

Strict and Particular Baptists Who? What? Why?

In order properly to answer this threefold question concerning Strict and Particular Baptists—who? what? why?—it is vitally important that I go back to the Word of God as I attempt to set forth our distinctive position, in terms of our principles and practices. Ultimately it is from the Scriptures that we draw our faith (the body of doctrine we believe), and also our practice (the things we do in our churches). I'm afraid that what follows is little more than a biblical outline of these things.

We are blessed to be living in this day of grace. In 2 Corinthians 6:1-2 Paul writes, "We then, as workers together with him (God), beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain. (For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.)" After the fourfold Gospel, in which we have the record of Christ's birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension, we come to the Acts of the Apostles, and this book really records the birthday of the New Testament Church.

The ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself was most discriminating and separating, three times in the Gospel According to St John we read, "There was a division among the people because of him" or "for his sayings." (John 7:43, 9:16 & 10:19) And regarding the long 6th chapter of John, I remember the late Rev Sidney Norton, one of the founders of the *Banner of Truth* magazine, often referring to it as "the chapter of the blessed diminishings." At the beginning of the chapter, after the feeding of the 5,000, there were multitudes following Christ and they wanted to make him King. However, at the end of the same chapter Christ expressed doubt concerning the apostles themselves, "... Will ye also go away?" (verse 67) - "Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?" referring to Judas Iscariot, who would betray Him. What was it that so offended the multitude, and caused them to go away? Two things. (1) First, Christ had declared his Deity and spoken of himself as the Bread of life "... I am the bread of life," (verse 35), and he had spoken of the vital necessity of spiritual union and communion with him, "... Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him." (verses 53-56) (2) Secondly, He had also plainly declared Divine sovereignty in salvation, "It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life. But there are some of you that believe not. For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray him. And he said, Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father. (then we read) From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him," (verses 63-66) Evidently it was the truth of sovereign grace that offended so many and caused them to depart from Christ. Historically the *Gospel Standard* magazine has been seen as very much advocating such a searching, sifting and separating ministry. The foremost of all its editors, J. C. Philpot is still recognised as one of the most discriminating preachers of all time.

What was the final result of Christ's faithful searching ministry? Concerning his true disciples, there were only few, we read in Acts 1:15 "... (the number of the names together were about an hundred and twenty)" Chapter 2 then opens with the statement, "And when the day of Pentecost was fully come." The Old Testament Feast of Weeks, or Pentecost, was fulfilled on that day, with the glorious outpouring of the Holy Ghost. The Spirit was of course present in the Old Testament. He was active in the creation, and all true spiritual Israelites throughout the Old Testament were born again of the Holy Ghost. David knew Him, and feared that in his great and dreadful transgressions he had sinned against the Spirit, crying out, "... take not thy Holy Spirit from me." (Psalm 51:11) However, all in the nation of Israel were not God's spiritual children. When Israel went up out of Egypt in Exodus 12:38 we read "... a mixed multitude went up also with them," (mg. a great mixture). Yet among this mixed multitude was to be found the church of God, the godly remnant, the true spiritual Israel. Stephen, the first Christian martyr speaks of "... the church in the wilderness" (Acts 7:38). Throughout that whole dispensation of the Old Testament, previous to the birth of Christ, the Spirit was clearly active.

Then in the mystery of the Incarnation, we witness one of the greatest of all the works of the Spirit of God. The angel says to the Virgin Mary, "... The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." (Luke 1:35) This is the great mystery of the Incarnation. Subsequently, after Christ had accomplished all the work of redemption and salvation, committed to him in the eternal covenant, there was to be a remarkable and glorious outpouring of the Spirit; the apostle declares in John 7:39 "... the Holy Ghost was not yet given; for Jesus was not yet glorified." There was yet to be a remarkable manifestation of the Spirit of God. And in three whole chapters in John 14-16 Christ himself has much to say regarding this future coming of the Holy Ghost. Among many other things he declares, "... I tell you the truth; it is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you." (John 16:7) Furthermore, after His resurrection Christ, told His disciples "... that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but await for the promise of the Father, which saith he, ye have heard of me." (Acts 1:4) And so it followed in Acts 2 "... that when the day of Pentecost was fully come" there was a mighty outpouring of the Spirit of God, and as he preached Christ crucified and risen again from the dead Peter declared, "Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear." (verse 33)

Most of Acts 2 is taken up with a detailed outline of the sermon Peter preached on that auspicious day, and the manner of his preaching and its consequences indicates that there was a remarkable unction of the Spirit upon him as he spoke. This is the conversion, rather restoration, that would follow his fall and threefold denial of Christ, foretold by the Lord in Luke 22:31-32 "... Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren." And so it was that the brethren, his fellow apostles, were strengthened, as he stood up with the eleven, and lifted up his voice to preach the Person and Work of Christ, asserting that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ, the Son of the living God. And what was the outcome? Conviction of sin, and Spirit-wrought conversions, as 3,000 were added to the 120 spoken of in Acts 1. Here is the true birth of the New Testament Church. Subsequently, in Acts 4:4, we read of another great number being converted, and added to the church, "... many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand." Then throughout the book of Acts we read of the blessed effect of the the Spirit's works in association with the preaching of the Apostolic Gospel.

Let us now turn to Acts 2: 41-42 where we have what is termed THE PRIMITIVE CHURCH ORDER, "Then they that gladly received his word were baptised: and the same day there were added unto them above three thousand souls. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers." Here we have the marks of the New Testament Church, and the real roots of the Strict and Particular Baptists. In considering this biblical order of our churches I shall deal with five points:

1. The doctrine of the church.
2. The doctrine of baptism.
3. The practice of strict communion.
4. The Apostolic doctrine of the Gospel.
5. True Experimental Religion.

1. The doctrine of the church

In being added to the number of the disciples (verse 41) it is evident that those converted were in fact joined to the church, for we read in verse 47 "... And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." Mark the fact that only the Lord can truly add anyone to the church. Let us consider the doctrine of the church, Christ is the Head of the church and He is the foundation also.

What is the proper biblical order and organisation of a church? There are basically three forms of church government. (i) Episcopalian churches, governed by archbishops and bishops, etc. e.g. the Church of England. (ii) Presbyterian churches, ministers and elders from churches in a local area gather as a presbytery, and once a year men representing these presbyteries gather for the general assembly, which is the highest court of all in Presbyterian churches. e.g. the Church of Scotland, and several other churches in Scotland. (iii) Independent churches. Each congregation,

gathered together in a local area, is independent and self-governing. This latter is the way in which Strict Baptists order their church affairs, believing that this is New Testament church order.

Some of you might be aware of the fact that the Presbyterians often speak of the Divine right of church government, asserting that what they uphold and practice is the true and proper biblical model. Also the Free Presbyterians in Scotland make much of their distinctive position, they even have a catechism which deals specifically with their history and principles. Furthermore, I remember many years ago when reading the Memoir of Neil Cameron, one of the best known of their earliest ministers, how impressed I was to learn that at the beginning of every year he would give a lecture to his congregation, reminding them of the *raison d'être* of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland.

Is there not here a lesson for Strict Baptists to learn? What are our distinctive principles? Do we really know where we stand? Hence this address today. First of all then I want to establish the clear biblical warrant for our independency. It is the Greek word "ecclesia" that is translated "church" in the AV New Testament. Interestingly this word was translated "congregation" in William Tyndale's English New Testament, and this is actually a more accurate rendering of the Greek. "Ekklesia" is derived from the Greek verb "to call out" (ek-kaleo). Therefore a church is made up of people called out—called out of the world and gathered together as a congregation. We might call this the gathered church principle. Strict Baptists don't believe in a territorial church, like the CofE or the CofS, which, as national churches, divide their whole nations into parishes, and all the parishes together make up the church, a territorial church, covering the whole country. Rather do we believe that each independent church, believers gathered together in a certain locality, is in fact a microcosm of the one true church, the whole company of the elect. This is a very high view of the church and the privilege and responsibilities of being a member. Each local church, seeking to uphold the primitive church order of Acts 2, is a miniature of THE CHURCH.

Although we read of the birth of the New Testament Church here in Acts 2, the truth I am asserting is rooted in the church in the Old Testament. One of the greatest times in Israel's history was the generation raised during their wilderness wanderings, after they came out of Egypt. Israel was then a theocracy, governed immediately by God, and many centuries later, referring to those days, he says to his prophet Jeremiah, "Go and cry in the ears of Jerusalem, saying, Thus saith the LORD; I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown. Israel was holiness to the LORD, and the firstfruits of his increase." (Jeremiah 2:2-3) And in the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, Israel is repeatedly referred to as "the assembly" or "the congregation." In fact we have the two words together in Exodus 12:6 "... the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel." It is interesting and instructive to observe how these two words are translated in the old Greek version of the Old Testament, called the Septuagint (LXX). This is a translation that the Apostles were very familiar with, and at times they quote from it in the New Testament. In the LXX Greek version "assembly" is translated "ekklesia," and "congregation" is translated "synagoge"—(synagogue). Interestingly in James 2:2 this latter word is clearly used in reference to a local church, gathered together for Divine worship, "If there come into your assembly (mg. synagogue)." Throughout the forty years in the wilderness Israel was a people called out of the world (Egypt) assembled together as a congregation of the Lord, looking to him as King and Sovereign. Likewise in the New Testament a church is a local congregation gathered together under the headship of Christ alone.

When Israel entered into the promised land, and were scattered throughout it, and began to fill the land, this principle of a gathered congregation was still to be recognised. Three times every year all the adult males must assemble at the tabernacle, and subsequently the temple, for the three great Jewish feasts of Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. In Deuteronomy 16:16 God commands, "Three times in a year shall all thy males appear before the LORD thy God in the place which he shall choose; in the feast of unleavened bread, and in the feast of weeks, and in the feast of tabernacles." However, there is a difference between the Old Testament, where we see Israel as THE one and only congregation of the Lord, represented by the seven-branched candelabra in the tabernacle (Exodus 25:31-40). Whereas in the New Testament, at the end of the Apostolic Age, in the book of Revelation we see the principle of several Independent local congregations. In Revelation 2 and 3 letters are sent to the seven individual churches in Asia Minor (modern day Turkey). And in chapter 1 these are not represented by a seven-branched

candelabra, but John sees the glorified Christ in the midst of seven separate candlesticks, “And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks; and in the midst of the candlesticks one like unto the Son of man.” (Revelation 1:12-13)

Therefore as Strict and Particular Baptists we uphold the primitive church order, and in our church government believe in and practice the principle of independency, as each congregation as it gathers, is a self-governing body of believers. Furthermore, we need to be aware that there can be no such thing as a virtual church, the gathering together as a corporate body is vital, Hebrews 10:25 “Not forsaking the assembling of our ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.” And the gathering is to Christ, in fulfilment of God’s ancient promise in Genesis 49:10 “The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be.”

The highest authority in these individual churches is the church meeting. As Baptists we delight in the biblical truth of the priesthood of all believers, “Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.” (1 Peter 2:5) And these believers gathered together as members in a local congregation constitute the highest court of the church. In any matter of discipline we must move from the few to the many, as Christ teaches in Matthew 18:15-17) “Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between him and thee alone: if he hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publication.” And in dealing with the matter of immorality in a member, Paul writes to the local church at Corinth, “In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (1 Corinthians 5:4-5) Suspend his membership, and even separate from him.

Moreover, those in the church are to have a mutual care of each other, it says “... they continued steadfastly in ...fellowship.” There is spiritual fellowship one with another in the gospel. John declares the purpose of his ministry in 1 John 1:3 “That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.” This fellowship is expressed in prayer, for “... they [also] continued steadfastly in ...prayers.” They prayed one for another, and also united together in prayer. In fact in the broadest sense this reference to “prayers” can be understood in terms of calling upon God in worship. In Genesis 4, after the death of the righteous seed, Abel, murdered by his brother, Cain, it is not until the following generation that we read of those who worshipped God, “And Adam knew his wife again; and she bare a son, and called his name Seth: For God, said she, hath appointed me another seed instead of Abel, whom Cain slew. And to Seth, to him also there was born a son; and he called his name Enos: then began men to call upon the name of the LORD.” (Genesis 4:25-26) Mark the words “... then began men to call upon the name of the LORD.” To call upon God in worship is the mark of the godly, therefore each local church is to be a worshipping community.

However, we must note that the word “fellowship” also refers to practical giving and supporting other believers in times of need. Paul uses the word in this context in 2 Corinthians 8:4 as he speaks of the relief that the churches of Macedonia generously gave to the churches of Judaea, when they were in need, “For to their power, I bear record, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves; praying us with much intreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints.” (2 Corinthians 8:3-4) Elsewhere the word is actually rendered “contribution” (Romans 15:26), and here in Acts 2:45 we are told how they “... sold their possessions and goods and parted them to all men, as every man had need.”—We can think of the purpose of the Gospel Standard Charitable Societies, to help needy believers.

2. The doctrine of baptism

It is clear in Acts 2:41 that those who were joined to the church were first baptised, “Then they that gladly received his word were baptised: and the same day there were added unto them about

three thousand souls.” Let us turn to believers baptism. This is one of our distinctive practices, and now often referred to as credo-baptism, i.e. baptism upon confession of faith. To the church at Ephesus Paul wrote, “There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.” (Ephesians 4:4-6) Observe that in the Authorised Version this is a single sentence, stating the great truth of the Trinity in salvation. Here we have the three Divine Persons in the Godhead. In verse 4, God the Holy Spirit. In verse 5, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God. And in verse 6, God the Father. First we have effectual calling by the Holy Spirit. This call is evidenced by their faith in Christ and they are baptised. Thus they are part of the whole family of God, in heaven and in earth, and call upon God as their Father. And baptism must always be in the name of the Trinity (Matthew 28:19).

Although 3,000 were converted on the day of Pentecost, from what we read in Acts 2:41 we deduce that there were some who did not receive the word of Peter but rejected it. And maybe some received it formally and superficially. It was only those “... that gladly received his word,” who were baptised. Only such as believe that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ, the Son of the living God are the proper subjects of baptism, and this is very evident here in Acts 2. They were “...pricked in their heart” (verse 37) and under conviction of sin, and in addressing them Peter said, “Repent, and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.” (verse 38) They had already experienced the grace of the Holy Spirit, for as Christ had said in the course of His ministry, it is the Spirit’s prerogative to convince of sin, “... when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgement.” (John 16:8(-11)) In being baptised they gave an outward expression of what they had inwardly felt. Through the baptism of the Holy Ghost they were in Christ, for the Spirit, who convinces of sin, then testifies of Christ as the only Saviour. Of the Spirit’s ministry, Christ also says, “He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you.” (John 16:14) And they should not conceal the fact, but openly profess their faith in Christ by passing through the waters of baptism, Romans 6:4 “... buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.”

The promise preached was the Holy Spirit Himself, He is the One that the Father promised to send (Luke 24:49). This is what Peter speaks in verse 39 “For the promise is unto you, and unto your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.” The reference to “your children” in no way supports the notion of paedobaptism. The context of the verse indicates that Peter speaks of their descendants or posterity through the ages. These last times, this day of grace, in which we are living is the dispensation of the Holy Ghost. and as the gospel goes out to the ends of the earth, so the Spirit will continually work in the hearts of elect sinners and bring them to salvation.

3. The practice of strict communion

Thirdly, we come to our practice of restricted, or strict communion. By these terms we mean that the privilege of partaking of the Lord’s Supper is restricted to those baptised as believers and members of the church. Observe the order in Acts 2:41-42, those who gladly received the word of the gospel and believed in Christ were baptised and added to the church, and then we are told that “...they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.” All of these are corporate activities in the church, therefore “breaking of bread” simply refers to the Lord’s Supper, which is an ordinance of the church, this is evident from what we read in 1 Corinthians 11:17-34. As Paul deals with the abuses of the Lord’s Supper in the church at Corinth we observe how in the 11th chapter he very much emphasises the principle of the gathered church. In verse 18 he writes “... when ye come together in the church,” here the reference is not to a building but to the corporate body of believers gathered together. In fact he also uses the expression “come together” in verses 17 and 20, and then in verse 33 exhorts, “Wherefore, my brethren, when ye come together to eat, tarry one for another.” Paul was concerned that all things should be done decently and in order at the Holy Supper of the Lord. This is why we practice, and contend for, restricted communion. Not that we want to be exclusive, but we want to obey the Lord’s precepts and please Him by being disciplined and orderly in the church.

At the Lord's table we should also manifest the deepest expression of another of the marks of the primitive New Testament Church, that of "fellowship," and observe the syntax in Acts 2:42 "breaking of bread" stands beside "fellowship." They continued steadfastly in "... fellowship, and in the breaking of bread." Oftentimes the Lord's Supper is referred to as a service of Holy Communion. Here believers may enter into all the privileges and blessings of spiritual union and communion with Christ. As the Lord says in John 6:53-56 "... Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him." This has nothing to do with the blasphemy of the RC mass and the doctrine of transubstantiation. The Protestant Reformed CofE in the 39 Articles of Religion speaks of RC masses as "...blasphemous fables, and dangerous deceits." (Article 31) In John 6 Christ simply speaks of spiritual communion with Himself, in the soul of the believer, which may be experienced at the Lord's Supper.

Also at the same time, at the Lord's table, there is also an expression of fellowship one with another in the local church, 1 Corinthians 10:16-17 "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread." Because we have a high doctrine of the local church we continue to contend for restricted communion, and not wanting to be exclusive and divisive we warmly welcome to the Lord's table those who are members of churches of the same faith and order, in other words those who are in agreement with our doctrine and practice.

4. The Apostolic Doctrine of the Gospel

Let us now turn to, and consider, what it means to continue "...steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine." (verse 42). Here we come to perhaps the most distinctive mark of Gospel Standard Strict Baptists: the clear distinction made between the Law and the Gospel. In Hebrews 8 the Apostle speaks plainly of the differences between the Old Covenant and the New, and in relation to the latter declares that Christ has obtained a more excellent ministry, as He is the Mediator of a better covenant, established upon better promises. He then goes on to say in verse 7 "... if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second." He next quotes Jeremiah 31:31-34, and Hebrews 8 then concludes with the words, "In that he saith, a new covenant, he hath made the first old, Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away." (verse 13). Hebrews 8 is a most important chapter in distinguishing between the covenant that God gave on Mount Sinai, and that which proceeds from Mount Zion. And in Hebrews 12:18-29 Paul further takes up the differences between these two covenants.

If Christ is the Mediator and Minister of the New Covenant, it follows that this will also be the subject-matter of the ministry of His apostles, and of all who seek to continue "... steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine." In fact throughout 2 Corinthians 3, as Paul there makes clear the distinction between the ministrations of Law and Gospel, speaking of himself, and his associates, he says, "...our sufficiency is of God; who also hath made us able ministers of the New Testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life." (verses 5-6) I want to deal with two particular areas of the Apostolic Doctrine of the Gospel:

(i) Preaching

First, historically, in preaching Strict Baptists have made clear the distinction between law and gospel. Hence the Gospel Standard Article 26 begins, "We deny duty faith and duty repentance—these terms signifying that it is every man's duty spiritually and savingly to repent and believe." The word "duty" suggests the works of the law, in contrast the gospel sets forth the gift of grace, "And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work." (Romans 11:6) We must always beware of legalising the gospel. In making this distinction between law and gospel we can go back to Martin Luther, who at the time of the Protestant Reformation, in his deep soul experience was caused to see and feel the differences between the law and the gospel. Luther then speaks of just two principal uses of the law given at Mount Sinai; what he called the *civil* or *political*, and the *spiritual* or *theological*. In Romans 13:1-9 Paul speaks of civil government, as that which God

has instituted, and clearly shows that where there is good government in a country the laws will be rooted in the Ten Commandments, particularly the second table of the law. Good laws are therefore a restraint to sin and preserve order in society. This is what Luther means by the first use of the law.

With regards preaching we are more interested in what Luther calls the second use of the law, its spiritual use. Theologically the purpose of the law is to bring conviction into the sinner's soul, "...what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin." (Romans 3:19-20) Luther understood this, when, as a Romish monk, he was awakened in the depths of his soul, to a profound sense of his bondage to sin. He brings this out in his great Commentary on Galatians, as he expounds chapter 3:23 "... before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed." Luther says, "Thus the law is a prison... it sheweth unto us spiritually our sin, terrifieth and humbleth us, that when we are so terrified and humbled, we may learn to know our own misery and condemnation. And this is the true and proper use of the law."

How careful, and discriminating, the faithful preacher must therefore be in addressing his congregation. Here Christ Himself, the Prince of Preachers, is the great pattern. We see this in Mark 10 and the Lord's different dealings with two men: the rich young ruler, and blind Bartimaeus, Mark 10:17-22 and 46-52.

- (i) *The rich young ruler.* There is something commendable in the young man's approach to Christ. He appears to be sincere, anxious, and earnest. He comes unashamedly, openly, and hastily to Christ, and kneeling before him, respectfully calls him "Good Master" (verse 17). Christ's reply might sound strange, "Why callest thou me good, there is none good but one, that is God." (verse 18) But the point is: does this man recognise who he's addressing? Does he accept the divine authority of Jesus as the promised Messiah, the Son of the living God? Moreover, the man speaks of his own works, "What shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" (verse 17). So Christ deals with him not with gospel words, but in terms of the law, "Thou knowest the commandments." (verse 17) How sad is the man's answer to Christ "... all these have I observed from my youth." (verse 20) He had no sense of his depravity, there was no conviction of sin, and no feeling of utter helplessness. Christ further probes his soul, is he covetous of the things of the world? Here is the test, he must sell all and follow Christ. This offended him, and we are told that he went away, sad and grieved.
- (ii) *Blind Bartimaeus.* Whereas the Lord did not speak one gospel word to the secure and self-righteous rich young ruler, how differently does he deal with the poor broken-hearted beggar in verses 46-52. Observe how Bartimaeus addresses Christ, "Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me." (verse 47) and then, when told to be silent, he repeats the words in verse 48. To call Jesus the Son of David, is to acknowledge him as the Messiah, spoken of by the prophets, the Christ, the Son of the living God (Matthew 16:16). Also, rather than speak of works and merit, the blind man makes a spiritual request. He cries out, "Have mercy on me" (verse 47), notice, initially he doesn't even ask for physical sight. He only asks for that in answer to Christ's question, "What wilt thou that I should do unto you?" (verse 51) It is not what the man must do, but what Christ will do. And the Lord declares, "Thy faith hath made thee whole (mg. saved thee)." (verse 52) He was blessed with saving and justifying faith "... and followed Jesus in the way." (verse 52)

A Lutheran theologian (Carl F W Walther) observes, "The gospel must be preached only to bruised, contrite, miserable sinners; the law to secure sinners (those who feel secure in their own works). Inverting this order means confounding both and, by confounding them, commingling both in the most dangerous manner... To make a miserable, contrite sinner the subject of law preaching is to commit a grievous sin against him; for the gospel ought to be preached to him."

What is this gospel? It centres in the Person and Work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Earlier this month I gave a lecture on J. K. Popham, a most well known Strict Baptist, and editor of the *Gospel Standard* from 1905-35, and I concentrated on his writings on the doctrine of Christ, a subject Popham also delighted to preach on. In his final editorial in the magazine, in June 1935, Popham wrote, "I have long known that I am regarded as 'obsessed' with the doctrine of Christ. Would that

the glory of the Divine Son filled my soul continually, that His glorious and necessary Name, 'Son of God,' were ever present to my faith." Before him, J. C. Philpot, one of the first, and the most gifted, of the editors of the *Gospel Standard* was also well known for his vehement contending for the truth of Christ's Eternal Sonship. Such preaching of the gospel of the glories of Christ has certainly been an historic distinctive of Gospel Standard Strict Baptists. Oh that it was still so today!

(ii) The rule of the believers conduct

Furthermore, besides a clear distinction between law and gospel in preaching; with regards to the believer's rule of conduct, Strict Baptists also emphasis the precepts of the gospel, and not the law of Moses. Although, with regards to the civil use of the law, which I mentioned earlier, believers, together with all members of society, are of course under the law of their country, as that law is rooted in God's law.

In the Gospel Standard Article 16 it states "We believe that the Believers Rule of conduct is the gospel, not the law, commonly called the Moral Law, issued on Mount Sinai." And later it speaks of "... the gospel containing the sum and substance and glory of all the laws which God ever promulgated from His throne." Clearly the believer is not lawless, but is under the higher law of what we term gospel precepts. What does this mean? In a sense it does not exclude the Mosaic Law, for that is a law that God obviously "... promulgated from his throne."

Here a key verse is Romans 7:6 where Paul plainly states, "But we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter." The law spoken of here is not the ceremonial law, for Gentiles were never under that law, and the NT church at Rome was principally a Gentile church. The law spoken of in Romans 7:6 is the same as that which Paul had previously spoken of in Romans 3:19-20, the law which brings the knowledge of sin and a sense of guilt, and silences all as they stand condemned before God. Remember, this is the first use of the law; to convince of sin. But Christ has come as the Surety of His people. He has stood in their law-place and obeyed all the precepts of the law for them. He has also suffered as their substitute, and died bearing the penalty of all their transgressions of the law. Therefore, in Christ, believers have died to the law. They are not under it as their legal code. The believer stands in a filial, not a legal relationship to God. However, believers desire to show their deep gratitude to God for all that they have in Christ. They are motivated by grace, and they love God's precepts as much as His promises, so they "... serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter." As all their motivation is rooted in the gospel, we speak of their rule of conduct as the precepts of the gospel, "And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God. (Galatians 6:16)

5. True Experimental religion

Finally, we come to true experimental religion. Historically this has certainly been one of the distinguishing marks of the Gospel Standard Strict Baptists. It was very evident in J. C. Philpot's ministry. In 1 Corinthians 4:1 Paul declares, "Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God." And, in his searching and sifting preaching, Philpot was greatly gifted in tracing out the mysterious workings of the Spirit of God in the souls of sinners. He was a steward of God's mysteries in the ways of salvation. Sadly, among us today there is much confusion, and a tendency with some to confuse this biblical experimentalism with a mysticism that verges on the religion of the Charismatics.

Excuse me if I here make some personal remarks. I remember the first Philpot sermon I read, I had gone to Northern Ireland to be best man at the wedding of a friend, who had just finished his course of studies at the Irish Baptist College, and after his wedding would be taking up the pastorate in a baptist church. On the night before the wedding I was staying in a bungalow, on the farm belonging to his prospective in-laws. As he left me there, my friend passed to me a little volume of Philpot's sermons, and that night I read my first Philpot sermon, on Proverbs 19:21 "There are many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless the counsel of the LORD, that shall stand." After previously struggling for some time with the doctrines of free grace, I had come to some understanding of the truth of God's sovereignty in salvation. I recognised the significance of

the word “particular” in the name “Particular Baptists.” It is of course a declaration of our belief in the truth of a limited atonement, that Christ died only for the elect. In and by His life and death, He actually accomplished the definite salvation of those chosen in Him before the foundation of the world. He didn’t just make salvation a mere possibility for all, but made it sure and certain for all those given to him in the eternal covenant.

We must never lose sight of the importance of this word “particular,” for it reminds us of our doctrinal position, just as “strict” reminds us of our practice. We are Strict and Particular Baptists. Doctrinally we are Calvinists, in distinction to those who are Arminians (Free-willers). What we believe and preach is summarised in the Five Points of Calvinism, which we remember in the mnemonics’ word, TULIP:

1. T - Total Depravity. 2. U - Unconditional Election. 3. L - Limited Atonement. 4? I - Irresistible Grace. 5. P - Perseverance of the Saints.

Returning to Philpot’s sermon, after reading just a couple of pages of it, I found him criticising those who had nothing more than an intellectual understanding of the truth, referring to “... many characters in the professing Church of God, who have received the doctrine into their judgements, without feeling the power of it in their hearts.” And then going on to say, “It is one thing to receive the doctrine as a doctrine, and another thing to submit to it as the truth of God.” Often such characters are referred to as letter-Calvinists. As I read on I found the sermon to be most searching, and at times I was made to wonder if I had any real religion at all. Yet there were points where I could relate to what Philpot said, for he seemed to trace out different parts of my experience of God’s dealings with my soul. I therefore began to see how in the past the Lord had indeed been dealing with me, in order to bring me to submission to His absolute sovereignty in salvation. This caused me to love Philpot’s ministry, and I have since read many of his sermons, and several times reread that sermon on “Man’s Devices and the Lord’s Counsel.” In fact, just a few weeks ago, I read it once more, and again I felt as if I was being stripped bare. However, I had to read to the end, and must acknowledge that, as usual, I found much to encourage me, as the sermon was really so full of Christ. In this sermon Philpot speaks of how the Lord’s counsel is simply one—all centres in the glory of God in Christ, but Philpot declares, “... as far as our experience is concerned, there are two [ends]. The one, the humbling and breaking down the creature into nothingness; the other, the setting up of Christ upon the wreck and ruin of the creature.”

This is an important point, for with experimental preaching the danger is that we misunderstand, and we get lost in subjectivism, poring too much over ourselves, as we look for something in self, in our experience, to qualify us for salvation and assure us. We need to remember, it is not our experience, our faith, that saves us. Of course we must never despise the gracious work of the Spirit in the soul, we do need “... the faith of the operation of God,” spoken of in Colossians 2:12. However, in salvation the Holy Ghost always works as the Spirit of Christ. In referring to the coming of the Spirit and His ministry, Christ says, “... he shall testify of me... for he shall not speak of himself... He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you.” (John 15:26 & 16:13-14)

Ultimately saving faith is objective. It is the object of faith that is all important, “Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith.” (Hebrews 12:2) This verb “to look,” is a strong verb, literally, “looking away to.” Looking away from every other object, and looking only unto Jesus. In Romans 4 we read of the justifying faith of Abraham, and Paul declares him to be the father of all that believe (verse 16). The apostle then concludes the chapter by speaking of the all important object of Abraham’s faith, “And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah’s womb: he staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith in faith, giving glory to God; and being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able to perform. And it was imputed to him for righteousness.” (Romans 4:19-22) Clearly it was the promise that was imputed to him, and historically the promise centred in Isaac, the son that Sarah would bear to Abraham. But Isaac is a type of Christ, and Paul declares Christ to be the true seed of Abraham in Galatians 3:16 “Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, and to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.” Thus Christ alone, and His righteousness, is the justification of all who believe in Him. We must always remember this truth.

Martin Luther said that the doctrine of justification by faith is the article by which the church stands or falls. And this is true of our churches.

With regards to the ministry of Philpot I have heard it said that he was “a corruption preacher,” and that he dwelt too much on the dark side of religion; the conviction of sin and the depths of man’s fall. However, with him all of this teaching was inevitably to the one blessed end; that sinners should see that all their salvation is completely, and continually, in Christ alone. Therefore I believe that the ten volume set of Philpot’s sermons, published at the beginning of the twentieth century, is rightly titled, “The Gospel Pulpit.” Might such Christ-centred gospel preaching yet again be the hallmark in the pulpits of our Strict and Particular Baptist Chapels.