

Free-Will
The Root Error
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Agape Chapel Ministries
P.O. Box 59084
Norwalk, CA 90652
USA

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FREE-WILL THE ROOT ERROR

TIME was when the doctrines of grace held their rightful place in the teaching of the churches of our land, but, alas, the glory is departed and free-will is on the throne. Only a very small remnant in this country hold these doctrines to-day which ascribe salvation unto God and involve a belief in Election, Effectual Calling, Particular Redemption and Final Perseverance.

So far have the churches departed from the truth and — terrible thought — the God of truth from the churches, that the doctrines which were the glory of the churches are now a reproach and in consequence the prophets prophecy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and the people love to have it so, Jer. v, 31. How applicable these and the following words are to this generation may in part be gathered from a perusal of this tract. 'To whom shall I speak, and give warning, that they may hear? behold, their ear is uncircumcized, and they cannot hearken: behold the word of the Lord is unto them a reproach; they have no delight in it . . . They have healed also the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, Peace, when there is no peace, Jer. 10-14. May God give us grace to attend to verse 16: 'Stand ye in the ways, and see and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and ye shall find rest for your souls.

E.R.G.

'To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word it is because there is no light in them', Isaiah viii, 20.

The Bereans were commended for their obedience to this injunction after hearing the things spoken of by the Apostle Paul, and it was this great apostle to the Gentiles who so solemnly declares, 'Though we or an angel from heaven preach unto you any other gospel than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed', a due consideration of such an awful warning might well make us all 'Swift to hear and slow to speak'. It is the reversal of this which has been responsible for the propagation of so much erroneous teaching. And 'who can understand his errors?' says the psalmist after extolling the works of God and His holy word in the 19th Psalm, and then in that tender fear of the Lord of which he has just spoken — arising from a right but imperfect knowledge of his own heart — he adds 'Cleanse me from my secret faults, keep back Thy servant also from presumptuous sins, let them not have dominion over me'.

'It is with a desire to earnestly contend for the faith once delivered to the saints' that, as the Lord may be pleased to make use of me I would single out the most prevalent of all the errors in the churches to-day, an error all the more dangerous since, on the surface, it appears to be true and God honouring, whilst in reality it is — I submit — false and dishonouring to God, 'Who doeth according to His will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth, and none can stay His hand nor say unto Him, What doest Thou?'

The error to which I refer is that man possesses an inherent ability to accept or reject the salvation of God, that his will is free to accept Christ and be eternally saved. This error is based upon the inference that because there are such statements in the bible as 'Whoever will let him take the water of life freely', therefore man must be able to respond, but we need more solid ground than inference to build our hopes for eternity upon, especially when as in this case the inference is opposed to the whole weight of Holy Writ, which describes man as being dead spiritually, totally depraved, carried captive by the devil at his will and kept in peace until the intervention of the stronger than he. The men who framed the 39 Articles recognized this, see Article 10, while the Holy Ghost expressly rules out the human will as having any part in the soul's regeneration, 'not of the will of man but of God', John 1, 13.

If I understand present-day evangelical preaching aright it is to the effect that God has done His part in giving His dear Son to die for sinners and to procure for them a full salvation which is offered for their acceptance. He wills them to be saved but is powerless to effect His purpose unless they will permit Him. If this were true, here is the exaltation of man with a vengeance and an awful degradation of Deity, but glory to God it is totally untrue and all who have obtained mercy know that the Lord alone was exalted in that day. 'Therefore will the Lord be exalted that He may have mercy upon you.'

In the epistle to the Romans the apostle in writing of the election by God of the vessels of mercy which He hath afore prepared unto glory even us Whom He hath called, not of the Jews only but also of the Gentiles, says that God had said to Moses 'I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy' and he then draws the conclusion 'So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy'. He then goes on to say 'Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth He then find fault, for who hath resisted His will?'

He then replies to this hypothetical question 'Nay but O man who art thou that repliest against God?'

The apostle would have deemed it the height of irreverence to suggest as so much modern preaching does, that those who fail to respond to offers of salvation are thwarting God's will.

The Lord Jesus says 'As the Father raiseth up the dead and quickeneth them, even so the Son quickeneth whom He will'. Again 'All that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me', Mark 1 'Shall come' not 'may come if they will'. He also says 'All power is given to Me in heaven and in earth' and yet I have heard preachers say that He is longing to save all mankind. He Himself says 'I pray not for the world but for them which Thou hast given Me'. But — it may be asked — is not this contrary to Paul's statement in I Timothy ii. 4, that God will have all men to be saved? I would reply that it seems clear from the context that the words 'all men' here, means men of all classes and it seems that the men who inserted the prayer for 'all sorts and conditions of men' in the book of 'Common Prayer' had this scripture in mind in doing so.

It might here be noted that the Lord Jesus was the recipient of unstinted admiration when introducing Himself as a preacher of good tidings, which admiration quickly turned to bitterest hatred as soon as He touched upon the subject of God's sovereignty Luke iv, 17-29; and what is free-willism but a denial of the sovereignty of God?

We need to pause before we condemn these Jews, we may quite easily deceive ourselves while like them, wondering at the gracious words proceeding out of His mouth of which there are so many recorded in the Scriptures and usually chosen as texts for what are called gospel addresses. But Christ is not here in the flesh to insist on the truth of God's sovereignty and there are few if any like Paul who did not shun to declare the whole counsel of God and so we can quite easily pass over the Scriptures which we want to pass over. But are we sure that there is no latent hatred in our hearts because there is no one to provoke it by bringing unpalatable doctrines before us? Nay, is not Calvinism — which has never been and cannot be disproved by Holy Writ — hated intensely by many who claim to be believers of the gospel? Is it not because of their Calvinism that the 39 Articles of the Church of England are discredited? And although they must be accepted by every ordinance, it is too often with mental reservations which are the fruit of a corrupt mind. It is because of its Calvinistic teaching that the Westminster Confession is also relegated to the scrap heap. Perhaps the greatest honour is thus done to both the Articles and the Confession in their being treated as God's word is treated.

May the Lord be pleased to revive His work in our midst and open our eyes to distinguish between His work and that counterfeit work which deceives so many by the fair show that is made in the flesh.

It is not enough to have learned that 'Man shall not live by bread alone' but it is equally important to know that 'by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord shall man live.'

If there were more prayerful and diligent study of God's word we should not hear such expressions as 'Men and women are perishing for whom Christ died'. 'God has done His part and you must do yours', 'God has given you a free-will etc. Nor should we hear promises and statements from God's word applied universally when it is quite clear from their setting that they are intended for the elect. To mention only one: 'The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all.'

To conclude. If we are found at last among the redeemed in heaven, it will not be because of anything we have done in time but because God has chosen us in Christ in eternity past having made an everlasting covenant with us to do us good, in the person of our Surety, who in fulfilling on our behalf the terms of the covenant has obtained for us eternal redemption, the Holy Ghost quickening us and effectually calling us by His grace, teaching us our needs and supplying them out of His riches in glory by Christ Jesus. Chastisement, repentance, faith, godly fear, forgiveness, justification, holiness. The Lord will give grace and glory, and will also be enquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them.

Our Lord is praying for a little flock each one of which has received from Himself an individual call to follow Him. He prays for them also who shall believe on Him through their word that they all may be one in the Father and the Son. Let us look at this little flock which is representative of them who shall after believe in Christ through their word spoken or written. The little flock is in the presence of the only Mediator (of whom they know anything) between God and man. Let one speak for all 'To whom shall we go? Thou has the words of eternal life' and they have received that word and have kept it, they have been given to know the only true God and Jesus Christ whom He hath sent, and they can say truly 'our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ'. They are hated by the world because like their Lord they are not of the world. Christ prays that His flock may be sanctified through the truth, and that there may be no doubt as to what that truth is. He adds 'Thy word is truth' and that word was Moses and the Prophets and Psalms confirmed by His own words to them Isaiah viii, 16, afterwards to be committed to writing by them with additional writings of their own, inspired by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven.

It passes comprehension how anyone in the pure light of John xvii can imagine that a re-union of the apostate churches of Christendom can be the Father's answer to His Son's prayer. What fellowship have such churches with the little flock? Some denying the need of sacraments appointed by Christ Himself, others receiving ordinances like the Mass an invention of man and putting men's traditions on a par with Holy Writ while multiplying to themselves mediators between God and themselves. Others who thankfully receive the theories of ungodly biologists (largely discredited though such theories are by many scientists). It may well be asked what these churches have in common, what basis on which they can all agree? The answer is, belief in man's free-will to do good, with its exaltation of the creature which will lead to the reign of the Man of Sin.

That many of God's dear people are to be found in these churches cannot be denied and their desire for unity blinds them to the significance of the word 'Re-union' which points to the unity of the dark ages when there was no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land. From such a re-union may God in His mercy deliver us.

The people of God in these churches have yet to hear the voice of God saying 'Come out of her My people that ye be not partaker of her plagues'. They have become used to hearing sermons and reading literature which are a mixture of free grace and free-will and in consequence are in the fowler's snare being ignorant to a great extent of Satan's devices. Popular evangelical literature is accepted without question and a mixture of truth and error imbibed instead of the sincere milk of the Word, and this may be partly through sloth. It is so much easier and pleasing to the flesh to accept the words of those who are regarded as 'sound men' than to search the scriptures and seek the teaching of the Holy Spirit and so almost unconsciously a few favourite writers are looked upon as virtually infallible and their statements are received without question, while in many cases writers whose books they have never read are thought of disparagingly such as Calvin and the Puritan divines who in common with those few who love their writings are despised and rejected of men and still bear the reproach of Christ.

When the Lord Jesus said 'I if I be lifted up will draw all men unto Me' He must have meant something less than every man in the world. Did He draw Herod, Annas and Caiaphas or the multitudes that have lived and died in abominable idolatry? It seems clear from the context that He meant men of all races, since the discourse in which the words occur arose from certain Greeks having approached Philip desiring to see Jesus, John xii, 20, and if in this case the words 'all men' cannot mean every worldling, why should they do so in the other?

Another verse often quoted in support of free-will is II Peter iii, 9, where it is stated that God is longsuffering to us-ward not willing that any should perish, and free-willers tell us that this must mean that God wants everybody to be saved, but here the word 'any' is related to the word 'us' of us-ward as though Peter had said that God is not willing that any who come within the scope of that little word 'us' should perish and it is them to whom the epistle is written. If we turn to chapter i, verse 1 we shall see that the apostle is writing to 'them that have obtained like precious faith with us' and this precious faith is something very different from the easy belief which free-will preachers exhort their hearers to exercise. The obtainers of this precious faith are the elect, I Peter i, 2, who are taught to know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ who though He was rich yet for their sakes became poor that they through His poverty might be rich, having first been taught their unutterable need and destitution and then drawn by the Father to His Son as poor beggars to obtain mercy, repentance and faith, having been predestinated by God unto the adoption of children by Christ Jesus unto Himself according to the good pleasure of His Will Ephesians i, 5, and according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His Own Will, Ephesians i, 11, and all 'to the praise of the glory of His grace'.

The doctrine of free-will exalts the creature, the doctrine of free-grace exalts God. Free-will puts man first: 'I accepted Christ' 'I decided for Christ' 'I gave my heart to God.' Free grace puts God first: 'He lifted me up out of a horrible pit' 'He saved me' 'He called me by His grace' 'He quickened my soul' 'He washed me from my sins in His own blood.'

To believe that man's will is free to receive salvation at his own convenience is to believe a lie, and Satan the father of lies deceives and ruins souls by means of this lie in two ways:

i, By deluding men into reasoning thus 'Since I am a free agent I will seek salvation when it is convenient to me to do so'.

ii, By deluding the soul to exercise its fancied freedom in taking up a profession of religion and satisfying itself that all is well though destitute of a saving knowledge of the truth, being ignorant of the difference between a notional religion and a true heart religion between a natural faith and a faith which is the gift of God.

Only God can remove the delusion in either case, and if He is pleased to do so, it will be by the application of His truth to the heart, the Holy Spirit applying

the word with convincing power quickening the soul and shedding light upon its ruined state, its darkness, ignorance, helplessness, helplessness, depravity and unbelief, its inability to repent or believe or to do anything acceptable to God, yet keeping it from despair by imparting a hope in the mercy of God. And He who commences this good work within, perfects it, leading the soul to look to Christ for the supply of all its needs.

It is greatly to be feared that many professing christians, perhaps the majority of those in evangelical circles, have a religion which was begun by themselves and are unconsciously trusting to something which they themselves have done.

One began by accepting Christ without having ever considered whether or not Christ has accepted him. Another has decided for Christ, another has given His heart to God, while yet another has believed the gospel. Now in all these cases the subject is really trusting to something which he has done, some step which he himself has taken, and not in anything which God has done for him. What has really happened is that he has made a profession of religion and thereafter his life is spent in trying to live up to his profession; he is encouraged to pray in public and perhaps to speak too and he settles down to a round of religious activities which carry him along as on the crest of a wave.

If any doubts as to his real state should arise he is told that they are from the devil and is exhorted to keep believing. It is thus that the professors mentioned in Hebrews xii, 8, are encouraged in a false faith.

All such professors are staunch adherents of the free-will theology. Have they not all exercised their fancied freedom in 'accepting Christ?' 'giving their heart to God', 'Deciding' or 'believing' but, alas, for such a religion it will be a poor refuge in the swelling of Jordan.

Before such professors can enter into the language of the apostle (if they ever do) 'We had the sentence of death in ourselves that we should not trust in ourselves but in God that raiseth the dead' and 'We are they which rejoice in Christ Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh'. All the wood, hay and stubble of their own doings will have to be burned up and sure I am that God will burn it all up for any to whom he has purposes of grace preparatory to beginning a good work in them. May God give us grace to obey the apostolic injunction 'Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith'.

Who began our religion? Did we begin it ourselves or did God begin it? Did it begin with the solemn conviction that

'If God should send my soul to hell
His righteous Law approves it well'.

Did it begin with a conviction that only mercy could reach such a depraved case? Have we felt the terrors of a broken Law? Was there a 'Fleeing from the wrath to come'? And is our peace (if we possess it) received through an application of the precious Blood of Christ to the conscience? Do we possess a Holy

Seth and the seed of the woman equally with the seed of the serpent although He says He will put enmity between them. He must have loved Esau equally with Jacob although He says 'Jacob have I loved but I hated Esau'. He must have loved Pharaoh equally with Moses, the Caananites and Amalekites equally with the Israelites.

Again if the world means every worldling in John iii, 16, why not in John i, 29. 'Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world'. If so then He has taken away the sin of every creature even to Anti-Christ himself. Again the Lord Jesus says that the Holy Spirit should convince the world of sin because they believe not on Him. Are we then to believe that every person who has lived since Pentecost has been convinced of sin on account of not believing in Christ when millions have died without ever having heard of Him?

But if we take John iii, 16 with its context we shall see that our Lord was talking to a ruler of the Jews who thought that salvation was only for Israel: which he undoubtedly assumed to be the kingdom of God (not that he would have included every Jew as belonging to that kingdom).

Our Lord teaches him that the kingdom of heaven has wider boundaries than Israel's borders and that into that kingdom no fleshly birth in any of Israel's tribes is any passport, but that God's kingdom is a spiritual kingdom and to enter it a spiritual birth is necessary, he is also reminded of an incident in Israel's history as being typical of a great event about to take place which would affect not Israel only but the whole wide world John ii, 50-52, 'As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness even so must the Son of Man be lifted up that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have eternal life'. The serpent was lifted up that perishing Israelites might look upon it and live. The Son of Man is lifted up that whosoever (Jew or Gentile) believeth in Him should have eternal life and then the reason is given to this perplexed master of Israel 'for God so loved (not Israel only but) the world that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life' and as many as the Lord our God shall call (effectually) out of all nations, kindreds, and peoples and tongues certainly shall believe in Him having been convinced of sin of righteousness and of judgment and obtained repentance and precious faith which are the gifts of our exalted Lord.

It seems clear that the world of John iii, 16 is the world which the Holy Spirit convices of sin of righteousness and of judgment, and for whose sins Christ is the propitiation I John ii, 2; in short, it is the world of the elect, as distinct from the world for which Christ does not pray John, xvii, 9.

Paul can say in Romans ii, 26. 'And so all Israel shall be saved' but this statement is qualified by 'They are not all Israel who are of Israel'. So it may be said 'God so loved the world' but they are not all of that world which God so loved, which are of this present evil world which lieth in the wicked one.

We are living in days when there are widespread movements afoot for re-union. We are told of our Lord's longing for the unity of the churches and are reminded of his prayer in John xvii that all His people may be one. Let us look at this prayer.

We have here the Eternal Son of God declaring the Eternal Mind of the Eternal Father to the sons of men on a subject fraught with consequences of Eternal import to their souls.

It might be noted here that our Lord's acquiescence with His Father's hiding of divine things from the wise and prudent is hardly consistent with His longing for their salvation.

It is true that all God's people are taught to acquiesce in God's way of saving sinners as it is written 'Thy people shall be willing in the day of Thy power'. God's people in common with the rest of mankind will not come to Christ that they may have life but in the day of His power they are made willing. How? By scourging. 'He scourgeth every son whom He receiveth'. God says, 'I will make thee sick in smiting thee' and this is a rich mercy, for 'they that are whole have no need of a physician but they that are sick' and God who is rich in mercy sweetly draws these sick ones to His dear Son, for it is His loved ones whom He chastens.

Helpless as Lazarus in the tomb, as the man who fell among thieves, cast out to the loathing of their persons until the Lord in pity passes by and says 'Live' when they begin to cry and their cry is for mercy, nor will they cease crying until they obtain. Others may be satisfied with a creed or the letter of the gospel and are never conscious of a doubt because they have never really and savingly believed. The strong man armed still keeps his goods in peace, but it is a false peace, the peace of a graveyard. How is it with your soul my reader and how is it with mine? Are we saying peace, peace, when there is no peace?

Depend upon it that Christ speaks peace to none but troubled souls. Have we experienced soul trouble? Have the fountains of the great deep been broken up?

It is greatly to be feared that there are many who, being ignorant (I mean experimentally) that the heart is deceitful above all things are deceived into assuming that they are true believers who have never had a Holy Ghost revelation of their lost and ruined condition, who have never fled for refuge from the wrath to come. The gospel may have come to them, but it has come in word only, not with power and in the Holy Ghost and in much assurance. It is true that a mere letter belief is often accompanied by a sense of carnal security which is really presumption.

True assurance of salvation is always preceded by a no less strong assurance of guilt, misery, ignorance and impotence which humbles the soul in the dust of self-ameasement, never to open the mouth again (in self justification) because of shame when God is pacified towards it for all that it has done, Ezekiel xvi, 63.

It is generally assumed by those who hold the doctrine of man's free-will that the word 'World' in John iii, 16, includes every worldling. Let us assume that God does love every worldling, then He must have done so from eternity since He never changes. He must have loved the seed of Cain equally with the seed of

Ghost religion? My reader, it is the writer's solemn conviction that if we are altogether strangers to such an experience we are still among them that 'sit in darkness and in the shadow of death'. At best we have but a name to live but are dead.

'True religion is more than notion
Something must be known and felt'.

Have we an experience of God's dealing with our souls? Can we say with the Psalmist 'Come ye that fear the Lord and I will tell you of what He hath done for my soul?'

I see nothing in Holy Writ about offers of salvation to all and sundry and no appeals to men to let Christ into their hearts. No appeal was made to Saul of Tarsus, the Philipian jailor, the Ethiopian Eunuch, and yet I have heard preachers say words to the effect that Christ is knocking at the doors of their hearers' hearts, willing to save them, but the latch is on the inside and He cannot enter unless they open the door. It is written in the Acts of the Apostles that the Lord opened Lydia's heart to attend to the apostle's preaching, nor can we doubt that He also opened the hearts of the Gentiles who besought Paul to preach to them, Acts xiii, and upon his compliance we read that as many as were ordained unto eternal life, believed and this is in accord with the whole tenor of Scripture.

'Whom He did foreknow, them He did predestinate, whom He did predestinate them He also called, whom He called, them He also justified, and whom He justified, them He also glorified.'

Perhaps no scripture is more misused than Rev. iii, 20, to bolster up the idea that man's will is free. This verse is invariably wrested from its context to depict a helpless Christ pleading with sinners to permit Him to save them. How shocking!

Now let us look at the verse, 'Behold I stand at the door and knock, if any man hear My voice and open the door, I will come in to him and will sup with him and he with Me'. Now without going deeply into the text, there are one or two things on the surface which show the impiety of those who interpret it as a picture of Christ pleading with sinners to give Him admission. First. 'Behold I stand at the door and knock'. Here let us note who it is knocking. Chapter i, verse 8 tells us that it is the Almighty, He who quickens whom He will and whose word shall not return unto Him void, but shall accomplish what He pleases and shall prosper in the thing whereto He sends it. Second. 'If any man hear my voice and open the door'. Now it is Christ's sheep who hear His voice and they hear His voice because God has given them what He does not give to the goats, a hearing ear. The hearing ear and the seeing eye, the Lord hath made even both of them Proverbs xx, 12, see also Deut. xxix, 4; and having heard His voice (prospering in the thing whereto He sent it) revealing their misery, poverty, wretchedness, blindness and nakedness and having beheld the speaker, a sight of whom begets self abhorrence Job xlii, 5, 6, they feel a deep need of His Almighty power to save them and His mercy to compassionate their sad case, and so Third the words 'I will come in to him and will sup with him and he with Me' are as the balm of Gilead, a revelation of matchless grace. The Lord Jesus though highly exalted is still the same Jesus who receiveth sinners and eateth and drinketh with them.

It is hoped that these few remarks are sufficient to show that Rev. iii, 20, is no bolster for free-will teaching.

The writer recalls an evening about 23 years ago at Southsea. A young sailor stood listening to some open-air preachers and at the close of the meeting I felt led to speak a few words to the lad but was interrupted by a man of about sixty years of age who asked the sailor if he was saved. The lad made some reply which I did not hear, upon which the elderly man said to the sailor 'Take my hand and repeat these words "I take Thee Lord Jesus to be my saviour"'. The words were repeated to the apparent satisfaction of this blind guide, whereupon the young man was exhorted to testify to his comrades that God had saved him. As I had only been in the way of life a few months and it would have seemed presumptuous on my part to criticize a man so many years my senior and one who seemed to be very familiar with the words of Scripture, I did not comment, but felt that at least my experience was vastly different, months of hard labour and anguish of soul and, at last, the Lord Jesus revealed to my soul from heaven and Oh! the wonder and sacred awe and yet sweet sense of relief, all quite inexpressible.

I never saw the sailor again, but I saw the man who had spoken to him and found that he belonged to a sect known as the Plymouth Brethren and for a time I felt drawn towards them. It was new to me to meet with a people who were so conversant with the Scriptures and so ready to converse on bible topics, but as time went on I came to see that the teaching of this sect is strongly infected with the error of free-will.

The doctrine of free-will has its roots in ignorance of the total depravity of our nature as a result of the fall and a corresponding ignorance of God. Not long ago at a large meeting one of the speakers in the course of his address said words to this effect: 'If you fail to respond to offers made to you at this service, the Man of sorrows will have to go on His lonely way.' I suppose it would be considered uncharitable to question whether such a preacher could really know Jesus Christ or not, but at least it is clear that the Holy Spirit (one of whose offices is to glorify Jesus) did not inspire such an utterance, the sad part about it is that the congregation apparently saw nothing irreverent in the statement.

I would ask such speakers if they are able to point to a single case in either of the four gospels where Christ ever pleaded with any one to receive Him. Did He plead with Nicodemus, the woman at the well, the rich young ruler, the dying thief or those who followed Him for a season and then followed Him no more? And if the gospels know nothing of a Christ who pleads with sinners to receive Him and since the writer to the Hebrews tells us that He is 'the same yesterday, to-day and forever' then I say that the Christ preached by these men is not the Christ of God and that the interpretation of Rev. iii, 20, which sees Him standing at the door and hears Him pleading evermore 'May I come in' is not the teaching of the Spirit of God.

All such preachers and their followers might learn to profit by reading Christian's words to Hopefull concerning Ignorance in Bunyan's allegory 'Ask him if he has

ever had Christ revealed to him from heaven' and upon Ignorance speaking in a disparaging manner of revelations in general, adds 'Why man! Christ is so hid in God from the natural apprehensions of the flesh, that He cannot be savingly known unless God the Father reveals Him' and furthermore says 'Yea, and faith too by which the soul layeth hold upon Christ, if it be right, must be wrought by the exceeding greatness of His power, the working of which faith, I perceive poor Ignorance thou art ignorant of'.

It may be objected that these are but the words of an unlearned man whose utterances are out of date and can have no weight against the learned theologians of our day. To this I would reply that Bunyan was taught in divine things as few if any are taught in these days and he not only has the whole weight of Holy Writ in his favour but his words are still verified in the experience of all who are taught of God.

As for the learning of present-day ministers of religion it may be worthy of our consideration that the Lord Jesus chose and called His first disciples from the unlettered class. Two of them were perceived by the religious leaders of those days to be 'ignorant and unlearned men' Acts iv, 13, and until the time that Paul wrote his first epistle to the Corinthians the ascended Lord had not called many wise men to Himself, that is, not wise according to this world's learning.

The spectacle these many years of churches whose ministers, especially the leaders, are mostly of the educated class would suggest that the Lord Jesus in choosing his disciples in those far off days was only experimenting and experimenting rather badly.

But to those who esteem it their highest favour to be His unworthy followers having gone forth unto Him without the camp, such a suggestion is anathema and they have to conclude that the church's ministry of these many years, with a comparatively few rare and gracious exceptions, is not of His choosing and they believe that they have excellent scriptural grounds for so concluding.

Is such a conclusion uncharitable? If so I know not what adjective to apply to the only alternative conclusion i.e. that the Holy Spirit calls men to the ministry who give more credence to the theories of ungodly biologists than to the writings which He himself has inspired, and calls others to make solemn vows which they have no intention of keeping and that He maintains an apostolic succession of men without enlightening them with apostolic doctrine.

And does not Christ say with reference to divine teaching 'I thank Thee O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent and revealed them unto babes, even so Father for so it seemed good in Thy sight'.

Let us not suppose that these words applied only to the day and time in which they were uttered. Christ was not the 'child of His day and generation' as some of our modern wise men declare.