

JANUARY — FEBRUARY 1997

THE GOSPEL MAGAZINE

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THE GOSPEL MAGAZINE

Editor

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Editorial

THERE IS A LOVELY PHRASE to be found in Isaiah 42 verse 4: "He shall not fail." What an arresting subject for contemplation — the unfailing Christ! You and I may fail, we may be discouraged and falter, but He never fails.

The Lord Jesus Christ did not fail in the work of redemption which He came to accomplish. It is written of Him that He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem, He never flinched or turned aside. He could say, "I have finished the work thou gavest me to do" and on the cross He said, "It is finished".

He will not fail because He is unchanging. All that He was yesterday, He is today. All that He has been, He will for ever be.

He never fails in patience. How patient He was with the disciples; how provoking they could be — yet He dealt tenderly and patiently with them. He never fails in love and there is nothing that can separate us from the love of Christ. He will not fail us in life or in death.

With your problems and anxiety you can trust Him absolutely, He will not fail. Other helpers may fail and comforts flee but the unfailing Christ never forsakes.

Let this text of Scripture impart courage and confidence as we enter a New Year and may we prove in daily experience that "He shall not fail".

The Power of the Gospel

A Sermon by the Editor

*“These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also”
(Acts 17:6)*

THIS WAS THE CHARGE laid against the early Christian missionaries, in this case, Paul and Silas at Thessalonica. They were accused of being dangerous revolutionaries for the simple reason that they had been proclaiming, as verse 7 says, another King whom the people reckoned to be a rival to Caesar. They had preached about one called Jesus. They turned the world upside down.

We need to ask, “Was the charge true?”. In a sense, yes. The missionaries of Christ were certainly causing a commotion. They were making things move everywhere they went. There were great stirrings and shakings as they preached Christ and as they challenged the spiritual apathy and the moral corruption of the Roman world. As they challenged them with the powerful appeal of the cross, there was a tremendous shaking and movement, because they were proclaiming a revolutionary message and it produced revolutionary results. Men and women could not remain indifferent in the face of such a message. They must either oppose it or obey it, and so, in the Acts of the Apostles you have mention of the bitter antagonism and persecution on the one hand and yet the story of the Church’s glorious triumph on the other. That was the same everywhere where the Gospel penetrated and where it was accepted no one could doubt, in a certain sense, that these crusaders for Christ had turned the world upside down. Looking at it from another point of view, the accusation was grossly untrue. These men, it was asserted, were turning the world upside down. When you really look at the situation it was the world that was upside down. What these preachers of the Gospel were endeavouring to do, by the grace of God, was to put the world the right side up. They had one simple purpose in life, to put men right with God and themselves, and with their fellows. What was the result? Well, wherever this message was believed and received, the transforming power of God was seen. Life became instinctive with a new glory, with a new purpose, and a new hope and, indeed, to many it was like stepping out into an entirely new world — a world that was turned, not upside down, but right side up. “These that have turned the world upside down,” says the narrative, “have come here also.”

What about the situation today? Obviously, life is very different from what it was in those now far off days, and yet, in spite of all the changes that have taken place, despite all our scientific achievements, in spite of our vaunted 20th century civilisation, human nature and the human situation remains very much as it was in the days of the Acts of the Apostles. We have to admit that we are living in a

crazy sort of world — a world that is upside down. The question is — how can it be turned the right side up? Here is where the Gospel comes in, because it is a life-changing message. The only way of putting the world right side up is by putting the individual man and woman right. That is at the heart of the problem. How can men be put right? Can statesmen and legislators do it? Can economists do it? Can social reformers do it? Can educationalists and men of learning do it? The verdict of history is a resounding No! They are quite powerless to change men. The answer to the problem lies much deeper than that — it lies in the regeneration of the individual — and there is only one power that can accomplish that — it is the Gospel of Christ which is “the power of God unto salvation”. The life-changing Gospel is the only hope for this topsy-turvy world.

The humanists blame man’s environment for what he is and for what is wrong with him. They say: “Create better social conditions in which people are to live; give them better houses; provide them with better amenities and you will end up with better people.” It sounds reasonable enough on the surface and it is right that there should be progress, but the problem won’t be solved that way. The solution proposed here begins the wrong way round. It attempts to work from the outside to the inward. The Gospel, on the other hand, works precisely in the reverse direction, from the inside and it goes outwards. It says, “Change the man and you will change society”, for if you change social conditions alone you will not necessarily change the individual, but, to change the man it requires an inward revolution, and that is the work of the Holy Spirit of God. It is only the Holy Spirit that can effect the revolution of which I am speaking and which is referred to in our text.

The Scripture says: “That which is born of the flesh is flesh: and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (John 3:6). It is sometimes said, “You cannot change human nature”. That is true — *you* cannot, but *God* can. By His life-giving Spirit and true faith in Christ the miracle of the new birth takes place in the heart of man and he becomes a new creation: “Old things have passed away, behold all things have become new.” This is revolutionary Christianity. This is the hope for a world that is upside down. But the revolution in question is not a political one — it is a spiritual one. It is a personal one, for Christ’s kingdom, we read, is not of this world, but He reigns by His Spirit in the lives of those who acknowledge His sovereignty and obey His will.

“Those that have turned the world upside down are come here also.” That was a very wonderful tribute to the preachers of the early Church. It was also a great tribute to the far-reaching power of the Gospel. This is what Paul and Silas, of course, were coming to do. This is what the Church in every age should be seeking to do, to bring about a spiritual revolution. This is what the Communists try to do on another level, what the false cults are trying to do, and how active they are, for theirs is a revolution of a different type. The Bible holds the key to the situation. It is centred in the Gospel of the grace of God.

Just look for a moment in Acts 17 in the context of our verse and you will find some of the characteristics of those who turned the world upside down. We have the first thought in verse 1: "Now when they passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia" and the thought here is of *tireless activity*. God's servants were continually on the move. They desired to be used of God wherever and whenever He pleased. Their one consuming passion was to preach the Gospel. They themselves had found the Pearl of great price — they had found the treasure. They had found the One who had transformed their life, and so they went on continually from place to place. "I must preach the Gospel," they said, "in other places also." They were following the Lord Himself, "for thereto," they said, "we are sent". They had got something to preach about. There was nothing dull and miserable about them for we read, "They were filled with joy and peace in believing". What struck the ancient world was their sense of mission and their sense of power, for Paganism was poverty stricken. These early preachers — Paul and Silas and the others — often had to contend with opposition and here in Thessalonica you read there was almost a riot. Others would have been quite daunted by the situation, but the opposition affected Paul and Silas as little as the passing hailstone will dint a rock — theirs was tireless activity. When you look at the Church today, haven't we settled down to be comfortable? We don't want the boat rocked. We want a quiet life, but here is a Church in action, moving on from place to place, filled with a zeal to preach the Gospel of Christ. That is the first thought, tireless activity.

Then notice they were *outward reaching*. Verse 2: "Paul as his manner was, went in unto them." He did not wait for the congregation to assemble in a church because they had not buildings, as such, in those days. He went and found out those who were potential candidates for the kingdom of God. "He went in unto them," and it has been well said that we have no authority for waiting. Our command is, "Go and preach the Gospel to every creature", and it is imperative that we go out and that we reach out, and the Church that does not evangelise will either fossilise or it will perish. "He went in unto them." He sought out the people.

Then notice in verse 2 they sought for a *common interest*. "Paul reasoned with them out of the Scripture," that was the Old Testament, and, remember, he was speaking to Jewish people. They knew their Old Testament and this was the point of contact. We, too, in our evangelism must establish a bridge-head, we must make a point of contact and be genuinely interested in people, "and so it was when he had gathered the people" — notice — "he went on opening and alleging that Christ must needs have suffered and risen again from the dead". He had got to grips. He did not talk about the weather. He did not talk about politics. He got down to the basic truths of the Gospel. "Opening the Scriptures," it says, and the word there means "explaining", "revealing", or, if you like, "letting in the light" and it reminds us of the testimony of those two who went to Emmaus on the first Easter Day. Do you remember when they

they came back to Jerusalem, they said to the assembled disciples, "Did not our heart *burn* within us?" — the very same word. Then notice the next words, "opening" and "alleging" — that is, they were affirming, they were setting forth the basic truths of the Gospel, and the message, we read, centred around the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. These are the truths that bring about a spiritual revolution.

Now notice, verse 2, *perseverance*. "Paul reasoned with them three Sabbaths out of the Scriptures." He didn't just go once and say: "Well, you have had your opportunity." He did not take up such a stance, but three sabbath days he ministered to them. It points out this truth, that Christian work requires stickability. It is one of the facts you find out before very long in the Christian path that there are those who take things up for a short time and then they down tools and move on to pastures new. We need the grace of continuity, stickability. Paul could say to the Galatians: "Let us not be weary in well doing for in due season we shall reap if we faint not" (Galatians 6:9).

Notice too the *outcome of their preaching*. Verse 4 says, "some of them believed". The next verse says, "But the Jews which believed not". Now we can see here a picture of what happens when the Gospel is preached. Some believe and some believe not. So the Gospel either melts the hearts of men and women and leads them to faith, or it hardens hearts and stirs up opposition, as it did here. This was the message that they preached and, said the people of the day, "Those that have turned the world upside down are come here also". The Gospel is revolutionary. Its very aim is "to turn men from darkness to light and from the power of Satan unto God".

How we need to pray that we might know something of this vital Christianity in our own day, that the Gospel will be preached with such power and attended by the gracious ministry of the Spirit that there will be a wonderful and abundant spiritual harvest of men and women and boys and girls swept into the kingdom of God.

We need to pray as never before, that God will visit us in revival, that God will open the windows of heaven and pour down the blessing that we need, that God will strengthen the things that remain, some of which are ready to die, that He will send a gracious revival. "Wilt thou not revive us again that thy people may rejoice in thee?" ought to be our prayer. "Those that have turned the world upside down have come here also." Our world needs to be turned the right side up. The Gospel is the key to the situation.

May God move amongst us in mighty power, for His Name's sake. Amen.

M.H.

"Nothing but Christ will do for a dying sinner; and why should we dream that anything else will do for a living sinner?"

A. M. Toplady

For Younger Readers

CARINE MACKENZIE

LOST AND FOUND

WE RECENTLY FLEW from Glasgow via Manchester to Frankfurt. The flights were very pleasant and arrived in good time. We went to the carousel to collect our luggage. Everything arrived safely — except for one case!

We waited hopefully but to no avail. Then we went to the luggage office, and made out a lengthy report. “We will let you know if it comes on the next plane,” they said. We were disappointed. The case was important — it was full of business papers and irreplaceable art work.

Twenty-four hours later, after trying to track down the case but with no success, we were becoming quite worried. We had prayed earnestly that the case would arrive. Many of our family and friends back home who knew of the predicament were praying too. We sat down in the baggage area to wait for one more plane, when a luggage officer came rushing over to us. “We have found your case; it came in on another airline; it is in the office here.” How relieved and joyful we felt — just to hear those words and then to actually see the case for ourselves. We were more pleased and thankful to see that case than we would normally be to see our luggage arrive safely.

When we got the case we wanted to share the good news with our friends. They had been anxious too.

Jesus used stories of missing things to tell one of the truths about His kingdom. He compared the joy of finding the missing sheep to the joy in heaven over one sinner that repents. The pleasure that we felt on seeing the missing case far outweighed the pleasure of reclaiming our other luggage.

In another story He tells of the woman who found her lost coin. She ran to find her friends and neighbours to share her joy. Jesus tells us that there is such joy shared in heaven when a sinner repents.

How often we forget to pray about ordinary incidents, and not until something goes wrong do we really appreciate God’s goodness to us. We learned that we should be thankful for each case as it arrives safely, and for each journey safely completed.

A man was travelling long ago on horseback across the north of Scotland. He fell off and his head just narrowly missed hitting a large rock. When he recounted his adventure to his friend he said: “I am so thankful today to have made the journey safely — my head just missed a big rock.” His friend replied: “Aren’t you thankful for all the times you have made this journey and never even fallen off your horse?”

Very often it takes a difficulty or trial to make us realise how dependent we are on God for everything — in Him we live, and move and have our being (Acts 17:28).

PUZZLE

What things were missing and were then found in the following Bible stories?

1. What man of you having an hundred _____ if he lose one, doth not leave the ninety and nine and go after that which is lost? Luke 15.
2. What woman having ten _____ if she lose one piece, doth not . . . seek diligently till she find it? Luke 15.
3. This my _____ was dead and is alive again, he was lost and is found. Luke 15.
4. The _____ of Kish, Saul's father were lost. 1 Samuel 9.
5. Hilkiyah the high priest said to Shaphan the scribe, "I have found _____ in the house of the Lord. 2 Kings 22.
6. He searched . . . and the _____ was found in Benjamin's sack. Genesis 44.
7. Darius made a decree and search was made . . . and there was found . . . in the palace . . . a _____ and therein was a record thus written. Ezra 6.
8. The _____ is come to seek and to save that which was lost. Luke 19.

Shoes for the Road

ALEXANDER STEWART, D.D. (1870-1937)

"Thy shoes shall be iron and brass; and as thy days, so shall thy strength be"
(Deuteronomy 33:25)

THE BLESSING PRONOUNCED by Moses on the tribe of Asher long ago contained a promise which is full of comfort for the followers of Jesus Christ in every age. Asher's inheritance included a stretch of rocky coast extending from Carmel to Sidon. It was a region in which travelling was difficult. The wayfaring man had to pass through rough places, at one time having to climb over great boulders of rock which lay across his path, at another having to tread on sharp-edged stones, which, unless his shoes were specially adapted to the road, left him ere long with torn and bleeding feet. A journey under such conditions strained to the full his physical endurance, but especially it tested the quality of his footwear. His shoes must be strong as well as his heart; otherwise they would

serve him but ill on such a road. It is clear that the promise given to Asher had this distinctive character of his inheritance in view. "*Thy shoes,*" it ran, "*shall be iron and brass; and as thy days, so shall thy strength be.*" Let us glance at the abiding significance of this great assurance.

I

It contains, first of all, a promise that the believer's equipment for the journey of life will be suited to the conditions in which his lot is cast. He will have shoes to match the road. If the lines have fallen to him in difficult places he will receive from the Lord's hand an outfit which will be adapted to the demands of his circumstances. This is an assurance which is full of grace and truth, and we may well seek to appropriate it for ourselves today. We are standing on the threshold of a new year, looking forward wistfully into the future. The prospect in some respects is far from cheerful. The world is still overshadowed by a dark cloud. All the nations are conscious, more or less, of the clutch of fear and insecurity. Beyond question it is a rough road by which many will have to travel throughout the coming year. But for those who trust in God there is a promise of strength and sustenance amid all the difficulties of the journey.

If indeed "our face is set to reach Jerusalem", we may expect to meet with hardships in the way; nor would it be good for us if the fact were otherwise. If the road were too easy, we should miss some of the most salutary experiences of the Christian life. The primrose path is no doubt the most pleasant to the flesh, but it is not the most profitable for the soul. We must look, therefore, for something in our lot which will correspond to the portion of Asher — for rough places over which we must press with weary feet and failing breath, for steep ascents which we must surmount "with toil of heart and knees and hands". There are tasks to be performed that sap our strength with their heaviness or wear out our spirit with their monotony. There are sorrows to be endured that wring our heart with pain, and make our day dark with night. Life is a ceaseless conflict, and long holding out. The road winds uphill all the way, and it is no ordinary perseverance that will enable us to endure unto the end.

But the Lord bestows on His children an equipment which is adapted to the needs of their pilgrimage. For the rough and toilsome road He provides shoes that are iron and brass. In the New Testament we read of shoes that form part of the armour of the Christian soldier. His feet are shod with the preparation — or rather the preparedness — of the Gospel of peace. Through belief of the Gospel of peace he attains to an experience of the peace of the Gospel; and the man who has the peace of the Gospel filling his soul is prepared for anything. However rough the road may be, and however sore the conflict, he will hold on his way without fainting. The gracious facts of the Gospel message, its unfailing promises, its strong consolations, its mighty hopes — these constitute a dynamic which enables him to triumph over the difficulties of his pilgrimage. Hudson

Taylor once wrote a moving letter from beside the couch where his beloved little daughter lay dying, in China. "It was no vain nor unintelligent act," he said, "when, knowing the land, its people and climate, I laid my wife and children, with myself, on the altar for this service." The road was rough, but his shoes were iron and brass, and he did not faint.

II

In the second clause of the verse — *as thy days, so shall thy strength be* — the promise seems to be merely repeated in different words, but there is a fresh shade of meaning. To begin with, there is the assurance of strength according to the *character* of our days, that is, of grace proportioned to the varying demands of life. Some of the believer's days are bright and happy. The sky is clear and the sun is warm; the air is fragrant with the scent of flowers and the woods are vocal with the singing of birds. But there are other days that are cold and cheerless, days of angry blasts and killing frosts, when the sun never breaks through the clouds, and the earth seems to be held in the grip of death.

Now it seems easy enough to live through the day of sunshine, but it should not be forgotten that prosperity brings its own special temptations. There is a real danger that success may dull the edge of conscience, and lead to self-sufficiency and spiritual pride. It requires a great deal of the grace of God to carry a full cup with a steady hand. It is in the cloudy and dark day, however, that the need of strength more evidently appears, and it is then that the Lord most clearly proves Himself to be a very present help. There are people whose lot it is nearly always "to go in company with pain"; they pass from one trial into another, and never seem to be free from trouble. Yet they hold on their way with a brave heart, and refuse to give way to despondency. Though perplexed, they are not in despair; though cast down, they are not destroyed. And if you ask them the reason for their courage and bouyancy, they will very likely answer quite simply that the Lord gives them a back according to their burden. There are few of us that cannot look back on some season of personal affliction that used up all the energy we had; sickness it may have been, or bereavement, or one form or another of disabling trial. We wonder how we were able to pull through, and we feel that if we had to face the same ordeal again we could not possibly survive. Yet we were carried on step by step, until our calamities were overpast. Each new day brought its supply of strength for its own pain and its own burden.

And this surely suggests to us the wisdom of taking the days as they come, and refusing to borrow trouble from the future. "Let us not pull that upon ourselves all at once," counsels Matthew Henry, "which Providence has wisely ordered to be borne by parcels." It is a wise and needful reminder. Often the dread of evils which never come is more distressing than all the troubles which we actually experience. But we have no promise of strength today for the trials of tomorrow. Rather are we encouraged to wait patiently upon God and depend on His

strength for every step of the way. "Anxiety," it has been well said, "does not empty tomorrow of its troubles, but it robs today of its strength."

III

But the words we are considering further contain a promise of strength that will be continued to the end of life. It is strength according to our "days" — the use of the plural is significant. The word embraces the *number* of our days as well as their quality. In other words the Lord gives the assurance that He will sustain His people to the end. This is the crowning assurance of the Gospel, for it puts the seal of permanence on all the other blessings of salvation. As the years pass away, the believer becomes conscious of failing powers. His eye becomes dim, and his natural force is abated. But although the outward man yields to the withering touch of time, the inward man is renewed day by day. The heart is sustained in hopefulness and courage, and the spirit triumphs over the infirmities of the flesh. The Lord will never forsake His people. He will abide with them throughout all the days, and at last, when the pilgrimage of life is ended, He will bring them safe home to dwell with Himself for ever.

"My knowledge of that life is small,
The eye of faith is dim;
But 'tis enough that Christ knows all,
And I shall be with Him."

Let us take hold of this gracious promise for our own comfort and encouragement as we face the future. We cannot read the secrets, but if we avail ourselves of the equipment with which the Lord provides us for the journey, we shall not faint in the way.

TO OUR READERS

We hope soon to be able to announce the name of the successor to Mr. David Hughes as Secretary to the trustees of *The Gospel Magazine*.

In the meantime, we ask that all correspondence and renewal of subscriptions be sent to the Editor, Rev. M. Handford, 9 Birtlespool Road, Cheadle Hulme, Cheadle, Cheshire SK8 5JZ.

Studies in the Book of Jonah (4)

P. D. JOHNSON (London)

SOME EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS ON THE FOURTH CHAPTER

Introduction

If the Captain of the warship mentioned in the "Introduction" to our previous study was appointed to command the vessel again after its refurbishment and recommissioning, he would carefully bear in mind the reasons why his ship had been damaged in the first place, and diligently consult intelligence reports, and set his watch, to ensure that the implacable foe did not gain a second advantage over him. And if, in a subsequent action, his ship played a part in the destruction of a capital ship belonging to the enemy — like the repaired cruiser *HMS Belfast* did in the sinking of the German battleship *Scharnhorst* — he would no doubt double his watchfulness against counter-attacks by a furious foe bent on revenge.

It is sad to discover, when we come to the fourth and final chapter of the Book of Jonah, that the prophet, who had earlier been recommissioned by God, and mightily used at Nineveh, did not redouble his own watchfulness in his hour of unseen danger, and consequently allowed Satan to gain a second advantage over him. The divinely-inspired record reads far differently from the "all lived happily ever after" endings of popular novels. And yet, despite the failings of God's prophet, we see the grace of his Father in heaven shining through, preserving Jonah again in his hours of weakness, and teaching him lessons which he needed so much to learn. Let us now consider the final section of this fascinating portion of Holy Scripture, and see what lessons it contains for us today.

1. Jonah's renewed anger

One would have thought that Jonah would have been filled with a sense of wonder and thankfulness at seeing the repentance of the people of Nineveh. How grateful a faithful minister of the Gospel is when just *one* sinner is brought to repentance under his ministry, and what would he not give to see *many* precious souls being awakened, convicted and converted under it, especially in one of our great cities! Alas, we look in vain for any such response from Jonah to the repentance of the Ninevites. "But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry" (verse 1). Satan was able to gain inroads into Jonah's heart again, and work him into a fury — and all this in spite of the prophet's experiences in the whale's belly, and remarkable ministry at Nineveh. Ministers who have been truly used of God, particularly when they have been made instrumental in bringing sinners to repentance, need to double their guard at

such times, for Satan often marshals his forces for a counter-attack when his kingdom has suffered real loss.

2. Jonah's revealing prayer

When we examine Jonah's prayer, recorded for us in verses 2 and 3, we look in vain for a note of thankfulness or praise. All he says is: "I pray thee, O Lord, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil. Therefore now, O Lord, take, I beseech thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live." But what Jonah *does* say in this prayer, offered when he was in a furious temper, is very revealing. Does it not tell us that what had upset Jonah, and given Satan his opportunity, was that God, in sparing the penitent Ninevites as He had done, had acted in a way very different to the way Jonah had expected Him to act! We see again that at the root of Jonah's sad behaviour lay, not so much a lack of understanding of God's attributes, but a failure to understand and appreciate God's purposes of grace towards the Gentile nations. No wonder, therefore that, when Jonah realised God had spared the penitent Ninevites, he became such an easy prey to Satan's wiles! Notice, too, that so deep-seated were Jonah's religious prejudices that, when coupled with the exhaustion he must have felt after his arduous ministry in Nineveh, Satan was actually able to tempt God's prophet to conclude his ministry had been a failure, and it would be best if God now called him home! All this reminds us that Satan is well acquainted with the deep-seated prejudices of Christ's people, and will skilfully work on them when he sees an opportunity to set believers alight! Nothing pleases the adversary of souls more than to gain such advantages over an able minister who continues to pose a threat to the safety and stability of his kingdom. But let us take heart! Like the Captain of the naval vessel mentioned in our illustration, we may find that we learn more from a few operational patrols at sea than from any number of lectures in a classroom. And if, like the Apostle Paul, we learn by personal experience the vital lessons of spiritual warfare, who are we to complain when such tuition not only makes us more effective combatants ourselves, but enables us to counsel more accurately our brethren? "Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices" (2 Corinthians 2:11).

3. A searching question for Jonah

Knowing that it was idle to spend time remonstrating with Jonah while he was in such a temper, the Lord contents Himself with putting to His prophet a short, pointed question. "Then said the Lord, Doest thou well to be angry?" (verse 4). What a *wise* way to deal with a Christian man in a fury! Like a man under the influence of alcohol, Jonah was best addressed, at this particular time, by a short, searching question, rather than by a stream of reasoning that was not likely to make much impression in view of the frame of mind he was in. And

what a *patient* way to deal with Jonah at this point. The Lord does not say any more to His erring servant at present, but keeps His peace for a short while longer. But let us not make the mistake of thinking that the Lord had turned away completely from Jonah at this point. As we shall shortly see, the Father in heaven sometimes bides His time, until a more suitable occasion arises, and then speaks firmly, faithfully, but always in grace, into the very ears and heart which carnal tempers had earlier closed to divine counsel.

4. Jonah's self-made observation post

Apparently ignoring the pointed question the Lord had put to him, and now out of communion again with his heavenly Father, Jonah leaves the city, and erects for himself a kind of observation post on the east side. "So Jonah went out of the city, and sat on the east side of the city, and there made him a booth, and sat under it in the shadow . . ." (verse 5). It seems clear from the context that Jonah did this *after* it had become clear to him that God intended to spare the penitent inhabitants of Nineveh. But what an incredible thing to do at this stage — to sit there, in his self-made observation post "till he might see what would become of the city" (verse 5)! Did Jonah really think that his reasoning and temper would induce the Almighty to change His mind, and begin raining down fire and brimstone on the city spread out before him? If so, then Jonah could not have been more mistaken — either about his Father's will concerning the heathen, or about his own spirit. The pathetic spectacle of Jonah gazing out over the city from his sentry's position gives us yet another insight into the folly a true Christian can run into when he allows himself to be governed by deep-seated religious prejudices and carnal tempers.

5. The incident of the gourd

When we come to the closing section of the Book of Jonah — the section which relates the incident of the gourd — we see again what we saw earlier, when Jonah was in the belly of the great fish, i.e. that the Lord not only preserves Jonah, but graciously teaches him lessons he needed to learn. There are three main points to notice from the incident of the gourd:

(a) *The entire incident was arranged by God*

A careful reading of verses 6 and 7 shows very clearly that the Lord was behind the whole affair. "And the Lord prepared a gourd, and made it to come up over Jonah. . . ." "But God prepared a worm when the morning arose the next day. . . ." It was the Lord who caused the gourd to grow, shield Jonah for a while, and then wither away the following day. When the Father in heaven is intent on correcting and instructing one of His erring children, He never finds Himself short of methods or resources. A simple plant will suffice Him now, just as surely as a great fish served His purpose earlier in Jonah's story, and a "vehement east wind" across Nineveh's plain will do His work just as effectively as the "great wind" He had earlier "sent into the sea".

(b) It was designed specifically for Jonah

There is an intimacy about the little drama being played out under the booth. Only the Lord and His erring servant were involved, just as they were the only persons involved in the whale's belly. The Father in heaven needs to deal with Jonah on his own again, and has made all the necessary arrangements. And how urgently Jonah needed the Lord to deal with him! His claim in verse 8 that "it is better for me to die than to live" is foolish enough, but the answer he gives to the Lord's question in verse 9, "Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd?" is almost beyond belief. Who would have thought that Jonah, already under the influence of an evil temper, would have had the effrontery to answer the Lord's pointed, personal question by asserting, "I do well to be angry, even unto death"? Oh, how true are the poet's words, "All things yellow appear to the jaundic'd eye"! In Jonah's eyes, everybody is wrong except himself! What a mercy that our Father in heaven never finally leaves His children to themselves at such times, but keeps His hold upon them, and patiently pursues His course of instruction in spite of their evil tempers and foolish bleatings!

(c) Its aim was to teach Jonah an important lesson

It is a wonder that God did not cut off Jonah as a cumberer of the ground after the arrogant way in which he had replied to the divine question, "Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd?" (verse 9). Instead, He points out to His erring prophet just how foolish and pitiless his attitude to the Ninevites really was, and how contrary was that attitude to the Gentiles to the will and way of His gracious Father in heaven. "Then said the Lord, Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night and perished in a night: and should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand, and also much cattle?" (verses 10 and 11). And it is just at *this* point that we see the *main* message of the Book of Jonah for evangelical Christians today. Surely God is calling us here to examine, not so much our methods of evangelism, but something *even more basic and fundamental* — our *attitude* to the unconverted multitudes at home and abroad today.

What, then, is our attitude to the godless people around us? Do we really understand the revealed will of God concerning the preaching of the Gospel to every creature, and have something of the mind and compassion of Christ towards the lost, or have we allowed the old, erroneous prejudices to hold us in their sway again, and a spirit far different to that of Christ to influence us? The question is a pressing one, not only because of the plight of the unsaved multitudes today, but also because of the state of the professing Church, where even some are beginning to exhibit the old Jonah-like symptoms again. Let us remember that it was the *wrong* outlook and attitude that our blessed Lord had to rebuke and correct in James and John when He "turned and rebuked" them

with the words, "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them" (Luke 9:55-56).

We cannot do better than close this short series of studies in the Book of Jonah by searching ourselves in the light of the final verse in the book, where God asks Jonah: "And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?"

James Hervey's Letters

H. A. LEWTY

A BUNDLE OF OLD LETTERS! Two hundred years old! Why did not somebody burn them? But they are James Hervey's!

Who was James Hervey? He was one of God's special witnesses to his day and generation. Born on 26th February 1713 at Hardingstone, a village in Northamptonshire, his father was rector of Weston Favell, and he eventually succeeded him in the living. At the age of 17 he entered Lincoln College, Oxford, took his BA and MA degrees, and was ordained in 1737. When he was nineteen (he tells us), he met with some friends who had "serious impressions of religion, and was engaged by their influence in a stricter attachment to piety and learning". This is his dry way of telling us of his call by grace, but we must not be deceived by this "dryness"; even as he penned the words his heart was aglow with love to God.

The principal literary productions which he published in his lifetime, were two volumes of *Meditations and Contemplations*, and three of *Dialogues and Letters* on doctrinal and devotional subjects between two imaginary persons whom he named *Theron and Aspasio*. He passed away on Christmas Day 1758, in the forty-fifth year of his life.

Those were stirring times. In 1704 Marlborough was winning his spurs at Blenheim. In 1715 the Scots rose in favour of the Old Pretender, unsuccessfully. In 1745 they rose again to support the Young Pretender, still unsuccessfully. In other walks of life the great names of the day were such as Pitt, Addison, Defoe, Dean Swift and Dr. Johnson. No mean names these!

Humanly speaking, the letters of an eminent literary man, coming down to us from such times, can scarcely fail to be of absorbing interest, but when we add to this that James Hervey was a convinced believer in the doctrines of grace, free grace people everywhere will find in this fact additional cause for thanksgiving that the letters have been preserved for us.

Reading between the lines we get a vivid picture of Hervey himself — no stiff unnatural one either. We find ourselves in the peaceful atmosphere of a Northamptonshire country parsonage. We learn something of what it felt like to be living in those days. We look over the parson's shoulder as he sits in his study, and see what sort of books he is reading. Then we gather in spirit in Weston Favell church, and listen to the messages that he gave to his people. Yes, indeed, we may well thank God that these old letters have been preserved.

It is a quiet sheltered life, this parsonage life. What the good Rector thought about Blenheim, about Prestonpans, about Culloden, he does not tell us. Once he mentions the Great Earthquake at Lisbon, which he thinks was a punishment to the Portuguese people for their "prophaneness and fopperies". But nearly always the letters breathe quietly and peacefully, full of everyday hints of everyday life.

Listen! "I am now at my brother's country house . . . I hope your health is established. How does your soul prosper?" After an illness he writes: "Blessed be God, I am got downstairs, and the day before yesterday went abroad in a coach."

His spelling is quaint at times. He speaks of his "extream weakness". Sometimes there are amusing touches: "A gentleman waits for me below, to transact an affair of which I understand but very little. He is come to take my parsonage grounds in order to plough them for woad, an herb much used by the dyers." And this: "A fire broke out in a sugar-baker's workhouse. Three engines played from his house and another stood ready in the dining room."

To an evidently wealthy friend he says rather sharply: "I hope your house is sufficiently ornamented. I think it is rather overstocked with decorations." Now and then he refers to his friends. Here is a picture of one of them: "A godly, sensible woman who understands, relishes, talks savourily and intelligently on the truths of the Gospel." Concerning another friend, who was passing over difficult paths, he says: "I pity poor Mr. ——— knowing what it is to be in a state of languishing. Ah! ah! my dear Sir, lay up a stock of comfort. Get your graces lively while animal nature blooms."

To one of his friends he writes: "A certain gentleman in Mile's lane, whom you once reprov'd, has been taught to find his consolation, not in the entertainments of the stage, but in the assured hopes of heaven."

Coming to their more serious side, the letters show us a Hervey who could say with St. Paul: "To me to live is Christ!" Speaking of the Lord Jesus he says to a friend: "I am glad that the beloved Traveller called at your house, and gave you so much of His company. Cold as the weather was, did not your heart burn within you?" In another letter he says: "I wish Dr. Cotton would be a little explicit and courageous (*sic*) for Christ. He does deserve it at our hands who for our sake endured the cross."

And so always, with regards to books and bookmen; e.g: "On Sunday last, a neighbouring clergyman sent me for my perusal a sermon preached by Dr. T.,

before the House of Commons, on the last public Fast. When I perused it and saw not a single mention of Christ, not a single hint of an evangelical nature, I was surprised and grieved." And again: "The Latin prayer you sent me for my opinion seems to be composed by a mystick. Not a word of Christ! Access through His blood is neglected, acceptance through His righteousness is forgotten."

Of the Atonement he says: "When I was lately upon the verge of eternity and just going to launch out into the invisible world, I could find consolation in nothing but this precious, precious faith. If all my iniquities were laid upon the beloved Son, they will never be laid to my charge in the Day of Judgment." And again: "Dr. ——— has Roman virtue, but indeed he very much needs the eyesalve. He sees no glory and comeliness in Christ."

Now shall we look over the good parson's shoulder as he sits in his study, and see what sort of books he is reading? Here are a few that he mentions — most of them but little known nowadays: (i) Marshall on *Sanctification* ("my favourite author"); (ii) Mr. Taylor, on *The Sacrifice of Christ*; (iii) The Bishop of Man (Dr. Wilson) on *The Lord's Supper*; (iv) Jenk's *Everyman's Ready Companion* ("I will take 100 of these, for my mind is not altered. This is a useful book to give away"); (v) Witsius on *The Covenants*; (vi) Fletcher's *Purple Island* ("I wish any bookseller could be prevailed on to reprint it"); (vii) Young's *Night Thoughts*.

In his reading as well as in his life he applies the same plumb-line of criticism. Listen! "Your friend's dissertations were put into my hands. Very pure diction, but that is all; all to me, at least. There was the bone but the marrow was gone. Jesus Christ, my portion and your's, was forgot."

At the same time, Hervey wears no Arminian rose-coloured spectacles; e.g.: "Will you say that our modern moral Christians, if I may so call them, are to be set in competition with the Reformers? I appeal to facts. Mark the effect of preaching mere morality and of preaching the grace of Christ. But long as the heart is unconvinced of sin, we may assure ourselves that the doctrine of justification by Christ's righteousness and salvation by free grace will meet with opposition. I wish Mr. ——— would study his Bible more and the classics less."

And again: "The Gospel contains the only motives that can possibly prevail upon any to embrace it. People may talk of the amiableness of the Divine Being and the charms of virtue, but without a true faith in the promises of pardon and acceptance, true repentance can never be attained, and a free and gracious pardon is nowhere promised but in the Lord Jesus Christ. We love God because He first loved us."

Speaking of the comfort of Christianity, he says it is "the sweet allurements to draw us to heaven, and a powerful instrument to fit us for heaven. If we have sinned, the love of the Lord Jesus is the most sovereign means of wounding our hearts and bringing us to repentance. When Nathan said unto David, 'The Lord hath put away thy sin, thou shalt not die', then it is supposed he poured out his soul in unreserved confession in Psalm 32."

Speaking of preaching, he says: "Oh, what a comfortable consideration is it that the success of our discourses depends not upon our ability, which is as nothing; depends not upon the favour of men, which is very capricious, but depends wholly upon the influence of the Almighty Spirit, whose presence is unlimited and power uncontrollable."

To two malefactors condemned to death, he said: "You have just the same foundation for hope as I must have when I shall depart this life. When I shall be summoned to the great tribunal, what will be my plea, and what my dependence? Nothing but Christ. I am a poor unworthy sinner, but worthy is the Lamb that was slain! This is my sole hope and this is as free for you as it is for your friend and fellow-sinner, James Hervey." "That is the best doctrine," he once declared, "which abases the sinner most, exalts the Saviour most, and produces most holiness."

In such a way did this good man speak, in such a way did he live, in such a spirit he passed from this world to the Great Beyond. It is recorded that among his last words were these: "I wonder and lament to think of the love of Christ in doing so much for me, and how little I have done for Him." May our last end be like Hervey's!

Studies in Second Chronicles: Jehoram — the Son who Followed His Father's Foolishness

PETER KING (Stanford, Beds)

Search me, O Lord, and see if there be any wicked way in me

EVIDENTLY FATHER-IN-LAW AHAB influenced Jehoshaphat's son Jehoram for 2 Chronicles 21:6 says, "he walked in the way of the kings of Israel", that is, in rebellion to the covenant made with King David. Despite this Jehovah honoured the covenant and Judah survived as the Lord forgave them. We rarely learn from our mistakes, and Jehoram did not learn from the mistakes of his father. The marriage had joined Judah and Israel, and this long-term plan by Ahab was now bearing fruit, as Athaliah, Ahab's daughter, began to be an influence in the royal court. Jezebel, the wicked daughter of Ethbaal, king of Tyre and Sidon, schooled Athaliah, bringing her gods into Israel by agreement with Ahab, and we remember the battle Elijah had with "the prophets of Baal". This influenced Jehoram, who was following Jehoshaphat alongside his

father-in-law — not always a wise path. If it is biblical, then all will be well, but if not, however gracious the men and convenient the tradition, it may be part of Satan's trap.

It has always been the Devil's policy to corrupt the things he cannot destroy, and we see this in our day with the Church. He knows he will not be able to destroy Christ's bride, so he infiltrates the fellowships and brings in practices which seem at first to be acceptable, but later prove to be destructive. So many Churches, trying to increase the congregation, have opened their doors to worship and service which does not please God, and then wonder why problems come. The Bible is sufficient for doctrine and practice, and a move away from this will allow Judas' to join. Satan is subtle, making it important we examine ourself every day, for pride is a cloaked evil which breaks out with unchained ferocity. Who can stand against someone who is proud and does not recognise it? Laodicea fell into that trap and made God sick; "I will spew thee out of my mouth", He said, and yet His mercy was always alongside. "Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me."

Our God is merciful, for in Jehoram's case He would not destroy the house of David because of the covenant, and through our Lord Jesus Christ He returns to us and saves us from our foolishness.

The Pattern of Reformation

DAVID N. SAMUEL

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TODAY ONE DETECTS a certain pessimism amongst people. How can the authority which has been broken down and destroyed — the authority of the parent, the teacher, the magistrate — ever be restored? There is a feeling of inevitability about the growing anarchy and fragmentation of our society that is taking place, as if the forces of history were compelling us to move further and further in that direction, and there were nothing we can do about it. But we fail to see that the "inevitability" lies not in any historical process, but in the choice that we have freely made as a society to adopt a humanist, secular philosophy of life in which the only authority which is recognised is that which resides in man, in the individual. Once you have taken that step, of course, the working out of the consequences in society are inevitable, but we should recognise this, and see that we are victims of our own deliberate folly, not of the so-called historical process, or fate, or some such notion of the world and history.

Of course, there are those who, like the Marxists, and others, have a vested interest in telling us that all this is inevitable, that it is the onward march of history and we must accept it; and there are those who are foolish enough to believe them. But this is not so, and we can see it is not so if we take the trouble to think about it. The nemesis that is overtaking us is the direct consequence of the godless, humanistic philosophy that has been adopted by the Western world.

There is no inevitable reason, however, why our civilization should sink in chaos and anarchy, or succumb to the appeal of the dictator or, in the spiritual realm, the blandishments of the Pope. There is a third possibility that is open to us if we will accept it, and that is the authority of Protestantism, which resides in the living experience of the Word of God, in the self-authenticating truth of the Bible. Where the saving power of God's Word is experienced, as it was at the Reformation, it recreates man as a responsible being under authority, as answerable to divine authority. It also reconstitutes and reconstructs society. As there are demonic and destructive consequences that inevitably follow upon the rejection of God's Word, and these work themselves out in society, so there are saving influences that follow upon the acceptance of God's Word and, with a similar inevitability, work themselves out in society.

This is why we cannot accept the argument that the Bible must be adapted and conformed to the prevailing culture of the age in which we live for it to be effective. That produces the very opposite result. It emasculates the Word of God and makes it of "none effect". That was the charge our Lord brought against the Pharisees; they were, "making the word of God of none effect through your tradition" (Mark 7:13). You have adapted it and accommodated it to the needs of your age and the circumstances of your time, and so rendered it weak and powerless. St. Paul says the same: "For Christ sent me . . . to preach the Gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect" (1 Corinthians 1:17). The wisdom, culture, ingenuity, philosophy of the world can rob the Word of its power and effect, especially when we seek to make its message conformable to worldly structures. That is why we must affirm the Word in all its primitive authority and spiritual power. And we must do this precisely because the Word is capable of changing structures, of changing society, and creating a culture which arises directly out of its own doctrines and principles. We seem to have forgotten that it is the Word that turns the world upside down, and now we seem anxious to turn the Word upside down to make it conformable to the world. The commission of God to the prophet is: "Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth. See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant" (Jeremiah 1:9-10).

Where the living authority and power of the Word of God is felt and experienced in a community, it throws down the destructive, demonic culture and structures and creates new ones of order and authority. It is a mistake to treat the structures and culture of any society as something given, into which the

Word of God must be made to fit. The Word must be understood to be capable of regenerating and creating anew the community, the nation into which it comes in power. This surely is the presupposition from which any reconstruction of authority must begin either in society or in the Church today.

Perhaps no better example of this principle at work can be given than that of the Reformation itself. The success of that movement did not depend upon adapting the Word to the culture of the age. That had been going on in the centuries that preceded the Reformation when the Scriptures had been accommodated to a culture based upon the Thomist/Aristotelean philosophy. The consequences of this was the corruption and distortion of the biblical message of salvation. What the Reformation did was to break the mould, to set the Word of God free. Thus the Word created its own forms and structures as it swept away the old culture and introduced a new. Art, science, literature, and music were all regenerated by this great movement. A new society, a new civilization emerged under the impact of the Word of God. All of which proves that the Word must have priority. "Pray," says St. Paul, "that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified." Where then the power and authority of the Word of God are felt it is capable of recreating not only the individual but society itself. "If any man be in Christ he is a new creation" (2 Corinthians 5:17). That regenerating power can also be felt by the community, for "the leaves of the tree (of life) were for the healing of the nations".

Let us therefore have faith in God. "O God, we have heard with our ears, and our fathers have declared unto us, the noble works that thou didst in their days, and in the old time before them. O Lord, arise, help us, and deliver us for thy Name's sake."

The Love of God

A SERMON PREACHED BY PASTOR KEITH BERRY
at Hightown Baptist Church, Luton

Psalm 103:8-10

I WOULD LIKE to direct your attention first of all to Leviticus 16:16-22. The whole chapter deals with the Day of Atonement. The word "atonement" occurs about twenty times. There is a tremendous emphasis on this. There was this great day for the nation of Israel when the high priest would go into the Holy of Holies and bring a blood sacrifice and, because of that, the sins of all the people could be atoned for. The word simply means "covered". So God's people could go on having a relationship with a holy, living and true God. This was surely the

greatest day in the calendar of Israel, for without it they would be consumed by the holy wrath of God. But God had provided this way of coming to Him.

Notice the details that are given of the "scapegoat". We use that word today; someone is called a "scapegoat", meaning someone who takes the guilt of another. Now, that language came from this chapter in the Old Testament. Notice verse 22: "And the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities unto a land not inhabited; and he shall let go the goat in the wilderness." That goat was left to wander. It was never seen again; and never mentioned again, because that was the end of the matter, the dealing by God with the sins of His people. I trust to be able to throw a little bit of light on that when we come to look at Psalm 103.

One of the most painful experiences in life is to be rejected by someone whom you love. If you are a parent whose teenage child has turned his back on you and run away from home, or a partner whose trust has been betrayed by a husband or a wife, or you have had the experience of being dropped by a boyfriend or a girlfriend, how painful that can be! Sometimes Christians can project their human experiences on to God, and wonder, "Will He treat me like that?". Now, in one sense, that is a good question, a logical question to ask if we know ourselves, if we know our sin. "After what I have done, after the way I have treated God, even since I have become a Christian, will He treat me like that? I could well understand if He treated me like that, if He were to reject me and cast me off for ever." Will God ever do that to His children? Psalm 103 is, surely, a beautiful and comprehensive answer to that question, showing us that the true child of God can be confident in, and rightly assured of, the steadfast love of God for His own. It was true for the Israelites long ago.

It says in verse 8 of this Psalm, "He is slow to anger", and, if that were not so, none of us would be here. He is slow to anger but, more than that; look how the verse goes on — "and plenteous in mercy". The verses that follow go on to expound what that means in more detail, to bring before us that great hope, in fact, the *only* hope of God's people, whether it is under the old covenant or the new covenant. The basis of all our confidence as the people of God is not in ourselves, in what we are, in what we have done; the only hope that we have is rooted in the character of God, the kind of God that He is and the things that He is prepared to do for His people.

Now, this is stated, first of all, negatively in verses 9 and 10. "He will not always chide: neither will he keep his anger for ever. He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities." I know that if God dealt with me as I deserve according to my sins I would be in hell. But, thank God, He does not treat us as our sins deserve. So that is the negative statement — what He does not do. But then positively, what He does do, verses 11-14: "For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy to them that fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us. Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him. For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust."

Let us now focus on these verses and explore what this little section, which is right at the heart of this Psalm, teaches us about the wonderful, abounding love of God for His people. What is this love like? Can we even begin to grasp the dimensions of the love of God? Do you want that? This is a good place to go in God's Word because this is what David is trying to do. He is seeking to get across to us the amazing dimensions of the love of God for His people.

The first dimension

The first image that He uses here is one of height — “How high is the love of God?” “For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him” (verse 11). I wonder what is the highest thing you have ever seen in this world? Have you ever seen the Eiffel Tower? Have you ever seen one of those wonderful mountains in Switzerland like the Jungfrau? I have been very privileged in my life, for I have seen these things and I can assure you they are very impressive — they really do take your breath away. But, of course, anything in this life — the heights if you like of this world — do not begin to compare with the heights of heaven. That is what is being referred to in this verse. Think of the stars that make up our solar system and our little solar system is only part of a vast galaxy that we are in and beyond that there are millions and billions of other galaxies. Can you take that in? I cannot. With all the wonders of modern technology we are only beginning to discover a fraction of this immense universe in which we live. Think of the Hubble telescope and what that is discovering. In a recent *Time Magazine* there was a whole issue on this — the wonders of the cosmos, amazing new pictures from the Hubble telescope, and you can see these galactic cloud formations in outer space which have never been seen before by human eyes. Do you know how high those clouds are? It says here, “ten trillion kilometres high”. One of the leading NASA scientists who was involved in collating all these photographs, when he saw these things for the first time said, “When I saw it I was just blown away”. That's right. These things are stunning; these things are extraordinary. The height of the universe — we cannot begin to calculate it, but, however far you go, however high you go in searching out the wonders of the cosmos, there is an end point. This universe is a created thing, and therefore it is finite. Oh yes! It is vast, it is glorious, but there is a point at which this universe stops, though even the Hubble telescope has not found that yet, and I do not think it ever will. This universe is finite, but that is not true of God. He is infinite; there are no boundaries with Him. There is no ceiling, there is no upper limit to God. God's love, of course, is just like God Himself, infinite, immense and boundless: That is what the Psalmist is saying here. He wants us to feel like that NASA scientist, “blown away” with a sense of the vastness and the greatness of the love of God. God's love is so different from what we call “love”. Often our love is so low; so impure and so self-centred. God's love is not like that. It is pure and perfect. It is a heavenly love. God's love is far removed from anything you can find in this world. It is so great — it will never

run out. It is so high — you cannot begin to measure the love of God in human or earthly terms. The Hubble telescope and all the computer systems in the world cannot measure the greatness of the love of God. So that is the first dimension to do with height. How high God's love is!

The second dimension

Then the second — how broad, how wide, is His love! “As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us” (verse 12). Again, we find here that God's love is so different from our human love — our love which is not broad at all — our love which is so narrow and so limited. We love people who love us. We love people we get on with, those with whom we have a natural affinity. Well! there is nothing wrong with that, but that is not really love. God's love is so different. He loves people who are *unlovely*. He loves people who are even His enemies (Romans 5:10). The love of God is so broad and so wide. How do we know that God's love is like that? What is the proof, what is the evidence that shows us how broad and wide is the love of God? It is simply this — the great thing that Jesus did for His people on the cross when He made a total removal from us of all our sins. That is what this verse is saying. That is the proof and evidence of how great, how broad is the love of God for His children.

The third dimension

He is using again an image from geography. He says: “As far as the east is from the west, so far hath He removed our transgressions from us.” Now, this used to confuse me, because I always used to think about a round globe which is the way we think about the world. But, of course, in those days many, many years ago, they would just have seen a flat horizon. Perhaps they had no concept that this world was a globe. Maybe they thought it was a flat earth — I am not quite sure. But I think that is how we should see this “east” and “west”. You start going east, I start going west — we keep travelling and travelling as far as we can go, and this is another dimension of infinity. The Psalmist is talking here about a length or a measurement which, humanly speaking, it is impossible to measure — so broad — so wide — that is the idea. Then he tells us just how broad this love of God is. It is as broad as the infinite distance which God has put between us and our sins. “As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.”

Now, that is why I read Leviticus chapter 16. What is all this that is said about the scapegoat? Well, it is a beautiful illustration of this very verse and it is a wonderful picture, pointing forward to the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. It tells us about Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, when the sins of Israel were covered and dealt with. Aaron could not come to God in any other way. He had to come in the way that God had ordained. He had to put on special garments, he had to be cleansed, to be pure and holy, and to bring two goats. The first one

had to be slain, its throat cut, its blood poured out in death. That is the way to come to God, through blood sacrifice, and that is the only means by which human beings today can be redeemed. Jesus gave His life; He shed His blood as a ransom for many. But, then, there was a second goat, and that was still alive, and the high priest put his hand on the head of that goat, symbolising, as he confessed the sins of all the nation, the transference of sin and guilt symbolically on to the head of that animal. Then a man was given the responsibility of taking that goat out to a desert, "into a far country". The goat was released; it was never seen again, never mentioned again. If the first goat was setting forth the means of our redemption through death, through blood being shed, then the second goat speaks about the effects of Christ's redemption. What is the effect of His death on the cross for His people? It is this — the total removal of our sin, the removal of our transgressions. When we think about that, it is almost too good to be true! We need a revelation of the Holy Spirit to take it in, that most amazing, that most wonderful fact of all at the very heart of the Gospel that God punished Jesus for my sin and God gives to me the perfection and the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Oh! I know I am still a sinner, but so far as God is concerned, I am accepted in the Beloved. What about those terrible sins that still plague me from my past, what about even those skeletons that are still rattling away in my cupboard? God says to His forgiven children: "Where are they? I cannot see them, and I will never, ever, bring them up before you. I will never mention them again in your life and for all eternity." Now we remember them, perhaps, and Satan does a good job to stir them up, does he not? You know what that feels like and so do I, but, as far as God is concerned, because Jesus cried on the cross "*It is finished*", not only are we redeemed in the sense of the taking away of the punishment that we deserve for sin, but even the very *memory* of it is taken away and God has removed these sins from us "as far as the east is from the west". That's how broad, that's how wide is the love of God for His people. Now if that is how God views His children, that is how we should view ourselves and surely, also, that is how we should view one another, as the forgiven people of God. We can be very good at remembering what somebody did to us, what somebody said about us and so on. No, that is not the way. It should be "forgiving one another as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven us".

The fourth dimension

Now there is the fourth image here which the Psalmist wants us to take in. Having used technology, astronomy, having used geography, he now uses the family. We find that in verses 13 and 14: "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him, for he knoweth our frame, he remembereth that we are dust." Now this draws our attention to the *depth* of the love of God. Again the Psalmist here is drawing upon human experience, what we know, what we expect at a human level, our relationships within a human family. Now I wonder what is your image of God? How do you see God? The Lord Jesus put

it so beautifully in Luke 11:12-13: "If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he give him a scorpion? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" We know that, under normal conditions a human father has a God-given care and concern for his child. Isn't that right? Jesus said, "You are sinful creatures"! That is what we are, and yet, even in that state, there is this tenderness, this kind of natural outgoing of the heart to the one who has been given to you, your child. That is just natural, even in a fallen world, and we thank God for it. Well, how much more will our heavenly Father who is perfect, pure and spotless and good, give good gifts and be kind and tender to His own, His beloved children. I cannot make you see it. Only the Holy Spirit can reveal to you the *heart* of God, but it is true. Do we think of God as being a tender-hearted Father? And then, do we mirror and model that tender love, that deep love in our dealings with one another as the people of God? He considers us like that and He deals with us like that, and we are given the reason here. It says, "Because he formed us". God is our Creator and He made us and He knows us. He knows that we are frail and weak. He knows that we are human. We *are* human, are we not? We are not angelic, we are not super-human, we are merely human. God knows that and that touches His heart. He does not hold that against us. He sympathises with us. He knows that we are just dust. So, likewise, should we deal with one another, not in judgment, being critical, harsh, but being merciful, kind, patient, full of pity like our heavenly Father.

Conclusion

If you are a Christian, how greatly comforting these truths are! We need to know God; we need to know what He is really like. Do not project on to God your experiences of earthly love, so-called. He is not like that. Do not offend Him by thinking of God as if He were just slightly more advanced than we are at a human level. *He is so different*. He is perfect and His love is like that, and He will never judge, never reject those that He has accepted in Christ, *never*. So there is great comfort when we think about His love like this. There is also a great challenge here as well, for God says to His people, "You must love one another as I have loved you". So when we think about these dimensions of the love of God, this is to be revealed and displayed in us, in the Church, in our relationships with one another. That is exactly what Paul prayed in Ephesians 3:17-19. "That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints, what is the breadth, and length and depth and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God." Do you pray that for your life, for this Church? Do you strive with all your might to live and to love like that? What a challenge!

Then finally, it is greatly challenging, but also greatly searching, for those of you that are not yet Christians — and I know that there are such in this gathering. These are wonderful promises, wonderful blessings, but it might surprise you to know that these things will not be enjoyed or experienced by everyone. It is for a particular group of people; we are told who they are in verse 11, “those who fear God” — which is an Old Testament way of talking about a believer. Only true believers in the Lord Jesus Christ can know and enjoy all these wonderful things. If that is not true of you, friend, let me just bring to you the words of the Lord Jesus where He says: “Whoever believes on the Son has eternal life” and he enjoys this love of God — but “he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth upon him” (John 3:36). What a tragedy to live and die in this life and never to have come to experience for yourself this wonderful love of God. Fear this true and living God, believe on His Son, the Lord Jesus. Trust Him, be saved, and you will experience for yourself this wonderful, steadfast love of God.

“My Times are in Thy Hand”

Psalm 31:15

JAMES CAMPBELL (Sale, Cheshire)

THERE ARE MOMENTS in life when we become acutely aware of the passing of time. We don't like to be reminded of it too often; the fact is obvious, and sometimes carries with it undertones of sadness which are unwelcome. But, whether we like it or not, the truth is — time passes, and we cannot halt its steady flow.

It is right that we should look back occasionally — not mere introspection, but a wholesome consideration whether we have got our priorities right, and if not, well then, why not? There will be things for which we are truly sorry; many things which we shall regret. But there will be more for which we can be thankful. We shall realise again, with a burst of joy, what God has been to us. What He has been in the past to all His people, we have found He has been to us. We have proved the experience of the Psalmist, “Lord, thou hast been our refuge from one generation to another”.

It is through remembrance that thankfulness grows. But, if we look back — and we shall want to do that — much more must we look forward with courage and with hope. It is a common human habit to be constantly lamenting that things are not as they were in the past. This kind of nostalgia is understandable, but its effect can be weakening to resolve and endeavour. The Bible does not encourage it. The Bible is, rather, full of hope for the future, for the coming of the final triumphant victory of God.

Such a hope makes all the difference to our attitude to time. To think of it as merely something that is passing which we cannot control; that takes away with it our lives and those we love, like leaves carried down by the stream, is inevitably a depressing one. This sombre way of thinking is inevitable without the Christian hope.

The Christian way of thinking about time is utterly different. It is not just the quiet acceptance of a fact; it is the transfiguration of a fact. The difference is that, into this passing world of time, came the eternal Son of God. The earthly life of Jesus was a life lived like ours in a world of time. By His perfect life, His death and resurrection, our Lord has made possible a new kind of life, eternal life. This is His gift, His life, and is given to all who believe in Him. It is a new quality of life, a new kind of life which begins now, and will find its fulfilment in the world to come. We know already the satisfaction it brings, for we have already tasted it.

Time is therefore full of the intimation of eternity. Life cannot be dominated by any nostalgia for the past, whatever that past may be. We can hope to pursue a steady and balanced course in life precisely because we have the conviction that always the best is yet to be.

Prisoner Finds Key to Escape in a Diary

JOHN BOWMER

writes on the unique prison ministry of The Lord's Day Observance Society

GARY, AT THE AGE OF SEVENTEEN, was serving his third custodial sentence; this time, eighteen months for robbery with violence. Two years earlier he rebelled against the Christian upbringing which his parents had attempted to "force" upon him. Gary felt he had no need of God. He was of the opinion that if anyone was to prosper in this life they needed money. "No Divine person up there or wherever could give me that," Gary declared. And when he found it wasn't so simple to make his fortune through honest means, he resorted to crime which eventually led to time in youth custody establishments.

Life for Gary took a turn for the better when the text in his *Day One* diary, given to him by the chaplain, brought him to the place of questioning about his priorities and life-style which had led to his downfall. Lacking courage to speak to the chaplain about his condition, Gary wrote to the Lord's Day Observance Society whose address was on the cover of the diary. Resources were quickly harnessed to ensure that Gary received all the help he required. Now released from custody, Gary says: "I now know that the Christian way of life which my

parents tried to teach me is the only way. I shall always be grateful for the *Day One* diary which brought me to my senses, and for Christian people who cared enough to show me the essential values of life."

Then there is the story of Enid, a sophisticated young woman, daughter of a wealthy industrialist and a socialite mother. Enid lived life to the full, the kind of life that was possible only to one in a privileged position. She attended Church with her family on special occasions but this was only a charade. For Enid, God was a threatening figure, although she readily acknowledged His existence. But in reality she had turned her back on Him and the formality of religion long before she was sent to prison.

Enid tells her story. "I was on drugs and I was wild, absolutely wild, enjoying life in the fast lane with my jet set friends. This was my life and I wanted to live for kicks without anybody telling me what I could and couldn't do. I lived only for the present with no thought for the harsh reality of the future."

For Enid that harsh reality was prison where she was sent for nine months after being convicted of a drug-related offence. Given a *Day One* diary at the conclusion of the prison carol service, Enid immediately began to use the gift to highlight special dates — visiting days, parole eligibility and date of release being the most significant of all. Enid says that for her, the diary was one link with the outside world.

One day Enid discovered the diary held the key of another kind. Since her conviction and sentence her mind had been racked with shame and tortured with guilt. As she turned over the pages of the little diary she read with increasing interest the scripture verses. "And what I read," says Enid, "revealed to me the emptiness of my life."

"I began to realise that for years I had been stifling my own nagging doubts about the real meaning of life, and love, and death and beyond. I was more intent on putting on a good show of 'being with it' in front of my friends." As Enid reflected upon the scripture texts in her diary she knew she had to do something to escape from the kind of life she had been living. She decided that God's way must be the better way. "Once I acknowledged my sin before God and claimed His forgiveness," says Enid, "I was overwhelmed with a sense of freedom and a desire to show His love to others." Now released from prison, Enid spends as much time as she can talking from her own experience to young people on the dangers of drugs.

These are just two of many stories which can be told of how God is using this "Diaries to Prisons Ministry" to turn the minds and hearts of men and women in prison towards Himself. When Prison Chaplain, the Rev. Noel Proctor, wrote to the Lord's Day Observance Society in 1978 asking for a few diaries to distribute among prisoners in Dartmoor Prison he little realised that his request would have such a far-reaching effect or lead to a nationwide ministry of distributing scripture text diaries to prisons.

The Society responded to Noel Proctor's request by sending 150 diaries to Dartmoor. Just two years later the Society distributed nearly 25,000 diaries to 93 prisons. This year the number of diaries distributed exceeded 70,000 diaries to 170 prisons. Still, the demand from prisons is for more. Next year, the Society hopes to be able to distribute 100,000 diaries.

The growth of this outreach to prisoners is a great achievement by any standards, but even more significant is the realisation that prisoners have found new faith and fresh hope because of the gift of the diary.

For most prisoners the diary is the only Christian reading matter accepted by them. Many long-term prisoners who would never dream of reading the Bible or a religious book, annually beat a path to the door of the chaplain's office to make sure they don't miss out when the diaries are distributed. One chaplain told the Lord's Day Observance Society: "Men come into my office with well-thumbed, crumpled diaries. I see them sticking out of back pockets and shirt pockets. The men do not want to leave them where they can be stolen. They are truly valuable."

This ongoing ministry is dependent upon the continuing generosity of God's people. Church congregations and individuals give regularly to support the work and support the outreach in prayer. But if the Society is to reach its goal of distributing 100,000 diaries in 1997, even more support will be required. Further details of the Diaries to Prisons Ministry and how you can help can be obtained from: The Lord's Day Observance Society, 6 Sherman Road, Bromley, Kent BR1 3JH.

Self-Examination

JOEL R. BEEKE (Grand Rapids, Michigan)

"Examine yourselves" (2 Corinthians 13:5a)

SELF-EXAMINATION IS INEVITABLE for God's people and necessary for all of us, for our heart is "like a cheating tradesman, which will put one off with bad wares, settling for *seeming* grace, instead of *saving*," preached Thomas Watson to his flock. "Therefore make up your spiritual accounts daily; see how matters stand between God and your souls (Psalm 77:6). Often reckonings keep God and conscience friends. Do with your hearts as you do with your watches, wind them up every morning by prayer, and at night examine whether your hearts have done true all that day, whether the wheels of your affections have moved swiftly towards heaven."

The right standard of self-examination is rooted in the armour of God rather than in the armour of men (Ephesians 6). Not the opinions of men, but the touchstone of *God's holy Word and attributes* must be our examination textbook; for, as Robert Leighton truthfully expounds: "Men compare themselves with men, and readily with the worst, and flatter themselves with their comparative betterness. This is not the way to see spots, to look into the muddy streams of profane men's lives; but look into the clear fountain of the Word, and there we may both discern and wash them; and consider the infinite holiness of God, and this will humble us to the dust."

Focusing on God's Word and perfections, let us ask for honest grace to examine the genuineness of our conversion with such questions as these:

Do I possess only a *hypocritical conversion* like Judas, who followed Christ for three years only for self-profit, typically condemning Mary's ointment-pouring on behalf of the poor, while Scripture tells us that the real cause was "not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and bare what was put" in the treasurer's bag entrusted to him (John 12:6)?

Do I have only a *head conversion* like the five false virgins, who could claim the same confession, same expectation, same clothing, and same outward walk of life as the five wise, though lacking the oil of the Spirit?

Do I harbour only a *carnal conversion* like Orpah, who could walk and talk with her God-fearing mother-in-law even to the border of Moab, though her love for the world drove her back to worldly idols at the final climax of separation?

Do I only maintain a *fruitless conversion* such as Christ complained of in Luke 6:46: "Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" or as Paul uncovers in Titus 1:16: "They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate"?

Do I only cling to a *good works conversion* like Paul prior to his Damascus journey: "Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless" (Philippians 3:5-6)?

Do I embrace only a *conversion of reformation* like Saul who possessed another heart but not a new heart, or like millions today who mistake the outward transition from tavern to church for the saving operations of the Spirit?

Do I cherish only a *legalistic conversion* like the Pharisees, of whom Christ defyingly answered their mocking challenge concerning blindness: "If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth" (John 9:41)?

Do I only exercise a *holier-than-thou conversion* like the Israelite God speaks against in Isaiah 65:5: "Which say, Stand by thyself, come not near to me; for I am holier than thou. These are a smoke in my nose, a fire that burneth all the day"?

Do I pursue only a *lip conversion*, being one of the hypocrites Christ condemns in Matthew 15: "Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me" (verses 7-8)?

Do I entertain only an *external conversion* like the majority of Nineveh's inhabitants, lacking true heart-repentance all the while?

Do I only carry a *pious conversion* like Ahab, who rent his clothes, fasted, lay in sackcloth, walked softly, and humbled himself, though it was all *before man* instead of *under God* (1 Kings 21:27)?

Do I engender only an *emotional conversion* like Esau, who sought a place of repentance of tears though yet lacking the godly repentance that needs not to be repented of?

Do I embody only an *affliction conversion* like Pharoah, confessing my guilt only under sore trials?

Do I only retain an *impressionistic conversion* like Simon the sorcerer, being caught under the spell of miraculous happenings rather than in the net of God's Gospel grace?

Do I only grasp a *temporary conversion* like Lot's wife, seeming to be on the narrow way to Zoar though my heart remains in Sodom?

Do I only sustain a *slavish conversion* like Balaam, trembling before God's attributes and fearing death and hell, though a stranger of childlike fear of God?

Does my life savour only a "*heavy*" conversion for the sake of heaviness, seeking deliverance in misery and misery in deliverance? Is my conversion only *Church-made, preacher-made, or office-bearer-made* rather than God-made? Do I clutch to a *self-centred conversion* which always begins, continues, and ends with my own experiences? Am I controlled by a *providence conversion* rather than Word-centred regeneration, so that an answer to prayer of the minister's choice of a text means more to me than the Spirit's inward acts of grace? Am I only supported in heaven's journey by a *text or psalm verse conversion*, without a corresponding change of life? Do I cling to a *sick-bed, death-bed, or funeral conversion*, forgetting that the devil makes more converts than God at such places, using serious thoughts to deceive many?

All such so-called conversions, being false, call us to serious and laborious self-examination; for our heart is "deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" (Jeremiah 17:9). Eternity hinges on the serious question of whether or not we are partakers of *the only true conversion*, which results in the soul's experiential knowledge of being without God in the world; being full of sin and iniquity, being condemned by God's attributes, and the spirituality and curse of the law; being helpless and hopeless to convert or save itself; being cut off from everything in and of self, and standing in desperate need for Jesus Christ and Him crucified; and realising both deliverance applied and gratitude revealed. In sum, "this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou has sent" (John 17:3).

Also God's people sorely neglect habitual self-examination in general today. Daily, prayerful, and serious self-discovering questions are, for the most part, series of soul-interrogations which stimulate historical interests more than imitable and practical searchings. Almost unheard of are examples of personal soul-interrogations such as these five questions Philip Henry regularly asked himself:

1. Can I choose to undergo the greatest suffering rather than commit the least sin?
2. Can I embrace Christ with His cross?
3. Can I work for God, though there be no wages?
4. Can I swim against the stream, be good in bad times and places?
5. Can I pull out right eyes for Christ and cut off right hands for Him?

I know, true believer, we are apt to use the vain excuse that God alone can grant us true self-examination; nevertheless, does not the oft-repeated truism, "When the outward form is gone, all is gone", also hold true for self-examination? Indeed, it is not surprising that the twin comforts of divine examination and self-examination are more often feared than relished among Jehovah's sheep in our generation. "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith."

Book Reviews

***To Tell the Truth.* John Appleby. Grace Publications Trust. pp. 189. £5.95.**

"Mrs. Brown had been asked to attend an evangelistic service in the chapel. And to the delight of those inviting her, she came. But she knew none of the hymns or the tunes — 'Abide with me' wasn't chosen. All around her people sang enthusiastically; she felt exposed and obvious for she could not join in. Things got worse with the Bible reading: who on earth was Hosea and where does one find what he wrote? . . . Mrs. Brown never came again" (page 146).

John Appleby, in this hard-hitting book, tells us how to present the Gospel to Mrs. Brown. Why is it so hard for unbelievers to respond to the Gospel? Mr. Appleby suggests three reasons: Firstly, their inability to grasp spiritual truth; secondly, we do not always talk their language; and thirdly, we do not understand their pagan culture. The author insists that we remain faithful to God's inerrant Word and that our evangelistic efforts are useless apart from the power of the Holy Spirit; nevertheless it is essential to speak relevantly to present-day sinners. We do not change the message but we adapt our presentation to the understanding of our hearers. John Appleby's book gives us a model of the clear communication for which he argues.

Some readers may not like Mr. Appleby's plain speaking on Bible versions (he quotes from the New Revised Standard Version), addressing God as "You", the value of carefully selected modern hymns in worship, and the use of non-sexist terminology in witnessing and preaching. However, these points ought not to distract from the importance of this book written by a Reformed Baptist who has served the Lord for over forty years in India and the United Kingdom. John Appleby tells us that he has wrestled with these issues for over fifty years. How then do we reach unbelievers today? Read the book and find out! The sub-title sums up its message: "Some Biblical guidelines to help Christians speak about the Faith."

S.K.E.

***Free in Christ. The Message of Galatians.* Edgar H. Andrews. Welwyn Commentary Series. Evangelical Press (1996). pp. 320 paperback. £7.95.**

Professor Andrews divides the commentary into three parts:

The Gospel of Grace — 1-2:14.

The Nature and Necessity of Faith — 2:15-3:29.

The Spirit and the Believer — 4:1-6:18.

The book can be read straight through or be used for daily readings. The emphasis is on the grace of God operating in the heart of the believer, showing that the good works that God has prepared beforehand are the fruit of obedience to the Spirit, and not of human effort.

As long as our faith is centred upon Christ, both in doctrine and practice, we shall remain free. Lose that perspective, and bondage will ensue.

Edgar Andrews is Professor of Materials at the University of London and a leader of the Campus Church in Welwyn Garden City, Herefordshire.

J.C.

***A Dictionary of Bible Knowledge. I.* Stringer. Grace Publications. pp. 208 paperback. £6.95.**

This slightly revised edition is a follow-up of *A Dictionary of Bible Symbols* and *A Dictionary of Theological Terms*.

Written in easier English, the almost 400 biblical topics will prove helpful to students of Scripture. The topics are printed alphabetically and this makes for easy reference.

J.C.

***Truth Under Attack. Cults and Contemporary Religions.* Eryl Davies. Evangelical Press. pp. 368 paperback. £9.95.**

The expanded and revised issue (1995) is a timely handbook which provides a comprehensive and practical comment about the ever-growing number of cults and movements.

Each chapter contains useful background information followed by a handy reference guide to specific doctrines of the sect and how these conflict with the Word of the Living Lord.

The book's value is enhanced by an excellent section on thirteen basic Christian doctrines and, as one would expect from the Principal of the Evangelical College of Wales, these are described in a thoroughly biblical and understandable way.

This is a book that will be useful to ministers and laity.

J.C.

***Strange Fire. Assessing the Vineyard Movement and the Toronto Blessing.* Eric E. Wright. Evangelical Press (1996). pp. 368. £8.95.**

The author, a former missionary in Pakistan, now a pastor of a Baptist Church in Canada, draws on first-hand experience of meetings he attended and he gives extensive quotations from leaders of the Vineyard Movement.

Eric Wright is careful to base his comments in the light of Holy Scripture and Church history. His findings should be of vital concern to pastors and lay people alike.

The title of the book is indicative. We all need to seek a closer walk with God and this will come as we daily seek His will and live in obedience to it.

The book is paperback and the publishers are to be commended on the production.

J.C.

***How Shall They Hear?* Peter Jeffery. Evangelical Press. pp. 128. £3.95.**

In a day of confused thinking and erroneous doctrine, this clear record of biblical truth, entwined with evangelistic mission, is refreshingly simple and thought-provoking. The three sections deal firstly with attitudes and actions, reminding Christians that if they cannot speak about the Lord to each other they will not be able to witness to unbelievers. Secondly, the evangelism of the Church needs vision, acknowledging the Lordship of Christ, using wise words to pull down the world's barriers. The last section, primarily for preachers, solemnly declares that "Christians have lost their vision of Christ because our pulpits have abandoned the preaching of Christ"!

Readers will find quotations from the New International Version of the Bible, but not exclusively.

P.K.

***Our Father. Enjoying the Fatherhood of God.* Clifford Pond. Grace Publications. pp. 112 paperback. £4.95.**

In the iniquitous days in which we live it is helpful to have a book stressing the Fatherhood of God as a doctrine to be believed and defended. There are five senses in which God is spoke of as Father.

1. The first person of the Trinity. Matthew 28:19.
2. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Ephesians 1:3.
3. The Creator of the world. 1 Corinthians 8:6.
4. The Founder of the nation of Israel. Deuteronomy 32:6.
5. The One who gives spiritual life to all believers and adopts them into His family.

Many children's concept of fatherhood is warped by bitter experience of neglect, abuse or brutality. The author stresses the need to be sure we are God's children and then explore what it means to have the eternal God as our heavenly Father.

J.C.

Please obtain any books reviewed or advertised from your local Christian bookshop, as we regretfully are not in a position to supply your requirements.

SECRETARIAL NOTES

We are particularly grateful to all those who so helpfully send gifts and amounts in excess of the *nominal* subscription. **The post paid subscription for 1997 is £5.50 Sterling.** Single copies 90p (postage overseas extra).

It is a saving in time and expense for our small office administration when readers remit subscriptions without our need to send "subscription due" reminder letters. **Kindly pay in sterling.** Banks charge considerable commission, etc. for negotiation of foreign cheques, including those of the Irish Republic.

If payment is not made in sterling we are unable to meet even bank negotiation charges, so that nothing is left for the cost of the magazine. The postage overseas is double that for the UK. PLEASE PAY IN STERLING IF AT ALL POSSIBLE.

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Some pre-1997 past copies are available — single copies 25p (postage overseas extra).

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