

## HALF-DAY CONVENTION IN MORLEY ON 18TH SEPTEMBER

Report by Mark Skoulding

Zion Chapel, Morley, near Leeds, hosted the second of the half-day conventions organised by the British Reformed Fellowship. The meetings were well attended and some interesting new acquaintances were made. A fine tea was provided by the ladies complimenting the robust and definite preaching of Rev Ron Hanko, Pastor of Covenant Reformed Fellowship, Ballymena, Northern Ireland. The subjects were "What is Calvinism?" at 3.00 pm and "The Sovereignty of God" at 6.30 pm, and in his treatment Pastor Hanko showed plainly how dear to his heart these subjects were and how closely they were interwoven into his thinking. No mere paper Calvinism here!

### WHAT IS CALVINISM?

Of the many angles Pastor Hanko could have chosen – historical, creedal or exegetical – he opted to revive the now dwindling knowledge of the 'Five Points' or Doctrines of Grace. It is often the case that new publications today disregard the Five Points and treat Calvinism more with politics and science or even with music and the arts. Pastor Hanko, however, treated the subject topically by contrasting what at first sounds like good news – Arminianism, with what is really good news – Calvinism.

Calvinism is the gospel. The doctrines of grace are the gospel; and because the gospel is good news, and Calvinism is the best expression of that gospel, Calvinism is the best news a person will ever hear. The core and meat of Calvinism are the 'Five Points' – often expressed as the acrostic 'TULIP.'

**T=Total Depravity.** Man is as wicked as he can be and has not even a desire to do good (Psalm 14:2-3). Ephesians 2:1 speaks of *death* in sins, and no man is worse off than being dead. The opposing view – which sounds like good news – is that we can do some good or at least we are able to decide for God on our own. However, the only really good news is to have a correct diagnosis of our spiritual condition, otherwise no medicine can help.

**U=Unconditional Election.** God chose some because He was pleased to do so (Ephesians 1:9). This means that the salvation of any man depends solely on God's will. This, again, sounds like bad news but the opposing view is appalling – that my salvation depends upon my will, my fickle will that changes so much during the course of my life. The good news is that salvation rests on the unchangeable sovereign God whose predestinating will applies to all sorts and conditions of men, such as fathers, children, servants and masters (Ephesians 5).

**L=Limited Atonement.** Christ died for some only may sound like blasphemy if preached in today's Christian climate; while Christ died for everybody sounds like good news, until one looks into the world and sees vast masses perishing in a Christless state. Why is limited atonement good news? There are three reasons. Firstly, the limit is not on the value of Christ's atonement but only on the number, decreed by God, to whom it applies. Secondly, the elect can rest in the full assurance of Christ's atonement even though their sins, actual and original, are many and reach to heaven. Thirdly, limited atonement means that Christ really saves those for whom He atones. Matthew 1:21 is not just good news but the very best news there is: "He shall save his people from their sins"!

**I=Irresistible Grace.** God sends the knowledge of Christ effectively into the hearts of His people. He converts them in His own way, in His own time and in His own place. The opposing view rises up in derision and claims that we make men mere objects to be moved at God's will. Our answer is resolute and scriptural – that God's sovereignty does not remove our responsibility. But even if it did, we would rather be objects in the hands of God than to be capable of resisting His will.

**P=Perseverance (or Preservation) of the Saints.** God's people shall persevere in salvation to the end – to eternity. Here, the opposing view does not even sound like good news – that a person can lose his salvation! The gospel is this – that we "are kept by the power of God" (1 Peter 1:5) and I rest all my hopes on Him. He is faithful; He is Almighty; He is gracious.

In conclusion, we assert that the modern church's view of a God offering salvation to everyone who hears because He wants to save them, is not good news! The good news is not God offering salvation to all hoping some will accept His offer, but the gospel is the very "power of God unto salvation" (Romans 1:16). The

power is not in any man or any preacher but in Christ Himself, who secures the salvation of His chosen ones.

## THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD

This message was an exposition of Psalm 135 with the focus on verse 6. With clarity and force we were driven to many logical conclusions and given high views of God's sovereignty and some old problems associated with the subject were cleared up. For instance, I was particularly helped by the correlation of 2 Samuel 24:1, 1Chronicles 21:1 and 1Chronicles 21:8.

Essentially, the Bible does not really speak of anything else than the sovereignty of God. Although some verses are more plain than others, many of the more direct references are to be found in the book of Psalms. Ninety percent of the psalms have half their content devoted to the subject and one third of the Psalms have the sovereignty of God as their main theme. Calvinists are often accused of over-emphasising God's sovereignty but a simple reading of the Psalms will reveal that one cannot speak too much of this subject.

With regard to Psalm 135 in particular, when speaking about God and Who He is, like Moses, we should remove our shoes for this is holy ground. Furthermore any consideration of God's sovereignty should lead us to profound praise (vv 1-3, 19-21).

### 1. The Sovereignty of God – What He Is.

To say God is sovereign is just to say God is God! Any denial of His sovereignty is idolatry (vv 15-18). The theology that teaches that God wills to save men and sent His Son to die for them and then sent the Holy Spirit to *try* to save them, is idolatry – for it portrays God as frustrated by the stubborn wills of men. The same theology teaches that "prayer changes things," but God is *unchangeable* and so He is robbed of His sovereignty. If God is not sovereign He is not God!

### 2. The Sovereignty of God – What He Does.

God does everything, everywhere, everytime as it pleases Him (v 6). Whatever happens in heaven, in earth, in the hidden places or in hell – God does it all. This may be difficult to understand and accept but God's ways and thoughts are not our ways and thoughts (Isaiah 55:8-9).

God is sovereign in five areas:

a. **Creation** (v 6). Evolution denies God's sovereignty and that He can speak and act infallibly. In fact, it denies God Himself.

**b. Providence** (v 7). This is God's daily rule over His creation. He even keeps the wind in his 'cupboard' and then sends it out to blow. The modern infidel church says that sickness, war, earthquakes and death are not from God. They are outside His control and therefore outside the realm of His sovereignty.

**c. History** (vv 8– 13). The Constitution of the United States of America says: "All men are created equal with unalienable rights to life and liberty." God's sovereignty, however, means that men have no *rights* at all; only God has *rights* – sovereign rights over His creation.

**d. Judgment** (v 14). God is the Judge of all the earth and He will do what is right.

**e. Salvation** (v 4). This above all things is most important. Salvation is inextricably bound up with predestination.

### 3. The Sovereignty of God – His Attributes.

**a. He is Almighty.** All power is God's even over hell and Satan and over Judas and Pilate (John 19:11; Daniel 4:34–35).

**b. He has Sovereign Right.** God does not need to justify Himself or give an account of His actions (cf Romans 9:17).

**c. His Sovereignty is Unlimied** – in power and authority. The modern Arminian error is that He limits Himself in certain areas, especially in salvation.

**d. His Sovereignty is All Comprehensive** – over the whole life of man and the very way he takes (Job 31:4; Jeremiah 10:23); over the life of the king upon his throne (Proverbs 21:1); and over Satan and wicked men in their deeds (Acts 4:26–28).

**e. His Sovereignty is Active.** Is there such a doctrine as God permitting evil? Scripture on the contrary teaches that God is active in evil occurrences. Consider the following references: Exodus 9:14–16; 10:20; Deut. 2:30; Judges 14:4; 1 Samuel 16:14; Isaiah 19:17; 63:17; Jeremiah 13:13–14; 25:33; 44:27; Lamentations 1:15; 2:8; 3:38; Amos 3:6; Romans 9:18.

In 2 Samuel 24:1 God's sovereign will moved David to number Israel. The instrument God used in this evil act was Satan (1Chronicles 21:1) but, when it came to the blame, David does not say "God willed this" or "Satan tempted me," but "I have sinned greatly" (1Chronicles 21:8).

Some of these things are hard for us to understand but we have no guide other than the Scriptures. Scripture *never* denies the sovereignty of God; Scripture *never* denies the responsibility of man; and Scripture *never* admits any contradiction between the two. To God be everlasting glory and praise!