

Fulness

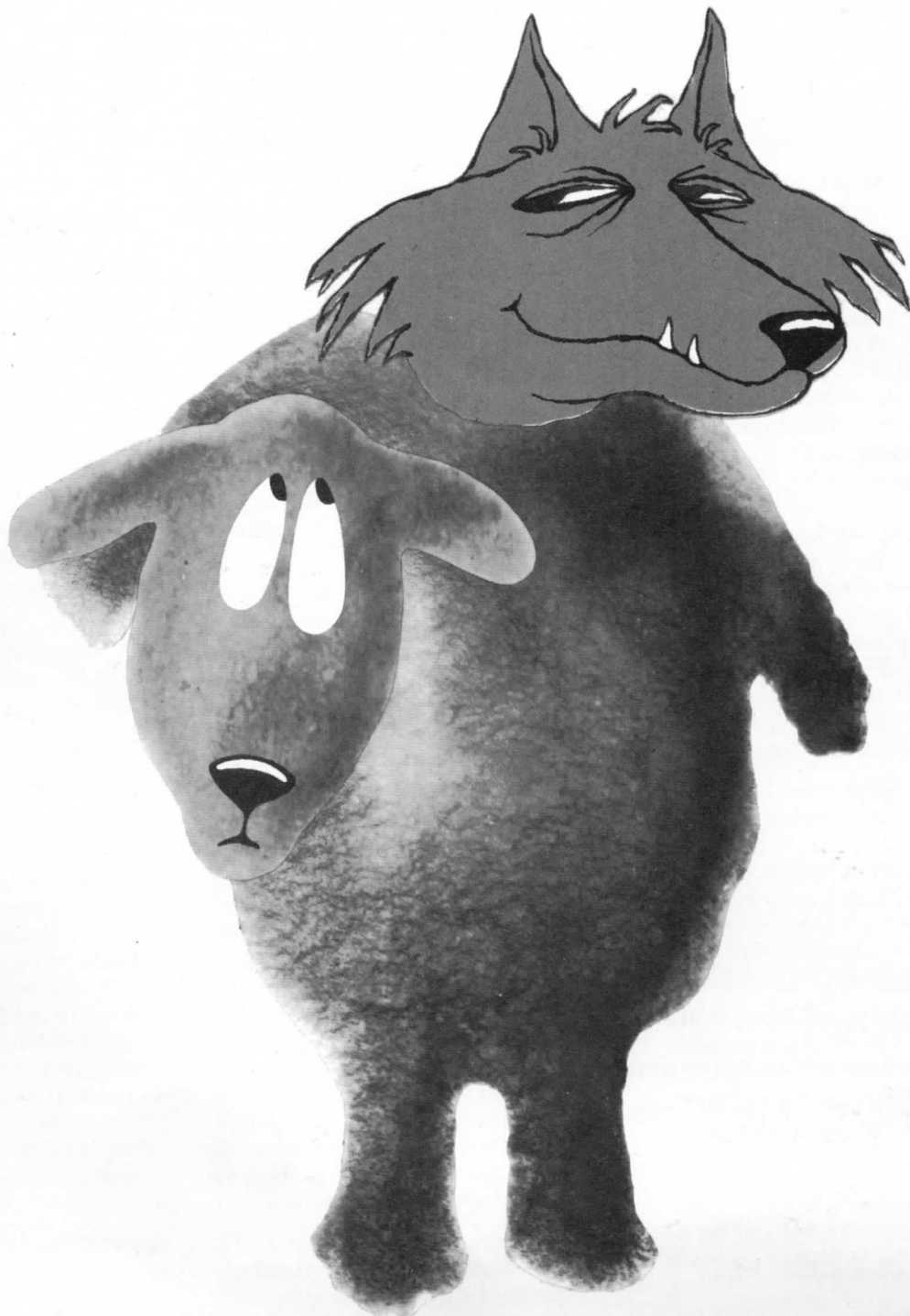
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Editorial

Are we radical enough?

Graham Perrins

An air of excitement still prevails in the Church. The present movement of the Spirit is by no means a spent force. Multitudes are still being baptized in the Spirit and spiritual gifts are increasingly seen to be a normal part of Church life. The fog of formality and tradition is lifting. A welcome emphasis is being placed on personal relationships, discipleship, freedom of worship, community life, authority and commitment.

The evidence of renewal is clearer in some places than in others. Houston and Ann Arbor have been given much publicity. The growth of house churches has received a lot of comment. It is also evident that on a quieter, more unobtrusive level, great changes are taking place. There is a rising tide of desire for true unity to be seen amongst God's people.

Our lives have been immeasurably enriched by what began in a small way in so many places some ten to fifteen years ago.

If we are to continue to make progress, certain matters will have to be clearly faced. For some while different attitudes have been simmering on the subject of denominational churches and house churches.

For some the present movement of the Spirit is associated almost exclusively with the renewal of denominational Christianity. The spirit of nationalism can so easily be replaced by the spirit of denominationalism. I am pleased that many Methodists have been baptized in the Spirit but at present I fail to see this as a justification of Methodism. That Anglicans are experiencing the gifts of the Spirit does not mean that God has said 'Carry on Bishop'!

It is tragic that some Christians are more concerned about their particular organisation be it

Pentecostal or Catholic than with the Church of Jesus Christ. This preoccupation with denominational Christianity must be challenged. Often it can mask bigotry or a party spirit.

That God is doing something far transcending denominational boundaries is evident to many. Some have called this age the post denominational era. There is undoubtedly a move away from denominational Christianity. Fifteen years ago most Christians in this country were to be found in the so called 'historic churches'. This position is now changing and I believe it will continue to do so.

Many are asking the question 'Is the concept of denominational church life biblical?' It is a complicated and challenging issue. Important theological definitions of Church life and structure are involved.

But we have to face not only theological definitions concerning the nature of the Church, there is also the practical side, these cannot be divorced. If the present march of the Spirit is to continue there has to be a radical change in life style so that the Church can meet the needs of a crumbling world.

Family life without God is not standing up to the strain. False ideas of love and liberty have unfitted the young to face up to their marriage vows. Society today is shifting, rootless and shallow. The Church must show its relevance to these pressing needs. It must be seen as the alternative society living as much as possible an alternative way of life. It must demonstrate the kingdom of God in its overall life style rather than provide a mediocre music hall to entertain the religiously inclined.

The Church must become indented with people and families rather than with buildings and rituals.

God's people must seek to share together not only in meetings but in the daily round of life. They must show to the world that they depend on one another, that they trust and love each other, that they are being built together into God's family. This may involve moving house in order to live closer together, but this will enable community to be expressed in each neighbourhood.

We must work for the removal of denominational barriers, so that all believers who own the Lordship of Christ may gather together irrespective of former labels. We must pray for leaders to arise who will have a burden to establish one church in one locality and so demonstrate a true unity. This one local church will have many different household expressions but its leaders will relate to one another and submit to each other. They will go beyond the limitations of their own ministries and their own work and will learn to give place to others according to gift and ability. They will do this without bitterness or jealousy. The body will begin to function in depth as these diversified expressions begin to complement one another.

There will need to be true apostolic ministry to lay such foundations, men with vision and the ability to see their vision worked out in a practical way. Local leaders will learn to submit themselves to such men. The authority of God will be established in His Church.

There must be no half measures, no drawing back because of the difficulties. We dare not rest content with increasing numbers, bigger meetings, more influence or popularity. We cannot afford to be anything less than radical. The Spirit of God is in our midst leading us on in thought and life to the place of fulness.



Faith

The faith hyper-market

If faith could be purchased over the counter today, what a rush there would be! Imagine the all-night queue by large windows displaying the sign in bold lettering 'GRAND SALE! FAITH AT GREATLY REDUCED PRICES ...'

In the queue would be the mother whose son was a Hell's Angel, a dishevelled alcoholic, a hippy with drug-glazed eyes, the teenage mother with her illegitimate baby and maybe a man with cancer.

Faith is an integral part of human life. Without faith in each other, marriage is doomed to failure; without faith in his product a salesman cannot succeed; without faith in his equipment and skill the pilot would be a nervous wreck. But before we discuss what faith is we would do well to understand what faith isn't! There seem to be:

57 varieties

Well, not quite, but there are a number of things which we call 'faith' but which are not faith at all.

A tin of food stuff may bear a fancy title on the label but somewhere in small print you will find a list of the items you've really bought. It may read something like this: glutamate, colouring, cornflour, sugar . . . not a very appetizing list! So with our 'faith'. If we closely scrutinize our attitudes and are willing to be honest with ourselves we may find that our faith is really only:

Self confidence. This isn't faith in God but only a self-knowledge. "I know my own limitations and will endeavour to keep within them," is the brief which the self confident heart gives to its owner. This attitude gives an appearance of faith and may fool a lot of people until a real crisis looms on the horizon. Then as the storm increases 'self

Brian Holley

confidence' topples from its foundation of pride and the pride is washed away by the rain. Faith is confidence in someone else — not self.

Optimism. Now that's a nice attitude to life . . . always hoping for the best. But when that hope is based only on the so-called 'law' of averages instead of the unalterable love of God, Mr. Optimist is in for a lean time especially with the world as it is today. Optimism is nice but it's lazy: it expects the best to happen, but for no reason. Faith expects the best to happen because "in everything God works for good with those who love Him".

Fatalism. This kind of 'faith' is tailor made for those who hate making decisions. It accepts everything that comes, good and bad, and doesn't complain. Now it may appear to be a very commendable state of mind but in reality it is, like optimism, only laziness. It is also highly dangerous, for the Christian is told to 'resist the Devil'. Can you imagine God wanting us to say to that old lion Satan, "O.K. Satan, go on, gnaw my arm. Chew it off if you want; it's all God's will. I'll just sit here and let you carry on"? But when it comes to good and evil the man of faith is not passive but active, for "this is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith".

We often tend to regard these attitudes in ourselves or in others as 'faith' but really they are of a counterfeit variety. Real faith is like another limb. It isn't merely an attitude of mind (although it is that too), it is a condition of heart, which actually does something about the situation and which can change the course of events effectively as the hands of a captain turn his mighty vessel with a small wheel.

What is it?

"Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."

It is very difficult to describe the abstract. Faith is an abstract and like love can only be explained in its effect. When Paul wrote to Philemon he included a passage which will considerably help us to define what faith is. In verse six of the letter Paul says, "I pray that the sharing of your faith may promote the knowledge of all the good that is ours in Christ."

The phrase, 'the good that is ours in Christ' can surely come under the heading of 'things hoped for' and 'things not seen' in Hebrews 11:1. Basically of course faith is believing, but it's not just believing blindly and therefore Paul connects faith with knowledge (Gk. perception) in Philemon.

Among other definitions we can say then that faith is seeing 'the good that is ours in Christ' and having the assurance in our hearts of all that God intends towards those who love Him. It is that attitude which was manifested by Jesus when he prayed "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven". He saw that the will of God was, even at that moment, supremely established in heaven and that God's intention was to establish this same perfect will on earth. It is when we perceive God's will and believe in His ability to accomplish it that we can be called people of faith.

Where can I get it?

Of course we can't buy faith; but it is available and free. It doesn't come from meetings, it doesn't come from men of God, and you can't whip it up from somewhere inside. If you're reading this, you've probably tried all these wells and found them dry.

The Bible states quite categorically that faith — like everything else — comes from God. “By grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God.”

The experts say that Jesus’ statement “Have faith in God” can be translated ‘Have the faith of God’. In Galatians chapter 5 Paul explains that faith is a fruit of the Holy Spirit. So we see that when the Bible speaks of God as the author of all things it includes our faith. Indeed we have the clear statement in Hebrews 12 that Jesus is the author of our faith.

How do I get it?

“Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God.”

As we listen to what God says when we are reading the Bible or sitting under the ministry of men filled with the Holy Spirit, this living word is being sown into our hearts.

The well known parable of the sower describes various conditions of heart in which the seed will not prosper. It may be that there are stones and weeds that need uprooting by some special ministry before the seed can begin to take root effectively. Don’t let that thought get you down. There is not one condition mentioned in the parable of the sower that cannot be overcome by the Spirit-annointed ministry of a good husbandman.

Mains supply

Knowing then that God is faithful and that all the promises of God are Yes and Amen (not No or Maybe), let us look at some of the promises which provide our supply-line of faith.

“If God is for us, who is against us?”

“We know that in everything God works for good with those who love

Him.”

“My God will supply every need of yours according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.”

“Lo, I am with you always, even to the close of the age.”

“Yes, yes,” you say, I’ve read all this before, but it hasn’t made a scrap of difference. I’m still as depressed and defeated as ever!”.

How does faith work?

Faith is like electricity. The generator is in heaven (and there are never any power cuts there!). The Holy Spirit conveys the power of faith to our hearts by the Word of God which gains access to our being through our physical or mental ‘ears’.

Jesus said, “If any man’s will is to do his (God’s) will, he shall know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority.”

Between our ears and our heart lies a very important switch, the human will. This is a vital part of our make up, for with the will we rule the whole body, mind and spirit. It is the human will which decides to accept or reject what one sees, hears or feels.

It is by the will that a marriage is contracted. The question is asked “Will you take this woman...?” and the answer expected is “I will.”

It is by the will that the goods of the deceased are distributed. An unwilling worker becomes a burden to his company, but a willing worker is an asset.

But the will must be distinguished from faith. The Oxford Dictionary describes the will as the “faculty by which one decides what one shall do; control exercised by deliberate purpose over impulse;” the strength of my will lies in my own power

whereas the strength of my faith depends on the person on whom I am trusting.

You can accept what God says — if you want to. You can disbelieve what God says — if you want to. God has given you a will and in exercising it you can either receive “every spiritual blessing in heavenly places,” or continue the round of sin, failure and depression.

Jesus had a will of His own, but when He found Himself in the most desperate situation in His earthly life He did a very sensible thing. He yielded up His will and received the mighty will of His Father. Ultimately then He overcame His own will by faith. But we must begin at the other end, receiving that faith into our hearts by willing co-operation with God.

Faith that works

“Faith working through love”.

Once you operate the ‘will switch’ the current of the Word of God starts getting through to the heart. Now if it’s a hard heart, full of bitterness and unforgiving attitudes, faith is going to be short circuited in no time. If you feel bitter towards the Lord for not letting you do something or for taking away a loved one, you’re short circuiting that ‘faith current’. Only a tender loving heart makes a good conductor for faith to travel through. If that’s the case with you then confess your sins to God right now and He will give you a new start.

Do you love Jesus? Not just believe about Him, not just pray to Him, not just sing about Him, but do you love Him? Would you die for Him, suffer shame for Him, forsake all for Him, not because you ought to but because you really love Him? The Church is called the Bride of Christ and Jesus wants our affection. He’s not interested in religious platitudes

droned out on Sundays to the accompaniment of a wheezing organ! There are many Christians who would have to admit that they don't love Jesus, but only believe in Him. But don't get discouraged. If you see yourself here, don't give up. Jesus still loves you with all His heart. "He who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all, will He not also give us all things with Him?" You can't do anything about the past except admit the failure and give it to God. You can't do anything about the present except to receive willingly what God says and let His Word work in your heart.

But it may be that you're saying, "Well that's not relevant to me. I do love the Lord and there doesn't seem to be anything particularly wrong in my walk with Him, yet I'm still not getting the victory that I feel I should be getting." Well, there is a further stage to God's faith circuit.

Open the flood gates!

To complete a circuit the electricity flows in one side of an appliance and out the other. It is the outflow that often causes the problem in the 'faith-circuit'.

God says. "My word . . . shall not return unto me empty, "and this gives us the key to God's law of faith.

We have seen that God's Word comes

from Him. It is received by our ears and then the will of man decides whether or not he will accept the word. Upon acceptance the word is channelled to the heart, but then, as we see from the verse in Isaiah it must then return to it's maker in order to complete the circuit. This is the cycle of life, the word itself being a living word.

"If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."

Here is how the word of the Lord returns to Him. It is when we start confessing that things begin to happen. Here is where the power of God is fully harnessed to our circumstances.

It was this simple act that brought the walls of Jericho down. A woman of 90 bore a son to a man over 100 because of his confession. The Red Sea stood on its hind legs and clapped its hands at Moses' confession, and by that same confession Pharaoh had capitulated to a nation of slaves.

The word 'confess' in the original language of the New Testament means 'to say the same thing as.' When God says, "Christ died for your sins," and the word enters our ears and is willingly received into our hearts we are half way to being saved. It is when the word is 'confessed with our lips' and we say, "Christ died for my sins," that the

circuit is completed and God's word returns to Him, having accomplished what it was sent to do. You will notice that it is nowhere suggested that God's word will always return to Him. But what is clearly stated is that when it does it will be in a state of fulfilment.

So walk

"As you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so live in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith."

How did you receive Him? By faith.

How will you now walk? By faith.

You will continue to hear God's word day by day. You will discover that He will speak to you specifically of certain issues. You will continue to believe His word in your heart because you are beginning to see it work out in life in a particular sense. Then you will continue to confess it aloud to God in prayer and praise — aloud to Satan as he comes to tempt and deceive you — aloud to those with whom you live and move and have your being. No longer will you struggle to maintain some semblance of Christian witness, but you will begin to experience what it means to be seated together with Christ in heavenly places. Then, as with the Head, so with you, a part of His Body, you will uphold all things by the word of His power.

Book review by Barney Coombs

Not under law

Gerald Coates &
Hugh Thompson

'Not under law' spells fireworks. It may produce temporary confusion, and perhaps hurt some: but it will make a vital contribution to the recovery of God's principles in the Church.

In this little book quite a number of evangelical sacred cows are not merely touched, but slaughtered, I fear the authors will be sadly misunderstood and that there will be strong reaction from the many 'Mr. Lawsons' of the religious establishment. I sincerely hope that the incisive thrust of this book will penetrate many legalistically bound minds causing a thorough repentance from dead works and establishing the renewed mind of Christ.

The authors must not be suprised or deterred by an adverse response. After all, the Lord Jesus Himself

received far worse treatment on the same issues as those raised in this book. There is a rapidly increasing host of honest, searching believers who will warmly welcome it.

One criticism I would make is that while Nick Butterworth's cover design is excellent I feel that it is spoilt by the rather drab colour; and the book's size and shape is not well suited to the normal display apparatus of a book shop. These factors may result in fewer readers: that would be a great pity for so many people desperately need to read 'Not under law'.

Not Under Law can be obtained from: Facet Publications, 41 Tartar Road, Cobham, Surrey, England.
Price 25p with discount on larger orders.

Apostolic Ministry



Graham Perrins
takes a look at the ministry
of 'one sent forth'

Consider Jesus

In studying the New Testament ministry of an Apostle, we begin by considering Jesus, he is the Apostle supreme. In Him we have an Apostolic ministry of full stature.

The Apostle is literally 'one sent forth', the word being derived from a root meaning 'to send'. It does not contain any thought of purpose or function, it just has the simple meaning of 'one who is sent forth'.

There is an equivalent word in the Hebrew which does add a little to our understanding of the word Apostle. In the part of the Talmud dealing with the oral law, there is a passage that reads:

'If he that says the tefillah (the tefillah was a Jewish prayer) falls into error, it is a bad omen for him, and if he was the agent (apostle) of the congregation, it is a bad omen for them that appointed him, because a man's agent is like to himself'.

A man's apostle is like to himself. We see that if a man saying prayers, falls into error, he brings shame upon himself. If the man who falls into error is the agent, the apostle of a congregation, then he brings shame upon the congregation, because there is this link, a man's apostle is like to himself. The

apostle is more than just a messenger, he is identified with the one sending him.

The earliest occurrence in the Greek is in Herodotus, and there it is used of a herald who is sent forth to arrange a truce. Clearly a man with authority to execute business on behalf of the one who sends him. He embodies the authority of the one sending him. Thayer in discussing the link between the two Greek words for send, says that *pempo*, is a more general term, whereas the word we are looking at, *apostello*, is a term that usually suggests an authoritative or official sending.

Linking these definitions together, we see that the word apostle is a very rich word. It suggests that Jesus Christ was 'sent forth from the Father', not as a mere messenger, but as one who embodied in himself all the authority of the Father, one who was identified with, and came to represent the one who sent him.

Bringing salvation

The purpose of his apostleship is described in many New Testament passages. John in particular brings out one reason. 'God sent His Son into the world, not to condemn the world; but that the world through

Him might be saved' (John 3:17, see also 1 John 4:9,10,14).

Jesus was sent to deal with the sin of humanity and to bring humanity into life, into salvation. In an even simpler definition Jesus said 'I am come to do the will of Him who sent me'. Jesus the Apostle was concerned to implement the will of the one who sent him.

Building God's house

In Hebrews 3 there is a further reason for His apostleship. The whole passage is concerned with the building of the house of God. Jesus did not come only to bring salvation to men and women, but to ensure that those who had received life might be built together into a habitation for God. 'Consider the Apostle and High Priest Jesus, he that build the house'. He was sent to deal with the sin of men, to bring men into salvation and life, and then to crown it all by building a house where God might dwell, a house God could fill with his presence.

Note the example of Moses who is also referred to in this passage in Hebrews. He was faithful concerning God's house. In Acts 7 we see that Moses had a ministry of salvation. He was sent to be a deliverer (v 35). He also had another

task. He was to build God a dwelling place according to the pattern God had shown him on the mount (v 44). The apostolic ministry of Moses was concerned not only with redemption but with building a house for God. Moses here prefigures what God is ultimately after, a house not made with hands, build up of living stones.

Mission unfinished

Let me observe from Acts 3 that the apostolic ministry of Jesus is an incompleting ministry, it did not finish with the resurrection. In this chapter we see a further sending forth of Jesus to bless Israel, indeed to bless the nations (25-26). How was he sent forth after being raised from the dead? He was sent forth in the ministry of the church.

Apostleship in the Church

The resurrection of Jesus brought about a transformation in the ministry of the apostle. What had hitherto been limited to Jesus and the twelve is now enlarged. What had been limited in geography to Palestine now becomes universal. It is significant that in Ephesians 4 it is the risen Lord who bestowed the gift of apostleship to the church. This came after the resurrection of Jesus. He ascended and gave gifts unto men — first apostles. The apostolic mission of Jesus is an incompleting mission, for after his resurrection it continues in the apostles of the New Testament, the ones sent forth to represent Him.

The message they brought was 'repent therefore and return that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; and that he may send Jesus the Christ appointed for you, whom heaven must receive until the period of restoration of all

things.' (Acts 3:19).

The mission of Jesus

Here is the ultimate expression of the apostleship of Jesus, his final sending forth. Here we see a tremendous sweep, God sent forth Jesus Christ, who completed the work of redemption and was raised from the dead, apostolic ministry then entered a new dimension with the apostles of the church, this to be climaxed by the final sending forth of Christ to bring about the restoration of all things.

Whether we look at the twelve, or at the company who follow, we must see that their apostolic ministry is an extension of His. It is His apostleship which is being embodied in them. He is sent in his apostles. We see it more specifically in John's Gospel. 'Truly, truly I say to you, he who receives whomsoever I send receives me' (13 v20). Here is the sent one, and he who receives the sent one is receiving Christ himself.

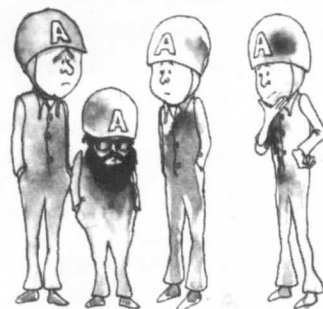
Continued by his apostles

'As thou didst send me into the world, I also have sent them into the world' (17.18, 20.21). One purpose for the sending in verse 21, 'that the world may believe that thou didst send me'. Their sending forth not only extended the sending forth of Jesus Christ but also vindicated and confirmed it. The proof of Christ's apostleship is in the apostleship of the Church and if there isn't a church apostleship, there is no witness to his apostleship. The main task of apostles today is still to bring salvation and to build the house of the Lord.

I have referred to the twelve and to those who followed as an extension of the ministry of Christ. It has often been stated that apostolic ministry ceased with the twelve, but there is abundant evidence in

the New Testament for an extension of apostleship beyond the twelve. In Ephesians 4 we see apostleship to be a gift of the risen Lord, whereas the twelve were appointed before he rose from the dead.

There are at least eight people in the New Testament who are called apostles: Barnabas and Paul, Timothy and Silas, Andronicas and Junias, Apollos and James. In 1 Corinthians 15 the twelve are contrasted with the rest of the apostles (5,7,8). In 2 Corinthians 11.13 and in Revelation 2.2 there are references to false apostles, if apostleship was limited to twelve it would be easy to demonstrate who was false.



Clearly there are other apostles in the New Testament, but let us look at the link between them and the twelve. In many ways the twelve were unique. They were unique in being the first apostles to represent Christ's apostleship. They were not unique in being the only ones. There is always a uniqueness attached to the first, and that uniqueness is seen in the twelve.

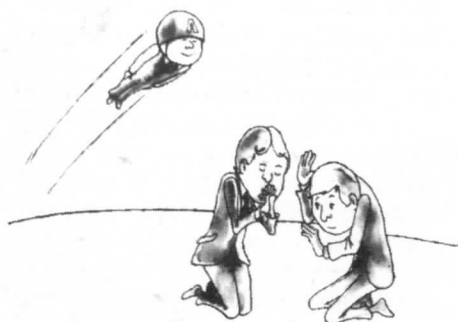
Secondly, they were unique in that they were twelve apostles. The number twelve is not meant to be exclusive, but symbolic. It links us back to the Old Testament people of God. The twelve sons of Jacob were not designed to limit his seed but to be the first fruits of it. In the twelve we have a symbol linking

the new community with the old community, they were the first fruits of a new humanity, the first fruits of God's new habitation. They were unique in being first. They were unique in being God's link between the old covenant and the new covenant people of God. They were unique as the first fruits of a new humanity. Here their uniqueness ends, and their essential ministry is taken up by many others.

The making of an apostle

Prayer

Let us now turn to the origin and preparation of apostolic ministry. Luke records how the ministry of the twelve began. 'And it was at this time that Jesus went off to the mountain to pray; and he spent the whole night in prayer to God. And when day came he called his disciples to him, and chose twelve of them, whom he also named as apostles' (Luke 6:12,13). Prayer brought forth apostolic ministry. We do not often hear of prayer for the bringing forth of ministries, but this is a vital need in our day. Jesus prayed and I am sure he is still praying for the emergence of apostles and we need to get our prayers into gear with His. Then we are going to see some answers. Prayer is a foundation to the bringing forth of an apostle.



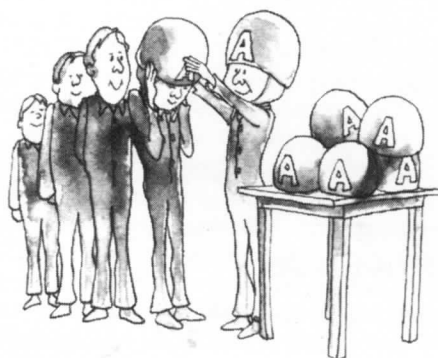
Discipleship

Notice that he called them from amongst the company of disciples. Discipleship is also a prerequisite for being an apostle. When in Romans 1 Paul refers to his apostleship, he begins this way. 'Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle'. If we do not qualify in the school of discipleship, we certainly will not qualify in the school of apostleship. It is from amongst the disciples, the bondslaves of Jesus, that he calls the apostle.

We are all aware of the cost of discipleship. 'If any man will be my disciple, let him take up his cross daily and follow me'. It is not until all that is involved in discipleship has gone deeply into our spirit and deeply into our experience, that we can begin to think about apostleship.

God's call

Let me emphasize further that it was Jesus who called. Apostleship is a ministry that no man can take upon himself. Neither is it a ministry that one man can put upon another. Jesus calls, if he doesn't call, there is no apostleship. The church may in its natural ways, lay hands on man after man for an apostolic



succession, but it doesn't come that way. It is an extension of the risen Lord, not an extension of man's hand. Ministries can emerge in

different ways, we see the Apostles inviting the church to appoint men to look after the troubles of the widows, but not so with apostleship. He calls. Again and again Paul reiterates that he is an apostle of Jesus Christ, not by the will of man but by the commandment of God.

Friendship

The parallel passage in Mark's gospel states that 'Jesus went up to the mountain and summoned those whom he himself wanted: and they came to him. And he appointed twelve, that they might be with him, and that he might send them out to preach' (Mark 3 vs 13,14). He appointed them that they might be with him. Just a simple phrase isn't it, but everything is there. From amongst those who had proved themselves in the school of discipleship he, by divine will, chose some to be with him. Clearly this suggests an intimacy of relationship which transcends discipleship. It is said of the New Testament Apostles that men took note of them, that they had been with Jesus. The apostle is a man who has a close fellowship with the one who sends him. This is what the Lord had in mind when he said 'You are my friends, if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you slaves for the slave does not know what his master is doing, but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you' (John 15 vs 14,15).

The discipleship of the bondservant still continues, but it is now absorbed into a greater friendship, a greater intimacy with Jesus Christ. It is a sharing of all the things, 'That I have heard from my Father'. 'You did not choose me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that you should go' (v.16). He called them that they might be with him, that he might send them forth.

The ministry of an apostle

Now let me go into the main characteristics of an apostolic ministry, I have made them three-fold:

Initiatory

First of all, an apostle exercises an initiatory ministry. He expresses not human initiative but divine initiative. God uses the apostle to bring about his own beginnings, in the out-working of the plan of salvation. We see it in the sending forth of the twelve. The initiative in reaching the cities of Israel with the Gospel of the Kingdom of God did not lie with the multitude of disciples in general but with the twelve apostles in particular. They were the ones who first went forth preaching the kingdom of God. Later on, we see that he appointed seventy others also, but it was the twelve who took the initiative.

On the day it was the Apostles who took the initiative in interpreting the event of the Pentecost, Luke says that Peter stood up with the eleven. Later on when the multitudes responded, they came to Peter and the rest of the Apostles saying 'what shall we do?' Although 120 people were filled with the Spirit, it was the Apostles who led the way.

In the outreach to the Gentiles it was an apostolic ministry that broke



down the centuries of tradition that had brought a wall of partition between Jew and Gentile. Peter says 'God made choice that by my life, the Gentiles should hear'. It was the apostle Peter who brought about a new stage in God's programme of salvation and later his ministry was followed and surpassed by that of the Apostle Paul. Apostolic ministry takes the first step in God's programme, the first step in a new direction, in a new dimension. Paul was determined to name Christ where he had not yet been named. He wanted to be the initiator, he wanted to be the first one.

I use initiate rather than pioneer because there are some situations today where I don't think we could be said to be pioneering, but the ministry needed is still apostolic. For example we can go into many towns and villages in our land today and find someone has beaten us to it. There are churches and halls, salvation is there. Yet there might be an air of death over the place. It requires an apostolic ministry to go there and grasp the initiative back for God. That is an apostolic function. It is God using the apostle to take the initiative that his salvation purposes may again flow amongst men and women.



Foundational

Secondly, apostolic ministry is foundational. This is an advance on initiating. It is important that we set the ball rolling, but there are some people who set the ball rolling and it is just sheer guess work where it will end up. It is good to have

some people initiating things, but the apostle knows not only how to initiate, but how to ensure that the purposes of God behind that initiating are realised. This is vital. The apostle brings the purposes of God into evident demonstration, the goal is reached, the mission is accomplished. This distinction can be seen in Philip. Philip went forth with a tremendous message, souls were saved, but there seemed to be something lacking in the converts that Philip himself was not able to meet. It is only when the apostles have led these people into the experience of the Spirit, have baptized them into the Body of Christ, that there is a church. There lies the distinction, one may have initiated, but he did not know how to lay the foundations.

The apostle not only laid foundations, he was the foundation. It is the



apostles themselves who are gifted to the church, not merely their ministries. They are God's gift and they themselves are foundational. We see this in Matthew 16. There are some who are so keen to thwart the Roman Catholics, that they make very sure that the rock is the confession of Peter and certainly not Peter himself. I think we need to do justice to Peter. It seems to me a little strange that the Lord having commended Peter, should immediately relegate him into the oblivion of being a pebble next to

a boulder. Even if we grant that Peter is a stone, then along with other living stones fitted into the corner stone, he forms the rock foundation upon which the church is built.

Paul gives us an interpretation of Matthew 16 in Ephesians 2 v19 where he refers to the household of God being built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the chief corner stone. John in his vision of the new Jerusalem saw the twelve foundations bearing the names of the twelve apostles. Paul himself could speak of those who were pillars of the Church in Jerusalem, Cephas, James and John. They were men who had risen to a place of importance and prominence solely because God had put a burden and a responsibility upon them. God had made them into foundations and the work depended on them.

We do not want to support a one man band or perpetuate a denominational priesthood. Neither do we want to so emphasise the priesthood of believers that no leaders can emerge and no apostles can be recognised, and no men of God can become foundations in the work of God. In some quarters we are so eager to get away from personality cults that when a man begins to emerge and it is obvious that a work is being built around him, we immediately want to chop him down to size. Maybe God is wanting to build him up a bit more.

The apostle also knows how to build upon the foundations and to structure the church. There is a wonderful parallel to Matthew 16 in 1 Corinthians 3 verse 9, where we have a reference to God's building, and then in verse 10 'According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise masterbuilder I laid a foundation'. Jesus said 'Upon this rock I will

build my church'. And Paul says 'As a wise masterbuilder I have laid a foundation'. His ministry is one with the ministry of Jesus, But he is not only concerned with laying foundations, he is just as concerned with what is built upon it. 'Another is building upon it, but let each man be careful how he builds upon it.



Overseeing

The third characteristic of the Apostle is his overseeing ministry. 'For it is written in the book of Psalms, let his habitation be made desolate, and let no man dwell therein; his office let another take' (Acts 1 v 20). The word for office is 'episkope', the same word that we translate elsewhere by the word bishop. Let his bishoprick another take. This word was already very significant at the time the Acts of the Apostles was written. It is used in the Septuagint. In Numbers 7 v 2 there is a reference to the princes of Israel who presided over the numbering. In 4 v 16 'Eleazer the son of Aaron the priest is overseer, the oil of the light, and the incense of composition, and the daily meat offering and the anointing oil are his charge; even the oversight of the whole tabernacle, and all things that are in the holy place, in all the works'.

The book of Kings refers to the overseers of the house of the Lord whose task it was to receive the

money collected to repair and rebuild the Temple and to give it out to the carpenters and masons and all who worked on the house of the Lord to restore it. Nehemiah writes of the overseer of the Levites. The Jews then were already familiar with this phrase, they knew that overseeing was a function of the princes or leaders of Israel, and a function of those who had a charge over the house of God.

It is this same kind of thinking that is developed in the New Testament use of the term. 'An overseer then must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity; but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?' (1 Tim. 3 vs 2-5). 'The elders therefore tend the flock of God which is among you, exercising the oversight, not of constraint, but willingly according unto God; neither as lording it over the charge allotted to you' (1 Peter 5 vs 1-3).

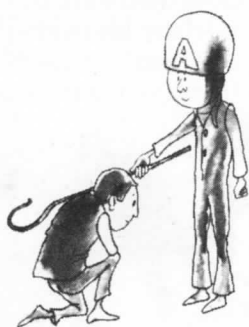
In these two references we see the 'episkope' in its local setting. The apostle functions in an elder capacity to the universal church, while an elder is limited to a locality, the apostle is sent forth with that same essential ministry to the whole church of God. There are three main realms where his oversight is outworked.



(1) First of all in the realm of teaching, the early disciples

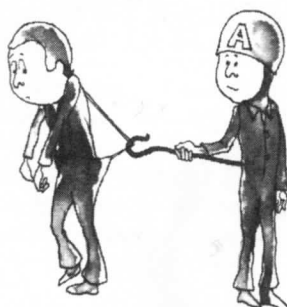
continued steadfastly in the Apostles teaching and this teaching was normative for the early church. Paul as an Apostle wrote with the expectation that his writings would be obeyed. 'Recognise that the things which I write to you are the Lord's commandment. If any one does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of that man and do not associate with him (1 Corinthians 14 v 37, 2 Thess. 3 v 14). Peter writes that we should remember the commandment of the Lord and Saviour spoken by your Apostles (2 Peter 3 v 2).

When dealing with the problem of circumcision it was the Apostles who took the initiative in sorting out what should be taught to the gentile converts. They were concerned about the teaching given to the body of Christ. There need to be apostles today who will be concerned about the various teachings and revelations that are circulating and be able to deal with them authoritatively as the early Apostles did. If no lead is given, the people of God may drift into confusion. It is the responsibility of an apostle to ensure the sound teaching of the word of God and to prevent the devil making havoc through 'winds of doctrine'.



(2) Secondly, in the realm of appointing elders, local church government was appointed by the Apostles. We see it in the Acts and in Titus. They were aware of how

things were going in churches, they appointed the local elders and they exercised an oversight over the elders. Their ministry helped to link and unify the churches.



(3) The third realm is the realm of discipline. Paul concerned himself with local situations and when he heard about difficulties in the churches, he wrote involving himself even though he wasn't there physically. At Corinth he delivered one brother over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh and called the church to back up his judgement. Later on he wrote to them. 'Wherefore I urge you to reaffirm your love for him. For to this end also I wrote, that I might put you to the test whether you are obedient in all things' (Cor. 2 vs 8, 9). 'For this reason I am writing these things while absent in order that when present I may not use severity in accordance with the authority which the Lord gave me for building up, and not tearing down' (2 Cor. 13).

Spiritual authority

In closing let me say that apostolic authority is essentially spiritual. 'And calling them to himself Jesus said to them, 'You know that those who are recognised as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them, but it is not so among you, but whoever wishes to be great

among you shall be your servant and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all' (Mark 10 vs 42-44). We are back again to this spiritual characteristic of being with Jesus, the apostolic ministry is carried out under the umbrella of fellowship with Christ. His authority is like his Lord's, it is in the realm of the Spirit. It is significant that Jesus, when proclaiming himself to be the Messiah, never offered proofs that would satisfy all and sundry, else he would never have been crucified. The Apostles are just like that, they have no letters of commendation, there is no council behind them, they have no clerical collar to help them to be recognised. Their ministry is hard for the natural man to understand.

The Apostle is a man who is in close touch with Jesus. His authority stems from his relationship with Christ. He has no authority of himself. If Paul was to preach another gospel he would be as accused and as powerless as the next man. His authority lay in doing the will of the one who sent him. If men resisted his Apostleship, the fact that he remained obedient in will and heart to his Lord, meant that sooner or later that authority would be vindicated and then the mouths of opposers would be silenced. Jesus is looking for men like this. Who is sufficient for these things? We need to ask God to raise up first . . . Apostles.



True Fellowship

Maurice Smith

The Christian life is a new life, not a new way of life. I believe that one of Satan's most dangerous weapons at this time is traditional Christianity, whether evangelical or otherwise. People brought up in this realm find fellowship with others very limited. They seek to get others to 'see' what they have seen, and fellowship becomes a matter of believing the same things. Each time the enemy of our souls convinces us that ours is a spiritual attitude, and that the other party is breaking fellowship. On the contrary, we have made fellowship impossible because doctrine has been made the ground of relating. We are all at different stages and we all have more to learn. I have found myself having fellowship with High Churchmen which was impossible with many evangelicals! This means that our hearts were open to God at that moment.

Fellowship in Christ becomes a difficult position to maintain because many will want to know your doctrine before they accept you. One can detect the over-attentiveness to your words lest you should depart from what is considered to be the truth. Strain has entered the relationship. Fellowship has gone. The result of such an attitude is that the more light we receive, the more difficult we find it to have fellowship with anyone.

Fellowship is inexplicable; you either have it, or you don't. Whenever you are currently partaking of the life of the Lord, and others are too, then you have it.

This means that University dons and unlettered ignorant men — the former like Paul and the latter like Peter — can all enjoy the same blessed experience of God together.

I am not asking 'Have you joined a Church?', 'Do you know John 3.16 off by heart?', 'Have you been baptised in water, or in the Holy Spirit?'. What I am saying is: 'Have you got a real this-moment experience of God in your heart in spite of your circumstances?'. If not, then I beg of you to start being honest. Tell God the truth. He knows already anyway; He is not mocked.

'Our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ'. If you are in fellowship with Him, and I am in fellowship with Him, then we shall not have any trouble with each other. If I can't love you, then I am not loving God. We must not blame others. Even if I receive a closed hand for my open one, true love will not rebel; but unless both our hands are open we cannot 'shake', we cannot have true fellowship.



Deception

We are living at the end of an age, we are living in a time when things internationally are coming to a head. The world cannot go on in its present state. Just as the Lord Jesus prophesied, nation is rising against nation and the whole world is being thrown into tremendous conflict.

The child of God can be equipped for this hour. We can talk with our heads up, we can walk with a certainty of step knowing the end of things, and knowing God's answer to these conditions.

God does not want his people to be doom watchers. For the church this is an hour of challenge and while people are afraid of the prospects of world war, famine, economic chaos and so on, we should rejoice because the hour of triumph and glory is at hand. The whole world is going to become one great counselling room with people desperately looking for answers and there are going to be Christians prepared to speak a word from heaven into the situation.

Let me draw your attention to one particular aspect of the last days. We are going to move into a time of increasing deception. We have seen some of this. At high levels of government there has been deception with people trying desperately to cover their tracks, to wriggle out of their responsibilities. We know that there is deception in international politics. We know there is deception in industry and in commerce, in education and in every level of national life. People cannot be trusted, we don't know whether they are speaking truth because we are living in a society that has been conditioned.

Take heed lest anyone . . .

Whilst all this is true of the world in which we live, we need to take special warning because the



Peter Lyne

Bible prophesies deception is going to increase amongst the people of God. It has done already, and is no new thing, but it is going to escalate to an alarming degree.

People have read the prophecy of Matthew, where Jesus spoke about the end, of rumours of war, famines and earthquakes and said 'It is all very well for you Christians to start banging your drum about the end times, but these things have happened right through history, there have always been wars, famines and earthquakes'. Why do you make out that this is something exceptional for the hour in which you live? If I understand Matthew 24 aright Jesus was saying that at the end there will be an escalation of these things, not that they are exceptional to history, but at the end of the age they are

going to come tumbling one on top of another into our world situation at an alarming rate. Science bears this out. Earthquakes, for example, have been increasing at an alarming rate both in size and number.

. . . lead you astray

In Matthew 24 Jesus warned on four occasions, 'Take heed lest anyone leads you astray'. Deception is to be led astray, to be led from that which is the truth.

Some indication of how far this can go as far as Christians are concerned may be seen in 2 Corinthians chapter 11. Paul was troubled by the situation at Corinth because some had come in assuming Apostolic authority, who were in fact charlatans, deceitful men. They were there for ulterior motives. Paul being an apostle who regarded himself as the Father of that congregation, responsible for betrothing them to Christ, was alarmed in his spirit. He knew that they were being turned aside from the path God had ordained for them. The extent of this deception was such that they were following another Jesus, opening themselves to a spirit other than the Holy Spirit and were believing another gospel. This is the depth to which deception can run. Don't be misled because people have the name of Jesus on their lips. Make sure it is the same Jesus. Don't open yourselves to any spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are of God. There are all kinds of spirits moving out into the world in these days and many of them have religious language and are leading the people of God astray.

The example of Joshua

In the story of Joshua we have an example of how a man of God was deceived and of how the children of Israel who were moving in victory

were deceived. Something happened then that left its mark on Israel for many years. Long after Joshua's death the results of this deception were still being felt. Deception is very serious, in this story there are some lessons that will help protect us from being led astray.

Beware of success!

The first thing to notice is that we especially need to be on our guard in a time of success. Joshua was leading the people of God into their inheritance. At last the children of Israel were possessing their possessions and you can appreciate the spiritual significance this has for us.

God wants to get us into our inheritance. God didn't want to get the children of Israel out of Egypt only to give them a wonderful deliverance through the Red Sea. God didn't want the children of Israel to tramp the rest of their days around the wilderness, rejoicing in their miraculous food. There have been many who have had some miraculous experience and for the rest of their lives think that they have got the answer. God wants to take us on to the promised land.

The promised land does not picture heaven, because there were a lot of giants there, and much conflict. It is the fulness of God's kingdom, God's kingdom being possessed now. Many Christians have a pie in the sky when you die theology. God is interested in his kingdom coming now. The message of possessing the promised land is that we can come into the kingdom of God now and receive something of that inheritance now. There is a day coming when there will be a new heaven and a new earth, but I thank God that we are enjoying a foretaste of that kingdom and there is yet much land to be possessed now. God is looking for a people who won't sit

around saying Jesus is coming, but a people who will be determined to get the King back. A different emphasis isn't it? We get stirred out of our sloth and our slumber, to see that the message of the kingdom is vital to the situation we are living in right now.

Reading the book of Joshua in this light makes it come alive in a new way. The lessons Joshua learnt are so appropriate to each one of us here and now, because he faced the same problems that you and I face. The same sins that held up the progress of the people are the very same sins that befall us. We need to be particularly careful in the time of success, when the church is making progress, when the saints start possessing their possessions.

The devil is . . .

The opening verses of Joshua chapter 9 describe how the various nations that were in the promised land were gathered together in one accord to fight Joshua and Israel. The devil has two main lines of attack and it is important that we recognise both of them.

A roaring lion . . .

The first attack is one of open aggression and here we find it described to us. All these nations were massing their strength to come head on against Israel. In the New Testament 1 Peter 5, it says that Satan goes around like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. May I suggest that it is often easy to recognise Satan when he comes in that guise.

and an angel of light . . .

The open aggression is so obvious, we see it and recognise it but you will notice that when the inhabitants of Gibeon heard what Joshua had

done to Jericho and Ai, they on their part acted with cunning. It wasn't the open aggression that floored Joshua and Israel, it was this act of cunning on the part of Gibeon and that is why we read in 2 Corinthians chapter 11 that Satan transforms himself into an angel of light, I believe that this approach of Satan is far more difficult to deal with.

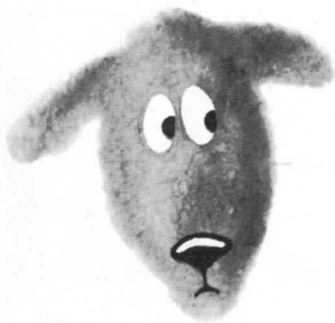
The original deception that caused the fall of man was on this very front. When Satan came to Eve, he didn't come with his roaring lion tactics, he came with cunning. The Serpent was more cunning, and it is this front that is so devastating because it so often gives the enemy the ground he wants. In Ephesians chapter 6 when Paul deals with the conflict in the heavenly places, he writes about the wiles of the devil.

Seven steps to deception

The inhabitants of Gibeon came to Joshua with cunning, they had heard about their success, how Jericho had fallen, how Ai was taken and they dressed some of their leaders in old clothes and gave them mouldy bread, worn out wine skins and sent them off to Joshua. Notice what happened when they met with Joshua, let me highlight seven downward steps to deception.

1. Disobeying God's word

The first one is in chapter 9 verse 6, the Gibeonites went to Joshua in the camp of Gilgal and said to him "We have come from a far country, so now make a covenant with us". The first step in deception is to disobey the word of God. When God commanded Joshua to lead the people into their inheritance, he said to Joshua "Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law which Moses my servant commanded you, turn not from it to the righthand or to



the left that you may have good success wherever you go. This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth but you shall meditate on it day and night that you may be careful to do all that is written in it and you shall make your way prosperous and then you shall have good success”.

The same word can be spoken to us. If we are going to overcome in this crucial hour, and face all the tactics of the enemy we need to be men and women who are meditating in the word of God. If only Joshua had heeded that word.

On at least three occasions in the law God explained what Israel was to do when they came into the land. God warned them not to covenant with the inhabitants of the land. They were to drive them out, to cut them off completely and to destroy them.

“Observe what I command you this day. Behold, I will drive out before you the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites. Take heed to yourself, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land whither you go, lest it become a snare in the midst of you. You shall tear down their altars, and break their pillars, and cut down their Asherim (for you shall worship no other God for the Lord whose name is jealous is a jealous God) lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land and when they play the harlot after their gods and sacrifice to their gods and one invites you to eat of their sacrifice and you take of their daughters for your sons and the daughters play the harlot after their gods and make your sons play the harlot after their gods”. Exodus 34 v 11.

The Gibeonites had disguised themselves when that word came out, “Make a covenant with us”, if Joshua had been heeding the word, he should have known instinctively

that something was going wrong, because the Word of God had forbidden making covenants.

God knew full well that if they didn’t destroy these people they would become a snare. The sins that they were committing, witchcraft and idolatry even burning their children as sacrifices to false gods would come in among the people of God.

2. Ignoring the witness of the Spirit

The second step is that they ignored the witness of the Spirit. Chapter 9 verse 7 “The Men of Israel said to the Hivites, perhaps you live among us then how can we make a covenant”. It is evident that the Israelites were already uncertain. The very language reflects the fact that they were feeling unsure, they were of two minds. We need to pay heed to this witness of the Holy Spirit.

“I write this to you about those who would deceive you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you and we have no need of anyone to teach us as his anointing teaches you about everything and is true and is no liar, just as it is taught to you, abide in Him” 1 John 2 verse 26.

Sometimes people have taken hold of this scripture and said “I don’t have any need for any man to teach me. I am just walking with Jesus and I’ve got my Bible and I’ve got the Holy Spirit and he is teaching me. I don’t need all these commentaries, these books of doctrine, I don’t need to go and hear this preacher and that, I’ve got the Holy Spirit and that’s it, I don’t need any man’s teaching”. If that is what the Word of God meant then why has Christ set teachers in the Body if we don’t need them?

The context here is specific, it is of false prophets and of deceivers. It

says if anyone comes in to deceive you, you have got this anointing that you have received from the Lord Jesus and it abides in you. It is a wonderful thing that even though you are new in Christ, God has set that inner witness, the Holy Spirit within you and if you will pay heed to that witness, you will be delivered again and again from situations where people will try to deceive you. If only Israel had obeyed this discipline they would have been saved a lot of trouble.

Do not run away with this witness of the Spirit discerning people left right and centre.

3. Succumbing to false humility

The third step is succumbing to false humility. This is really difficult to deal with. These people said to Joshua ‘we are your servants’. Ch. 9 verse 8, what is Joshua to do? They have thrown the ball right into his court. If he starts to be suspicious, or to examine or to challenge them immediately he is going to be accused of being hard, unloving and unsympathetic. I have seen this happen in the Body of Christ time and time again.

People say “Why did you treat that brother so severely?” I wonder what they would have said to the Apostle Paul when he was faced with Elymas, the magician as he sought to advise Sergius Paulus who was seeking to know the way of the Lord. Elymas was trying to twist everything Paul said. Did Paul turn round and say “My dear fellow you shouldn’t be talking like that, it is not really right you know it is not the truth”. No! he turned round and said “You son of the devil, enemy of all righteousness, how long will you keep making crooked the straight paths of the Lord”, and he commanded the man to be blinded. How would you like a church like that? How would you have liked to have been

there when Annanias and Saphira were carried out dead? This is the church of God.

We have had years of this sympathetic, slushy, so called love, floating around, that is not mixed with discernment and is not love at all. It is a soulish thing that has brought terrible inroads into the Body of Christ because there was nobody who would move with authority.

Please don't misunderstand me, no gift or ministry of the Holy Spirit can be exercised with profit unless it is saturated with love, with the love of God. I can give my body to be burned as a martyr, but if it is not the love of God, if it is not *agape* love motivating me, it is a waste of time. I don't want to minimise the place of God's love. I want God's love shed abroad in my heart by the Holy Spirit, but that love is full of discernment, it is full of justice, it is full of authority.

For too long we have had people playing fast and loose in the church of God who should never have been allowed to open their mouths or to act, but they are there. Why? Because, well you see they are so humble. If this kind of humility is challenged you will soon find a change of face.

4. Misplacing trust

Fourthly, there was a misplaced trust. Chapter 9 verse 8 "Joshua said to them 'who are you and where do you come from?' Joshua was asking the wrong people the question. The reply was a pack of lies from beginning to end. Joshua wasn't meant to be asking these people, he should have been asking God.

One reason why we can't afford to go only by face value is given in John 8 verse 44 where Jesus reveals something of the character of the devil. "When he lies he speaks

according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies". The devil is a liar through and through and his children are liars too. Very often they don't even know that they are lying, but they do lie. It is so vital to get the right perspective in these matters. Don't just accept what people say but learn to discern in the realm of the Spirit.

5. Heeding religious language

There is a fifth step to deception. It is religious language. The Lord Jesus spoke of those who would cast out demons in his name, prophesy in his name, do all sorts of works in his name, and yet be rejected. Some imagine that if the name of Jesus or the name of the Lord is used that this is proof people are genuine. The Gibeonites said "From a very far country your servants have come because of the name of the Lord your God", chapter 9 verse 9. How tragic it is if we are swayed simply by religious language.

There is an exceptional example of this in Acts chapter 16 when Paul went to Philippi. One day a slave girl who had a spirit of divination followed Paul and Silas, shouting out after them "These men are servants of the most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation".

She was the only person in the whole of the place who recognised who Paul and Silas were. Some Christians hearing a testimony like that would have had her up in the meeting sharing! Paul wasn't fooled, because he wasn't simply listening to the language, he was listening to the spirit of this woman.

He didn't suddenly turn round and say "In the name of Jesus come out of her". Some have the idea that deliverance and healing is automatic. "You have the promises of God brother, move in". Paul waited for



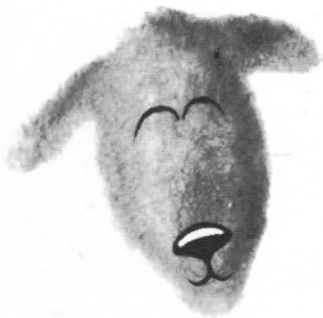
several days as this girl carried on. What was he doing? I believe he was communing with God. Each day he came out with Silas, each day it got worse. I believe he said "Father can we move today, can we act today?" No word from heaven, so what did Paul do? He did nothing. It is tremendous to be able to do nothing.

We are always under pressure to do something. This person comes to us with real need, we feel we must do something. People with demonic problems will try and get you into a corner, and pressure you to do something... take them into your house, get them free, sit up all night counselling them. If you won't do anything they may threaten to walk out and commit suicide. The Lord let Judas commit suicide even though he knew where he was going. He didn't stop him. You might say 'How unloving that was of Jesus'. But the Lord knew he couldn't do anything, he knew that Judas had set his heart in a particular direction and he let him go.

We need a re-education in these things. Many saints have been led up the garden path again and again and the work of God has been marred and people drained and time wasted, handling things that God never gave them authority to handle. It is an amazing thing that we assume an authority that the Lord Jesus didn't even take upon himself. He said "I can do nothing on my own authority". So with Paul. One day the answer came from heaven and Paul commanded the demon to come out and the girl was instantly delivered. So often we have been deceived by religious language.

6. Judging superficially

The next problem was one of superficial judgement. Joshua listened to this story and it sounded perfectly plausible. They had all the props to



back it up, there was the mouldy bread, the worn out shoes, it looked so convincing. Who would create a story like that? Joshua relied on superficial judgement. Isaiah speaking of the Lord Jesus says "He shall not judge by what his eyes see or decide by what his ears hear", chapter 11 verse 3. Many of us move in this realm of superficial judgement. In our day to day relationships with one another we must be delivered from judging by what the eye sees and the ear hears.

It is important to be open with one another. If you hear something about a brother then defend him to the person who brings it. Take the person and say "Alright you are saying this about that person, I want you to share it in his presence". Let's have it out into the open. We must start moving under the anointing and start judging with the judgement of God.

7. Failing to seek the Lord

The last point was a complete failure to seek the Lord. In chapter 9 verse 14 it says "So the men partook of their provisions and did not ask direction from the Lord". If only Joshua had called the men together and said "You fellows stay there a moment, we are going away to seek the Lord, to ask God if we can make a covenant with you." Fancy making a serious covenant without asking God about it first.

Joshua was a man who had seen the walls of Jericho fall down because they had obeyed the word of God, he had gone through that colossal experience over Achan and the destruction of Ai. Surely, at last here is a leader who will seek God. We cannot rely on past experiences, I believe seeking God has got to be a moment by moment relationship. It is seen in prayer such as Nehemiah prayed when the king asked him a question. He shot a prayer to heaven

and God gave him the answer. It does not mean that we are forever shutting ourselves away and praying and fasting for hours. I believe there has to be a constant seeking of God as we walk with Him day by day. If only Joshua had stopped, and sought the Lord. They went ahead, made the covenant and within a short space of time realised they had been terribly deceived. The men of Gibeon belonged to the Hivites, one of the nations God had decreed they were to drive out.

God's protection

I realise these are sober things to share. Some might be alarmed and say "If Joshua can get deceived I don't stand much chance, I am going to fall for anything". There is a safeguard.

In Acts 20 the Apostle Paul calls for the elders of the church at Ephesus to talk to them for the last time. He has some important things to share. "Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock in which the Holy Spirit has made you guardians, to feed the church of the Lord which he obtained with his own blood, I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you not sparing the flock and from among your own selves will arise men speaking perverse things to draw away the disciples after them", verse 28. It is not just the fierce wolves that come in from the outside, it is also those within the flock who start believing a lie that lead the church into deception. "Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish everyone with tears", verse 31. Here is a wonderful safeguard.

Paul gave the responsibility to the elders. I believe that the principles I have been sharing about deception apply to all. Everyone will be confronted by deceiving things in these

last days. We must learn to trust the Holy Spirit, we must meditate in the Word, we have to be governed by the voice of the Lord and not listen to all these other voices. But the safest place is in submitting one to another.

We need to be in submission to elders who have been appointed by God, those who are keeping watch over the soul, who are praying and seeking God, who are guarding you. Then if you are doubtful or run into trouble and are not sure about what this person is saying or what they are doing, you will have someone you can go to, someone whom God has set in authority.

Let me ask "Who is your covering in the Lord? Who is responsible for you spiritually? When you run into a problem, when you are faced with difficulties, to whom do you relate?" We live in an hour when everyone needs to know God's order in the church, we need to be submitted to one another, we need divine authority.

I thank God that there are men over me, men whom I can go to and I know that they will seek the Lord, they won't just hand out the first thing that comes into their head. They won't just slap me on the back and say "Yes that is right brother", I know that they will seek God, that they will be open to the Holy Spirit and I just covet that for everyone who reads this.

These are the days when deception is going forth into the world but praise God he is going to have a people who are not deceived. He is going to have a people who are going to usher in his glory and the God of peace is going to tread down Satan under our feet, Hallelujah! The Serpent is not going to deceive God's overcoming people, they are going to cast him out of the heavenly places by their overcoming lives so that the glorious kingdom of God might be established.

Witnesses

'Witnesses to Me', You said;
And as I spoke of You and shared
What You had done for me and for my brethren,
I rejoiced with them
At all Your goodness and Your grace
But that was not enough for You, my Lord.
For next You showed me what it is You mean;
How witnessing is dying out —
Is living only by Your life, is being weak,
Is giving up, is seeking nothing
Yet possessing all in You.
So I submit to You, my Lord;
So would I be baptized to share with You, Your death;
So would I let You live;
That all Your risen life may radiate through me
And find expression in my death to self,
That I, like Abraham of old, may learn the faith
That leads through death and life
To fellowship with You.

M. Seager

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