice between two different sets of words. If we are baptising based on our identification with Jesus Christ and in his delegated authority, then, provided that is a reality, the particular words used in the ceremony will neither validate nor invalidate it. It must surely be permissible to speak of God in any biblical term or manner at baptisms or on any other occasion. To insist on using a particular form of words, especially when that is in dispute anyway, would seem to be unnecessarily contentious.

Unless we insist all Jesus' followers were either seriously mistaken or deliberately disobedient, we have to accept that they did not take His words to mean a Trinitarian formula should be used at baptisms for the simple reason they did not do it.

How then should we understand Jesus' final commands?

During the days spent on earth after His resurrection, Jesus prepared His disciples for the task that lay ahead of them. This primarily consisted of two elements:

He told them what they should do: Evangelise, make disciples and baptise all nations.

He told them the basis of their authority for doing so. The scriptures had foretold His coming, He was now the supreme authority in the universe, God the Father would validate and empower the disciples by sending the Holy Spirit, and Jesus Himself would be alongside His followers until the work was finished.

Whilst it was Jesus who commissioned the disciples, His instructions would be backed up by the active involvement of Father, Son and Spirit. This appears to be how Peter understood the situation. Preaching his first sermon on the day of Pentecost Peter explained that:

*God the Father raised Jesus from the dead, exalted Him to His right hand (place of authority) and gave Him the Holy Spirit promised before-hand in scripture. The Holy Spirit, now come to earth, was visibly authenticating what Peter and the others were saying and doing. Peter's hearers should therefore repent, be forgiven by the Father, **be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ**, and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*

Whilst the preaching of Peter could hardly be more Trinitarian in content, the mandate to baptise is clearly stated as coming from the specific authority of Jesus. If Peter understood it in this way, then it would seem likely that the heart of the meaning of Jesus' words as recorded by Matthew relate to His own standing within the Trinity. That is:

All authority in heaven and on earth had now been given to Him.

Therefore, any command of His would be identified with, and would carry the full authority of the Trinitarian God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

His active on-going involvement with His disciples should be understood as being the active involvement of Godhead.

At the beginning of Matthew's Gospel, Jesus is called Immanuel - God with us. He is also clearly designated as the Messianic King, God's representative on earth. At the time of Jesus transfiguration God is heard to say 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, listen to Him'. Jesus is the Messianic representative of God, the mediator of God to men. Jesus final command should therefore be understood as embodying full Trinitarian authority – not as requiring the use of a Trinitarian formula.

The above argument does not mean that we may not use a particular form of words in baptism, either Trinitarian or relating to Jesus. However, it does mean that we may not insist upon a particular form, nor treat a baptism as invalid purely on the grounds that the words used were not the ones favoured by ourselves or our particular church community.

HOW GOD TEACHES US

As we seek to grow as Christians, and especially as we seek to co-operate with Jesus as He builds His church, we need to adjust our thinking to try and understand how God thinks, in order that we can understand how He will teach us to live as He wants us to. The bible explains:

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. (Isaiah Ch 55 v 8)

"For what person knows the thoughts and motives of a man except the man's spirit within him? So also no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God." (1 Corinthians Ch 2 v 11)

All thoughts are unique, only fully known by the one who thinks them. When we try and pass them on to someone else, there is always the possibility that they will not receive them as they were in our minds before we communicated them. There is usually some loss in understanding when one person passes on their thoughts to another. That is why misunderstandings arise between human beings. How much more then, are we likely to misunderstand what God is thinking? Although we have a record of what He has spoken to us in the bible, there may be misunderstanding on our part about what God has said.

It is important to realise that we should not try to understand merely on a human level, but allow ourselves to be taught by the Spirit of God. As the scripture says, it is only the Spirit of God who knows the thoughts of God, and we are entirely dependent on Him teaching us. This is of course promised to us as part of the New Covenant.

“This is the covenant I will establish with the people of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will they teach their neighbour, or say to one another, ‘Know the Lord’, because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest” (Hebrews Ch 8 v 10-11 quoted from Jeremiah Ch 31 v 31ff).

When the New Covenant was inaugurated on the day of Pentecost, the most noticeable change that happened to Peter, was not an increase in power, but a marked increase in understanding. Previously, he had thought the cross was totally wrong for Jesus, and he, along with the other disciples, thought of the kingdom in national and military terms. They maintained this wrong idea up until the moment Jesus returned to heaven. However, as soon as Peter had received the Holy Spirit, he not only understood that what he and the other disciples were experiencing had been foretold by Joel, but also that the resurrection had been foretold by David. Most importantly, he knew what was taking place in heaven between Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Peter was only able to grasp these things because God had fulfilled His New Covenant promise to send the Holy Spirit to teach His people Himself. Peter was the first to manifestly benefit from this, though it is God’s intention to teach us all. The apostle John emphasised this in his first letter:

“The anointing which you have received from Him remains in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you: but that anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true and is not a lie.”
(1 John Ch 2 v 27)

One of the primary tasks of the Holy Spirit is to renew our minds including changing the way we think about things. If we continue to think in the way that we did before we became Christians, then we are likely to remain the same in the way we live. We may want

to change, but our words and our actions will always match the way we think. We need to begin to understand how God thinks. Quoting from Jeremiah Ch 23, Paul asked the Roman Church *“Who has known the mind of the Lord?”* He emphasised that God’s ways are past finding out; the human mind is simply not capable of understanding what God thinks. However, Paul then goes on to say:

“Do not conform to the way that the world does things, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”(Romans Ch 12 v 2).

We can have our minds renewed and that renewal will be measured by conformity to the mind of Christ. As we embrace that renewal, we will be changed. From the same passage in Romans, we see that this is linked to a surrender of our whole beings to God as living sacrifices. In the New Covenant, we embrace Christ’s death for ourselves, accepting by faith the termination of our own lives through His cross, so that we can say with Paul:

“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” (Galatians ch 2 v 20)

As we live this new life, the indwelling Spirit of Christ will teach us. His teaching will change our understanding and our actions. The New Covenant reception and indwelling of the Spirit is the way God enables us to live the Christian life. When Ezekiel prophesied about the future age of the Spirit, he said:

“I will put my Spirit inside you and change you so that you will obey my laws and carefully obey my commands.” (Ezekiel Ch 36 v 27)

However, it is very important to see that the work of the Holy Spirit is intimately linked to the scriptures God has given us. The Holy Spirit was only able to give Peter understanding about the cross and resurrection, Pentecost and what was happening in heaven

because, in common with many Jewish men of his time, he would have had some working knowledge of the scriptures.

It is absolutely right to emphasise the necessity of being taught by the Spirit, but that does not diminish the role of the bible in our spiritual education. Paul reminded Timothy:

“The Holy Scriptures are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Jesus Christ. For all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, in order that the man or woman of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” (2 Timothy Ch 3 v 15-17)

It is not a question of word or Spirit, but word and Spirit.

If you have ever seen a dead bird in the garden, you will need no convincing, that without breath there is no life. However when you see a bird soaring through the sky, you will also know that its ultimate purpose and function comes when breath imparts life to its body, and the two in unison express what God intended the bird to be. Just as it is perfectly normal for the bird to be a fusion of breath and feathers, blood and bone, and indeed it must be, to be truly a bird, so too, it is normal for the word of God to be a fusion of Spirit, words, phrases, sentences and paragraphs. Jesus said:

“The very words I have spoken to you are spirit and life.” (John Ch 6 v 63)

Jesus’ words, the words of human language, made up of letters, grammar, punctuation and intonation, were Spirit and Life. The words that God speaks are always a fusion of language and Spirit. Just as the breath in a bird does not change the feathers, blood and bone into something else, but makes them what they should be, so

also the Spirit does not change the scriptures to make them something other than what they are, rather the Spirit fills the words with the meaning that God always intended them to have.

It is very important that we recognise that just as the bird consists of natural component parts (feathers etc.) so too the bible consists of the ordinary component parts that make up a language. There are letters, words, and sentences. There is punctuation, parts of speech, context, history, poetry and everything else that goes into the formation of normal language. The Spirit does not change that, but makes it come alive. Paul also wrote to Timothy:

“Work hard so you can present yourself to God and receive his approval. Be a good worker, one who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly explains the word of truth.” (2 Timothy Ch 2 v 15)

It was the same Paul who wrote to the Corinthian Church that, *“the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life”*, who also told Timothy that he needed to study hard. The right balance for a learner is 100% reliance on the Holy Spirit and 100% reliance on the study of the written word. When this dual emphasis is lacking, we become open to the extremes of right understanding coupled with inadequate experience and action, or right experience and action coupled with inadequate understanding. Or, God forbid, we may even end up with inadequate understanding, inadequate experience and inadequate action. This especially tends to happen when leaders encourage the people to become reliant on them, rather than equipping them to become proficient in the scriptures, and to be in tune with the Spirit themselves.

Any of us who are leaders, need to mature in our understanding of the mind of God, but all His people have been made priests with access to God as well, and we are all called to a new measure of understanding where all are taught by God Himself.

IT COULDN'T HAPPEN OR COULD IT?

If there is one thing that all Christians say they agree with Jesus on, it is probably His reply to the question “What is the greatest commandment?”

Few would want to argue against the primacy of loving God with all our heart, all our soul and all of our mind, and nor would we disagree with the second greatest commandment either – loving our neighbour as ourselves.

If we were given the task of working out how to prevent Christians from keeping these commandments, whilst at the same time making them think they were actually fulfilling them, I wonder how we would go about it. Learning from Screwtape’s advice to the apprentice devil Wormwood, perhaps we could offer advice along these lines:

‘Your first approach should be to study methods that have been used in the past. A direct attack on truth through an outright denial rarely seems to be successful. Looking at the way that the serpent successfully spoke to Eve, we see that victory was gained by a subtle twisting or undermining of the truth that invited confusion (we might affectionately call it a ‘half lie’).

An easy suggestion – almost too obvious to be considered – would be to switch round the order of the commandments. Make the second one the first and relegate the first to be second. What if you could convince Christians that the primary task of the church was to love their neighbours? There was an old saying used as a weapon of defence against us in years past, but now generally in disuse, that, ‘The good is the enemy of the best’, but we have managed to stop them using that.

No one could, would, or dare deny the rightness of good works toward neighbours, but what if, and this would need to be done very skilfully, it was possible to alter the order and priority, so that good works become the first requirement and loving God the second?

It might then be possible, to increase the emphasis on the good works to such an extent that they become the total, or as near to total as we can get, focus of resources and energy of the church. This then is the masterstroke, it might just then be possible to separate the two commandments entirely so that God is squeezed out of the equation altogether.

Perhaps it could work alongside other lines of attack which are already in place such as these:

We know that the first main weapon God has given the church is the belt of truth and that it is that (as belts are intended to do) which keeps everything else together. Truth is communicated first through the bible, and received first by the mind. If we could persuade Christians that experience overrules what the bible says, and that it is in fact ‘unspiritual’ to use their minds too much, then we might be in a position to consolidate the proposed strategy.

*The bible teaches that God is the God who provides. But, what if we can convince them that this does not happen **in experience**. We could then persuade them that the world is their source of provision, not God. We know that the world is in such a mess that many governments and secular organisations will fall over themselves to put resources into any effective work, but most of them will also insist that any ‘religious’ element is toned down or removed entirely. So, if the church can be persuaded to look to the world for support, then it will inevitably compromise its message.*

We know of course that there is ample evidence from the past in the way of written testimonies, that will back up the bible, and make a strong case for what used to be called 'living by faith' (don't neglect to point out how quaint and old fashioned some of these sayings are), but few read such things these days.

The only real danger of failure we face, is if Christians learn how to think about our strategy. However, provided we keep up the bombardment against their minds, we should be OK. Remember – keep emphasising rules that will keep their minds inactive such as:

- 1. It is not truly spiritual to use the mind too much.*
- 2. Truth is whatever anyone says it is.*
- 3. It is not possible these days to have ultimate truths.*
- 4. Keep emphasising love, **but under no circumstances let anyone define what it means.***
- 5. Every challenge to an opinion should be taken personally and classified as unloving.*
- 6. Experience is the only validating factor.*
- 7. Believe the bible, but don't study it.*
- 8. Television (either 5 minute interviews or soaps; both are equally effective) is a much better place to get formative information than reading.*
- 9. Everything on social media should be considered true.*
- 10. Make sure that whatever you do, you do because it makes you feel good, not because it is somehow 'right'.*
- 11. A thing is more likely to be good if it is new and more likely to be bad if it is old.*
- 12. That any argument can be silenced, or any point rejected, if you just say strongly enough: **"But that is only your opinion"**. This will prove to be one of the most effective ploys that you can use, as it gives the increased benefit of making the speaker believe they have won the argument.*

There are of course lots more, but I am sure you will be able to think of some for yourselves (oops! We used the 'think' word there, mustn't do that too often).

The next step might be to remove any real meaning or content from the words that are sung in church. It is essential to make them feel good but to actually be very vague as far as having any meaning is concerned. Also, and very, very important, eliminate sermons that stimulate the mind. It will be quite easy if you persuade people that no one can concentrate these days, or failing that, simply revert to the strategy that emphasises that preaching is old fashioned and we must keep up with the times. And of course, tone down anything to do with sin – we want everyone (except ourselves of course) to be very, very tolerant. We will deal with some of these things in more detail in a further letter.

A few decades might be enough to accomplish this, but the first wave of troops were sent in thirty or forty years ago, so we might begin to see some real results quite soon, provided of course, no one alerts the church to what is happening.

Let me know how you get on with this suggestion of relegating the commandment of loving God to second place – I think it could really work.

Of course, it could never happen– or could it?

HAVE HOLINESS SONGS BEEN



It would be an astonishing thing for any church to ban songs about holiness, but it is so rare to hear them sung in churches these days, that I might be excused for wondering if it could possibly be true. I appreciate that many of the poems, songs and hymns that echoed this theme were written some time ago, but if age and style were the only criteria we would have banished bibles long ago.

In 1874 Frances Ridley Havergal, wrote a hymn as an act of re-consecration out of the sheer joy of seeing ten people converted or brought back to the Lord over the previous five days. She had only come into a holy walk with God a few years previously, after having been a Christian for many years. Perhaps we so rarely experience what she experienced that we rarely sing what she sang.

Take my life, and let it be, consecrated, Lord, to Thee.
Take my moments and my days; let them flow in ceaseless praise.

Take my voice, and let me sing, always, only, for my King.
Take my lips, and let them be filled with messages from Thee.

Take my silver and my gold; not a mite would I withhold.
Take my intellect, and use every power as Thou shalt choose.

Take my will, and make it Thine; it shall be no longer mine.
Take my heart, it is Thine own; it shall be Thy royal throne.

Written about ten years previously, *The Church's One Foundation* was penned in very different circumstances. Samuel Stone, a young curate in the Church of England was stirred by divisions in the church and by the increasing strength of the liberal wing within it. He wanted to affirm the churches traditional position on the ninth of the Thirty Nine Articles 'I believe in the Holy Universal Church'. The first verse, declares unequivocally that the Church was created by Christ to be His Holy Bride.

The Church's one foundation
Is Jesus Christ her Lord,
She is His new creation
By water and the Word.
From heaven He came and sought her
To be His holy bride;
With His own blood He bought her
And for her life He died.

Stone's passion was for the Church to be holy. A hundred years earlier than Frances Havergal, Augustus Toplady shared her passion for the holiness of the individual. Contemporary with the Wesleys, he also preached and wrote of the cross of Jesus achieving the double victory over the guilt and the power of sin.

Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee;
Let the water and the blood,
From Thy riven side which flowed,
Be of sin the double cure,
Save me from its guilt and power.

For a long time this same theme was the foundational message of the Keswick Convention, but has been largely lost today. It was also the undergirding message of many of the early pioneers of the Pentecostal movement during the first three decades of last century. However, among many, the emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit shifted from holiness to gifts rather than to holiness *and* gifts. Some of the pioneering charismatics from the 1960's did re-emphasise holiness and re-introduced some of Charles Wesley's hymns such as:

O for a heart to praise my God,
A heart from sin set free!
A heart that always feels the blood
So freely spilt for me.

As a new Christian, I remember being challenged and stimulated by the powerful singing of Charles Wesley's hymn:

The most impossible of all
Is that I e'er from sin should cease;
Yet shall it be, I know it shall;
Jesus, look to thy faithfulness!
If nothing is too hard for thee,
All things are possible to me.

However, the revival of the singing of such hymns did not last very long. Just a decade in some places, and not more than twenty or thirty years in most. Although the 1960s and 1970s did see a number of very good new songs written on the theme of holiness, these rarely entered into the mainstream of the church. 'Jesus, thy cross is sweet to me', by Carol Jerman was one such song:

Jesus, thy cross is sweet to me,
This blessed place of rest;
Abiding here brings liberty
From all that once distressed;
All my condition, so hopeless and stubborn,
All the despair that ensued;
Jesus, my Lord, I die in thee,
In thee I rise renewed..

Jesus, thy cross is given to me,
A gift unspeakably great;
Nothing but this could remedy
My accursed state.
Now from the curse, thou hast provided
This way of escape alone;
This is the way that all may go,
This is too hard for none.

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In one of his latest books, 'Whatever Happened to the Gospel?' R.T. Kendall notes the 'shallow content of so many songs today'. The sad thing is that such shallowness is vigorously defended in many churches, whilst songs which express a deep heart longing and expectant faith for holiness no longer have any place. Of course, I do not think they have been banned, but their omission may be more serious. Could it be that we no longer believe that holiness is an integral part of the Gospel? If we do not, that would go some way toward explaining why we no longer sing about it. Such hymns arise whenever God moves in holiness, but only last for as long as the matter is preached and experienced. Referring to the hymn 'O for a heart to praise my God, a heart from sin set free!' General William Booth remarked: 'Great as is the power of such songs to stir our hearts, nothing delights the genuine Salvationist more than the definite testimonies of those living in the enjoyment of the Blessing, or the earnest prayers for its bestowment.' Would he be able to say the same today?

For those who do believe in the importance of holiness and who miss such singing I leave a couple of verses of one more hymn, by Francis Bottome (1823 – 1894) and sung to the tune of Guide me O thou Great Jehovah.

Full salvation! Full salvation!
Lo, the fountain opened wide,
Streams through every land and nation
From the Saviour's wounded side.
Full salvation! Full salvation!
Streams an endless crimson tide.

Oh, the glorious revelation!
See the cleansing current flow,
Washing stains of condemnation
Whiter than the driven snow:
Full salvation! Full salvation!
Oh, the rapturous bliss to know.

SMITH WIGGLESWORTH

Rightly called 'The Apostle of Faith' and much used of God in preaching, healing and evangelism during the formation and establishment of the Pentecostal churches in the first half of the last century, he is still often remembered for the following prophecy, which he gave in 1947, shortly before he died:



“During the next few decades there will be two distinct moves of the Holy Spirit across the church in Great Britain. The first move will affect every church that is open to receive it, and will be characterised by the restoration of the baptism and gifts of the Holy Spirit.

The second move of the Holy Spirit will result in people leaving historic churches and planting new churches. In the duration of each of these moves, the people who are involved will say, 'This is a great revival.' But the Lord says, 'No, neither is this the great revival but both are steps towards it.'

When the new church phase is on the wane, there will be evidence in the churches of something that has not been seen before: a coming together of those with an emphasis on the word and those with an emphasis on the Spirit.

When the word and the Spirit come together, there will be the biggest move of the Holy Spirit that the nations, and indeed, the world have ever seen. It will mark the beginning of a revival that will eclipse anything that has been witnessed within these shores, even the Wesleyan and Welsh revivals of former years.

The outpouring of God's Spirit will flow over from the United Kingdom to mainland Europe, and from there, will begin a missionary move to the ends of the earth.”

Many people have seen a fulfilment of the words of the first two paragraphs of this prophecy in the charismatic movement in the historic churches, followed by the restoration movement in some

of the newer churches, and the explosion of small independent pentecostal churches and new denominations, which have characterised the past thirty years or so in this country.

If Wigglesworth's prophecy has been accurate to this extent, then should we be asking how we prepare for the time when the new churches are on the wane? Some would suggest this is already happening, and certainly the fragmentation and de-powering of the Church would make it seem inevitable in the not too distant future.

Quite apart from the prophecy, any discerning Christian will be aware of the need in the Church for a recovery of the word of God to be preached and expounded in life and converting power. How many of us have seen real moves of the Spirit in recent years, compared to those in the first two thirds of the twentieth century?

Without question we need a powerful coming together of word and Spirit. Wigglesworth's prophecy may simply be another signpost of that need. Where are those who are prepared to pay the price necessary in order to be mastered by the word of God and to be holy and powerful ministers of the Spirit?

There appear to be many who are looking for quick fixes, and apparently finding them in hyped up meetings that are characterised by the flesh rather than the Spirit of God. Whatever we think of the Wigglesworth prophecy, we are desperately in need of God to have mercy and revive His people by His Spirit. But, and this is crucial, the Spirit must find us saturated with the word so that He can make it alive to both us and the world.

Apparently, Smith Wigglesworth, the mouthpiece of the famous prophecy, also stoutly insisted that there are four principles we need to maintain in respect of the bible:

1st, Read the word of God

2nd, Consume the word of God until it consumes you

3rd, Believe on the word of God

4th, Act on the word of God

