

and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit.

If we are living enslaved by our feelings, as we all are, we do nothing that is worth anything, and our lives are utterly pointless. No wonder the psychiatric hospitals are full! But, God has shown us a way out. He sent Christ into the world to save sinners. So we *can* have something eternal to live for, our true home being in the next world, and not in this one. We should spend our lives in the light of this, realising that we are just:

Hebrews 11:13
....strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

We must think of this world as the passing, evanescent thing that it really is.

True Worship

How then is God to be worshipped? It is God who sets the rules, not man. True worship is not in outward rituals.

John 4:24
God is a spirit, and they that worship Him, must worship Him in spirit and in truth.

True worship is therefore of the heart. It is inward thoughts, beliefs and motives that God sees. Many in the church have all the right outward actions, but their hearts are far from God. But if we are right inwardly, our outward actions should consequently be affected.

We Should be Deadly Serious

The things of God, heaven and hell, are deadly serious subjects. Therefore we must treat them as such. So when we come to worship, we should come in a serious manner. The church has forgotten this, and most people today come to church in a casual, relaxed manner, which reflects the world around them. But this leads to taking the things of God lightly, whereas they are the most serious things of all. If we are believers, we have been saved from hell fire, and should no longer fear God's wrath. That should make us even more serious when we come to worship God, to thank Him for His mercy to us.

Only God Ordains How We Should Worship Him

With this air of seriousness about us as we come to worship, we should not be wanting jolly, foot-tapping tunes, or a smiley,

happy religion going on all around us. God alone has ordained the elements of true worship. These are psalm singing, prayer, Scripture reading and preaching. No other elements should be allowed to creep in. We need to sing the psalms seriously and without distraction. Prayer needs to be offered with the members of the congregation silently joining in and agreeing with what is being said. To this end, God has ordained the posture we should use in prayer. Standing, kneeling or falling prostrate are the only postures mentioned in the Bible. Sitting, or slouching, is not suitable. The scripture reading and preaching should be solemn, humble and in the fear of God.

The Primacy of the Word of God

At the time of the Reformation, the Reformers spoke very much about the "primacy of preaching." This was quite right, especially when confronted with the Roman Catholic superstitious worship, whereby the ritual took the prime place. True religion is not to be found in outward ritual, but in the understanding gained from the reading and expounding of the Word of God. However, today, we have another problem. Protestant churches are full of leaders who preach their own peculiar doctrines and think so highly of themselves for being right. Except that none of them are. But all of them get a following. As long as men follow men, especially if they are smooth talkers, easy to listen to and very persuasive, we must redefine what we mean by the "primacy of preaching." Instead we must now talk about the "primacy of the Word of God." This would entail scripture readings in worship, and preaching limited only to a direct explanation of the Scripture, and its practical implications.

Nehemiah 8:8
So they read in the book of the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading.

Here are nine things needful, which are missing in our churches today. How far the church has strayed from the truth! Let us commit ourselves to become a living sacrifice to promote these truths, bring them to the fore, and to make the Christian church once more a light shining on a hill, where people may say again:

Psalms 122:1
I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord.

The Church has Forgotten

The Christian church, whatever denomination, has forgotten what Jesus Christ came into the world to teach. The philosophies of men have taken over. We need to get back to teaching, believing and practising the truth.

The Source of Truth

- The Bible is the only Source of Truth

Most people nowadays would say that there are elements of truth to be found everywhere - in all religions, in science and in philosophy. This would possibly be true, except for one thing. If God really exists, men are not at liberty to invent truth (as in all false religions), or to think that by their own efforts they can seek truth out (as in science and philosophy). God Himself is the one who must reveal truth to men. He created us, so He must be the one to teach what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man.

Men think that they have to prove the existence of God before they can believe. But that is impossible. All men's so-called philosophical "proofs" for God's existence commit the most basic logical fallacies (such as "begging the question"). Science cannot prove the existence of God either, because science, useful though it is, cannot actually prove anything - it too commits logical fallacies (such as "asserting the consequent" and the use of induction). On the other hand, men cannot prove the non-existence of God either.

All belief systems, whether that of the scientist, the philosopher or of any religion, begin with unprovable first principles. The first principle of the Christian is that God exists and that He has revealed Himself in the Bible. The Bible is our only source of authority. So, debating with atheists and people of other religions is useless, because they would have their own first principles, and wouldn't accept ours. And we wouldn't accept theirs.

Some people think that God speaks directly to them today, and it is very difficult to tell them otherwise. But this is not so:

Hebrews 1:1-2
God,at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son....

Now Scripture is complete, we need no more revelation:

2 Peter 1:19

We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts.

God's Word is far greater than any vision or voice of God, even a genuine one, as Peter had when he wrote that. The Scripture is reliable, and the only source of truth.

- Every Word of the Bible is Inspired

If the source of truth is in written form, we must conclude that every word of it, in the original languages, has been inspired by and given to us directly from God. So, when we translate the Bible into other languages, we must make sure we translate word for word as closely as possible. Because different languages have different word orders, syntax and grammatical constructions, we must realise that no translation is perfect. But what truth remains will be used by God to fulfil His purposes. This does not mean that we can therefore be sloppy in our translating. We must translate word for word as accurately as possible. Some Bibles helpfully put in additional words in italics to show that they have been added to make more sense in the target language. If we have a problem in any translation, we must always go back to the original languages.

Most modern translations do not translate word for word. Modern translators have the concept of translating "idea for idea." But this then becomes no longer a translation as such, but a commentary, an interpretation, which may or may not be correct. The work of a translator should be purely translation, as accurately as possible. He should not try to impose his opinion into the text, to try and give credence to his particular views, right or wrong.

- God Preserves His Bible

God makes sure, in His inscrutable providence, that His Word is preserved entire throughout every generation. Papyrus, parchment and paper all decay, so we no longer have the original documents available to us. But God has ensured perfect copies of His Word will always be made and be available to the church.

But we see some variations in manuscripts. How do we know which ones are correct? Well, we don't go by the age of the manuscript - maybe it still exists today because it lay unused, because it was erroneous. Neither do we go by what scholars tell us are the correct manuscripts, because scholars, like scientists, change their views frequently. Neither do we necessarily go by what the majority of manuscripts say, although we are coming

nearer the truth now. In actual fact, 90% of all manuscripts in existence today agree with the correct text. But we cannot believe that this is the correct text *because* it is in the majority, as it could theoretically change as more manuscripts are discovered (although God in His providence has prevented this from happening). But the Word of God never changes. We believe in the doctrine of a Received Text, kept pure throughout all ages. This is found in the *Masoretic* text of the Hebrew Old Testament and the *Textus Receptus* of the Greek New Testament.

The Jews were the keepers of the Scriptures in Old Testament times:

Romans 3:2

Unto them [the Jews] were committed the oracles of God.

And the church is today:

1 Timothy 3:15

The church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.

The Doctrines of Truth

Because the church has forgotten the source of truth, it has lost many of its basic doctrines. Thousands of churches today, all claim to be Bible-believing, but they teach many different things. No-one understands all truth, so no church is perfect, or ever will be. So we should trust in the Bible alone as our perfect source of truth, not in any church. Three truths especially lost are these:

- Men are Vile

The church has forgotten about the total depravity of man, but rather clings to the philosophies of the world, claiming that men should have a sense of "self-worth" and "self-esteem." But we all fell in our forefather Adam, and all mankind by their fall, lost communion with God, are under His wrath and curse, and so made liable to all miseries of this life, to death itself and to the pains of hell for ever. If you don't believe this, then you have too high a view of yourself. Men deserve eternal conscious torment in body and soul in hell fire forever. So we should not be asking why God should be so cruel as to send men to hell for ever, rather we should be wondering why God should save any of these wretches from hell at all.

But don't men do good works? No, because the works they do are not to the glory of God. The only reason that the world is not worse than it is, is because it is not to most people's advantage to thieve, commit adultery or murder. Otherwise they would do it

all the time. Only when society has broken down do we see men doing these things. In a rich society they refrain from their baser instincts because peace and order suit them very nicely.

Job, upon understanding the ways of God for himself, concluded:

Job 40:4; 42:6

Behold I am vile.... I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.

Our view of ourselves should be no different.

- God Does Not Love Everybody

To most people this is a shocking thing to say. But it is the truth. We don't know who God loves and who He doesn't, but we do know that God sent His Son into the world to:

Matthew 1:21

....save his people from their sins.

Not everybody, but only "*His people*," whoever they are. This doctrine becomes so obvious when we come to a realisation of the vileness of man, because we then see that there is no reason at all for God to save anybody. But in His mercy, God saves a certain number from the punishment they deserve, grants them faith and repentance, so they may escape the wrath to come, and brings them into heaven to be with Christ for ever. And none of it is of their own deserving. What grace! What mercy!

Man is so arrogant that he thinks he can strut into heaven by himself, but we see that only repentant sinners go there, and even then, repentance is a gift of God.

- The Vanity of this World

Because of our sins, God has shut us up in bondage to decay and death. This is far from being a natural process, as most people think. Rather:

Romans 6:23

The wages of sin is death.

Because it is inevitable that we die, and have only a few short years on this earth, all we do or think here is vanity:

Ecclesiastes 1:14

I have seen all the works that are done under the sun;