

Pastoral Letter July 2010

Coalitions

We are having to get used to something which is new for many people in the United Kingdom: a coalition government. The circumstances arose when none of the political parties gained an outright majority in the general election. One of the inevitable features of such an arrangement is that neither of the parties in the coalition can pursue their full manifesto. There has to be government by mutual consent, and that means give and take.

In the Christian life, however, things are different. The psalmist prays, 'unite my heart to fear thy name' (Psalm 86:11). We cannot have a divided heart – or what we might call, a 'coalition' heart. We cannot give and take. We must not pick and choose. We dare not mix and match. The Lord God both requires and desires our undivided heart, and one of his complaints concerning his people of old at one point was this: 'Their heart is divided' (Hosea 10:1).

A helpful way of working this out in practice is to remember that there are certain things which cannot exist or be pursued together if we are to live genuine, consistent and (most important) God-glorifying lives. They are such things as these:

There can be no coalition between *grace and works*. Either our salvation is of grace (God's) or it is of works (ours). It is all of grace, from first to last.

There can be no coalition between *Spirit and flesh*. As saved people we 'are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit', and so we must 'through the Spirit ... mortify the deeds of the body' (Romans 8:9, 13).

There can be no coalition between *Scripture and tradition*. Either the word of God is our sole rule both for doctrine (all that we believe) and practice (all that we do), or it is not. It is.

There can be no coalition between *delight and drudgery*. Our command and privilege is, 'Rejoice in the Lord' (Philippians 4:4), and to know 'the joy of the Lord (as our) strength' (Nehemiah 8:10). This is very different from begrudging God the happy, spontaneous and obedient service which is his holy due.

There can be no coalition between *heaven and earth*. We cannot belong to both. The Christian lives on earth (for now) but is a citizen of heaven (even now). We are not here to stay, but here to go.

Our calling is not to be 'coalition Christians' but 'decided Christians'. May God grant us grace to be so!