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The
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WITH WHICH IS INCORPORATED

The British Protestant

EDITED BY THE REV. H. M. CARSON, B.A., B.D.

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THE
GOSPEL MAGAZINE

" COMFORT YE, COMFORT YE MY PEOPLE, SAITH YOUR GOD "
" ENDEAVOURING TO KEEP THE UNITY OF THE SPIRIT IN THE BOND OF PEACE "
" JESUS CHRIST, THE SAME YESTERDAY, AND TODAY, AND FOR EVER "

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EDITORIAL

We are hardly likely to quarrel with those who insist that the work of God should be carried on in a businesslike manner. Inefficiency is in no sense the hallmark of spirituality, and slipshod methods can hardly be said to accord with Paul's maxim, "Let all things be done decently and in order." Yet we are often in danger of going to the other extreme and imposing business methods in realms where they do not apply. The desire for organisational efficiency can indeed lead us to serious errors.

Take the whole matter of prayer. Many of us with our untidy minds and our erratic memories find it useful to have a list of people or of Christian enterprises for which we pray regularly. But before we know where we are we have such a well organised list that our praying becomes more a daily routine of checking our card index than an encounter with the living God.

The same applies to the calls to prayer which are issued either within a local church or to Christians at large. By the time pledges of prayer have been collected and topics for prayer issued we are in danger of sliding again to the wrong extreme. Of course it is right that those who are called to pray should be informed of the needs, but we must beware of the danger of making the enterprise a slick business project in which the impression all too easily gains ground that the greater the volume of prayer we are able to organise, the greater will be the blessing. Once again we have missed the way and left behind the essential truth about prayer that it is communion with our living Lord.

The devil of course is at work in all this. He so deludes us that we imagine we are following a biblical principle when in fact he has given it just that slight twist in our minds that it has become something very different. We read of the Lord spending the whole night in prayer to God. We turn to history and find some of the great warriors of the faith spending long seasons in prayer. This is naturally the kind of praying we desire; but if we are not careful we shall well find ourselves trying to produce a mighty effort by which we aim to match their spiritual achievements.

The corrective that we need constantly to apply is the realisation that prayer is not some effort which we produce. It is not an attempt on our part to force the hand of God. It does not mean organising our friends and our churches to bring pressure to bear upon the Almighty. Prayer is rather a spiritual activity in which God Himself is powerfully active in us and through us.

We need in the first place to recapture the truth, all too often forgotten, of the heavenly ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is now in the place of authority and power at the Father's right hand and there He is making intercession for us. When we are asleep, when we are apathetic, when we forget, He ever lives to intercede. Far from God needing to be stirred by our praying, the initiative in prayer is taken in heaven, and our praying in so far as it is real is but an echo of the praying of our great High Priest in glory.

There is a parallel truth which also needs to be emphasised these days. It is the intercessory work of the Holy Spirit. Paul writes to the Romans and reminds them of our ignorance in this whole matter. "We know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit himself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered." This is the Spirit who dwells within us. This is the Spirit who proceeds from the Father and the Son. He is the gift of the Father bestowed at the Son's request upon the elect. Thus our praying is essentially dependent on the operation within us of the Holy Spirit. Again we see that the initiative in the life of prayer is from heaven.

This is no plea for us to abandon our prayer lists, or to cease to call Christians to special seasons of prayer, or to terminate the issue of any specific requests for intercession. It is simply a warning of the danger of carnal thinking, and of imagining that we can organise a spiritual assault on the gates of heaven. It is after all the Father's purpose that His people should pray. He delights in our praying and welcomes our constant approach. He has at His right hand our interceding Saviour. He has put in our hearts the interceding Spirit. Our concern surely is to seek to know Christ

more completely in His heavenly ministry and to experience more fully the powerful working within of the Holy Spirit. In this aspect of spiritual experience as in every other it is God who "worketh in us both to will and to work." Let our dependence then be, not on our efficient methods, or on the enthusiasm we so desperately try to muster, but on the power of the living God Himself who graciously works in our hearts and comes so readily to us when we cry to Him.

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The Sabbath Day

ERIC T. GURR

The fourth commandment (Exodus 20: 8-11) is not ceremonial Jewish law, it is a part of God's moral law for mankind. It is inextricably woven into the sacred fabric of the ten commandments. If we are troubled for the welfare of our nation, we should not only concern ourselves with those laws on the statute book which support such commandments as "Thou shalt not steal" or "Thou shalt not kill," but equally with laws pertaining to the keeping of the Sabbath. It is shallow reasoning to say, "We cannot legislate in these matters for other people," for if we support legislation for the implementation of commandments six, eight and nine, we must surely, logically, support legislation for the implementation of this commandment also.

See how important amongst the moral laws this commandment is! It is the longest of the ten. Then again, it is the only one of the ten built around both an affirmative and a negative. The affirmative, "Remember the sabbath day to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour and do all thy work." The negative, "In it thou shalt not do any work," etc. Furthermore, it is the only commandment that is not only personal, but in which our responsibility to see that others keep it also is clearly indicated. "In it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates." Once more, it is the only commandment beginning with "Remember." In other words, the sabbath was not instituted with the giving of the ten commandments, but was a long established custom to be recalled and remembered; a custom belonging to the world and not merely to Israel. It would not be difficult to marshal considerable evidence from the early part of the Old Testament to prove this.

We first read of the sabbath in Genesis 2: 1-3. The very first act of God after creation was to institute the sabbath. Before a single page of history is turned. Before one act of man is recorded, the Holy Spirit places before us the institution of the sabbath, signifying surely that the observance and sanctifying of the sabbath day is a primary duty, and failure to keep the sabbath day as God has appointed, a sin of the first magnitude. The first time the Biblical word "sanctify" occurs is in connection with the sabbath. Genesis 2: 3, "God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it." There surely

can be no true holiness of life, no scriptural certification apart from the proper observance of the sabbath.

If all this is true, why do we then observe the first day of the week and not the seventh? I will answer this in five particulars.

1) Genesis two contains nothing whatever which would enable us to determine which actual day of our present week this primal seventh day was. The primal seventh day could have been the day we now call "Tuesday" or "Thursday," or "Friday." The important factor in Genesis two and Exodus twenty is the principle that one day in seven is to be set apart as different—every SEVENTH day a hallowed day.

(2) But, even if we were to disallow that, it is interesting to notice how important the eighth day is in the Old Testament scheme of things. This, of course, would be our first day—our Sunday. So important is this day, under Moses, that it would seem that something great is being foreshadowed for it. (a) Circumcision was administered on the eighth day, Genesis 17: 12 (b) Animals were accepted for sacrifice on the eighth day, and not a day before, Leviticus 22: 27. (c) The consecration of Aaron as High Priest and his sons as Priests was completed on the eighth day, Leviticus 9: 1. (d) Cleansing from issues, emblematic of sin, was on the eighth day, Leviticus 15: 29. (e) Atonement was made for the defiled Nazarite on the eighth day, Numbers 6: 10. (f) The sheaf of first-fruits was accepted on the eighth day, Leviticus 23: 11. These ceremonies, and others observed on the eighth day, speak to us variously of the Resurrection of our Lord from the dead; of the acceptance and vindication of His great Atoning Sacrifice; of His consecration as our Great High Priest for evermore; of forgiveness and salvation and cleansing—ALL UPON THE EIGHTH DAY, OR OUR FIRST DAY OF THE WEEK.

(3) The seventh day or the first day? Which shall be my sabbath? Under which covenant do you walk before God? Hebrews 7: 12, "For the priesthood being changed, there is made OF NECESSITY a change also of the law." It could be shown at great length that the seventh day was essentially a day of the Old Covenant, whilst the first day is essentially a day of the New Covenant.

(4) What is it you wish to celebrate on your Holy Day? Creation or Redemption? The seventh day was for the celebration of creation, whilst the first day is for the celebration of redemption. And, redemption is a greater work by far than creation. If we may say it reverently, God managed creation by the speaking of a word, but He couldn't manage redemption without the shedding of blood. Creation was the work of God's fingers, Psalm 8: 3, but redemption

was by the strength of His arm, Luke 1:51. In creation God gave us ourselves. In redemption God gave us Himself. In creation we have life in Adam. In redemption we have life in Christ. In creation we were given a right to an earthly paradise. In redemption we are given a title to a heavenly kingdom. What is it you wish to celebrate on your Holy Day? Creation or redemption?

(5) What do we find when we turn the pages of the New Testament? (a) Upon the first day of the week, the risen Lord visited His people. John 20:19. "Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you." Why were the disciples assembled? At other times they were scattered through fear. Had they been given commandment to assemble on the first day of the week and then to celebrate their sabbath? They fastened the doors upon their assembly for fear of the Jews. What were they particularly afraid of? If the Jews had a case against them they could have been taken when their Master was taken. Was their very assembly likely to arouse opposition of the religious leaders. Was this a change in the sabbath, which would of necessity sting the Jews into persecution? Had their understanding been opened to understand the Scriptures in this matter? Whatever the answers to these questions may be, one thing is sure, on the day of His Glorious Resurrection, the Lord appeared to His assembled people. Then in verse 26 of the same chapter we read, "And after eight days (once more the first day of the week) AGAIN his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you." Now at once certain questions arise. What does it mean "AGAIN the disciples were within"? They had evidently been out and about during the intervening week, seemingly without stirring the indignation of the Jews. But, here, on this particular day they are again assembled, and once more they shut the doors on their assembly, presumably feeling that there was something about their coming together in this way and upon this day which would provoke the religious leaders to wrath. Again, why is there no record of them having assembled between times? The Word seems almost emphatic that they had met together on the Resurrection day, and then not again until the same day one week later. Why had our Lord not appeared to them in the week? What was He teaching them? Why had He tarried until once more they gathered on the first day of the week? (b) As we read on in the New Testament we find that upon the first day of the week the Holy Spirit fell at the feast of Pentecost. This is surely not without

meaning and significance. (c) The continuing custom of the Apostles and of the early Church is made clear in Acts 20: 7, "And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them" Then again in 1 Cor. 16: 1-2, "Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come." The Corinthian Christians were obviously meeting together on the first day of the week, and from these verses we discover that the Galatians were meeting in a similar way. This word to the Corinthians is particularly important in view of what Paul had written in 1 Cor. 14: 37, "The things that I write unto you are THE COMMANDMENTS OF THE LORD."

If you want to go on into the writings of the early fathers, you will find it there too. JUSTIN MARTYR—A.D. 140—wrote that Sunday was the day for Christians, whether in cities or in the rural districts, to come together, and memoirs of the Apostles and the writings of the Prophets were read. He continues, "Because it is the first day on which God dispelled the darkness and the primeval matter and formed the world, and because Jesus Christ our Saviour rose from the dead on it." IRANAEUS speaks of the keeping of the first day as an established custom on which there was general agreement.

The one question which remains is this, HOW SHOULD WE OBSERVE THE CHRISTIAN SABBATH? Are there any rules or principles laid down in Scripture for its proper use? There are four to which I would call your attention.

(1) The sabbath will bring us more enjoyment and contentment if we keep the WHOLE of this commandment. It is true that in this commandment, more than three thousand years old, is the first known instance of any statutory limitation of hours—FOR THE WIFE TOO! To the law of God and to Him who died and rose again an extreme debt of gratitude is due which has not by any means been liquidated. But the commandment does also say, SIX DAYS SHALT THOU LABOUR? Yes, the sabbath will bring us more enjoyment and contentment if we keep the whole of the commandment!

(2) The sabbath is to be a day of rest but not a day of inactivity. It is not a day for sleeping late or lounging. In Genesis 2: 2 we read, "And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had made; He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made." This primal element surely suggests a resting from the activities commonly pursued during the six working days. But the seventh day was not a day of inactivity. Concerning God and the

sabbath Jesus said, "My Father worketh hitherto and I work." Had God become inactive everything would have ceased to be, for He upholdeth all things by the Word of His Power. According to Hebrews 4: 10, our Lord has entered into His rest, but He is not inactive. He ever liveth to make intercession. An eternal rest awaits the people of God, but not an eternal inactivity. Rev. 22: 3, "His servants shall serve Him." So, the sabbath day is a day of rest, but not a day of inactivity. What sort of work, then, is permissible on the sabbath day? At the beginning of Matthew 12 we read, "At that time Jesus went on the sabbath day through the corn; and his disciples were an hungered, and began to pluck the ears of corn and to eat. But, when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto him, Behold, thy disciples do that which is not lawful to do upon the sabbath day. But he said unto them, Have ye not read what David did, when he was an hungered, and they that were with him; How he entered into the house of God and did eat the shewbread, which was not lawful for him to eat, neither for them which were with him, but only for the priests?" Our Lord here teaches us that **WORKS OF NECESSITY** are permissible on the sabbath day, works required to supply real human wants. Then in verses 11-12 of the same chapter we read, "And he said unto them, What man shall there be among you, that shall have one sheep, and if it fall into a pit on the sabbath day, will he not lay hold on it and lift it out? How much then is a man better than a sheep? Wherefore it is lawful to do well on the sabbath days." **WORKS OF MERCY** are permissible on the sabbath day.

(3) Then, we must remember that it is **THE LORD'S DAY**. It is not ours, it is **HIS!** Genesis 2: 3 teaches us that this one day in seven is set apart for sacred use. **GOD HALLOWED IT! ALL of it is His!** Remember the sabbath **DAY** to keep it Holy. Not a part of it. Not an hour or two in the morning or evening. Not during one visit to the House of God. **ALL of it is His, is sanctified and to be kept holy!** We are permitted on this day, as we have seen, to do **WORKS OF NECESSITY** and **WORKS OF MERCY**, but the works we do, because it is His Day, should relate particularly to Him, to His cause, to His people, and to our own relationship to Him and the improvement of it. Christ rose early on this day—before the sun was up (John 20: 1). Did He rise early to save us and shall we not rise early to worship Him and to glorify Him. The children of Israel washed themselves before the law was delivered to them (Ex. 19: 10). Do we not need to give time each sabbath morning to prepare ourselves for the fellowship of God's people and the corporate worship of His Holy Name? Oh, to be in the Spirit on the

Lord's Day! It is the Lord's Day. We do not engage in newspaper reading on this day, not necessarily because of the involvement of others in the work, but because we have enough of the tensions and troubles, the sins and scandals of this evil world on other days, and we want this day to be different—HIS DAY! By the very nature of the life we live in organised society we cannot avoid giving work to some on the Lord's Day. This is something beyond our control. But we should see to it, that for us, and for as many as we can help and influence, it is indeed kept as the Lord's Day.

(4) Is there a hint as to the suitable use of this day in Matthew 28: 17-20? Could this be a description of Sunday morning as we gather with the Lord's people for worship? "And when they saw him, they worshipped him: but some doubted." And, could this be a description of Sunday evening, when, as we gather we have more particularly in mind the free offer of Christ to the unconverted, "And Jesus came and spake unto them saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."

What a glad day this is! Honoured by the Blessed Holy Trinity. God the Father hallowed it. God the Son rose upon it. God the Holy Spirit descended upon it. This bright gem in the crown of life. This day of Resurrection might. This day of Holy Ghost activity. This day after which the hearts of the saints hunger throughout the weary week. This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it!

THE LIVING LORD AND THE FAITHFUL CHURCH

R. J. GRAHAM

The second of "The Seven Churches" to which our ascended Lord speaks is Smyrna. His message to them is found in the second chapter of Revelation, verses 8-11. When speaking to Ephesus our Saviour exhorted them to be what they were but as His eye fell upon the congregation at Smyrna He encouraged them to continue in their faithfulness. History leaves us in little doubt that our Lord's message to Ephesus went unheeded. Evidence that the Sovereign Lord took away the candle-stick is to be found in the only witness that the Ephesians leave—heaps of stone, ancient archways and fields. The church that ignores the Highest will be brought to the lowest; history is replete with such examples.

Situated on the western coast of Asia Minor, Smyrna was originally populated by a people called the Legales. In the year 1,100 B.C. it capitulated to the Greeks. It was noted for its fine monetary system, schools of medicine, and science. Its broad streets called for no road improvement scheme. That this city had its fair share of entertainment is seen in that it possessed a theatre on the slopes of Mount Pagus capable of seating 20,000 people. At the present time it is named Izmir and is noted for liquorice roots. This city has been the arena of many an ugly and bloody scene. In the middle ages Timur zealously persecuted the Christians here, incorporating 1,000 of their skulls in a tower which he built. Perhaps it is most closely associated in the minds of Christians with the person of Polycarp (A.D. 70-155). In all probability the friend of the Apostle John, Polycarp was born in the year Jerusalem fell and sealed his witness for his Lord and Saviour by being burned to death at the ripe old age of 86 years. The answer his persecutors elicited from this old saint when they invited him to save his life by reviling Christ is stirring: "Fourscore and six years have I been His servant, and He hath done me no wrong; how, then, can I blaspheme the King who saved me?" These words indicate that 60 years subsequent to our Lord's message the faithful spirit still indwelt the Christians at Smyrna. In the light of these facts the meaning of Smyrna—bitterness—takes on a great significance.

There are many facets of the character of our glorious Lord and the first set forth in this letter is:

THE CHRIST OF RESURRECTION

Our Lord reveals Himself to His people according to their need. Sinful Peter discovers His scorching holiness and cries out in an agony of soul, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord." To the Pharisees He is seen as the Wrathful Lamb, "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!" Again and again we tremble for these unfortunate beings as we read Matthew 23. His tenderness with the erring, but penitent, is as touching as His denunciation of hypocrisy is terrifying: "Neither do I condemn thee: GO, AND SIN NO MORE" (John 8: 11). Throughout scripture we behold His versatility in meeting every need. To the sick is known His therapeutic skill as the Great Physician; the sorrowing and broken-hearted learn of His comforting power; the weary and heavy laden find rest in coming to Him; but above all, He is adored as the Saviour who puts away the guilt of sin and infuses power to conquer inward corruptions. "In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" is the apostolic and satisfying description (Col. 2: 3). We must hasten to see Him as He is portrayed in Rev. 2: 8.

(i) *The Creator and Consumator*. "These things saith the First and the Last . . ."

The Turks referred to Smyrna as "Infidel Smyrna"; thus the Christians were looked upon as atheists because they worshipped no visible god. Christianity was looked upon as a new sect and was sneered at and frowned upon by a city which took great pride in its antiquity. The revelation of Christ as "the first and the last" came to them with great encouragement. The Lord seemed to say to them: "Before Smyrna was I am. When this city has passed away I shall be." Of God the Son we can confidently say with the psalmist (90: 2), "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from *everlasting to everlasting*, Thou art God." In her persecution the Church at Smyrna was cheered that the Saviour to whom she remained loyal had the last word as Judge of all the earth. In such a situation the Church can always both wait and quietly hope in her God.

(ii) *The Redeemer and Conqueror* . . . "which was dead and is alive."

"Which was dead. . . ." "Ye have not resisted unto death striving against sin" would seem to be part of the implication of these words. We can almost hear Him say: "Remember that as a Man I died for your sins, took your guilt to Calvary, paid the price of your redemption to Justice, and set you free from the law of sin and death. I am the man of sorrows acquainted with grief, therefore I am aware of your grief; I was wounded for your transgressions and

bruised for your iniquities, therefore I can bind up your wounds and pour in the healing oil. You are restless in this world but do not forget that I am preparing a place for you, that where I am, there you may be also. Have no fear, death is not the end of all."

"And is alive." Hallelujah! Jesus reigns. He has conquered death and ever lives to make intercession. The cross is vacant, the tomb is empty, the throne is occupied. To receive a personal message such as this from the Lord of Glory was more than ample compensation to the persecuted saints in this city. With the shadow of death overhanging them daily such gracious words extracted death's sting, robbed the grave of its victory, and sent these soldiers of the cross forth into the battle against evil fearless, and full of faith. A glimpse of the Lamb upon His throne has always stirred the Church from the defensive to the offensive. "He is Risen" is followed by a pentecost. The Christ of Resurrection is . . .

THE CHRIST OF OBSERVATION

"I know thy works, and tribulation and poverty (but thou art rich), and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan." Their fidelity, adversity, and poverty were all known to Him. They are reminded of His omniscience. They need never have thought that their Saviour had forgotten them—a common temptation to those undergoing severe trial. The truth of Paul's words were well illustrated in his own life when he wrote: ". . . God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (1 Cor. 10: 13). The saints need never become overwrought with care, for, whom He loves, He loves unto the end.

He knows; He cares;

Nothing this truth can dim:

He gives the very best to those

Who leave the choice with Him.

Months, perhaps years of silence, are now broken to reveal heaven's estimate of those whom the earth despises. Christ had been observing approvingly, their patience in tribulation, zeal in good works, and contentment in poverty. Do not the saints of Smyrna put us to shame? Does He observe us taking the spleen of the world because of our faithfulness to the truth? There can be no doubt that those who are zealous in godliness will soon know the zeal of the devil and the world pitched against them. It is palpably untrue that the tactful and wise Christian is exempt from the malice of the Evil One. In the case of the Smyrna Christians conscience prevented

them from many positions to which their ability would have given them ready access. Their poverty did not arise from inability or laziness but from faithfulness to their Lord.

"Marvel not if the world hate you" (1 John 3: 13) is the apostolic emphasis on the words of our Saviour: "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you" (John 15: 18). There can be little doubt that the faithful Christian is looked upon by the world as a fool because his Christianity apparently brings nothing upon him but adversity and poverty—such is the world's assessment. The world says: "Just think of all you miss!" The Lord Jesus says: "Thou art rich." One can imagine one of the Smyrna saints saying: "Christ counts me rich therefore I will go through ten thousand such tribulations." We should attach more importance to Christ's Word than to all the opinions of philosophers, psychiatrists, psychologists, and religionists; they speak out of a darkened understanding words of vanity; but Christ's Word will never pass away. True, we may miss much of this world's luxuries but then we taste of pleasures from God's right hand of which they know nothing.

"Solid joys and lasting treasure,
None but Zion's children know."

Our passage leaves us in no doubt that these Christians were rich in their past. Confidently they could raise their Ebenezer and say: "Hitherto hath the Lord helped us." They had a history that would stand the test of time and eternity. Nor were they poor at the time His message came to them, for, Christ the hope of glory indwelt them. The future was in the hands of their Crucified and Risen Lord and none could snatch them out of His hands. The warfare they waged was fierce, the pathway they walked was righteous, and the wealth they possessed was in Him. Christ esteemed them above the kings of the earth because they were: "... rich in faith and heirs of the Kingdom." And what Christian can call himself poor who possesses the Bible with its teeming promises—promises which in Christ are yea, and in Him Amen, to the Glory of God by us (2 Cor. 1: 20).

"And I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan." From which we learn that pure religion and undefiled is often persecuted by bigoted religionists, in this case Jews, who were of "the synagogue of Satan." Who will ever forget the slaughter and harassment of the Covenanters of Scotland by the Episcopalians during the reign of Charles

the Second, or, the persecuting zeal of Romanism against the Reformers in this land and on the continent? Seldom is persecuting zeal found so strong as among religionists dead in trespasses and sins. Cain is always ready to rise up and slay Abel. The scripture now directs our attention to . . .

THE CHRIST OF CONSOLATION

“Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer . . .”

(a) *He incites them to fearlessness.* Our Lord holds out no promise of relief, instead, He encourages them to resist the Devil with redoubled effort. Our conception of consolation is to be found in the removal of the offending person or thing, here it is *grace given to overcome* by the power of the Risen Lord. The saints at Smyrna are to accept their circumstances as part of the Divine plan for their spiritual enrichment. “Thou shalt suffer” is the revelation strong souls are given; and the advice to “fear none” conveys with it the necessary power.

(b) *He informs them of facts.* “. . . behold, the Devil shall cast some of you into prison.” To spiritual giants is reserved the unveiling of their future. The Church at Smyrna is unique in receiving this information. To be forewarned is to be forearmed; and the spiritual maturity that could receive this advance news is to be coveted by all God’s people. That this information was meant to be encouraging is to be seen in the words: “. . . and ye shall have tribulation ten days.” Students who find great significance in numbers may find much here to exercise their imagination but for us the message is plain; the Lord has set a limit to that which they have to endure. He is Sovereign in every situation. The recognition of that Sovereignty has always been a great source of strength to believers.

(c) *He inspires them to the end.* “. . . be thou faithful unto death, and I will give you a crown of life.” Our Beloved calls, and looks for faithfulness in all His children. He saves by grace, enables us to be faithful, and then holds out the promise of reward to the children of grace! See how he encourages His loved ones! With what glad abandon these must have pressed on in the way of holiness after hearing such cheerful news from Glory. O my people this life is as a tale that is told, a vapour, a moment. Let us hold lightly to everything earthly and grasp for all that is heavenly. The consecration called for by our Lord is complete—“unto death”; such faithfulness possesses the certainty of the promise—“I will give thee . . .”; further, a life thus lived is *crowned* with a degree of glory surpassing all others—“a crown of life.” The kind of faith for which Christ looks is of the nature that will not shrink at martyrdom. Finally we behold: —

THE CHRIST OF EXHORTATION

"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."

(a) *The timelessness of His message.*

His message to Smyrna is as suited to us, in many ways, as it was to them. The importance of hearing in such a way that we heed the Word is as real now as it was then. How mighty would the Church be today if all evangelical Christians heeded what they heard and practised what they professed! Seriously to attend to the ministry of the Word is to become familiar with the Holy Spirit. The Spirit joined in the Word unveils the majesty and glory of the Risen and Interceding Saviour. Few churches, if any, have been so highly commended by the Great High Priest of our faith as Smyrna; yet it is to this Church He speaks of obedience to the Spirit. We must ever strive to avoid grieving Him who takes of the things of Christ and shows them unto us.

(b) *The triumph of His message.*

"He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death." The final outcome of a life lived in obedience to the Holy Spirit, here and now, is the personal guarantee that in the Day of Judgment you will be with Christ at the Father's right hand. You will most assuredly stand complete in Christ. Overcoming grace will have delivered you from hell and have awarded you a place in heaven. In that great and dreadful Day may we be found faithful.

*"Lord, we await Thy glory;
We have no home but there,
Where the adopted family
With us Thy joy shall share.
No place can fully please us
Where Thou, O Lord, art not;
In Thee, and with Thee, ever
Is found, by grace, our lot."*

(Mary Bowley).

JOHN PRESTON

(1587 - 1628)

CHARLES WALKER

One of the most eloquent preachers of the seventeenth century was drawing the crowds to St. Mary's Church, Cambridge. And as has so often been the case there since, the attraction was not altogether the prospect of receiving instruction in the faith. The entertainment value was considerable. John Cotton was to speak, and the sheer elegance of his style, the golden rhetoric, the philosophic disquisitions, always assured him of a hearing. The sermon on this evening in 1611, however, was not in Cotton's usual style. After years of actively resisting the truth preached by William Perkins, Cotton had at last been converted under Richard Sibbes. He put aside his philosophy and rhetoric and preached a straightforward evangelical sermon. The congregation were not all sure that they liked the change. Cotton felt the coolness of the reception and went back to his room rather depressed. But not for long. In a little while there was a knock at the door. John Preston had come to tell of his conversion during that evening's sermon. Cotton preached many subsequent sermons and made many converts in the remaining forty-two years of his ministry, but none of his converts were more illustrious than John Preston.

FALSE STARTS

Preston was born in Northamptonshire in 1587, the son of a farmer. He was brought up by an uncle and educated at a grammar school. In 1604 he matriculated as a sizar in King's College, Cambridge, but later transferred to Queen's College. His career had a few false starts. Originally he had thought of a career in diplomacy. Although poor he was regarded as a "gentleman" and diplomacy would have been well suited to his talents. Arrangements which he made to spend some time studying in Paris fell through, and with them the hope of a career in this field. He then took up the study of philosophy and graduated as a Bachelor of Arts in 1607. Two years later he became a Fellow of Queen's College and started to study medicine and with it astrology, which was then looked upon as a related subject. The study of theology he regarded as "a kind of honest silliness," that is until he heard John Cotton preach with "an over-ruling gravity and majesty" that

he thought had been "impossible to pulpits." From then on he was in no doubt about his life's work. He determined to become a preacher. He began his studies with Thomas Aquinas, Duns Scotus and other schoolmen, eventually graduating to Calvin. Some idea can be gathered from a contemporary account of Preston sitting in the barber's chair, reading his "Summa" and blowing from the page the hair that fell from the barber's scissors.

THE PRICE OF POPULARITY

After completing his studies he became Dean and Catechist of Queen's College, and began to preach a series of sermons which were to form a "body of divinity." A good preacher needs no public relations man, and the power of Preston's sermons soon had the effect of filling the College Chapel not only with students from other colleges but with people from the town. A complaint was made to the Vice-Chancellor and all but members of the College were excluded from the Chapel. Because of their exclusion Preston decided to begin a series of afternoon lectures at St. Botolph's Church. This led to a more serious complaint. A clergyman by the name of Newcome took exception to Preston lecturing there and on one occasion entered into a dispute with him at the start of a service. The argument delayed the commencement of the service and, to avoid having to shorten the sermon unduly Preston decided to omit common prayer. Newcome denounced this irregular proceeding to the Bishop, Lancelot Andrewes, who instructed Preston to preach a sermon at St. Botolph's setting out his views on forms of prayer. They seem to have been acceptable for he was allowed to continue the lectures. Failure to toe the party line on this subject might very well have cost Preston his position in the College and have effectually silenced him.

POLITICAL DEXTERITY

The Puritan cause lay very close to Preston's heart, and for him it was not enough to further it by preaching. He never failed to make the most of any opportunity where his influence might be used to support it. He never seems to have been short of friends in high places, and whenever he could induce them to use their influence to prosper the cause, he did so. Political maneuvering was the order of the day and few were more adept at it than Preston. In 1614 the Mastership of Queen's College became vacant. It had been known for some time that George Montague, who later became Archbishop of York, wanted to become Master. Preston wanted a Puritan there. When the vacancy occurred, he dashed off to London, interviewed the Earl of Somerset and got Court sanction for the choice of the

Puritan John Davenant. The election was over before Montague had even heard of the vacancy.

Preston's list of influential friends, and consequently his opportunities for wire-pulling for the benefit of Puritanism increased dramatically during the following year. James I paid a visit to Cambridge. One of the entertainments arranged for him was to hear a debate on the subject: "Whether dogs could make syllogisms". Preston argued that they could and the King was delighted with the skill with which he handled his case. The King's approval was quickly noted and echoed by the Courtiers, one of whom (Sir Fulke Greville) settled £50 a year on him. Indeed for Preston, this incident could have been the beginning of a brilliant career at Court. His mind, however, was set on preaching, and other things were important to him only in so far as they furthered the cause of God and truth.

WIDENING INFLUENCE

In 1622 Preston, then thirty-five years old, was appointed preacher at Lincoln's Inn in succession to John Donne who had just resigned. This was a most important post as it gave him opportunity to exert his influence on the most powerful group of purists and legislators in the country. Later in the same year he became Master of Emmanuel College. Laurence Chadderton had been Master there for thirty-eight years and had outlived most of his influential friends. The fellows thought that it would be in the interests of the College if Preston were appointed,—in view of the fact that he had influence with the Duke of Buckingham. Chadderton, although he thought well of Preston, was unwilling to relinquish office. He feared that the vacancy might be filled by an Arminian. It was not until Preston had procured a letter to Chadderton from Buckingham informing him that the King and the Prince would like him to make way for Preston that he did so. The College Regulations forbade the absence of the Master for more than a month in any one quarter. This regulation may not seem very demanding but it was very inconvenient for Preston because of his commitments at Lincoln's Inn. Exceptions to the regulations included absence caused by "violent detention" and Preston was able to convince the willing fellows that he was "violently detained" in a moral sense to preach at Lincoln's Inn. He had not read the school-men in vain!

Another honour was soon offered to Preston—the see of Gloucester. He turned it down, however, preferring a lectureship at Trinity Church, Cambridge. The new Bishop of Ely was opposed to Preston getting this lectureship, but Preston was supported by the townsmen and got the post. He had thus three major positions at

one time and he found the going heavy. He begun to suffer from insomnia and, on consulting the best adviser available, the remedy suggested was to start the tobacco habit. He took up smoking and his insomnia disappeared.

ROYAL CHAPLAIN

Preston had been Chaplain to Prince Charles for some years, but his duties in this respect became more onerous in 1625 when Charles became King. His opportunities for exerting influence on behalf of Puritanism were doubtless great, but they must have been considerably lessened by his pointed Puritan sermons on such subjects as Repentance, Regeneration etc. These were not likely to go down well with the man who later came so strongly under the influence of Archbishop Laud.

The volume of work which Preston undertook could not be supported for long by one man. By 1625 he had begun to fail in health and he gradually went into a decline and died in 1628 at the age of forty-one. He had never married. His life was too busy for him to write much, but many of his sermons, edited by Thomas Goodwin and Richard Sibbes (his most famous disciples), were published after his death.

"What a sore night I have had in my bed tossing and in pain till morning as well as all yesterday. I see it to be a chastisement from my Father because I was taking too much time for active work, and too little for prayer."

ANDREW BONAR.

"Leave tomorrow's troubles for tomorrow's strength; tomorrow's work for tomorrow's time; tomorrow's trials for tomorrow's grace—and tomorrow's God."

DAVID LIVINGSTONE.

SERMON

LOVE SO AMAZING, SO DIVINE

H. M. CARSON

"Then said the Lord unto me, Go yet, love a woman beloved of her friend, yet an adulteress, according to the love of the Lord toward the children of Israel, who took to other gods, and love flagons of wine.

"So I bought her to me for fifteen pieces of silver, and for an homer of barley, and an half homer of barley:

"And I said unto her, Thou shalt abide for me many days; thou shalt not play the harlot, and thou shalt not be for another man: so will I also be for thee.

"For the children of Israel shall abide many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice, and without an image, and without an ephod, and without teraphim:

"Afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the Lord their God, and David their king; and shall fear the Lord and His goodness in the latter days."—Hosea, chapter 3.

We continue with our studies in this great tragedy of the Old Testament. We have been looking at Hosea, this man whose wife was unfaithful to him; this man whose prophecies emerged out of his own personal tragedy. And I trust that as we have listened to Hosea's prophecy and as we have looked at this great man of God in all the tragedy of his own home, we have seen what Hosea of course was intending to be seen, and that is the greatness of the love of God. In the opening chapters of the book there are two themes running constantly—the theme of Gomer's sin, his wife Gomer's unfaithfulness, and on the other side Hosea's continuing love for her; and so there are the underlying themes of the sin of unfaithfulness to God and the constancy of God's love to the sinner. Now here in this third chapter it is the second theme which tends to be more prominent. That does not mean to say that the unfaithfulness is forgotten but it is rather that the unfaithfulness brings into sharper relief the amazing persistence of love.

God speaks to Hosea and here is the word, in some ways an almost impossible word to accept, an intolerable word surely to carry out. Could he act like this in view of the way Gomer had behaved? God says, "Go yet, go again, love a woman beloved of

her friend, yet an adulteress." Who was the friend? Well of course it would seem quite clear that it was Hosea himself. Here is Gomer beloved of Hosea, beloved of her husband, yet unfaithful. And yet as you think of the depths of Gomer's shame, her unfaithfulness, her turning aside from her husband, you see the amazing extent of the love of this man, who went on loving when everything would have bidden his love die; but he was going on because in his love he was to mirror the love of God. Indeed says God, "Go yet, love her according to the love of the Lord toward the children of Israel;" because if there could be written across Gomer's life this 'yet an adulteress' how much more could it be written right across the life of the nation of Israel. They were beloved of God. Everything about their history spoke of this fact. Right away there in the distant past God had called their forefather Abraham. He had taken him from Ur of the Chaldees, and He had led him into the land of promise. There He protected him and protected his descendants, and when they went down into Egypt, God had still been gracious to them. God had preserved them and He had sustained them as a national group through the long years of captivity in Egypt. He had brought them out with a mighty deliverance. He had led them through the wilderness and brought them into the promised land. Through the days of the Judges He had delivered them again and again from their enemies. In the days of the Kings the same was true, God was their mighty Deliverer. Everything spoke to them of His love for them but this 'yet' is written right across their history. If of Gomer it was said, "Love this woman who is beloved of you and yet an adulteress"—well, it was true of Israel.

Here is a nation beloved of God, yet turning aside, forgetting God, turning to their own ungrateful ways. But it was the very unfaithfulness of Israel, their very sinfulness, their constant transgressions, their forgetfulness of God's goodness, it was all these things that simply threw up into relief the amazing persistence of God's love. In spite of it, in spite of the way they had drifted, in spite of the way they had flaunted every promise that He had made to them, He still loved them. And you know at the very heart of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ there is this emphasis upon the amazing persistence of the love of God. This is the thing that always thrills the heart of the Christian and it thrills him because he knows something of his own heart. He knows his own sin, his own failure, his own spiritual unfaithfulness, and he constantly marvels that God should love such a one as he is. The Christian is, if he is true to his calling, very far removed from the Pharisee. The Pharisee was so sure of himself, proud of his attainments, proud

of his background, but the Christian does not speak in these terms at all. He looks within and he asks in wonder—Why did God choose me? Why did God call me? Why did God save me? Why has He kept me? There is no answer apart from this amazing love of God. The more the Christian thinks about his sin and his failure, so the more he marvels at this grace and this love.

That is why the true Christian is not annoyed when sin is preached from a pulpit. In fact I believe this is where the parting of the ways comes between a man who is a true believer and a man whose profession is merely nominal, between the man who is born again of the Holy Ghost and the man who merely comes to church and takes part in a service. The one, because he knows he is a sinner and because he has proved the wonder of the love of God, never hesitates to confess that sin and to submit himself to the preaching of the Word which condemns that sin. But the man who is merely nominal, who has never really embraced the gospel, who has never really trusted the Saviour, who has never really known the power of the Spirit and the new birth; he is resentful, and this kind of preaching annoys him. It irritates him intensely because he has never really known the amazing wonder of this condescending love of God, this persistent love. But a man who has once known the sweetness of God's forgiveness, who has known what it means to be brought back from sin and to be brought to the path of holiness, will constantly look back to what he was and say—But for the grace of God, my end was perdition. Indeed he looks still within and, knowing how much of the old Adam is still in his life, he marvels still at God's forgiveness, God's patience, God's amazing long-suffering. He bows and acknowledges the persistence of God's love. Well, says God to Hosea, Go and love her still in spite of what she has been.

But there was a price to be paid: "I bought her to me for fifteen pieces of silver"—and so on. We may wonder why he has to buy her back. Well it seems quite clear from the story that Gomer had not only forsaken her husband Hosea, but she had virtually become the slave concubine of another man, and of course in the world of that day, having forfeited her liberty, she had to be bought back again. She was being bought back from slavery so that it was not simply a shameful condition into which she had drifted but it was a condition of utter bondage. I wonder did she sometimes stop in that new home where now she was living and reflect on whence she had come, on her husband, on his amazingly persistent love? Did she think of her children? We do not know, but here she is in this miserable plight, a slave concubine needing to be bought back.

But of course this was Israel—this whole tragedy is mirroring the national tragedy of a people which had turned to idols, and they were going to understand what it meant to be brought into bondage to these idols. Here they were, a people whom God had blessed. Surrounding them were the pagan nations, nations who bowed down to gods of wood and stone, but Israel had the Word God; Israel had a knowledge of the living God. Yet here they were turning from Him and serving idols. What was going to happen? The judgment which followed was just this—they served the idols of these nations and ultimately they became the bondslaves of these nations. The northern nation of Assyria, pagan, heathen, idol worshipping, ultimately became the masters of Israel, so that Israel, like Gomer, ended in a state of bondage.

That of course is how sin always works. Sin at its outset appears so plausible, so attractive. The devil, after all, does not appear as he is so often caricatured. No, in the New Testament it says he is often like an "angel of light," extraordinarily attractive, coming with seductive tones, coming to suggest the attractiveness of the path which he is encouraging us to follow, dressing sin up so that it appears something to be desired. What happens? Says Christ Himself, "He that committeth sin is the servant of sin." How strong for example a habit can become. It can weave chains about a man so that he is bound and he cannot get free, and with that bondage there comes utter misery. Take for example a man who has gone his own way for a long time, and possibly had a sort of nodding acquaintance with the Word of God, but then the gospel begins to grip him. Maybe he sits in church Sunday by Sunday and this Word begins to penetrate and to probe his conscience and he begins to wake up to spiritual realities. He realises he ought to turn from his sin, and for the first time the horrible realisation comes home to him that he cannot turn, that sin has bound and chained him, that he is no longer free. Now he wants to turn to Christ, now he wants to believe, and somehow it is as if he is bound and cannot break loose; because sin brings with it an appalling bondage and with that bondage there comes misery. I cannot conceive of any more miserable condition than this wretched woman Gomer, away from her home, away from her family, in a state of bondage, in a condition of shame, utterly miserable. Yet this is being depicted here in order to show us the spiritual misery involved in sin and in spiritual bondage.

The Lord Jesus told a story, which is very familiar to us, in order to bring home the very same truth. This time it was not the relation of a wife to a husband, it was the relation of a son to his

father. The boy who thought home was too restrictive and who wanted to break loose to have a good time, to have money to spend and pleasure to enjoy, and who found friends in abundance while the money lasted, and when the money ran out he found himself alone. You remember the prodigal son in that parable of Christ's, sitting watching the swine eating and he was so hungry and wretched he could have eaten the husks that the pigs were feeding on. Such, says Christ, is the state of soul of the man who has drifted away from God. Outwardly things may not appear very different. He may move amongst men with a smile on his face; he may continue his ordinary business, but very often below the surface there is this sense of being chained and bound, this longing to be delivered and this inner misery. Well, says God, if a man is in this condition, he needs not simply exhortation, he needs deliverance. Gomer, you see, had got into the condition where it was not enough merely to hear Hosea's appeal for her to return, she could no longer respond to that appeal, she was now in bondage. As well as the appeal, and as well as the readiness to respond to his appeal, there was need for deliverance, for redemption. So here there is specified the actual price that he paid, and from the Book of Exodus it would seem that it was just a slave's redemption price. He was buying her back.

We think of a far greater than Hosea who came to buy back men and women from the slavery of sin. Before His birth when the word came from the angel concerning the name that was to be given to this child to be born at Bethlehem—what was it? "Thou shalt call His name Jesus for He shall save His people from their sins." He is coming to deliver them. That is why the great word in the New Testament is "Redeemer," for redemption means buying back from the bondage into which they have fallen. In the world of Christ's day, a slave might be redeemed. He might collect over a long period of time, from the miserable pittance which was his earnings, sufficient money to effect his release. It was his redemption price, his ransom money, and when that was paid and the transaction publicly witnessed, he could go out a free man. The apostle Peter writes to Christians and he says, "You were redeemed (you were ransomed, you were delivered from your bondage), not with corruptible things as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot." And the Christian goes back in imagination often to Calvary and he thinks of that One who hung on that central Cross, he thinks of that blood which He shed, and that is rich currency indeed. It was the currency minted in heaven's treasury and it was the

currency that brought his redemption. Hosea gave a price for Gomer's deliverance. The Lord Jesus Christ gave, not some sum of money, He gave His own precious blood, He gave everything, that He might redeem, that He might deliver.

What was the purpose in view? Well quite obviously in this story it comes again and again—Hosea had only one purpose in view and that is that Gomer should come back to him. God had one purpose in view in bringing this prophecy through Hosea, it was that Israel might hear the word and might come back, that Israel might be humbled to realise that their sin was just like harlotry and that they might turn and seek God's face. And this word comes to us tonight, not in order that we may have an interesting history lesson looking at Israel in the 8th century B.C. but that we may hear a word that humbles us and turns us back to the living God.

Now in the chapter this coming back seems to be pictured in two stages. There is a time of delay—as it were, she is on the threshold before she is fully admitted. In verse 3 he says, "Thou shalt abide for me many days; thou shalt not play the harlot, thou shalt not be for another man, so I also to thee." The suggestion seems to be that in spite of the ransom price being paid, Gomer is not immediately going to be welcomed right into the full experience of her marriage and her home. And naturally so, for she had gone so far adrift that one can understand there was a necessity for a time when she would show that she really had turned from her old ways, that this was no temporary reform, that she really meant a true and deep amendment of life. She needed in other words to show that she was truly penitent and this was a word of course to Israel. God says this is how Israel must come. They are going to come through bitter experience, this nation which owes so much to God's goodness, and this nation which has gone so far astray they are going to come back through bitter trial. The nation, at this point in their history, was poised on the brink of disaster. They were about to go into exile. The Assyrians were going to lead them into captivity; but the exile and the bitterness of that exile were to be the preliminary to further blessing from God.

This is how God still calls—He calls us to come back in true repentance. He does not want a temporary reformation. He does not want us to pay lip service to the need for turning from sin. He wants a true grief of soul. He wants men and women who know they are sinners, and do not merely admit it with their lips but in their hearts long to turn from anything that will be displeasing to God. And sometimes God, I believe, keeps us at it were on the

threshold. There is sometimes a necessity of chastening. We need sometimes to be made really aware of the ugliness of sin before we are ready to be welcomed fully into God's embrace. That is why sometimes when a man turns from his sin and really does put his trust in Christ as Saviour, there can be a time when he has no real settled assurance. He may struggle on, and there is a time of darkness and doubting. One moment he feels he has been saved, he has been forgiven, he is a new man, and there are other times when there are doubts. If you read the biography of John Bunyan, you will find he went through just this kind of experience. He turned to Christ from his sinful ways, he reached out to the Saviour, but it was some time before Bunyan knew that he really was Christ's and really enjoyed the assurance of the forgiveness of his sins. That does not always happen—the Philippian jailor, that night in the Acts of the Apostles when he heard Paul and Silas, believed, and that very night you find him rejoicing with all his house that God had visited him. It does not always happen because of course God does not deal in precisely the same way with every one of us, but sometimes it does. If there is someone here who has turned to Christ, and who has trusted in Him for salvation and yet there is doubt and uncertainty, it may be that it is this chastening upon the threshold. It may be that the Lord is teaching you what Gomer needed to learn, that when there has been sin and disobedience and when sometimes there has been persistence in that sin, there is the need to be made aware of how ugly it all is so that penitence is true and real, and turning away from sin is definite.

But of course it was not Hosea's aim that Gomer should remain like that. His desire was that she should come back to him, and that she should know and enjoy his love again. This was God's purpose for Israel. The tragedy of Israel was that so many of them did not heed; they went into exile and many of them were never to return. God's purpose in thus humbling us and in chastening us is that He might bring us to Himself. Here is the wonderful picture in the closing verse—how do they come? "They will come and seek the Lord their God and David their king, and they will fear the Lord and His goodness in the latter days." This was Hosea's message to them. He wanted Gomer thus to return, humbly honest, turning back to him. Well God desired that Israel should seek Him, should seek His forgiveness, should seek to be reconciled to Him, should trust in Him with a quiet loving confidence. And this is how we come. If it is the first time we come to Christ, we must come with this seeking heart. We must be desiring Him, not simply His gifts or His blessings, but Christ Himself. The returning sinner is

seeking the Lord and trusting in the Lord and trusting in His goodness. The same applies to the person who comes from a time of backsliding. Yes, a true believer, one who knows and loves the Lord but has drifted away in spirit and is coming back. How will he come? Well he comes doubtless with grief and with shame, acknowledging the failure, but he comes to seek with all his heart for God's forgiveness, for Christ's cleansing, for a renewed experience of this love of God.

This of course is the theme of the chapter. This is the theme of this whole prophecy. This is the theme of Scripture. Where is Scripture mirrored? It is in that familiar verse in John 3—"God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish but have everlasting life." The theme of Scripture is this amazing, persistent, constant and continuing love of God. Indeed it is pictured as the theme of heaven; the great company of the redeemed who have washed their robes white in the blood of the Lamb—what is their theme? It is "Unto Him that loved us and loosed us from our sins in His own blood, unto Him be glory." When you turn to the hymn-writers of the church of God, so often in their poetry they are trying with all the inadequacy of human language to speak about this love.

"O love divine how sweet thou art,
When shall I find my willing heart
All taken up with Thee?"

Well, let us stand alongside that love tonight, let us reflect upon it, let us think of the amazing persistence of this love. How can you stand alongside it? By standing alongside Calvary and seeing there the love that brought the Son of God to die, not for the just but for the unjust, not for the pure but for the impure, not for the holy but for the sinful. When I look on Calvary's Cross, and when I look upon the Prince of Glory who died there, I see, I begin to understand, something of that great love of God. But as the hymn-writer put it—

"Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my life, my soul, my all."

May God open our eyes to see the wonder of His love, but may God open our hearts that we may experience that love shed abroad in our hearts by His Spirit. May God set our hearts, in a glad response, upon Christ Himself.

PRAYER

P. TUCKER

This is the ninth of a series of studies originally given in the East London Tabernacle Bible School.

THE PERILS OF A PRAYING LIFE

We all agree that prayer is an obligation laid upon us as believers. "Men ought always to pray." We would all recognise that prayer is a privilege. But do we all equally acknowledge that privilege brings responsibility. It is possible for a Christian to pray lightly, ill-advisedly and without a due regard to the consequences, should God answer the prayer that has been offered. I want to look at some of these perils concerning prayer.

I.—THE PERIL THAT ARISES FROM A DUAL PRESSURE THAT IS UPON THE BELIEVER.

1. *The gracious pressure and constraint of the Holy Spirit.* The entire disposition of his life should be under the influence and direction of the Holy Spirit. (a) Prayer is not the exercise of our own human activity on its own. When we pray it is the Holy Spirit who prompts us, constrains us and urges us (Rom. 8:26). The help that the Holy Spirit gives to us is an inward help (v. 27). The Spirit of God gives meaning and reality to our praying and brings us right into the presence of a God who searches our hearts, desires, and motives. (b) In Eph. 6:18. The Spirit helps us to persevere, to continue in prayer. If prayer were just a human activity, then it would be very fitful and irregular. (c) Another reference to the Spirit's pressure upon the believer is in Jude 20.

2. *The pressure of the flesh.* The believer has an old nature which remains with him and which he carries with him to the grave. See Gal. 5:17. The flesh would prevent us from praying, and even if we do pray, would mislead us into praying in the wrong way and for the wrong things. The Lord Jesus Christ Himself recognised the limitations of the flesh. See Matt. 26:41. You see the contrast. Our Lord here is speaking primarily of the physical body when He said, "the flesh is weak." These men were weary physically. One of the perils in prayer is that the flesh can over-influence the spirit so that the spirit is overcome. In considering this whole doctrine of prayer we must ever remember that the believer is not an ordinary person. He is a new man in Christ and

therefore has two natures. The old nature has to be reckoned dead, but the trouble is that though the flesh may be reckoned dead to sin, sin is not dead to the flesh. It is always active, persistent, pressing. On the one hand the Spirit of God would call us aside to pray; on the other side the flesh would tell us we have not time, or we are tired, or too weary, or later on will be a better occasion.

II.—THE PERIL OF SATANIC ATTACK.

I believe that when our Lord Jesus Christ was in the Garden of Gethsemane the powers of darkness were mustering their forces and concentrating themselves upon the Son of God. I am sure that some of the darkness that wrapped itself about the soul of the Son of God in the Garden, extended to those disciples and they themselves were somewhat enveloped in it. The devil hates prayer. The devil is a great believer in prayer. He does not practice prayer but he suffers from the effects of prayer. He knows that prayer deals a death blow at his kingdom. "Satan trembles when he sees the weakest saint upon his knees." It may not be true, if that weak saint is out of touch with the Lord, but it may well be true if that weak saint is really linked on to the Lord in vital communion with the Lord. See Dan. 10: 12, 13. An angelic being appeared to Daniel who had been praying for three weeks and fasting to a certain extent. Daniel prayed but there were forces in the unseen realm contesting his prayer and seemingly hindering the answer to it for three weeks. Surely that is why the Lord Jesus puts it like this, in the Garden when rebuking Peter and the rest—"Peter, could ye not watch with Me one hour. Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation." There is this relation of watching and praying. See also Eph. 6: 18. "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and *watching thereunto.*"

1. *We ought to watch first of all before we pray.* It is quite obvious that the devil is going to do his utmost to keep us from prayer. It does seem that there are occasions when the devil can manipulate circumstances, before you turn to prayer, in order to stop you from praying. If we are really going to come into the presence of God, we need first of all a quiet mind. If the devil can so arrange circumstances as to rob us of our peace of mind, then he knows that when we begin to pray our thoughts will wander off to the thing that is pre-occupying us and we shall be disabled. We need, not only a quiet mind, we need a right spirit. You cannot pray if your spirit is out of harmony with the Spirit of God. If the devil can so work things as to get us ruffled or irritable with someone else, to put us in the wrong frame of mind altogether, then he knows he will rob our prayers of any spiritual effectiveness.

2. *We need to watch while we pray.* (a) *Physical weariness is something that is very real.* In Rom. 8: 11. I think that Paul is referring to this physical body. It is a mortal body, subject to death. He is not there speaking of the incorruptible body. The ministry of the Holy Spirit can quicken the mortal body, but if the devil can keep it weary, I am quite sure he will do his best to prevent us from praying. (b) *An undisciplined mind can keep us from prayer.* How the devil loves to lead us away from the real burden of our prayer to lesser and secondary things. How we need that every thought shall be brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.

(c) *The devil will play upon us by suggestion that self should obtrude.* The peril of being taken up with ourselves in prayer rather than with the Lord Jesus Christ. Self-adulation is something that follows us even into the very presence of God. It sometimes produces this result that even when we try to persuade ourselves that we are worshipping God, we are actually worshipping ourselves and doing nothing more. Man is never greater than when he is in communion and contact with God, but even at that point sin is with us and assailing us. Indeed, it is only there that we really begin to understand sin.

(d) *Prejudice comes into this very strongly.* Perhaps there is someone I do not like very much. I never pray for him. Yet he is a child of God. I am not really in deep fellowship with him and so I exclude him from my prayer. How often our prejudices control our prayer life. See Gen. 18: 23-33 and 19: 18-20. When Abraham prayed he left himself out of it altogether. But Lot, when he came to pray, did not pray for any one or anything except himself.

3. *We need to watch after we have prayed.* We must expect God to answer prayer. See Habakkuk 2: 1. He was on the lookout after he had prayed.

III.—THE PERIL OF A WRONG MOTIVE.

That was the trouble with the Israelites. See Psalm 106: 15. "And he gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul." The reference is to Num. 11. The striking thing here is that they did not formally pray to God, but that was the prayer that went up from their hearts. In v. 18 Moses said: "Ye have wept in the ears of the Lord." A man may pray very spiritually in the prayer meeting or in a service and yet deep down in his heart he may have very carnal desires, ambitions that are un sanctified, longings that are unspiritual. The real prayer God hears is the prayer that has the energy of the whole life behind it, what the man is really desiring, deep down in the recesses of the soul. There is not a

single Christian who would say, "O God, I wish I had never been redeemed by the blood, I wish I was back in the bondage of the world." Yet each of us as children of God, can cherish in our heart carnal desires that belong to the world. Those desires are the real prayer. God worked a miracle to answer the Israelites' prayer. Most probably they had a great thanksgiving service. Even while the flesh was between their teeth they were smitten with a plague, and many of them perished and they were buried there on that site, in a communal grave known as the grave of lusting. If a man asks God for bread God will never give him a stone. If he asks for an egg, God will never give him a scorpion; but if a man asks God for a stone and keeps asking God for a stone, God might give him one in order to break his teeth upon it. *There is another great illustration in the Old Testament when Israel wanted a king like the other nations.* They were tired of Theocratic Government and they pleaded for a king. They were given Saul and we all know the tragic mess he made of his reign. They had their request, but it brought leanness into their soul. *The New Testament illustration is the Prodigal Son.* He prayed in the beginning "Father, give me," but when he had learned his lesson, he came home and said "Father, make me."

IV.—THE PERIL OF UN-IMPLEMENTED PRAYER.

That is prayer that is substituted for action, and activity. There are two illustrations of this. *The first is at the Red Sea, in Ex. 14: 15.* The Egyptians were pursuing Israel. This was not the time for prayer, it was the time for action. "Speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward." *The other great illustration in the Old Testament is in Joshua 7: 10.* "And the Lord said unto Joshua, get thee up; wherefore liest thou thus upon thy face? Israel hath sinned." "You have prayed long enough," says God. "You have been on your face from morning until evening, now it is time to work." This is a very real peril in prayer. It is the peril of praying and then leaving it there, not prepared to do anything about the praying. Now, someone has said this, "Service without prayer is presumption; prayer without readiness to serve is hypocrisy; but service bathed in prayer is the pathway to power." When you and I pray we must be prepared for God to challenge us to do something about answering our own prayers. Moses prays, the Lord says, part of the answer Moses, is in your own hands. Speak to the children of Israel that they go forward. Touch the water with the rod. Joshua prays and the Lord says Joshua, part of the answer is in your own hands. Get up and go to the camp and identify the transgressor.

The Perseverance of the Saints in Hebrews VI

by

H. J. BLAIR

When Oliver Cromwell lay dying, it was a wild September day with the winds howling: and the winds of doubt assailed his own heart. He had one question to ask the chaplain who was ministering to him. "Tell me," he asked, "is it possible to fall from grace?" The chaplain, true to this great doctrine of the perseverance of the saints, answered, "No, it is not possible." "Then," said the dying man, "I am safe, for I know that I was once in grace."

That soul-steadying truth, that those who are truly born again by the Holy Spirit "can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace, but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved" (Westminster Confession of Faith, XVII:1), is clearly taught in several passages of Scripture. For example, John 10:28, 29, "I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand." See also Romans 8:38, 39 and Philippians 1:6. In view of the fact that there is such clear Scriptural support for this doctrine in the passages which have been referred to, it may be asked what purpose is served by seeking to derive it from this difficult chapter in Hebrews, where, as is well known, there is one passage which seems to contradict it flatly and has been something of an embarrassment to expositors who have held to the truth that it is not possible to fall from grace. The answer is that if it can be shown that Hebrews 6 not only does not contradict the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints but specifically teaches it, the doctrine is incontrovertibly confirmed.

It may be well at the outset to look at the passage in question, and examine some of the attempts that have been made to show that it does not conflict with the doctrine so clearly taught elsewhere. The crucial verses read as follows: "For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance;

seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame" (Hebrews 6 : 4-6).

Two lines of approach have been followed in attempts to show that these verses do not contradict the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. One is the view that those described in these verses were not believers at all. "None of the experiences described by any means implies being born again, true repentance, true saving faith or divine election to eternal life. What these people had was a religious experience common to multitudes of people who are not really born again" (Dr. J. G. Vos, in *Blue Banner Faith and Life*, July-Sept., 1950, p. 124). Bishop Ryle says, "The person here described as 'falling away' has no characteristics which may not be discovered in unconverted men: while it is not said that he possesses saving faith, or charity, or is elect." And Calvin takes "tasted of" not to mean experienced but to taste merely with the tip of the lips. But one cannot help feeling that the watering down of the strong terms in verses 4, 5 to make them apply to the unregenerate is motivated by the apparent impossibility of harmonizing the passage otherwise with the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints! Dr. T. T. Shields says bluntly, "If the man of whom that is said is not a Christian, who is?" (*The Doctrines of Grace*, p. 168).

Dr. Louis Berkhof adopts another interpretation: "There are warnings against apostasy which would seem to be quite uncalled for, if the believer could not fall away, Matt. 24 : 12; Col. 1 : 23; Heb. 2 : 1, 3 : 14, 6 : 11; I John 2 : 6. But these warnings regard the whole matter from the side of man and are seriously meant. They prompt self-examination, and are instrumental in keeping believers in the way of perseverance. They do not prove that any of those addressed will apostatize, but simply state that the use of means is necessary to prevent them from committing this sin" (*Systematic Theology*, p. 548). A. M. Stibbs refers to similar interpretations in *The New Bible Commentary*, p. 1117, where he writes, "Others, again, suppose that this suggestion that the regenerate can thus become apostate, and be finally lost, is actually only hypothetical and theoretical. Even on the human side it is much more unlikely than physical suicide, and so only to be thought of as a remote possibility; and actually on the divine side it can by grace never happen."

It seems, therefore, that this passage can be harmonized with the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints by assuming either that those referred to are not real believers or that the apostasy referred to is not real apostasy. Neither seems entirely satisfactory, and each

cancels out the other. Is there another alternative? The purpose of this article is to present the view that there is.

It should be noted that the whole passage—Hebrews 5:11 to 6:20—is really a parenthesis, and should be considered as a whole. The writer is on the point of beginning a discussion of Christ's priesthood "after the order of Melchisedec", when he realizes that the teaching which he is about to give may prove to be beyond the capacity of those to whom he is writing. When they should be capable of digesting strong meat, they are still babies, able to take only milk. They, like a good many Christians, are still at the ABCs of Christian experience and Christian knowledge, and satisfied enough that it should be so. Chapter 6 therefore deals with this situation, and it is only with the last verse of it that the Epistle gets back to Christ as a high priest "after the order of Melchisedec".

The opening verses of this chapter are an exhortation to immature Christians to leave the first stage of Christian experience and go on to perfection, not trying to lay the foundation again. The first stages, of course, are of vital importance—repentance, faith, public profession ("doctrine of baptisms"), the call to Christian service ("laying on of hands"), newness of life ("resurrection of the dead"), and the realization of the fact of the final judgment. But the Christian must not be content with these first beginnings. Some of those to whom this epistle was written seemed to think that the Christian life consisted in a continual returning to such new beginnings, repenting and believing, making a profession, and so on; then falling away for a while to the old life again; then a new repentance and a new profession of faith, like a man laying the foundation of his house again and again. But, says the writer of this epistle, *that is quite impossible*. That is the import of verses 4 and 5. This going back to the beginnings again and again is impossible, for—and here is the crux of the argument—*that would imply that Christ would need to be continually crucified for them* ("crucifying for themselves the Son of God afresh, and putting Him to an open shame"). Christ's crucifixion on their behalf was apparently ineffective, if the whole process of repentance and faith has to be repeated, and so He is put to an open shame, not only the shame of a fresh crucifixion, but the ignominy of continual failure. If commentators had remembered that later in the Epistle the writer stresses most emphatically that Christ's sacrifice was once for all, the point made here might have been more clearly apprehended. The point of the passage is not simply that a man cannot be converted twice, but that *he does not need to be converted twice*, for Christ's finished work on behalf of the believer was final and

effective. The question under discussion is not the impossibility of being renewed from apostasy, but the impossibility of going back to the unregenerate state again. And what is that but the doctrine of final perseverance—once regenerate, always regenerate?

On this interpretation, the rest of the chapter fits amazingly into place. The significant word in the illustration of verses 7 and 8 is the word "off". If a piece of ground is good, and has good seed sown in it, the net result of God's frequent watering of it will be that it brings forth fruit abundantly and increasingly: the purpose of repeated rain is not to start growth all over again, but to increase the growth that has begun. But ground that is continually bringing forth briars and thorns is not going to produce any better harvest for all the rain that falls upon it: it never has been freed from the primeval curse of Adam's sin, and nothing can be done with it.

But, says the author of the Epistle in effect to his readers, "You are not like the ground which has never been freed from the curse." The fruits of salvation have already been showing in their lives: he mentions some of them—"your work and labour of love, which ye have showed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister". But still he is not satisfied, and again he appeals to them not to be lazily content with what they have but to go on "to the full assurance of hope unto the end". They have numerous examples of endurance to follow, particularly that of Abraham, who persevered in faith and patience, "and so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise". And so the chapter comes to its crown and climax with the secret of final perseverance: we have a faithful God, a God who has not only promised but who has sworn by Himself to bring us through—"that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us". There are two impossibilities in this chapter—for God to lie (verse 18), and, derived from that, for any who have been once enlightened to fall away and need renewal (verses 4-6).

And if we still doubt whether the hope of advancement can be realized in us, there is one more convincing argument to be brought forward. Christ our Forerunner has already entered into the perfection of glory that will one day be ours. "Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil, whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec."

The Hope of Glory

J. A. MOTYER

To want to know something of the future is the most natural thing, and because the Bible is designed by God to provide for us men as we are, and to meet our real needs as they actually exist, it caters for this need also. There is a very remarkable passage in Deuteronomy in which God acknowledges this need of His people and promises to provide for it. Deuteronomy 18: 9ff takes up the question of the attractiveness which Israel will find in certain heathen cults which will be encountered in Canaan—divination, enchantment, augury, sorcery, familiar spirits, wizards, necromancy. Many of these clearly deal with foretelling the future, but they are wholly forbidden to Israel. It is not by these that God will meet the legitimate desire of His people to know what lies ahead: He has His own provision (verse 15): "The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a prophet . . ." Biblical religion contains its own system of forewarning, and needs no help from the forbidden pastures of pagan probings into the future. And it is quite remarkable how much of the Bible is, in fact, taken up with future prediction: the books of the prophets are liberally salted with precise forecasts of coming events; the epistles clearly have their eyes fixed on the future, and impress a well-known and well-loved hope on their readers; whole books—notably Daniel and Revelation—concentrate on the elucidation of future days; and the Lord Jesus Christ gave a remarkable prophetic discourse in reply to His disciples question regarding happenings yet to come (Matt. 24 and parallels).

This aspect of the biblical message has been greatly neglected, and for that reason we see people turning to religious quacks who offer to satisfy—often by the methods of ancient Canaan—what the Bible itself recognises as an allowable desire and for which it provides its own message. And yet, the neglect is very understandable. For one thing, we all know the tendency to fight shy of topics which experience has frequently shown to be productive of "crankiness" and a divisive spirit. Not even its best friends could deny that the study of prophecy has seen this happen! We will do well, therefore, to bear in mind the two replies of our Lord, when asked about the future: In Mark 14: 3f He was asked of coming events, and replied with an outline of history covering the days till the fall of

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Jerusalem in A.D. 70 and then reaching on to His own return in the undated future; in Acts 1:7, replying to a request for dates, He asserted peremptorily: "It is not for you to know . . ." There seems to be a clear directive from our Lord as to how we are to come to those parts of Scripture which relate to the future: they are written in order that His people, being forewarned, may be forearmed; they are not written so that a precise calendar of events may be drawn up and dated, for such details are still locked within the Father's peculiar knowledge.

Another reason for the overlooking of the prophetic sections of the Bible is their inherent difficulty. It is all very well to say that in Daniel and Revelation God is catering for a known and allowed need, but what happens when we seek to satisfy this need? A plethora of beasts, and horns, and horses and their riders, and trumpets and vials, and dragons! We shrink back in despair, our need unsatisfied! Now this is not the place for airing and solving admittedly great problems of biblical interpretation, but this much can be said, that, in some cases at least, if only we grasped, to begin with, what spiritual principles the apocalyptic writers are expressing by means of all their various symbols, we would not find their writings so initially repellent, and we would be well on the way towards extracting the marrow of glorious Hope which they are setting before us.

As against these excuses for neglecting the apocalyptic parts of Scripture, there is one great factor which ought to act in the opposite direction: namely, that these scriptures were specially designed to speak to the Church in evil, calamitous days. Daniel's initial visions are so full of foreboding that, when he discerned them, he "fainted, and was sick certain days" (8: 27); the Lord Jesus expressly said that His prophetic discourse referred to times when men's hearts would be failing for fear (Luke 21: 26) because of the world events of their day; Revelation 6 takes up the story of the removal of peace from the earth (verse 4), scarcity of the necessities of life (verse 6), sword, famine, and death (verse 8). If we come to these books, and, for the moment lay aside all question of dates, and when and where; if we try to discard our pre-occupation with time-tables, and rather ask what sort of events are here symbolically depicted, we see things which are all too familiar in the world as we know it. In particular we see something that is daily increasing before our eyes: that the world, under all its multiplicity of divisions, is actually in two camps, and these, not the "east" and "west" of the politicians, but the "light" and the "darkness" of the apocalyptists: the forces of Satan, and the Saints of God. It is because

we live in such days that we should be recalled, and should recall ourselves to a study of these neglected scriptures.

What message do they bring to such days as ours? If we were to answer this in one word, it would be "God." Isaiah lived in a day of calamity, but he had no resource for himself or his nation till "I saw the Lord" (6: 1); Ezekiel was a prophet for a day of national desolation and the beginning of his message was this, that in the very heart of the anguish and loss he saw "visions of God" (1: 1); the centrepiece of Daniel's first vision was that he "beheld till thrones were placed, and one that was an ancient of days did sit" (7: 9); John, on the isle of Patmos, turned and saw "one like unto a son of man" (Rev. 1: 13). There is no greater need for the church in a day of worldly oppression than that its eyes should be filled with God, so that He becomes the treasure of His people and they cry out "Whom have I in heaven but Thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire in comparison with Thee. . . . God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever." It is only in this spirit that the church can be armed for the conflict, and be victorious.

In particular, in these scriptures, we see God enthroned. This is the primary feature of heaven, in John's record: "Straightway I was in the Spirit, and behold there was a throne . . ." (4: 2). This is so contrary to the popular assumption about God that it is almost the most salutary lesson that the prophetic scriptures can teach us. The God of the Bible is not the "poor God," the "defeated God" of popular (and sometimes even ecclesiastical) estimation, a God fuming impotently along the touchline of history while the "real" agents break His rules! A throne is set, and One sits on it and hears the adoring praise of the whole creation, ascribing to Him "the blessing, and the honour, and the glory, and the dominion for ever and ever" (Rev. 5: 13). Surely this is a vision of God for our day. God has not left His throne. The world is not left to the direction of sinful men. The human race has not achieved a successful rebellion whereby its destiny is left to its own discretion or indiscretion. God reigns, and with the effortless ease proper to Him who is called "the Lord God Omnipotent" will bring history to the conclusion which He has pre-determined.

But even this fails to express the whole faith of the Bible, and of the apocalyptists. It is not just the End that is determined and engineered by God; the whole movement of history has its roots in heaven. In the Revelation, earthly events follow on the sounding of trumpets *in heaven*, or the opening of seals *in heaven*, or the emptying out of bowls *in heaven*; the command proceeds "out of the temple" (16: 1). Again, the seer uses the device of fixed num-

bers: "five months" (9: 10), "a thousand two hundred and three score days" (10: 3), "a time and times and half a time" (12: 14). Whatever be the exact interpretation of these, the fundamental truth they teach us is that God orders all things as to their beginning, their duration, and their end. It is a plan exact in its details, "prepared for the hour, and day, and month, and year" (9: 15). The same truth is vividly taught by Ezekiel: he sees a great moving object, with four-faced angelic beings, and wheels that go every way. This is the ceaseless movement of the created world in all its departments, including man and human history. But the movement is not haphazard. Over the activity is a platform with a throne, and from the throne, "a voice" (1: 25), and it is by command of this voice that all takes place, begins, continues, and ends.

This is the dynamic, biblical conception of the sovereignty of God in the affairs of men. Daniel expressed it by saying that "the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will" (4: 32). But the biblical doctrine of the sovereignty of God, far from destroying the moral responsibility of men, in fact establishes it. The "determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God" delivers His Son to the death on the Cross but this does not make the human agents of the deed any less "lawless men" (Acts 2: 23). The apocalyptists declare to us that God, by His sovereign activity in history, is guiding the world to such an End as will display that throughout, in spite of all appearances, God's world is an exact system of retribution, conforming to the principles of the immutable justice of God. At that day, the short triumph of the godless will be over, and the oppression of God's people will be ended in joy, every balance will be redressed, and every tear dried.

This brings us face to face with the moral thrust of these prophetic writings. They find their goal in a "great white throne," and the opening of books, and exact, inescapable judgment, and fearful punishment (Rev. 20: 11ff). The question set squarely before the reader may be stated in the words of Peter (2 Pet. 3: 11ff): "Seeing that these things are thus all to be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy living and godliness . . . give diligence that ye may be found without spot and blameless in his sight." The End, when it comes, will be entirely God's doing; man cannot promote it, nor delay it; it comes by means of "a stone cut without hands" (Dan. 2: 45), an act of the Divine Creator (Is. 4: 5). But, meantime, God's people, waiting for the great climatic act of their God, are called by Him to live now as in the light which they hope then, by His grace, to enjoy. "O house of Jacob, come ye and let us walk in the light of the Lord" (Is. 13: 12f); "Behold, I come

as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments . . ." (Rev. 16: 15). These books of the Bible are not the happy hunting ground of prognosticators; they are essentially a call to holiness, enforcing the inescapable ethical entail of the Christian hope.

This hope is not an abstract, vague assurance of "pie in the sky," of "good things to come." It is hope of a Person. As Christians, we do not look for things; we look for Him. As writers, the apocalyptists are not mere "utopia-mongers," they are men "waiting for their lord." It is this which enlarges the heart: "The coming of the Lord draweth nigh." With their whole hearts they would re-echo the misreading of Rev. 21: 20 by a modern Sunday school-boy: "Ever so, come Lord Jesus!" This is the joy they set before us. The church which thrills to that joy is the church that plays a vital part in its day; its treasure is in heaven. Joy and moral challenge go hand in hand. Those who love His appearing, will obey His words: "Take heed to yourselves . . . watch ye at every season, making supplication that ye may prevail to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man" (Luke 21: 34ff).

As for defending either the Bible or Christ, who ever asked us to do it? Certainly not Christ, for He told us to be His witnesses and not His advocates, and He has promised that the gates of Hades shall not prevail against the church. The defence is in His own hand, while He has left the testimony in ours. The whole testimony of the church is Jesus Christ, and that testimony is by the Spirit of God; and those who are convinced and added to our number are so by the preaching which is in demonstration of Spirit and power.

—ADOLPH SAPHIR.

Book Reviews

JOHN BROWN OF HADDINGTON. Robert Mackenze. Banner of Truth Trust, 1964. Price 6/-.

This rather leisurely biography written in 1918 tends towards hagiography. The winds of Lytton Strachey or even J. C. Pollock have not blown. Our author goes back to the Picts, for example, for the roots of his story. Nevertheless, here is a man of God portrayed, one of the giants of 18th century Christianity in Britain, the century of the Wesleys and Whitefield.

His early life reads like a romance. This was the shepherd-boy who taught himself Greek the hard way, working out the Greek alphabet by comparison with the English version. Son of a noble mother who desired him "for the Kirk," he dedicated himself to God at the age of 12, read Alleine's "Alarm to the Unconverted," and found full freedom in faith when he was 19. Like the Wesleys, he had passed through a rather legalistic and methodical period in his piety.

A born linguist, he added Greek to his Latin, and Hebrew to both. In a famous episode, he was presented with a Greek New Testament in a St. Andrew's bookshop after successfully meeting a Professor's challenge to read from it. It seems incredible to learn that he was charged with being in league with the devil, apparently the arch-linguist. A relative sagely remarked "That shrewd personage, the devil, would not have employed him on the N.T."

Pedlar, soldier, schoolmaster, he eventually became divinity student and minister. In the secession Church of the Erskines, he rose to fame through his long ministry at Haddington. He preached, according to Hume, "as if he were conscious that the Son of God stood at his elbow." As Professor he turned out many of the same calibre.

As an author he is now little known, though famous even in the 19th century for his Self-Interpreting Bible, his Dictionary of the Bible, works on Typology, Prophecy, Preaching and many other topics. In the 18th century one could hardly avoid the burning controversy which separated Wesley and Whitefield, Arminian and Calvinist. John Brown was in correspondence with some of the English leaders and contributed a series of relevant articles to the "Gospel Magazine and Theological Miscellany."

For the 20th century reader, the book lacks that objectivity that should characterise even the writing of the lives of the saints. We know from our experience that they have their faults too. The

style is somewhat turgid and falls into Johnsonese at times: "letter writing" becomes "epistolacy intercourse." Has the book a message for today? It is doubtful, for the roots of our predicament go back to the 19th century (Hegel, Newman, Darwin and Co.) rather than to the 18th.

R. N. CASWELL.

JOHN BUNYAN, by Frank Mott Harrison (Banner of Truth Trust, 5/-).

This is a reprint of a popular biography of Bunyan first published in 1928 and now re-issued as a paperback. Some may be put off by the style, which certainly leaves something to be desired. Sentences sometimes appear in a rather disjointed fashion, isolated from the paragraph to which they belong. It may be that the author was striving for dramatic effect but one reader at least found it had a jarring effect.

Others may be put off by the way in which he gives free rein to his imagination. He frankly admits in his Preface that he has used his imagination. But while we agree that there is scope for this, at times he seems to let his imagination run away with him so that one's credulity becomes rather strained.

These criticisms are not made in order to dissuade readers. On the contrary it is because some may be deterred by these factors that they are noted, so that a word of encouragement to read the book may be given, for its virtues outweigh the defects. It certainly is well worth reading, for the person whose life it narrates was a great man of God and his witness still lives in these pages. In fact, as one reads, the stylistic considerations tend to recede and John Bunyan dominates the scene.

In a day when Christians seem unready for sacrifice, here is a timely reminder of the cost of discipleship. For Bunyan the preaching of the Gospel was a costly task. Had he ceased and had he conformed to the religious requirements of the church of the restoration period, he would doubtless have lived quietly to the end of his days. His non-conformity led him to years of imprisonment, which meant not only the personal suffering due to loss of liberty, but the further agony of seeing his family suffer.

Bunyan never became embittered by persecution. His was a forgiving spirit and one that readily sought to understand the outlook of others even when they differed from him. Inflexible when the truth of the Gospel was at stake, he was yet a man of tolerance in an intolerant age.

Bunyan's life was a living demonstration of the sure character of God's providence. His twelve years in Bedford gaol may have

silenced his preaching, but God used his imprisonment to give to the world "The Pilgrim's Progress." The loss sustained by the churches in Bedford and the villages around, proved to be the inestimable gain of all the generations since who have followed Christian on his pilgrimage to the Celestial City, a pilgrimage which was surely but the reflection of the spiritual experiences of the author, the tinker of Bedford whom God so mightily used.

GLEANINGS OF HIGHLAND HARVEST, by Murdock Campbell. (6/-, obtainable from Religious Bookroom, 6 Kenneth Street, Stornoway, Lewis or 15, North Bank Street, Edinburgh).

This book will probably be familiar to many readers as it was first published in 1953 and this is a reprint of the second edition. The earlier issues received favourable comment in the past by the reviews in the *Gospel Magazine*, and doubtless many who have read those reviews have endorsed their approval. This short review will thus be a way of introduction to others.

The book is discursive in character, and ranges over a wide variety of people and places. The unifying theme is God as exemplified in the lives of His servants. There are not only notable ministers of the word, but also those who while not in such a prominent position yet have a faithful testimony. Indeed it is the quality of spiritual life among the general run of church members which is so notable a feature of the narratives given here.

Clearly as its title suggests this book will have its primary appeal to Scots as it describes God's gracious working in the Highlands. But there may well be those from south of the border who will want to discover something of the godliness and sturdy righteousness of those northern churches of an earlier day—a godliness that we would indeed long to see afresh in our own generation. H.M.C.

THE CHRISTIAN IN COMPLETE ARMOUR, by William Gurnall. Banner of Truth Trust. 1189 + liii pp. 35s.

"Let go and let God" is not a maxim which would have appealed to the great puritan preachers of the 17th century, least of all to the author of this massive work, just reprinted by the Banner of Truth Trust. To him, warfare was the perpetual activity of the Christian—at least in his life. Not that William Gurnall was himself a robust stalwart. Suffering from poor health, he lived a sheltered life in a Suffolk country town, and even had to decline an invitation to preach before Parliament on account of the arduous journey which the task involved.

But there was nothing timid or unhealthy about Gurnall's approach to the Christian life. His extensive treatment of the subject

in these pages is deeply satisfying with him on a point of interpretation (for example, it is open to doubt whether the Christian's breastplate is the *imparted* righteousness which Gurnall claims it is, for this would surely be a poor defence against the fears and doubts implanted by Satan). There are several reasons why Gurnall maintains such a consistently high standard. First, he is not afraid to grapple with the profound doctrines of Christianity in order, not to obscure them, as he claims so many do, but to open and to elucidate. Secondly, he possesses that distinctively puritan virtue of an experimental Christianity. A variety of practical directions are drawn from Scripture and ruthlessly pressed home, so that the reader's conscience is repeatedly aroused from its customary slumbers. Thirdly, his writing is entirely free from pious platitudes and it is clear that everything he applies to us he has already applied to his own heart and life. In his pages his heart speaks, and it is not surprising that his fame and reputation derives entirely from the title and contents of this great work.

Perhaps Gurnall's chief gift was that of illustration. With extended simile, or pithy metaphor, he is a master—perhaps *THE* master—of this art. He describes how the believer wants to be holy but does not always succeed: "The saint's heart leaps when his legs do but creep in the way of God's commandments". He who reads such an illustration will surely never forget it. Again, describing the extent of God's care for His people: "Which, think you, speaks more love and condescent: for a prince to give a pension to a favourite, on which he may live by his own care, or for this prince to take the chief care upon himself, and come from day to day to this man's house, and look into his cupboard and see what provision he hath, what expense he is at, and so constantly to provide for the man from time to time?...Thus God doth with His saints. The great God comes and looks into their cupboard, and sees how they are laid in, and sends in accordingly as he finds them. 'Your heavenly Father knows you have need of these things,' and you shall have them." No wonder that Gurnall's work has been highly valued ever since its first edition. His fellow-puritans, Baxter and Flavel, thought highly of it. It went through six editions in his own lifetime, and shares with *Pilgrim's Progress* the distinction of never having lapsed into obscurity. Toplady, Newton and Cecil valued it, and so will Christians today—if they don't that will be a reflection upon them rather than upon the book.

The modern reader needs, perhaps, two warnings: the first is that he should not succumb to the temptation to skim hurriedly through the book on account of its size. In doing so he will miss the treasures

it contains. Perhaps three pages a day is an ideal diet—at the end of year, the soul will have been nourished indeed! The second warning is that the book should not be read exclusively of more modern writing—too many, in imbibing the puritans, seem to have missed their substance, so sorely needed from evangelical pulpits today, and adopted only their language (which we can well dispense with!).

Some will find Ryle's introductory biography tedious. So it is, if treated simply as a life of Gurnall (for there are scarcely any data to work from), but it is of great value if read as a commentary on the troubled times in which we lived.

J. R. BOWEN.

ANNOUNCEMENT FROM THE TRUSTEES

Mr. Trumble, who has served as joint manager of *The English Churchman* and *The Gospel Magazine* since 1958, has been appointed as secretary of the Seaman's Christian Friend Society and Hospital Trust. We are grateful to him for his services over the years and wish him God's blessing in his future work.

The business side of *The Gospel Magazine* will continue to be administered from the office and all subscriptions and business matters should be addressed to the acting manager at 69, Fleet Street, E.C.4.

Young People's Page

THE FALSE PROFESSION

About a hundred years ago, a little girl left her happy country home to go to a boarding school in London. Her elder sister was there already, and Maria soon settled down. The headmistress, who had begun her school on the usual worldly lines, had been changed by God's mercy, and was now a humble believer. She longed that her pupils might be brought to know the Lord, and in answer to her prayers, there was a movement of the Holy Spirit among the girls, so that many were born again.

Now Maria, though brought up by believing parents, was not yet a Christian. She was affectionate and cheerful, and industrious, but she felt no interest in the things of Christ, and she was just uncomfortable when spiritual things were mentioned. Mrs. Teed (the headmistress) often had little talks with the girls in private, trying to show them their need of a Saviour from sin, but Maria never responded. One day, the little girl was not very well, and it was found that she had scarlet fever. So she was moved to the sick-room, and nursed with the greatest kindness by Mrs. Teed. Not to lose the opportunity, she one day asked Maria very gently, if she believed in Jesus. Maria was very fond of Mrs. Teed, and she knew her indifference had often disappointed her, so she had determined that if Mrs. Teed asked her again, she would say "Yes." And she did, though she knew all the time that it was a lie.

As soon as she was well enough, Maria was sent home, and presently a kind letter came from Mrs. Teed, speaking of spiritual things as if she were a child of God. She showed the letter to Miriam, her elder sister, who was herself a Christian. But Miriam knew her little sister better than the headmistress did, and when she had read the letter, she said gravely to Maria that she had not seen any good change in her. "And I never see you reading your Bible," she added.

You see, Miriam saw through Maria's false pretences. She knew that a little girl cannot become a child of God without a complete change of heart. Two of the results that follow are a change of behaviour, and a new love for the Bible. Miriam was right, for when the Lord Jesus spoke of His flock, He said, "My sheep hear My voice . . . they follow Me." Following the Good Shepherd means the narrow way that leads to life, surely a very different thing from the broad road leading to destruction.

But Maria was quite a good girl already; so much so that Mrs. Teed easily believed her when she said she was a Christian. Yet Miriam was not deceived. The change that comes with conversion is not always as obvious as you might expect. If Maria had been a thoroughly naughty girl, bad-tempered and disobedient, then the change in her would have been plain enough. But children of Christian parents are often so well-behaved that they scarcely ever seem to do anything seriously wrong. That is just because of the careful way they have been brought up. Maria was like that; always pleasant and obliging, obedient, and hard-working. What more could a Christian be? Miriam knew that the difference would be not so much in the things that Maria did as in *her secret reasons for doing them*. You may be pleasant and obliging because obedience has become a habit; hard-working, because you want to be first in the class, and do better than the rest. On the other hand, if you are following Jesus, you may do all these same things *for His sake*, and in order to obey His commands, because you love Him. That shows that you *heart* is changed, not just your habits.

The other thing that Miriam said was that she never found Maria reading her Bible. Now there are many ways in which the Shepherd speaks to His sheep, but I think the commonest is through the Scriptures. There His voice can be heard from the first chapter to the last. Perhaps you will say, "Yes, of course Jesus speaks in the Gospels." But it is not only in the Gospels; it is all through the Bible, for all the Scriptures testify of Christ. Look at Genesis, for instance. It begins with the story of the Creation. But John tells us that the world was made by *Him*, the Lord Jesus. After the Fall the coming Redeemer is promised; Abel's sacrifice foreshadows the great Sacrifice on Calvary; Noah's ark is a type of the Lord Jesus as the only refuge for sinners. Then the Son of God Himself appears many times to Abraham, and again and again the Messiah's coming to earth is promised. There is the wonderful story of Abraham's finding the ram provided as an offering instead of Isaac his son, pointing to the Lord Jesus taking the sinner's place and dying in his stead. And so on, not only in Genesis, but all through the Bible. Wherever you read, the voice of the Shepherd sounds, and His sheep know His voice.

And sometimes He speaks through His Word, not just to all the flock generally, but to one sheep in particular. The Christian should watch to see what He will say unto *him*, and suddenly some special word may stand out glowingly, lit up by the Holy Spirit. There is nothing so sweet to the child of God as this lighting up of some words as a message to him for his very own. But you see Maria

was no more interested in the Bible than she had been before, and Miriam knew that if she was believing in Jesus she would have been hungering for His Word.

Perhaps you are wondering sorrowfully if you are really one of the sheep. Perhaps you feel that you are always straying away, and there are other voices you are listening to besides the voice of the Shepherd. You hoped that you really had a new heart, but the old evil heart still seems so strong and powerful. If you are troubled about the matter at all, I think there is comfort for you. The Shepherd does not only say, "My sheep hear My voice . . . they follow Me"; there are three precious words in between: "*I know them.*" The silly helpless sheep may be so bewildered by his own foolish habit of wandering away that he scarcely recognizes the Shepherd. But the Shepherd always knows; He brings back the straying sheep, and carries the lambs in His bosom.

You will like to know that later on Maria was brought into the fold of Christ, and she mourned bitterly over her false words spoken years before.

DAMARIS.

SCRIPTURE ENIGMA No. 131

The whole: An invitation given by the Lord Jesus Christ.

1. Every year Hannah made a little one for Samuel.
2. The Psalmist tells us to praise God with stringed instruments and these.
3. The angel said that after Babylon's fall its sound should be heard no more.
4. Plucked and eaten by hungry disciples.
5. Hearing that this was taken caused Eli's death.
6. Part of the present Jacob sent to Joseph.
7. Young ones helped to carry the posts in Esther's day.
8. Looking back, Lot's wife became a pillar of this.
9. Sent by King Herod to behead John in prison.
10. The one given to Rebekah by Abraham's servant was golden.

SOLUTION OF No. 130

The whole: Bethlehem (Matt. 2: 8).

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| 1. Birth (Matt. 1: 18). | 6. Egypt (Matt. 2: 14). |
| 2. East (Matt. 2: 1). | 7. Herod (Matt. 2: 3). |
| 3. Treasures (Matt. 2: 11). | 8. Emmanuel (Matt. 1: 23). |
| 4. House (Matt. 2: 11). | 9. Myrrh (Matt. 2: 11). |
| 5. Least (Matt. 2: 6). | |