

THE  
**GOSPEL MAGAZINE**

*Incorporating The Protestant Beacon and The British Protestant*

"JESUS CHRIST, THE SAME YESTERDAY, AND TODAY, AND FOR EVER."  
"ENDEAVOURING TO KEEP THE UNITY OF THE SPIRIT IN THE BOND  
OF PEACE."

"COMFORT YE, COMFORT YE MY PEOPLE, SAITH YOUR GOD."

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## ***EDITORIAL***

There is a great deal of difference between realism and pessimism. The realist looks at the situation and takes into account the dark and unpromising aspects, but he also tries to keep in view a wider aspect. He realises that there are other factors in a total situation apart from immediate discouragements. The pessimist by contrast is so taken up with the problems and difficulties that they become an obsession and his whole outlook is affected.

Now pessimism very easily percolates into the thinking of the Christian. The very fact that he takes life seriously makes him liable to the temptation to slide into a gloomy frame of mind. He is unable to accept the glib optimism of those who are always looking at the rosy side of the situation, and ignoring the bleak aspects. He sees so much to discourage, and almost unconsciously he lets himself slip into a depressed condition.

Pessimism is unhappily a contagious malady. It is not only that the pessimist himself tends to become worse, for the disease is a degenerative one. There is also the fact of his influence on others. Indeed, a small and struggling Church can be so infected that effort is paralysed and a defeatist mentality reigns supreme.

But the Christian must resist the tendency to cultivate gloom. Certainly he will equally strongly reject a superficial optimism. But he is—or should be—a realist. He sees the situation as it is but he looks beyond the immediate circumstance to the sovereign power of God, and so he takes heart.

It is true that ungodliness seems to be flourishing. It is not simply that men ignore God, they openly defy Him. It is also true that blatant unrighteousness thrusts its ugly features into every area of national life. All the media of communication, the hoardings, the glossy magazines, all combine to project a pattern of life where God is not in their reckoning. The crime rate, the swollen prison population, the soaring rates of alcoholism and V.D. are further comments on a degenerating situation.

But there is further cause for gloom, and indeed much more serious cause. The sins of today, while they are blatantly paraded, are not new. The immorality and greed and drunkenness of the age are all listed and condemned in the Book of Proverbs. But what is much more distressing is the state of the churches. On the one hand there are vast areas of church life where once the truth was preached and where apostasy has taken over. On the other side there are orthodox churches where the light is pure, but so contained within narrow bounds that it only lights the way for a diminishing remnant.

Yet the Christian realist does not despair. His God is King and has not abdicated His throne. The Lord God omnipotent still reigns, and He will reign for ever. So we must lift our eyes from the discouraging facts of the present situation and look more widely. There are still evidences that God is at work!

Look, for example, at the revival of interest among ministers of the Word in the doctrines of grace. Many like the present writer were reared on a very different—and a very meagre—diet. But today by God's grace they are preaching what had for so long become almost forgotten truths in wide areas of evangelical life.

Then again we look across the world. While the cause of the Gospel in Western Europe has been facing lean days the Spirit of God has been moving in other lands. The pessimist may look over his own backyard wall and see evidences of vandalism, but the realist climbs the mountain of faith and looks further afield.

But there is one final point where the realist completely parts company with the prophet of gloom. It is when he reflects on God's eternity. Our God is 'from everlasting to everlasting'. A thousand years in His sight are like a brief moment of time. When the modern purveyors of pornography have gone their way; when the whole paraphernalia of unrighteousness has gone down to ruins; when the ungodliness of men has been finally brought to judgment, the Lord will still be King. (*Continued at foot of next page*)

## A TESTIMONY

*After I had found grace and salvation, a little time elapsed before I had surveyed the work of the Lord upon me; and when I did so I learned much. Sitting down one day, I meditated upon where I was, and what I was. I said to myself, 'I have believed in Jesus Christ, and I have passed from death unto life. To God be praise!' Then my train of thought ran thus: 'How have I come to be in this condition? Did I make this change in myself? No. Must I praise my own free will? No. Was there originally in me some betterness which led me to Christ, while my companions have not come? I dared not say so, and therefore I perceived that the difference was made by the sovereign grace of God. I do not know whereabouts in theology I might have wandered else, but those reflections made me a Calvinist, that is to say, one who traces salvation to the Lord alone. I saw that my salvation was from the Lord from first to last and I have never had a doubt about the matter since. It is no wish of mine to preach salvation by the will of man, or by the will of the flesh, but salvation all of grace from beginning to end, according to the eternal purpose which God purposed in Christ Jesus or ever the world was. It did not need any intricate reasoning to land me on the rock of free grace doctrine. If the Lord saved me, then He intended to save me: He did not do so by accident or inadvertence. Then if He once intended to save me, there could be no reason why that intention should begin at any one moment; He must have purposed to save me from all eternity. God has His plan and purpose, and what He actually does must have been known to Him, and purposed by Him, from of old.—C. H. SPURGEON.*

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The Christian realist is fully aware of the darkness of the hour and the grim uncertainties of the future. But he hears a call from heaven, 'Lift up your hearts'; and with a vigorous rejection of the pessimism which paralyzes and destroys, faith replies 'We lift them up unto the Lord'.

H. M. CARSON.

# ***In Search of Significance***

H. M. CARSON

*A sermon preached in Hamilton Road  
Baptist Church, Bangor, Co. Down.*

'And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof; but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever' (1 John 2 : 17).

This verse follows the verses which we were considering together recently, 'Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world; if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father but is of the world'. So John continues, 'And the world passeth away and the lust thereof, but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever'.

Now John is not saying here that the Christian has no time for the created order in which God placed him. The Christian can enjoy and delight himself in that which God provides for him in creation. 'God has given us all things richly to enjoy', and the Christian can delight himself in all God's gifts. You know, the Puritans and the whole Puritan tradition have been sadly misrepresented. One rather cynical historian said that the Puritans were against bear baiting, not really because they were concerned about the pain inflicted upon the bear, but because they objected to the pleasure which was given to the spectators. The whole comment suggested that Puritans were those who could find no pleasure at all in life; that they were inward looking, pleasure denying, joyless and, as a result, had rather a warped and impoverished outlook. But this was a travesty of the true position. John is not saying that the Christian cannot enjoy the good gifts which God bestows upon him. Any Christian will go out on a day like this and he will enjoy the sunshine and delight in the loveliness of a summer's day, he will delight in the loveliness of the creation about him. The Christian delights in human gifts and human attainments. A Christian enjoys good music and he can enjoy good art. God gives us these things richly to enjoy.

Now if this is so, if we can in a sense love the world in which God has placed us, in what sense do we *not* love the

world; in what way do we reject the world? Well, surely John is thinking of the world as it has been blighted and corrupted by human sin and human selfishness. John is not thinking here of the gifts which God bestows upon us. He is thinking rather of this whole organised society, human society in which God is ignored, in which the things of God are dismissed as completely irrelevant. He is thinking about the condition of things in which men spend their time with issues which are temporary, with matters which are passing, rather than realising that the things which are here in this world are at best for a very brief time, and that only what is from God is eternal and lasting. So John adds this further comment. The world as we know it, the world as we experience it, the world with man enthroned at the centre of things—well, this world is passing away; it is at best a very temporary thing; but, he says, the man who does the will of God abides for ever.

This world is passing away; impermanence is written right into its constitution. This is so when one looks at any human attainment, any human accomplishment. There is always this temporary character about it, it is always transient, it is always but for a time. This is so because this world is finite and you and I who live within it are finite. We are limited creatures and so no matter how high we rise we are always very limited. We belong to time and, as a result, our time comes and it goes; we are here for a brief span and the temporary condition of our existence is evident on every side. If you read history, you are familiar with the fact that it is one long course of the rise and fall of civilisations. The great empires of the past are now just memories. Go to the Old Testament, read about the empires which dominated the life of the Middle East—the rise of Assyria, the rise of Babylon, great empires with a very high standard of culture, empires which dominated a large area. In the days of Isaiah, for example, or the days of Jeremiah, these empires were the world powers and everything tended to revolve about them. But Babylon is now just a topic for the archaeologist, Babylon has simply disappeared. That mighty culture and civilisation has gone virtually into oblivion apart from what has been rescued by the skill and labour of the archaeologist digging in the sands of the Middle East and uncovering a glory which was inevitably passing. And if you trace human history the same is true again and again. Empires rise, they dominate the scene for a century or a couple of centuries and then the inevitable process of decline begins, because every human structure has in it this element of impermanence, this lack of an abiding character.

The same is true as far as human thought is concerned. If you read a history of philosophy, it is very interesting to go back and read about the Greek philosophers. In that wonderful flowering of human thought which took place in ancient Greece they thought upon ultimate issues, but one tends sometimes to smile at the naïvety of some of their theories. We smile because as the centuries have passed, men have reflected further, and as each new school of philosophy emerges, they can see the flaws and deficiencies in the reflections of their predecessors and they formulate their new system. Often one dominant figure emerges. He is a man of great intellect, an original and creative thinker, and for a time he dominates the scene; inevitably disciples gather around him, and a philosophical system emerges. But there is this same lack of permanence about it. You move into a new era, and as men look back they are interested in the formulations and the theories of the past, but they belong to the past, everything is in a state of flux, everything is changing.

This was the problem that confronted those early Greek philosophers. They asked themselves, Is there anything that really gives stability and permanence in the midst of it all? There is flux everywhere, everything is changing; can you find anything that is really permanent? Is there any solid resting place? They debated and they discussed and they produced their philosophical theories in face of this basic issue—can anything permanent be found in the midst of all this change and uncertainty? And in a sense this has been the issue with which philosophers have been battling down the centuries, trying to penetrate beyond the superficial, to discover if in the midst of all the change and uncertainty of life, you can find any connecting theme, any basic point. But the one thing that emerges is this fact of change and flux and uncertainty. It is only in the will of God, says John, that a man finds that which is permanent, that which is lasting.

But of course you do not have to read history as a philosopher, you do not have to be experts in history, to discover this fact. You simply have to look at human life as you see it all around you. The one thing that is stamped upon every human life is its temporary character. Young people are full of vigour and activity, but before very long they do not move quite so quickly as once they moved and they begin to slow up, and they become old. This is the inevitable process. A young child, with a probing alert mind, asks his questions, his 'whys' and so on, but of course there comes a time when as an old person he ceases to think clearly, memory begins to fail

and sometimes there can be that sad condition of senility when he cannot think coherently at all. It is a case of development, maturity, decline, and this is human life. Now it is the fact of death which always underlines this sense of nothing being permanent, nothing being lasting. I am sure that has been brought home to us in the past week. Of course we live constantly with the fact of death. The obituary column in the newspaper is a constant factor of everyday life. But it was the way the events of the last week happened. They simply forced the ugliness and the horror of it all into our thinking and right into our consciousness. One suddenly saw just the stark reality—the life with promise, with ambition, and then suddenly the whole thing is cut short by one ghastly and criminal act. At such a time we realise how lacking in permanence anything which man plans or creates really is. We are creatures of a moment, we constantly are pressing on towards the conclusion. Things are changing, things are altering, and where is permanence to be found? Where is reality to be found? Where is there something really solid to be found in the midst of all the flux?

The great tragedy, of course, the great great tragedy of men is that instead of seeing this, instead of seeing that everything has this temporary nature, they tend to live for things which are temporary. They set their whole affection, their whole ambition, upon things which inevitably will not ultimately satisfy them because these things are passing. It is like men in a desert who see a mirage in the distance; they think they see an oasis, they can see the date palms, they can imagine the spring of water, and in their thirsty condition they can just visualise themselves shortly stooping down and drinking. They live for what they see—but what they see is an optical illusion, there is no reality at all; it is simply a mirage, beckoning them on to disappointment. Yet all around us men live for things which are but a mirage, things which they imagine are real and lasting, things which they believe will give them satisfaction, and yet in the ultimate analysis, these things are temporary and fleeting, they will never satisfy the really deep need of a man's soul. That is why so many men who reach the heights of their profession, so many men who are very successful as far as this world is concerned and amass a great deal of wealth, can be some of the most unhappy people you meet. They have everything, humanly speaking, and many of their fellows look upon them with great envy. They have money, they have luxury, they have power and position, and yet when you come close to them, or when later you read the biography

of their lives, or even more when you read their autobiography and listen to what they have got to say about themselves, their own reactions to what they have achieved, you discover how so often there is a sense of emptiness, that the goal after which they have striven so hard, when they reached it they discovered that it was a temporary thing, it did not last, it did not satisfy.

This surely is why, when the Lord Jesus Christ was dealing with this issue, He spoke in these terms: 'What shall it profit a man if he gains the whole world and lose his own soul?' What profit is it if he gains everything that this world can offer and yet loses the one essential thing and that is his own soul? What does it profit a man to turn his back finally at death on this world and to have nothing beyond? Is that not why the Lord Jesus described it in terms of a void, a deprivation; He spoke of 'outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth'. Outer darkness—well, you see, the lights have flickered out; the man lived for a condition of things in which he could see what he was doing, he could see how he was planning, he could see his schemes developing and maturing, but all these lights, the lights of his own wisdom, they flickered out. He is left now with absolutely nothing, in outer darkness, without a light to cheer that darkness; no light to point the way forward, just the complete emptiness of a life lived for things which are past, and now he has absolutely nothing.

'Outer darkness, where there is weeping,' says Jesus, and gnashing of teeth.' In this life a man tries to avoid weeping. There are so many interesting things to do, so many avenues along which to move. Weeping is an unfortunate occurrence in life, and grief and disappointment come. But as far as they can, men try to avoid them and to live for the enjoyable and pleasant things. But there comes a time when a man just has to leave it all behind, and all the things that have produced laughter and have produced pleasure for him, the things that have presented a temporary satisfaction, well, these things have gone. The world is passing away, says John; this whole order of things is but temporary, and out there beyond it all, when this whole structure has disintegrated, there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.

John is speaking here of a man who during his life was quite content with his own position, content with his own attainments. He may have nodded in a certain respectful way towards God, but by and large God had no vital place in his thinking. There was indeed deep down a real arrogance—he could plan his own life, he could think his way through to the

logical conclusion which his situation demanded. God?—well, God, as far as he was concerned, was really rather on the outskirts of things. And Jesus speaks of the condition as one of 'weeping and gnashing of teeth'. It is the suggestion of a man who suddenly discovers that he is now without the only One who can give any meaning to eternity, he is now in a void, in a meaningless emptiness. He has no light, no guide, no strength—nothing, and he has lived his life for those things which cannot satisfy. But I say that the tragedy of tragedies is that men simply do not see this. They are taken up with the issues of the moment; their home and their job, their money and their pleasures and their holidays; their security and their pension; their old age and retirement in comfort—all these things; their whole horizon is bounded by this. We say how incredibly stupid that a man can take in this little span of time and concentrate entirely upon this and forget the obvious fact that he is going to die, and this whole structure in which he has immersed himself is simply going to pass.

The world, says John, is passing away, and you can see evidence of that on every hand. But, he says, 'he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever'. And here in the gospel there is the answer, the answer of God Himself to the cry of the human heart for permanence, for that which will continue. Those Greek philosophers may have been more erudite and learned than the common herd who walked the streets of Athens, but in a sense they were simply asking the question that the most unlettered man asks. They were asking this question, 'Where can I find some solid ground beneath my feet? Where can I find something permanent and lasting?' They had no real answer; they speculated; they had their theories. They turned this way and that, but they had no real answer to this nagging question which produced uncertainty in their hearts. But the gospel has the answer. Here is where permanence is to be found. Here is solid rock beneath your feet. Here is a hope, not just for a few brief years this side of death, here is a hope for eternity. This is the hope that enables a man to face any kind of uncertainty that may beset him. He can go into a future which is dark and forbidding; he can go into a future where he cannot see the way forward. He can indeed face the ultimate fact of death itself. He can go forward confidently because he has discovered this truth that 'he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever'.

When God made man He made him in His image; he was in God's likeness. That is why there is something essentially different between man and the animal creation. Man was

created with the power to think, the ability to distinguish right and wrong. He was created for communion with God. It is, of course, true that he fell from this high destiny, he disobeyed, he turned aside, and yet there is still in man many of these longings which betoken the fact of his divine origin. Man still looks for something to satisfy him, something that will really give meaning to life. He is always looking for something permanent. That is why man hates the thought of death, because death is such a meaningless thing as far as he is concerned. It seems to come in as an ugly factor, without point, just destroying and tearing up everything, and there is something within him which dreads this fact of dissolution, this rending apart of body and spirit. Well, what can he do? He jokes about it, and his jokes about death and the grave are very often an indication of his own inner uncertainty. Or he ends up in pessimism. I believe that there are a great many thinking people today who below the surface are thoroughly pessimistic. There are a great many intellectuals today who have a very real sense of despair about the situation. They look out on a world which seems poised on the edge of a precipice. Even the civilisation which men have laboured so hard to build up, many of them feel it is pointless. That is why so many of them feel there is no real point in continuing to live and some of them come to the ultimate of taking their own lives.

I think there are very many today who are feeling the utter meaninglessness of life, and of course it *is* meaningless apart from the will of God. It *is* utterly without point, utterly without direction, apart from that direction which comes from heaven itself. But John says—Life is not meaningless for the man who knows Christ. He has found the key, he has found the answer. 'He that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.' That is why the Christian message constantly uses such words as 'peace' and 'joy' and 'confidence' and 'assurance'. The Christian is not a man who is groping his way tentatively forward, not sure how things will turn out but doing the best he can as each situation emerges. He is, rather, a man who knows that he is in the hands of the living God. He knows that his life has been lifted from this temporary condition of things and that he belongs to the world to come. When Jesus Christ came He preached the gospel of the Kingdom and He Himself was the King who was at the very heart of that gospel which He preached. He came to bring in the new age, and there is a sense in which the old age and the new age overlap. The old age—this world, this world with all its sinfulness and failure, blighted and corrupted by human perversity, human

disobedience of God's laws. But the new age is the age of Christ the Messiah, the age of the Saviour, and that age has already begun.

He that does the will of God, he abides, he already knows in his own heart that he has been ushered into a Kingdom which can never fail. That is why he knows true joy in his heart, because you can only really rejoice in a very deep way when you know that that joy is linked firmly to permanence. That is why any ordinary human experience of pleasure or delight has this nagging thought in the background—this is simply a momentary experience. Even the best things of life are but for a brief time. But the Christian can rejoice because he knows that his experience is not something merely for a time which will then mock him because it will disappear from him. He has been ushered into a Kingdom which never can fade. And so, says John, he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever. He belongs to the age to come and already he has tasted something of the glory of heaven itself. He is a citizen of heaven, although he is here on earth; he belongs to the world to come, although he is involved in this world. And having tasted that, having been given this vista, a vista of the glory that is yet to be, he discovers that he can adopt a new attitude to the world in which he finds himself. It does not mean to say that he takes the monastic line of trying to get away from it all and just clinging on until that day when he is taken from it. On the contrary, he goes right into it, he seeks to glorify God in the situation in which God puts him. He does his duties in his everyday life with a new verve because although he is in a temporary situation, and although everything about him he knows is finite and temporal and passing, yet he belongs to a world that never can be shaken. He is a member of the city of God whose foundations will outlast everything of man.

And who is this one who thus abides? Who is this one who has discovered the real lasting permanence? He is described here as the man who does the will of God. Now we must not misunderstand what John is saying. He is certainly not saying, If you do the will of God, well, this will be your reward. If you try very hard to follow God, then as a reward for your good efforts He will bring you into a condition where you will enjoy His blessings for eternity. Nothing could be further from the truth. John surely is saying this—The Christian is a man whose faith, the reality of whose faith, is demonstrated by the fact that he does the will of God. And that Christian is the one who has discovered the secret. Death no longer holds

any dread for him. The future uncertainties no longer press in upon him. He belongs to the world to come.

To do the will of God—what does it mean? Well, clearly it means that first you must know what that will is. The knowledge of the will of God comes, not because of our intellectual ability, not because we can read the Bible in such a way that we can grasp its message; the knowledge of the will of God comes when God enlightens our minds and we begin to see as we never saw before what God requires from men. We begin to understand what it means to repent for sin, what it means to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, what it means to be born again of the Holy Spirit. God works in a man, God enlightens the understanding. Yes, and He gives to us the desire to do His will, the desire to do it gladly. It is no longer a matter of seeing a law of God that we must try our best to keep because we think this is the only way of winning a place in heaven. It is rather that God so works in us that we now see the will of God as the great delight of our life, as the goal to be desired above all else. We suddenly discover how petty and pathetic so many of our other ambitions have been. This is something worth living for, to know the will of God and to do the will of God.

But the Christian discovers something else, he discovers the dynamic, the power, the ability, to do that will. There was a time when he vaguely thought of the will of God, and of what God requires from men, but all the time he discovered his own weakness, he discovered how much he belongs to this temporary passing order of things. He knew what he ought to do but he was utterly unable to do it. But this miracle which God has worked in him, this miracle which the New Testament would call the new birth or the new creation, has meant that now he knows the power of God in his life. The will of God is no longer a remote possibility, it is not simply a goal towards which he aspires, it now becomes a possible realisation because the God who has declared His will, is the God who has given His Spirit to give power in order that that will might be carried out. Sometimes you meet people—they have been at school or they have been at university and they lament the fact that they wasted so much of their time; they lament the fact that in spite of the opportunities that they were given, they frittered away their time on trivialities and they never really benefited from the training that was provided for them. And the tragedy of so many men is that they are frittering away their time on things which seem to be important,

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# **WEEPING—JOY**

W. EAVES

Psalm 30 : 5. God's anger (displeasure) is there but for a short space of time, as it were a wink of the eye. His favour is for a lifetime. Weeping, which is very sore, may tarry overnight, but gladness, rejoicing, singing, comes in the early dawn of day.

Jer. 31 : 13. God says: I will convert their lamentation into cheerfulness, gladness, rejoicing and mirth, and will comfort, console and ease them, and make them gleeful at the ceasing of their affliction and grief. (Free rendering.)

These two verses contain a similar situation, one of weeping and sorrow at the commencement, which will be turned to joy by the providence and moving of God. The Christian life is, from the very outset, a series of contrasts. The very first dealing of our precious Saviour with us brings about a sense of conviction of our terrible sin, only to bring us into the joy of knowing Him as our only Saviour and Redeemer. He makes His people low that He might exalt them in due time. He made us know we were dead in trespasses and sin that the glory of His life might be revealed. So we could go on with these contrasts. However, I wish to deal with the aspect of the situation which comes to the true child of God as found in Psalm 30 : 5.

## GOD'S ANGER.

The anger spoken of here is not the anger displayed by God toward the ungodly, for that anger is there continually (Psalm 7 : 11). God is always angry with the wicked. No, the anger spoken of here is displeasure which is but for a moment, a wink of the eye, and is contrasted with the favour of God which, for His children, is for a lifetime. He has set His love upon us, not that we loved Him, but He loved us and gave His only begotten Son a ransom for our sins.

## WEEPING OF THE CHILD OF GOD.

The child of God will weep many times in his life over his own ways, for God allows us to fall many times but does not give us over to be cast completely away. Many are the troubles of the righteous, but God delivers His people out of them all. Our sin should be a cause of grief and sorrow, for it is against God that we do these things.

There is, however, another side to the dealings of God with His people. It may be for reasons not known to us that God hides His face from us. We do not see His face smiling upon us; we do not feel His hand in our hand. Then there is weeping, then there is darkness as night. It seems an endless night, with no token of favour, not even the shining of a star to lead us. The blackness of despair can engulf us and we cry out with loud lamentations, for we cannot exist unless God delivers us. Indeed, we would rather die than have this separation from the One who has caused us to love Him, the darling of our soul. Praise God for the wonderful comfort that this is but for a moment for the child of God, even though it seem an eternity to bear. The anguish of soul that none can relieve and during which none can comfort us, is, God assures us, for a 'wink of an eye'. It is like a drop in the ocean, a grain of sand amid the others on the seashore. The morning will dawn and through the tears the sun rises and we see the rainbow. God's promise is sure that He will not utterly destroy His child.

Gladness and rejoicing return—yes, singing also at the sunshine of His love. Could we be silent at the glory and wonder of Jesus looking upon us with smiling face once more, as we feel the warmth of His love as the sun of righteousness risen with healing in His wings? Oh! praise His wonderful Name, He is there, the fairest of ten thousand to our soul. He has come as He said. It was but for a moment that He was hidden from our eyes, but there is a lifetime to be enjoyed of His favour.

When experiencing such a time as this, I seemed to see a picture of these contrasts like a see-saw. This may seem strange, but let me explain. When the see-saw is still, it has a natural bias one way or another. So we have a natural bias towards sin, since we are dead in trespasses and sins and can only be quickened by the Holy Spirit. It is as though we are placed on the see-saw and the balance is no longer weighed against us. Then comes the enemy of our soul and would seek to outbalance us on the other end, for he has many accusations he wishes to make against us and we are made helpless to bring the see-saw down to the ground again. The despair and trouble of soul are great, for we know that he is stronger than we and we can do nothing to change things. Then our blessed Saviour comes and, not by our weight on the end, but by His own weight He places a hand on the see-saw and we are lowered. The weight is in our favour again and we are not left to be pushed up and down by the evil one. Jesus is the victor

and moves things at His will. We cannot prevent the enemy trying to fight against us. We are helpless in and of ourselves, but Jesus hears our call, just as a mother would hear the call of her child when another child comes to tease. Yes, He hears our call and comes to us, standing by our side to help and comfort us, so that we are strong in Him.

Weeping, when it comes, is not pleasant, for this kind of soul anguish eats into our very being. But as God has said, He has set the bounds of the sea, so He has declared that this weeping is but for a moment. The joy, gladness and mirth of His renewed presence are wonderful. Let us not take His presence for granted while it is with us, but ever praise Him for all His mercies.

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seem to them to be very important, and they are failing to prepare themselves for what is of supreme importance, namely, the day when they shall stand before God.

The world is passing away, this whole structure is a temporary thing. Human society has written into its very constitution its own ultimate dissolution, and if we live for this world, if we make this world our ultimate goal, I say how tragic, how pathetic our condition really is. But if we live for *that* world, if we live for *that* goal, we learn what John is talking about—He that doeth the will of God abideth for ever. How do you find the will of God? You find it in one Person, the Lord Jesus Christ. There is One who did the will of God. To do the will of God? Why, it is to come to Him, to turn from all my own strivings, all my own efforts, and to commit myself humbly and completely unto Him. To trust Him as my Saviour, to receive Him as my Lord and my Master and by His grace to live for Him. Here is where true joy is to be found and here is where life becomes filled with meaning and significance and purpose, because although this world is passing, the man of God, the man who has come to know Christ, has discovered the secret and he knows that by God's grace he abides for ever.

# Doctrinal Definitions

PAUL TUCKER

## THE FALL OF SATAN

We may say of Ezekiel 28 that it is mainly concerned with what Lucifer was like prior to his rebellion, whereas the passage in Isaiah 14 is mainly concerned with the actual sin of Lucifer and with his fall. There is a very provocative statement in Ezekiel 28 : 15, ' . . . Till iniquity was found in thee', another translation is 'until iniquity was uncovered'. May we infer that in the beginning when unworthy desires came into the mind of Lucifer, he tried to keep them to himself, he tried to conceal them? He had these thoughts of self-admiration and self-assertion, but he did not immediately convey them or manifest them outwardly. The thought here is that the iniquity in his heart was discovered and unmasked.

The word 'iniquity' here means inequality, perverseness, crookedness, the opposite of uprightness and righteousness. The hitherto righteous innocent holy creature now becomes distorted and twisted in mind and intention. He hugs it to himself, he would not immediately disclose it to anyone, but he cannot conceal it because he is in the presence of the blazing holiness and omniscience, the perfect knowledge of God, and as the Psalmist says, 'Thou hast set all my secret sins in the light of Thy countenance'. A man or an angel cannot harbour sin within the heart without God in Heaven being conscious of it, for 'all things are open and naked to the eye of Him with whom we have to do'. Before the lustre of His throne there shine this holiness and glory which express the thoughts and intents of the heart of an angel and a man.

The sin that this creature committed was that of pride. It is brought out plainly in verse 17. This creature of beauty, grandeur and glory, this creature who perhaps more than any other heavenly being reflected the glory of God was lifted up and became proud and full of self-adulation and self-love. See Luke 10 : 17-18. I think our Lord is here cautioning His disciples against undue elation at their success lest they should become puffed up and proud. And then note verse 20. Of course, if this is the right interpretation it supports the eternal Sonship of Christ because it shows that He was there in eternity when the devil fell. See also 1 Tim. 3 : 16; 2 Thes. 2 : 9.

We could take it back one stage and ask, what prompted this sin of pride on the part of Lucifer? We have to recognise that now we are in the realm of speculation and therefore we must be careful what we say or believe. But the question is asked, 'Was the pride of Lucifer prompted by envy?' There is a sense in which envy is an aspect of pride, and yet there is another sense in which envy can promote and provoke pride. William Farrell, in a rather unusual book called 'Satan', makes this suggestion: 'Lucifer might have been envious of the future exaltation of human nature by its union to the Son of God in His incarnation'. The view is held that the devil knew (and they assume he did know as Lucifer) that God had an eternal purpose, and was going to send His Son, and that human nature was going to be joined to Deity and exalted to a position superior to the angels themselves, he became jealous and envious. It seems to me that there are Scriptures which could support this idea. Why is the devil so opposed to the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ? Why has he set up his rival kingdom of darkness as opposed to the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ? There seems to be this basic hostility to the incarnation and the redemptive purposes of the eternal God. Anyway, the pride of Lucifer brought into action a rebel will and he struck at the throne of God which he was commissioned to protect.

In this passage before us in Isaiah 14 we read how Lucifer attempted to dethrone the Almighty. That is what sin really is. Sin is not simply getting drunk or telling lies or committing some form of immorality. Those things are sinful and are sins, but basically sin is defiance of God. Sin is rebellion against God's sovereignty and against God's authority. And we must emphasise that at heart unconverted man has been injected with this spirit of rebellion by the very devil himself. As the Apostle John puts it, 'Sin is lawlessness'. It is clenching the fist in defiance in the face of Almighty God and saying, 'I am going to live my own life and I am going my own way'. And it all began with Lucifer. Here in Isaiah 14 we have what I call five awful 'I wills' on the part of Lucifer, showing how he rose in defiance of the sovereignty and authority of God (verses 13 and 14).

1. *There was the 'I will' of unholy self-promotion* (verse 13). 'I will ascend into Heaven.' Someone might say that he was already in Heaven. Yes, he was in Heaven, but the Word of God teaches that there are at least three Heavens. (a) There is the atmospheric heaven, where the birds of the air are, where the stellar places are. (b) There is the intermediate heaven,

where the principalities and powers are. (c) There is the ultimate Heaven, where the very Throne of God is. And you remember when the Lord Jesus Christ ascended on high, it was to that very third Heaven that He ascended, far above all principality and power and might and dominion and every name that is named. So He ascended above the evil angels and above the good angels. So Lucifer wanted to be where God was, he wanted God's position, he wanted God's authority and sovereignty, he wanted to occupy a place belonging to God alone.

2. *The second I will is 'I will exalt my throne above the stars of God'*. Here he introduces his throne. The stars of God, as we have seen, are a pictorial representation of the angels. So he wanted to be greater than any other created being, which he probably was in any case prior to the fall, but he wanted to be in absolute control over them all, he wanted the very position of God Himself.

3. *The third I will is 'I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation in the sides of the north'*. Notice the word 'also'. He has reached the heaven of heavens, he has taken the throne that belongs to God and called it 'my throne', now 'I will sit also (in addition to that) in the congregation, etc.' The mount in Scripture again and again is a reference to Mount Zion. It comes in Isaiah in several places and speaks of the seat of Divine government. The congregation in Scripture is a reference to Israel as a nation. See Psalm 48 : 2 for a description of Zion in Jerusalem. If you look at Psalm 2, you will see that the City of the great king is the city of the Messiah. So the reference here may be to Messianic recognition. Not only does Lucifer want to be supreme in the Heaven but he wants to be supreme on earth, he wants to be recognised as the Messiah. He wants that unique position which belongs to the Lord Jesus Christ to be given to him.

4. *The fourth I will is 'I will ascend above the heights of the clouds'*. There are more than 150 references to the clouds in the Bible and over 100 of these have to do with God and His Christ, so that the clouds more often than not in Scripture are used as a symbol of God's presence and of His glory. It was the pillar of cloud over the tabernacle that was a manifestation of God's presence. And when the Lord Jesus Christ comes in power and great glory we have this symbolism, 'Behold, He cometh with clouds'. The clouds that envelop Him on the Mount of Transfiguration become the chariots of His glory in His Second Advent, and here is one who will be exalted above the clouds and above the heights of the clouds.

He wants that glory and blessing, that grandeur belonging only to God, he wants to arrogate it to himself.

5. *And then he finishes 'I will be like the Most High'*. This is the key to the understanding of the motives and methods of Satan. His one great desire and purpose was to be as God. But notice that it does not say 'I will be like Jehovah', because Jehovah is the self-existent, uncreated, eternal One, and even Lucifer could never be like Jehovah because he was a created being, he was not self-existent. He was dependent for his existence upon the creatorial power of God. What he does say is 'I will be like the Most High'. That particular title is again and again associated with God's possessions and with God's power. See Gen. 14 : 19, 22, ' . . . possessor of Heaven and earth'. Lucifer did not want to be like God as to His character, because he is the antithesis of God's character, he became utterly and entirely evil. What he wanted to be was like God in His power and in His possessions.

Sin is something far more than doing certain things which are not very nice. Basically sin is a little bit of hell in the human heart. It is a little bit of the devil in human nature; this defiance of God, this putting of my will in the place where God's Will should reign. Man is a rebel until he comes back and that rebel will is slain by the love of Jesus Christ. Then the rebel says from the heart—'Nay, I yield, I can hold out no more, I sink by dying love compelled, and own Thee conqueror'. We should sing every day in spirit—

'Take my will and make it Thine,  
It shall be no longer mine;  
Take my heart it is Thine Own,  
It shall be Thy royal Throne.'

*'Where art thou?' (Genesis 3 : 9). To create man out of the dust of the ground was POWER; but to seek man in his lost estate was GRACE.—C. H. MACKINTOSH.*

*Whoever wishes to have the half of Christ loses the whole.*  
—JOHN CALVIN.

# Saving Faith and the Faith of Presumption

JONATHAN EDWARDS

(From "Religious Affections")

Here I cannot but observe that there are certain doctrines often preached to the people, which need to be delivered with more caution and explanation than they frequently are; for as they are by many understood, they tend greatly to establish this delusion and false confidence of hypocrites. The doctrines I speak of are of Christians living by faith, not by sight; their giving glory to God, by trusting Him in the dark; living upon Christ, and not upon experiences; not making their good frames the foundation of their faith. These are excellent and important doctrines indeed, rightly understood, but corrupt and destructive, as many understand them. The Scripture speaks of our living or walking by faith, and not by sight, in no other way than these, viz.: When we are governed by a respect to eternal things, which are the objects of faith, and are not seen, and not by a respect to temporal things, which are seen; when we believe things revealed, that we never saw with bodily eyes; and also exercise faith in the promise of future things, without yet seeing or enjoying the things promised, or knowing the way how they can be fulfilled. This will be easily evident to anyone that looks over the Scriptures, which speak of *faith* in opposition to *sight*. But this doctrine, as it is understood by many, is, that Christians ought firmly to believe and trust in Christ, without spiritual light; even although they are in a dark, dead frame, and for the present, have no spiritual experiences or discoveries. It is truly the *duty* of those who are thus in darkness to come out of darkness into light, and to *believe*. But that they should confidently believe and trust, while they yet remain without spiritual light or sight, is an anti-scriptural and absurd doctrine.

The Scripture is ignorant of any such faith in Christ of the operation of God, that is not founded in a spiritual sight of Christ. That believing on Christ, which accompanies a title to everlasting life, is a seeing the Son, and believing on Him (John 6.40). True faith in Christ is never exercised, any further than persons behold as in a glass the glory of the Lord,

and have the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 3 : 18; 4 : 6). They into whose minds the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, does not shine, they believe not (2 Cor. 4 : 4). That faith, which is without spiritual light, is not the faith of the children of the light and of the day; but the presumption of the children of darkness. And therefore to press and urge them to believe, without any spiritual light or sight, tends greatly to help forward the delusions of the prince of darkness. Men not only cannot exercise faith without some spiritual light, but they can exercise faith only just in such proportion as they have spiritual light. Men will trust in God no further than they know Him: and they cannot be in the exercise of faith in Him, further than they have a sight of His fulness and faithfulness in exercise. Nor can they have the exercise of trust in God, any further than they are in a gracious frame. They that are in a dead, carnal frame, doubtless *ought* to trust in God; because that would be the same thing as coming out of their bad frame, and turning to God; but to exhort men confidently to trust in God, and so hold up their hope and peace, though they are not in a gracious frame, and continue still to be so, is the same thing, in effect, as to exhort them confidently to trust in God, but not with a gracious trust: and what is that but a wicked presumption? It is just as impossible to trust in God, when they have no lively exercises of grace, without the exercises of grace!

It is true, that it is the *duty* of God's people to trust in Him when in darkness, even though they remain still in darkness, in one sense, viz.: when the aspects of His providence are dark, and look as though God had forsaken them, and did not hear their prayers. Many clouds gather, many enemies surround them with a formidable aspect, threatening to swallow them up, and all events of providence seem to be against them. All circumstances seem to render the promise of God difficult to be fulfilled, but He must be trusted out of sight, i.e., when we cannot see which way it is possible for Him to fulfil His word. Everything but God's mere word makes it look unlikely, so that if persons believe, they must hope against hope. Thus the ancient patriarchs, and thus the Psalmist, Jeremiah, Daniel, Shadrach, Meshech and Abednego, and the apostle Paul, gave glory to God by trusting Him in darkness. We have many instances of such a glorious, victorious faith in the eleventh of the Hebrews. But how different a thing is this, from trusting in God, without spiritual sight, and being at the same time in a dead and carnal frame!

Spiritual light may be let into the soul in one way, when it is not in another; and so there is such a thing as the saints trusting in God, and also knowing their good estate, when they are destitute of some kinds of experience. For instance, they may have clear views of God's all-sufficiency and faithfulness, and so may confidently trust in Him, and know that they are His children; and yet not have those clear and sweet ideas of His love, as at other times. Thus it was with Christ Himself in His last passion. They may also have views of God's sovereignty, holiness, and all-sufficiency, enabling them quietly to submit to Him, and to exercise a sweet and most encouraging hope in His fulness, when they are not satisfied of their own good estate. But how different things are these, from confidently trusting in God, without spiritual light or experience!

Those who thus insist on persons living by faith, when they have no experience, and are in very bad frames, are also very absurd in their notions of faith. What they mean by faith is, believing that they are in a good estate. Hence they count it a dreadful sin for them to doubt of their state, whatever frames they are in, and whatever wicked things they do, because it is the great and heinous sin of unbelief; and he is the best man, and puts most honour upon God, that maintains his hope of his good estate the most confidently and immovably, when he has the least light or experience; that is to say, when he is in the worst frame and way; because forsooth, that it is a sign that he is strong in faith, giving glory to God, and against hope believes in hope. But from what Bible do they learn this notion of faith, that it is a man's confidently believing that he is in a good estate? If this be faith, the Pharisees had faith in an eminent degree; some of whom Christ teaches, committed the unpardonable sin against the Holy Ghost. The Scripture represents faith, as that by which men are brought into a good estate; and therefore it cannot be the same thing, as believing that they are already in a good estate. To suppose that faith consists in persons believing that they are in a good estate, is in effect the same thing, as to suppose that faith consists in a person's believing that he has faith, or in *believing that he has faith!*

# Inability and Holiness

H. P. WOTTON

Inability is seen in the inorganic and in the organic. A stone possesses no power of being. The same is true of all inanimate objects. They have no power to be or to do. They can neither increase nor decrease, be improved or made into objects of utility or beauty apart from influences brought to bear upon them.

Apart from God, the organic is as powerless as the inorganic. Many people fail to see this because they are without faith, for 'through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of the things which do appear' (Hebrews 11 : 3), and God upholds 'all things by the word of His power' (Hebrews 1 : 3).

The experience is recorded of a lowly man whose service for God consisted in the continual practice of His presence. He said that 'in the winter, seeing a tree stripped of its leaves, and considering that within a little time the leaves would be renewed, and after that the flowers and fruit appear, he received a high view of the providence and power of God, which had never since been effaced from his soul. That this view had perfectly set him loose from the world, and kindled in him such a love for God that he could not tell whether it had increased in above forty years that he had lived since'. His recognition of the tree's inability and of God's power to renew its life was, by the blessing of God, the first step that led him to a knowledge of God in Christ and to a long life of humble service. In the Christian life inability and true spiritual life meet together, and from them springs a life of faith.

## **Fallen man**

The inability of fallen man to receive the things of God's kingdom consists not only in that he is spiritually dead. It consists also in his enmity against God, 'for the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God' (Romans 8 : 7, 8). And what is more pleasing to God than for Him to see the sinner returning from his ways to receive the Saviour He has provided for him, the Saviour of whom the Father has testified that 'this is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased' (Matthew 3 : 17).

But the sinner is neither a stone nor a clod. He has ears to hear. He has eyes to see. And what he would do in the spiritual life were he spiritually alive are the things he now does in the natural life, with different objects in view. He loves, he hates, he believes. But he loves and hates the wrong things, and puts his trust in that which will avail him nothing.

It is not that he has no knowledge of God, for God has revealed Himself in the things He has made. 'The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth His handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard' (Psalm 19 : 1 to 3). But because of his enmity the natural man turns away from God's revelation of His glory.

The apostle's indictment against him for this is that 'the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness. Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse; because that, when they knew God they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools' (Romans 1 : 18 to 22).

#### **The natural man's knowledge of God's natural attributes**

The natural man indeed may know something of the character of God and still remain unwilling and so unable to perform any spiritual act. He may know that God is omnipotent, that He is unchangeable, that He is infinite. He may see something of the majesty and glory of God as He has revealed Himself to us in the creation of the universe, but a sight of God's natural attributes has no power to convert. It is a sight of God's moral attributes that does this. It is holiness essential to the new birth that sweetly subdues a man and makes him willing to come to Christ, for without holiness 'no man shall see the Lord' (Hebrews 12 : 14).

Natural attributes of themselves have no moral quality. There is nothing in power, or infinitude, or immutability, in and of themselves apart from holiness to influence a person for good, and so he who does not see the beauty of God's moral or spiritual perfections cannot be influenced by them.

### The beauty of holiness

Jonathan Edwards in his *Religious Affections* has this to say: 'Saints and angels behold that glory of God which consists in the beauty of His holiness; and it is this sight only that will melt and humble the hearts of men, wean them from the world, draw them to God, and effectually change them. A sight of the awful greatness of God may overpower men's strength, and be more than they can endure; but if the moral beauty of God be hid, the enmity of the heart will remain in its full strength'. And again, 'He that sees not the beauty of holiness knows not what one of the graces of God's Spirit is, he is destitute of any idea or conception of gracious exercises of the soul, and all holy comforts and delights, and all effects of the saving influences of the Spirit of God on the heart; and so is ignorant of the greatest works of God, the most important and glorious effects of His power upon the creature: and also is wholly ignorant of the saints as saints. He knows not what they are, and in effect is ignorant of the whole spiritual world'.

Just as the Lord Jesus was 'declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead' (Romans 1 : 4), so the new man in Christ is partaker of the divine nature, which rejoices in holy things.

Though the regenerate have not always the power to do what they would, the desire to be holy is with them. And so the apostle cries out in Romans 7 : 24, 'O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?'

What has happened to him to make him cry out in this way? The answer is that his eyes have been opened to see the spirituality of God's holy law. By virtue of the renewing of his mind in Christ he sees the moral and spiritual beauty of the law as it is summed up in love to God and man. But this sight has also shown him, by way of contrast, the deformity and ugliness of sin in himself. And so, though his renewed mind found delight in the beauty of holiness, he found in himself the opposing force of sin that he hated. And so he says, 'I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself

serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin' (Romans 7 : 21 to 25).

As a man 'thinketh in his heart, so is he' (Proverbs 23 : 7). The things a man loves and cleaves to—these are the man. And though, because of impediments, he is not always able to traverse the path he loves, it is his path by right of love and choice. The thing that would draw him away from the path of peace is now no longer a part of himself, for God by virtue of regeneration has caused him to choose the highway of holiness, and 'wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein' (Isaiah 35 : 8). With his mind he serves the law of Christ, and such is the love and kindness of God to His regenerate people that He is pleased to overlook their inability to do what they would so much like to do and cannot, and to say that 'the desire of a man is his kindness' (Proverbs 19 : 22).

The new creature in Christ would do so many things. He would always please his Lord. He would walk in the way of righteousness. He would serve his generation according to the will of God. But when he has done all, if by the grace of God he is enabled to do all, he must say that he is an unprofitable servant, for he sees sin in his service and pollution in his prayers. But his hatred of what he sees arises from a new principle of holiness that is his by virtue of a living faith in Jesus Christ.

### MEDITATION

*Meditation and prayer are twin sisters; and both appear equally necessary to the Christian life. Meditation must exist where there is prayer, and prayer is sure to exist where there is meditation. Nothing is more wanting nowadays to make Christians grow in grace than meditation.*

—C. H. SPURGEON.

### 'DO ALL IN THE NAME OF THE LORD JESUS'

*Let me write these words over whatever I do in word or deed. Let me pray, let me live my daily life, let me suffer in the name of Jesus, seeking to reflect Him, my peerless pattern and let me enter heaven at last in the name of Jesus as one who believes in Him. It is my only title to the mansions in the skies.*—DR. ALEX SMELLIE.

# ***The Breastplate of Righteousness***

*A Sermon preached by Pastor D. W. Middleton  
at Surrey Chapel, Norwich, on Sunday morning,  
17th January, 1971.*

Text: 'And having on the breastplate of righteousness.'  
—Ephesians 6 : 14.

Here is the Apostle Paul in prison. He is not in a cell or in an ordinary sort of prison. Rather, he is under house arrest and his friends can come to him and stay with him; only he himself must never go out. And always at the door of the room in which he is there is at least one Roman soldier on duty. Much of Paul's time is given to writing letters. He is writing a letter now, or rather Tychicus, his secretary, is doing the actual writing and Paul himself is perhaps walking up and down. God's Spirit is within him, moving, prompting, inspiring his heart and mind; and he is dictating to Tychicus about this warfare that every Christian is engaged in: this moral and spiritual warfare.

The godless is not at all worried about it. He doesn't know there is such a warfare. But the Christian takes it seriously. He has to have God's strength in him for one thing; he has to be armed; he has to have the armour the Old Testament speaks about—*God's* armour. Armour not unlike the armour worn by this very Roman soldier standing at the door and looking out into the street. The breastplate, covering the chest from the shoulders down to the loins; sometimes made of small metal scales fixed on to leather, sometimes—now coming in from the East—of chain mail, or, possibly in this case, a bronze breastplate. The war boots, light but strong, reinforced, made for the famous forced marches the Roman infantry had to make. The shield, a huge thing some 2½ feet broad and 4 feet high; and the helmet—a light, metal helmet, sometimes with a crest or plume according to the rank of the soldier. And, hanging from his belt, the sword—not a long, broad sword, but the new revolutionary Roman sword, short, two-edged, light, quick-to-use, and deadly in the hands of trained men.

There he stands, the sun gleaming on his armour. As Paul looks him up and down, the Spirit stirred within him and moved his mind; and he goes on dictating. Tychicus goes on

writing: 'And having on the breastplate of righteousness, and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace, and taking the shield of faith and the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit.'

Last week we looked at the general principles. We have to be armed, and not with man's armour, not with mere morality, or psychology or superstition or legalism, but with *God's* armour. We looked at the first piece: the belt of Truth. Here was the first thing: that we have to gird the loins of our mind with the truth of God. This morning, therefore, we are going on to the second piece. The belt of truth was not strictly armour. We saw that it was to be used upon ourselves. There was God's truth, as we said, 'pulling us together'. The breastplate is, however, obviously armour. It is specifically and specially for this purpose. The actual breastplate was no use to a soldier when he wasn't fighting, in the way that a belt could have been. In fact, it was probably a nuisance to him. He has to polish it and wear it on parade, and he probably hated the sight of it; but in battle he blessed it. And when the battle was ended he saw all the dents in this breastplate where it had taken so many thrusts of spear and sword that would otherwise have proved fatal. So it is definitely armour in relationship to the attacks that we get from our enemies; and, what is more, it is essential because if any Christian takes seriously the matter of overcoming evil in their life, then they have got to be able to put on this breastplate, otherwise they do not stand a chance. You think of a Roman soldier going into battle without a breastplate—well, he would have been slaughtered in a few minutes. The breastplate protected the heart, the lungs, the vital organs, and was an essential piece of armour. Without it, he was lost.

Now, let us find out what in fact is meant by the breastplate, how it works, how it deflects evil, and how we put it on. The breastplate is mentioned just once in the Old Testament, and once in the New Testament apart from this. It is mentioned, of course, many times in the Old Testament, describing the High Priest's breastplate; but that wasn't really armour. The one reference to our purpose, the major reference in the Old Testament is in Isaiah 59 where it speaks of 'righteousness as a breastplate' which God as a man of war puts on. The other New Testament references we will leave as we must now try to get into the meaning of these words 'the breastplate of righteousness'.

What righteousness is this? The word can be used, so far as the Christian is concerned, in three principal ways. First, it

can be used to describe legal righteousness; the righteousness which is of the law, the kind of righteousness which the Apostle Paul had in large degree when he was a Pharisee. Secondly, it can mean the imputed righteousness of Christ—the 'righteousness which is of God by faith'. Thirdly, it can mean the actual righteousness of the saint—the righteousness which the Christian is gradually being blessed and graced by God into, as the fruit of the Spirit grows in his life. Now the obvious question is: which one is in mind here? I think the first we can rule out immediately because our old legal righteousness is what the Old Testament calls 'filthy rags'. We are all such frail and foolish creatures that surely none of us dare call our own attempts to keep God's law a breastplate—strong and bright, and proof against evil. I hope we are all convinced of this. That kind of 'do-goodery'—doing our best to keep the law of God—is doomed to failure. It won't do either for this life or the next. I like William Gurnall's remark here. He says—and you remember the age in which he was writing—he says: 'This way to heaven is like the Northern Passage to the Indies (the north-west passage they were all trying to find then): whoever attempts it is sure to get frozen before he gets halfway thither.'

Well then, can we take this third sense of righteousness: the righteousness of sanctification—Christian holiness, Christ-likeness? Now, many do try to take it in this way. But my own conviction is that we cannot do so for very serious reasons. How can *my* righteousness be the armour of *God*? How can I put on something which is already part of me—my righteousness? How can my imperfect righteousness be armour to me? What of the young and immature and weak Christian? He has no armour. Are any of us sufficiently righteous to think our righteousness can arm us against the devil? I know for myself, if I have to depend on my own righteousness to protect me, then I might just as well not try and fight. The whole thing is hopeless. I give up before the beginning. My righteousness is not a breastplate. It is more like a string vest.

So we turn to the second meaning of righteousness: 'the righteousness which is of God by faith'. Now, if this is a completely novel idea to you, just turn over a couple of pages—to Philippians chapter 3, verses 8 and 9, particularly verse 9: 'That I may win Christ and be found in Him'—listen—'not having my own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith'. That is a basic text for this subject. Not my

own righteousness, but the 'righteousness which is of God by faith'.

Now, I feel convinced that this is what is intended here: the righteousness of *Christ*. I was very interested in what one old Commentary that I looked at said on this passage. It belonged originally to Robert Govett, the first minister of this chapel. His memorial plaque is there on the wall; and the Commentary had inside the cover his name, Robert Govett, February 28th, 1856. And when the writer deals with 'our righteousness' and asks 'Is this the meaning?' Govett had written in the margin, 'But this is not perfect'. And when the writer asks 'Is it Christ's righteousness?' Govett puts a little tick and says: 'It is something put on and therefore outside of themselves'. Well, exactly. I'm always glad to agree with Govett and, indeed, with the majority of evangelical, reformed scholars who show that it is the righteousness of *Christ*. All right, but clearly this sounds a bit mysterious and fanciful to many Christian people, and we need to get a great deal nearer to this if we are to be helped by it because the setting of this is the great doctrine of *Justification*.

Now this is one of the central doctrines and realities of the New Testament; and if through mental laziness we neglect it, then we make ourselves very poor Christians. We all know this word appears in the New Testament many times. When you read the Epistles you come across these words: 'justify', 'justification', but what do they mean? To justify someone means to declare them righteous. It is the opposite of to condemn. If you condemn someone you declare him to be guilty. It is not that you make him guilty by condemning him; you declare him to be guilty. To justify does not mean to make someone righteous; it means to declare him righteous. In other words, this is just what man needs from God. When a man feels his position before God, what he needs is that God should declare him righteous, so that all the privileges that follow should be his. I need that God should not condemn me. I want to escape from that, I want God to justify me and say, 'This is a righteous man'. But how can it be? Not on the basis of what I have done—that is impossible. I can do my best to keep God's law, but I cannot keep it. No one can. The Bible is clear and adamant on this. 'By the works of the law shall no flesh be justified,' 'knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law.' Again and again and again it is saying that when God looks at my efforts, my failures, and my sins, He cannot justify me. He can never say 'That is a righteous man'. He *has* to condemn me. He *has* to say 'That

is a guilty man'. And I know it myself. My own heart agrees.

Well, then, how can I be justified? It is exactly for this, the truth of God tells us, that God sent His Son into the world. What did He do? First—and don't miss this—He lived an absolutely perfect life, a life of perfect obedience to God—the only perfect life ever lived. And, mark this, not a life of easy, Divine innocence but (and this is important to our subject) a life of fierce temptation, fighting, and prayers and tears and crying to God, and through it all a life of sinless obedience, a life that God *could* justify, a life that God *could* declare perfectly and absolutely righteous—the one life ever lived that satisfied God in every detail. But He didn't only live a perfect life. He offered up that perfect life to God in death. He died, as the Bible says again and again, for us, for our sins. His death on the cross was not just a great act of love; not only that, it was God the Son dying for the sins of men and offering up His perfect life. Now, hold that in your mind: *perfect* life and *perfect* sacrifice. All very well, you say, but what good does that do to me? Well, exactly this: God tells us that when we are in union with Christ, all He has done is then applied to *our* lives personally. His death for my sins will mean my forgiveness before God. His righteous life will mean His righteousness being given to me.

Now the way I come into union with Christ is by grace through faith; 'Being justified by faith we have peace with God'. But when I come by faith to Christ, what happens to me? What does God *do*? Well, the Word of God is clear. He pardons my sins. He no longer imputes them to me. He declares me to be acquitted, discharged. I come under the blessing of His promises: 'Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin', 'Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, whose sins are covered'. That's the blessing I come under when I put my faith in Christ. The past is dealt with. The guilt is pardoned. Not only so, I am brought into God's family. God now becomes my Heavenly Father. I become an heir of everlasting life in His home. But then there is this (and this is what we are working up to all the time): I am clothed with the righteousness of Christ. The righteousness of Christ is imputed to me. My sins are imputed to Him. His righteousness is imputed to me. Do you remember the great verse in the end of 2 Corinthians 5 where it says 'He (God) hath made Him (Christ) to be sin Who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him'? Or again, 'Christ Jesus, Who of God is made unto us righteousness' ? Our reading of Romans 5 was because it speaks so

many times of this: 'the gift of righteousness'; and says that 'by the obedience of One (Christ) shall many be made righteous'. This is the righteousness of God which is 'by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe'. Now, in case you think that this is something extraordinary, let me read to you just a few short sentences from the New Bible Dictionary which is published by the Inter-Varsity Fellowship and is, you might say, a standard work of middle-of-the-road evangelical faith. It says this: 'The gift of Christ's righteousness is made by God to all who believe and it is the basis of God's justification. Those clothed with His righteousness are justly acquitted and accepted as righteous at God's judgment bar. The fact that God has provided this righteousness for sinners is the central fact of the Gospel'. Now can you see it? God looks at me and He sees not my own frailty and foolishness and readiness to sin, but because I am clothed in Christ's righteousness, He sees *that*. He sees me hidden in Christ. I am wearing His wedding garment. I can cry out 'He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation. He hath covered me with the robe of righteousness'. That is a lovely word in Isaiah 61: 'He hath covered me with the robe of righteousness'. I can sing in the words of Zinzendorf's great hymn:

'Jesus, Thy robe of righteousness,  
 My beauty is, my glorious dress;  
 'Midst flaming worlds in this arrayed,  
 With joy shall I lift up my head'.

Now, this is my position as a justified man: I am covered with the robe of Christ's righteousness. And how perfect that robe is! It is woven all of my Lord's obedience. In it His tears and His prayers shine. In it is woven His love to His Father, it is shot through with His shed blood. It is infinitely perfect.

'This spotless robe the same appears  
 When ruined nature sinks in years.  
 No age can change its glorious hue;  
 The robe of Christ is ever new.'

Now, we are saying 'Christian, rejoice in this. If this is real and true, rejoice in this: that Christ's perfect righteousness is put on to us; and rejoice that this is true, that this is a spiritual reality'.

But there is a difficulty here. How do we understand this? How is it that Christ *can give* me His righteousness? It is as if I have to go out to an important function and I have no clothes, only dirty rags. What shall I do? I have nothing to wear, I've no suit. But a friend comes along and says, 'Take mine and wear it', and he gives it to me—a new and perfect

suit. And so I go out to this function in his suit. I can wear his clothes in that way. But how can I wear Christ's righteousness? How does this work in terms of morality and psychology? These are things beyond us to answer. How is it that God can see us in Christ? Yet the Scriptures tell us this is true. God is able to do this. *And I trust this*, I trust that my standing before God is not now in the filthy rags of my righteousness; consciously by faith, I take this stand.

Now, make this simple movement of thought: the righteousness of Christ is my robe; the righteousness of Christ is also my *breastplate*. Before God it is my robe; before the devil it is my breastplate. Before God's holy and all-seeing eye, it is a perfect and holy robe that satisfies Him entirely. Before the devil and his cunning and force and hatred, it is a breastplate of perfect armour that protects against his stabs and cuts. I hope you can see this; the robe before God for Him to be satisfied with, a breastplate before the devil for him to be thwarted by. Now, I believe with all my heart that this is the breastplate of righteousness. It is Christ's perfect righteousness imputed to me in justification; and if I am justified by faith, it is mine to wear as a breastplate. Grasp this, believe this, rejoice in it. The righteousness I wear is not my righteousness—it couldn't stand a single blow from Satan. Only Christ's righteousness will be the breastplate.

And now *how* really does it protect me? In the daily to and fro battle of life, how does the devil assault the Christian, what are his temptations? Don't think too narrowly of this. Sometimes we think only of temptations we have to endure every day when we are tempted to lie, to lust, or when we are tempted to hate with bad temper. But that isn't all he does. So often he comes and he speaks to us in this way: 'You're a poor Christian. Look at all the sins you've committed. Look at all the light you've sinned against. Think of how you've sinned there, and how you've sinned here, how you've failed in spite of all God's promises to you, and in spite of what people think about you. Why ever should you think of yourself as a Christian? No wonder God is angry with you, no wonder God doesn't bless your life. The fact about you is you are not a Christian at all and never will be. Look at your life, look at your record. Despair, give up. You're not a Christian at all'. Doesn't the devil attack you like this? He does me, all too often. And when that temptation has worked enough, when it is successful, it casts us right down to the ground; it keeps us there; it paralyses us. We feel we can't go on at all.

So what can we do? Well, here is exactly where the breast-

plate comes in. I can divert all the devil's attempts here because what he is trying to do is to get me to judge myself by the law instead of by the gospel. And so I reply to him: 'Of course I'm a poor Christian, and that grieves me; but that isn't the end of the matter. I am in Christ, and all God's favour towards me is for Christ's sake. God isn't casting me out because of my sins. He is welcoming me for Christ's sake'. And so when I'm tempted in exactly this way, I tell the devil: 'You poor fool, you've got it all wrong. You're trying to make me forget the Gospel and leave out Christ'. Now we have to do this. This is practical. This is acting the Gospel. I confess to you sometimes when I lie awake at night, it almost makes me weep to think what a vile and guilty and worthless creature I am as a Christian. And the enemy can drive home these thoughts like nails into your conscience and heart. There's only one answer to it: the free and perfect righteousness of Christ. And then you have to put it on. You must lay hold of it by faith. Put on the breastplate. Yes, the devil's right about me, but he is forgetting all about Christ. I am in Christ, and God sees me in Christ. And I must see myself in Christ, and the devil must see me in Christ because I'll take my stand nowhere else.

'When Satan tempts me to despair  
And tells me of the guilt within,  
Upward I look and see HIM there  
Who made an end of all my sin.'

Do you use this breastplate? If it were my righteousness, I would have to say to the devil, 'Oh, I'm not such a bad chap after all. I have done this, and I have done that'. I would try and protect myself with my own righteousness. But the devil would soon get past that, and bring me to despair. Instead, what he has to try to do is to break down the righteousness of Christ. He's got to try to find some flaw, some fault, with Christ's perfect righteousness. And that's beyond the devil. I referred earlier to Govett's comments written in the margin of that Commentary I use, and his comment here is this: 'First pierce Him, then me'. That's a challenge to the enemy; 'You find a loophole. You find some gap in Christ's righteousness. Then you can floor me. You find something *undone* by Christ and then that will be something that I can never do and you can pierce me to the heart'. But Christ's breastplate is perfect, and the devil can't get through. 'First pierce Him, then me.' But he cannot do it.

I hope we can, all of us, see this. But what you will want to ask if you're following at all is this: how does this breastplate

protect *me* from all the other sorts of temptations—the temptation to lie, to lust, to anger, to pride, the ordinary everyday ones? Well, I do believe the breastplate comes in there too. When Satan tempts to lie, when Satan tempts to other sins, what do I say? I say, ‘I am a man in Christ. I’m cleansed by His blood. I’m clothed in His righteousness. He died to make me holy’. Put it this way: shall I who wear this spotless robe wallow in sin like a sow in the mud and filth? Is that what you are asking me to do? I take account of what I am in Christ; the dignity and beauty of it, the price He paid to bless me. And I turn aside the temptation with this breastplate. I am a man in Christ.

But, having said that, I would very strongly maintain that the first purpose of this breastplate is to turn away accusations and despairing thoughts. Put it like this: each part of the armour has its special purpose. It is not that each piece is against all temptation, but that each piece is appropriate to certain temptations. The shield is to catch the flaming darts of the devil; each part of the armour is appropriate to a certain type of temptation. And this breastplate is especially against the enemy, the great accuser. Don’t, I say again, limit what the devil does to mere temptations to our ordinary little sins. He does everything he can to throw us down in every way. He wants us to despair. He wants us to mourn. He wants us to give up. He wants us to be joyless Christians. He wants us to lack all confidence, so that instead of running in the race, we are sitting beside the track moaning and weeping. So many Christians are just like that; and this kind of attack, I believe, is far more common than we tend to think. Just about every Christian biography you can read speaks about this, and all the great men and women of God have endured it. And ordinary Christian people like you and me have to endure it. But God has given us armour specifically against the devil in this respect: the breastplate of the righteousness of Christ. And when I have this on, the devil cannot touch me.

Now, I don’t know how it is with you, but to me this is something vital and practical. I couldn’t live without it. And it isn’t to be put on just for those times when the devil comes. It is something we must always have, to be joyful in Christ. It isn’t just a medicine for when we are ill; it’s a tonic for always. Always live and walk in the conscious enjoyment of what you are in Christ. When you get up in the morning and look at yourself in the mirror, take account of who and what you are in Christ. Say to yourself, ‘I’m a man, a woman, in Christ.

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# On Earth in Heaven

MARTIN J. ELLISTON

## I. THE TWO SPHERES

'O teach me what it meaneth,  
That cross uplifted high.'

To the Christian, the cross means his personal salvation and marks the start of his appreciation of the real meaning and significance of life. Further study of the Scriptures reveals that each miracle of salvation is but a part of a vast plan that involves time and eternity, God, Satan and the whole of mankind.

This short series of articles is a study of that plan and its participants, beginning with a view of the spheres in which it is enacted—time and eternity.

### TIME

This universe, that which we are able to observe, live in, send objects around and, increasingly, to travel in, is based on what we call time—day and night, the seasons, years. The planets take a certain time to go round the sun, our earth takes a certain time to revolve on its axis, stars burst into life and dissipate their energy and die in time. 'To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven' (Ecclesiastes 3 : 1). Now although man can measure time and can use it as a measurement of speed, he is a long way from understanding the nature of time, particularly since he will not go to the Scriptures and believe what God has revealed about it. It is therefore important that Christians have a clear understanding of the biblical teaching on time and the universe as we know it.

First of all there are two very clear statements about time—one from Genesis and one from Revelation.

Genesis 1 : 1-5—'In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light: and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness. And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day.'

Time was the first thing that God created—Day and Night were divided the one from the other. For the first three days

of creation God Himself divided the Day from the Night, and controlled the time basis of the universe. On the fourth day (vv. 14-18) He created the natural laws of the movement of the sun, moon and stars to carry out the task of dividing Day from Night and keeping the time processes going. Time had a beginning. There was a state before time. There was a first day.

There will also be a last day. The universe controlled by time will come to an end.

Revelation 10 : 5-7—'And the angel which I saw stand upon the sea and upon the earth lifted up his hand to heaven. And swore by him that liveth for ever and ever, who created heaven, and the things that therein are, and the earth, and the things which are therein, that there should be time no longer: But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished, as he hath declared to his servants the prophets.'

'Time no longer' is the condition to which reference is made in Revelation 21 : 1-5 and verses 21-27, particularly verse 23, 'And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof'.

The present order of heaven and earth, the universe as we know it today will pass away to be replaced by a heaven and earth existing on a different principle, not of time but of eternity. The original dividers of day and night—the sun and the moon—will no longer exist in the new heaven and earth, the Lamb of God will control it on an eternal, not a time basis.

### ETERNITY

That basis, eternity, is completely different to the time structure. It has a completely different set of rules. Eternity has no beginning and no ending. In 2 Peter 3 : 8 we read that a 'thousand years are as one day and one day is as a thousand years', which tells us that the measurements of time simply do not apply to eternity.

Three main points about eternity that affect our overall theme are as follows:

(1) Eternity is a permanent state that is separate from time. It is not a continuation of time as we know it. It is outside time. God dwells in eternity and to Him the past, present and future are all one. 'He declares the end from the beginning.' In the Scriptures the present tense is usually used to describe eternal things. The Lord Jesus Christ used the present tense for eternity when He stated His own eternal position, 'Before Abraham was (these are the terms of time) I AM' (that is the

language of eternity). In Revelation Christ says 'I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending'—not 'I was the beginning and will be the ending' but 'I am'. He is the beginning and ending both at the same eternal moment.

(2) The eternal world has contact with the temporal world. We can be in contact with God through Jesus Christ by prayer. God is with us by reason of His omnipresence and by reason of His Holy Spirit dwelling within us.

(3) Our evidence for the existence of the eternal world comes from the contacts with it recorded in the Scriptures. The Bible tells us that there are three distinct types of being who people the eternal world: the Holy Trinity of the God-Head; the angels, and the dead. The angels are of two classes—the blessed who serve God and the fallen (sometimes called demons) who serve Satan. There are also two kinds of dead, those who are dead in Christ and those who are damned.

The contacts between men, creatures of time, and God the supreme Being of eternity, have been numerous and are recorded in many parts of Scripture. We shall look at some of these in more detail in later articles. For the moment let it suffice that God communicated with the Patriarchs (Abraham, Jacob and Moses) directly, revealed Himself to His people through the prophets and finally entered the time universe in the Person of His Son the Lord Jesus Christ to do the work of Salvation. Hebrews 1 : 1-2.

The angels are sometimes called spirits and there are of course instances of them appearing with messages from God, especially in the New Testament (Luke 1 : 5-20, 26-38; Luke 2 : 8-16, etc.). In the New Testament as well there is reference to the activities of demons and demon possession. Incidentally, this is, to this day, one of the dangers of tampering with the occult, the possibility of becoming possessed by devils. We are told to try the spirits (1 John 4 : 1) and this applies to all our experiences of a spiritual nature. Do they lead to an increase in our witness and conviction that Christ is the Son of God?

There are many doctrinal statements, particularly in Paul's epistles, of the existence for man of a life after death. Here we are concerned with evidences. One is in the Old Testament. The Witch of Endor raises Samuel—1 Samuel 28 : 7-14. Here from Scripture we have firm evidence that the spirits of the dead can be called back, but we have firmer instructions in the Law of Moses—'Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live' (Lev. 20 : 6). Human beings must not attempt it. God has said we are not to meddle. So, whether Spiritualism works or not (and

from the evidence of Scripture it could), it is a practice condemned by God.

Secondly, we know of the existence of the after-life from Christ's own statements concerning Paradise (Abraham's bosom) and Hell—Dives and Lazarus (Luke 16 : 19-31). The fact that Christ rose from the dead and ascended is our evidence that there is an eternity. Added to that we have the evidence of John the Apostle who actually saw the glories of Heaven (Revelation).

The fact of the eternal world should influence our scale of values while we live in the time universe. Once we realise that there is another world, an eternal world to which all mankind is travelling and which for us as Christians holds out a promise of glory; once we gain the vision that our lives here and the activities in which we engage have an eternal significance, then we shall get our priorities right. Hebrews 11 : 13-14.

*(To be continued)*

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I'm a justified man, a justified woman'. Let me live like it then! I am clothed with the garments of salvation, I have the righteousness of God by faith—perfect robe, perfect armour. Thank God, I don't depend on my own good works at all. It is all Christ now, nothing but Christ. Christian, this is a neglected truth. It is a little-known truth among Christians today, this great truth of Justification, and especially its application. It is neglected, it is little believed; and it is even less enjoyed and experienced. But it works. It is pragmatic. It works powerfully. Well then, 'Lay hold of the truth and reality of it. Be clad in the robe of Christ and be armed with the breast-plate of His perfect righteousness'. Amen.

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*'Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace' (Galatians 5 : 4).*

# ASSURANCE—the TRUE and the FALSE

A Study in the First Epistle of John

W. WEIR

Some time ago a woman who had been a Christian for many years was troubled with serious doubts concerning her salvation. She was most anxious to be right with God, but for years she knew nothing of 'the full assurance of faith'. Christian friends tried to help her, but the clouds of uncertainty darkened her whole life during this period. Before her death, however, the gloom was completely dispelled, and she enjoyed real peace. Although there was this temporary lack of assurance on her part, those who were most intimately associated with her had no doubts concerning the genuineness of her Christian profession.

A man of very different character made profession of faith in Jesus Christ, and for years had been accepted as a Christian. The time came, however, when he no longer companied with Christians, turned his back on the Christian way of life, and for a number of years gave way to open sin. When in this careless and even sinful state he became seriously ill. A Christian friend visited him on his death-bed and expressed concern for his soul's condition and the eternity he must face. He had hopes that there might have been true repentance for the past and a contrite seeking of forgiveness. Instead, he was met with the confident reply, 'Oh, I'm all right'. This troubled the friend who had gone to help the dying sinner, because there seemed to be no real foundation for such an assurance.

The doubts that troubled the true child of God for some years may have been distressing, but the unjustified confidence of one living in sin and about to pass into eternity was even more terrible, and far more dangerous.

Obviously this matter of Christian assurance is one of very great importance. It is possible for a true Christian to be seriously hindered because of doubts, but even worse than such doubts is the danger of being deceived by a false confidence.

A careful study of the first epistle of John<sup>1</sup> will help to protect the soul against both these evils. We find here the true foundation for a joyful assurance, and at the same time a solemn warning concerning any confidence that is not fully justified.

#### THE PEOPLE ADDRESSED

No particular Church is mentioned in this letter. However, it is clear that the writer has in mind those who belong to the Lord—those who know fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. When we think of John's advanced years, the last remaining member of the twelve Apostles, we can understand his form of address—'Little children', 'My little children'. John is thinking primarily of those who are now 'the children of God', and are one day to be 'like Him' who is 'altogether lovely'.

And yet, as we read this and other New Testament letters, we are reminded that it is necessary sometimes to talk to professing saints as if they were sinners. Thus Paul wrote in the following terms to the Church at Corinth—'Sanctified in Christ Jesus, called saints'—

'But brother goes to law against brother, and that before [Gentile judges] who are unbelievers—without faith or trust in the Gospel of Christ? Why, the very fact of your having lawsuits with one another at all is a defect—a defeat, an evidence of positive moral loss for you. Why not rather let yourselves suffer wrong and be deprived of what is your due? Why not rather be cheated—defrauded and robbed?

'But [instead it is you] yourselves who wrong and defraud, and that even your own brethren [by so treating them]!

'Do you not know that the unrighteous and the wrongdoers will not inherit or have any share in the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived (misled); neither the impure and immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor those who participate in homosexuality,

'Nor cheats—swindlers and thieves; nor greedy graspers, nor drunkards, nor foulmouthed revilers and slanderers, nor extortioners and robbers will inherit or have any share in the kingdom of God.

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<sup>1</sup> The majority of the Scripture references in the following pages are from *The Amplified New Testament*, by kind permission of The Lockman Foundation.

'And such some of you were (once). But you were washed . . . ' (1 Cor. 6 : 6-11)

To the same Church Paul wrote later this word of warning:

'Examine and test and evaluate your own selves, to see whether you are holding to your faith and showing the proper fruits of it. Test and prove yourselves [not Christ]. Do you not yourselves realise and know (thoroughly by an ever-increasing experience) that Jesus Christ is in you? unless you are [counterfeits] disapproved on trial and rejected.' (2 Cor. 13 : 5)

Why did he write like this? Obviously there were some in that Church in whose lives the fruits of righteousness had not matured, and it would have been very difficult for the onlooker to tell on which side of the dividing line they were. They professed to be on the Lord's side, but their lives were somewhat contradictory.

We have the same thought in the letter to 'the Churches of Galatia'. Paul wrote to them, 'I am fearful and perplexed about you' (Gal. 4 : 20). It would seem that no local Church was absolutely ideal in its life and personnel, not even in the days when the apostles were present to supervise. This condition of things in the Churches helps us to understand the words of solemn warning to be found alongside the words of clear assurance.

#### THE TWO SIDES OF TRUTH TO BE APPRECIATED

There is that which leads the Christian to assurance that he has eternal life. There is also that which comes as a solemn warning 'lest . . . any should seem to come short'. Error can easily arise in our thinking by emphasising one side of truth to the exclusion of the other side. It is essential that we should endeavour to preserve the balance of truth.

How often we read 'we know' in John's first epistle! It is intended that, as the reader grasps these certainties about the most vital things of life, he should be led into an assurance that will dispel the uncertainty and sense of insecurity so characteristic of the age in which we live. The Christian message should help us to appropriate and enjoy the 'promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come' (1 Tim. 4 : 8, A.V.).

We also read in this epistle:

'Whoever says, I know Him—I perceive, recognise, understand and am acquainted with Him—but fails to keep and obey His commandments is a liar . . . ' (chapter 2 : 4).

There is an assurance that is false and therefore dangerous. The Lord Jesus spoke very solemn words of warning concerning this very thing:

'Not every one who says to Me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father Who is in heaven' (Matt. 7 : 21).

Again, He said:

'You will fully recognise them by their fruits. Do people pick grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles?

'Even so every healthy tree bears good fruit—worthy of admiration; but the sickly (decaying, worthless) tree bears bad and worthless fruit.

'A good (healthy) tree cannot bear bad (worthless) fruit; nor can a bad (diseased) tree bear excellent fruit—worthy of admiration.' (Matt. 7 : 16-18)

If you can imagine a bramble bush covered with blackberries growing in the middle of a vineyard, and calling out 'I'm a true vine', it would not be more incongruous than for one who is living in habitual sin to be in the membership of a Christian Church, claiming to be a disciple of the sinless Son of God. The blackberries of sin would give the lie to any profession to be a branch in the true vine. The Apostle John states this truth in the strongest possible language in his epistle.

Some have such an assurance of eternal life that they tend to think the solemn warnings have no application to their case. They might well express their attitude in the verse of Toplady's hymn:

'Yes, I to the end shall endure,  
As sure as the earnest is given,  
More happy but not more secure  
The glorified spirits in heaven.'

If 'the earnest of our inheritance' (Eph. 1 : 14) is given as 'a pledge and foretaste' of future bliss, can there be any doubt about final possession? For any Christian who is living in the enjoyment of such confidence, surely there is an abiding responsibility to see to it that his life gives evidence that the earnest is really given.

#### A THREE-FOLD PURPOSE

It would hardly be possible to epitomise all John has to say in this epistle in two or three sentences. However, for this study it will be helpful to link together the three verses in which the writer clearly declares his purpose. In the introduction we read:

'And we are now writing these things to you so that our joy [in seeing you included] may be full—and your joy may be complete.' (Chap. 1 : 4)

In the closing part we read:

'I write this to you who believe in [adhere to, trust in and rely on] the name of the Son of God—that is, in the peculiar services and blessings conferred by Him on men—so that you may know [with settled and absolute knowledge] that you [already] have life, yes, eternal life.' (Chap. 5 : 13)

In chapter 2 : 1 another reason for writing is given:

'I write you these things so that you may not violate God's law and sin.'

Putting these three verses together, we see that John's aim in writing is: Fulness of Joy, Fulness of Assurance, and Holiness of Life.

First of all the writer's objective is that we might know fulness of joy. We tend to underestimate the importance of joy in the Christian life. The Rev. Robert Rowland said truly: 'One of the main tasks of the Christian is to keep in the enjoyment of God's blessings'.

How much the Lord Jesus spoke about joy, especially when He came toward the close of His earthly ministry! At the same time He made it quite clear that He was thinking of something very different from the kind of enjoyment the ungodly can have. This is what He said:

'I have told you these things that my joy and delight may be in you, and that your joy and gladness may be full measure and complete and overflowing' (John 15 : 11).

The Lord said 'my joy' in face of the worst that the world and the devil could do to Him. It was the kind of joy that the distress of the hour could not destroy, because it was linked with perfect assurance. 'For the joy that was set before Him He endured the cross, despising the shame.' Evidently the 'Man of sorrows' was also the Man of irrepressible joy—the joy of full assurance of final victory. He wanted the disciples to know this kind of joy—that their joy might be full.

Now John, the aged apostle, who had lived through a turbulent period, emphasised this same truth. Indeed, his avowed purpose in writing was 'that your joy might be full', in spite of so much that tended to kill joy.

Just as in the Lord's teaching, so in this epistle, it is clear that this fulness of joy is not founded upon anything material, but rather on a right relationship with the Lord Jesus. It is in

this connection that he speaks about a wonderful fellowship—fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.

It follows that any enjoyment that one has while deliberately pursuing a course of sin is not of the quality mentioned in this letter.

In the second place, the writer's objective is that the believer may have assurance. 'I write this to you . . . so that you may know . . . that you [already] have life, yes, eternal life' (chap. 5 : 13). This, too, is an important matter in Christian experience. Joy and assurance are close companions. They are helpers one of another. John writes some wonderful things to stimulate joy, and they are the very things that inspire real assurance. Thus we see that the assurance is in the very same setting as the joy. Therefore any confidence one has while deliberately pursuing a course of sin is not of the quality mentioned in this epistle.

Once again, the writer's objective is that the believer may be led to holiness of life. 'I write these things so that you may not violate God's law and sin' (chap. 2 : 1). The epistle gives no licence for sinning. It is not unrealistic; it tells us plainly that sin is something to be reckoned with, and we are not yet completely freed from it. A full provision is made for the present imperfect conditions in which we find ourselves (chap. 1 : 9). But acts of sin should not be tolerated in our lives. There should be deliverance from the dominion of sin.

The three-fold objective of the writer is clear:

Fulness of Joy,  
Fulness of Assurance,  
Purity of Life.

*(To be continued)*

# The "Black Sheep" of the Family

J. B. ROWELL

'There's no hope for me, I'm the "black sheep" of the family,' cried an old man over eighty years of age. Anguish filled this man's face as he gave vent to this outburst of deep feeling.

Years ago, while I was Pastor of the First Baptist Church in Kamloops, B.C., it was my responsibility, which I voluntarily assumed, to visit the Provincial Home for Aged Men, which we called 'the Old Men's Home'. Here I conducted a weekly gospel service.

On one occasion, after I had concluded the service, I went to the door to converse with the men. As I spoke to one of them, a Mr. Smail, with a very troubled countenance, exclaimed, 'It's too late now, it's too late now, I'm the black sheep of the family'.

I could see that he was too distressed for me to talk with him while among the men assembled there. As he left to go to his room, I followed him. When in his room, he gave expression to the same lamentation, giving evidence that he was under deep conviction, as he continued to call out in loud voice, 'It's no use, it's too late, I'm *the black sheep of the family*'. I sought to urge his need to turn to Jesus Christ, the only Saviour, who came 'to seek and to save that which was lost' (Luke 19 : 10). However, he seemed to be too overwhelmed with a sense of his lost condition that his sins shut out any thought of God's mercy.

I reluctantly left him in that hopeless condition, but went back to him the next day. I found him pacing his room with the same dreadful hopelessness filling his mind, which had obsessed him all those twenty-four hours since I was with him the previous day. He seemed beset by some fiend seeking to magnify his sins and blind him to any thought of Jesus Christ and His willingness to receive him.

Once again I was compelled to leave that convicted sinner in his wretched condition. However, I was aware of a tremendous issue hanging in the balance, so I went back to him on the third day. I seemed to be under divine compulsion to minister to him again in his crisis.

## THE APPOINTED TIME

Long years ago I learned these lines—

'The appointed time rolls on apace,  
Not to propose but call by grace:  
To change the heart, renew the will,  
And turn the feet to Zion's hill.' (Kent)

When I entered his room he commenced with the same attitude; whereupon I said, 'Come, we are going to have prayer', and when I knelt by his little bed he immediately knelt by my side. I prayed the Lord to deliver him from the bondage of believing there was no hope for him, and cause him to realise there was *a welcome at the throne of Grace*, and the forgiveness of sins by the Saviour who said, 'Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest' (Matt. 11 : 28). Almost to my amazement, this man by my side suddenly shouted out, 'It is alright now. It is alright now'; and, wonder of wonders, he rose to his feet a delivered man. The Lord had set him free. After that, he lived a life of jubilant Christian testimony among the men with whom he had lived for years.

## I DO BELIEVE IT

Some time later, he attended the Lord's Day morning service in the Baptist church. It was the morning worship service. Without asking for permission, he suddenly rose to his feet and in strong voice he sang:

'I do believe it, I do believe it,  
I'm saved by the Blood of the Lamb;  
My happy soul is free,  
For the Lord has pardoned me,  
Hallelujah to His Name.'

Of course, the congregation was surprised, but they rejoiced in his glowing testimony, and so did I.

*O Lord, let me have anything but Thy frown and anything with Thy smile!*—RICHARD CECIL.

# *He is Precious*

C. H. SPURGEON

As all the rivers run into the sea, so all delights centre in our Beloved.

The glances of His eyes outshine the sun: the beauties of His face are fairer than the choicest flowers: no fragrance is like the breath of His mouth.

Gems of the mine, and pearls from the sea, are worthless things when measured by His preciousness.

Peter tells us that Jesus is precious (1 Peter 2 : 7), but he did not and could not tell us how precious, nor could any of us compute the value of God's unspeakable Gift.

Words cannot set forth the preciousness of the Lord Jesus to His people, nor fully tell how essential He is to their satisfaction and happiness.

Believer, have you not found in the midst of plenty a sore famine if your Lord has been absent?

The sun was shining, but Christ had hidden Himself, and all the world was black to you; or it was night, and since the bright and morning Star was gone, no other star could yield you so much as a ray of light.

What a howling wilderness is this world without our Lord!

If once He hideth Himself from us, withered are the flowers of our garden; our pleasant fruits decay; the birds suspend their songs, and a tempest overturns our hopes.

All earth's candles cannot make daylight if the Sun of Righteousness be eclipsed.

He is the Light of our light, the Life of our life.

What wouldst thou do in the world without Him, in the midst of its temptations and its cares?

What wouldst thou do in the morning without Him, when thou wakest up and lookest forward to the day's battle?

What wouldst thou do at night, when thou comest home jaded and weary, if there were no door of fellowship between thee and Christ?

Blessed be His name, He will not suffer us to try our lot without Him, for Jesus never forsakes His own.

Yea, let the thought of what life would be without Him enhance His preciousness.