

113 Sandettie Light Vessel Automatic

Radio listeners to the Shipping Forecast in Britain hear mention of the "Sandettie Light Vessel Automatic"! This is an unmanned vessel, one of many around our coasts, which transmits weather information and displays its own particular light.

This Light Vessel is vital for safe passage of the Dover Strait, one of the most congested shipping lanes in the world, and it is trusted! It has been positioned on the Sandettie Bank by someone who knows just where it should be; and it is anchored to the seabed, so the location of its light is fixed and ever-true. The safety of vessels and their crews depend on that light, for discerning the deep channels and avoiding the treacherous Goodwin Sands.

Now Almighty God has given to all of humanity a "Bible Light Vessel Automatic". There it is, anchored in the midst of the often-dangerous seas through which we steer the little ships of our lives. Its light is constant, reliable and trustworthy, put in position by "the One who knows". It shines steadily forth as it points us to the safe channels and away from the rocks and the sandbanks. Truly, "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (Psalm 119.105) - or we could say "unto my voyage" this time to keep to this picture.

There are other Light Vessels around these days which are not anchored: they shift, they drift, they give misleading light. At first glance they look fine - seemingly secure, permanent, truthful, trustworthy - so how easy for us at the helm of our own life-ships to steer according to their guidance, which not surprisingly leads us quickly and unknowingly into dangerous waters.

The Light Vessel "Tradition" is one such untrustworthy light. Some parts of Christ's Church steer doggedly according to its light - "we do things like this because we have always done things like this". There is a place for tradition, a respect for the ways of those who have gone before us, who have tackled the same issues we now face today, and who have perhaps suffered greatly at the hands of the enemies of Christ. But if the Light Vessel of Tradition ever contradicts that of the Bible, the Bible's light is to take preference.

Another Light Vessel we need to be wary of these days is "Novelty", whose light tends to point us in exactly the opposite direction from that of Tradition! Novelty bids us to set our course for anything that is new, easy, popular, accessible, inclusive, acceptable, quick. An over-reliance on Novelty's light can quickly bring the ship into shallow water, and shallow water is dangerous water.

Perhaps the most common drifting Light Vessel today is "Reason", which tempts any ship we are on, be it the Church or our own Christian lives, to be steered not by the Bible's light, but by the light only of human reasoning and intellect. Reason comes rightly into play when applied in response to God's unchanging light. Otherwise it is quickly suspect, drifting around on the currents and tides of ever-changing, contemporary opinion, which are in turn shaped only by those who speak the loudest and the longest.

Steering first, foremost and always by the "Bible Light Vessel Automatic" is the only choice that makes any sense. Whatever decisions we are facing on our own voyages, we can ask God the Father, through the Lord Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to show us the light He provides in His written Word on this particular matter. What precedents are there, or promises, or principles, by which we can steer a true course? This is a very practical, constant, close-to-home habit that we can develop in all aspects of our lives, be they great or small.

This instinctive looking to the light of God's Word has nothing to do with our seeking pat answers to complicated issues - though sometimes the answer is a great deal more "pat" than we might like to think. It has everything to do with our remembering who is who round here: the Lord is the Lord, and in His infinite mercy He has anchored the Bible, His Light Vessel Automatic, right in the middle of the busy shipping lanes of humanity. By its light He shows us all we need to know, and by its light He will bring us safely home - to Peacehaven.

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