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2008**

The Gospel Magazine

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Publishing the Truth since 1766

THE GOSPEL MAGAZINE

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• EDITORIAL •

*“Alleluia: salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God”
(Revelation 19:1).*

THE word “Alleluia” only occurs here in this chapter in the whole Bible, and then only four times, and only in these first six verses. Yet it is one of the favourite words of Christians.

In the Bible it is used by those in heaven, of the final victory of God over the “great whore”. “Alleluia” in verse six gives the reason, “for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth”.

Why is it so much used by Christians? It is because “a voice came out of the throne, saying, Praise our God, all ye his servants, and ye that fear him, both small and great”. God commands His servants to celebrate that final victory. They reply, “Alleluia”.

How can we on earth celebrate a final victory that has not yet happened? The answer is, because it follows inevitably from the resurrection victory of our Lord Jesus Christ over Satan, death, hell and false religion – Romanism, Islam and the rest.

On the lid of a bottle of nuts packed in Britain, I was puzzled by the words, “Oily Loo Yah Thank heaven for Olives Et Al”. The penny dropped later with me than it will with you. I always remember the poster outside the crematorium chapel in Wolverhampton, young spring crocuses bursting out of the winter ground, with the words “We are an alleluia people”. The manager was a pleasant and efficient Roman Catholic young man, I liked very well. I once said to him that the Bible said differently to the poster. Only those who were Christ’s, would be resurrected as an “Alleluia people”. It gave a false impression. His reply was,

"The trouble with you, is you take the Bible too seriously. We do not bother with the Bible like that." That's the age we live in, founding all upon changeable opinions of men; frivolous, without awe of God, and ignorant of the Bible.

We have the word in our hearts, for excellent reasons. We glory in Easter, we say "Alleluia". The resurrection makes me praise because it is the mighty power of God. Christ is alive and reigns. I join the heavenly chorus. I shall rise with Him. Death has no more power over Christ's people. I am victor with Him. I exult.

I ought to dare to lose my life in the cause of Christ. When multitudes are prepared to die for a cause, even a false one like Islam, their victory is assured over those who are not prepared to die for their cause. Secularism, atheism, immorality – the West's "values" – inspire no one to die to defend them. That is how Christ overcame Caesar. To Augustus belonged the pomp, the power, the legions, the allegiance of the people in their millions. His the greatest organized system of heathenism ever seen in the world – the great whore. Historians say that the cause of the downfall of Rome was because no one saw the empire as worth defending, certainly not dying for.

With Christ were a dozen ordinary men, one of whom betrayed him. Caesar fought with every weapon: unlimited power, deceit, cruelty, lust, hate and riches. Christ won by rejection, utter love, and a Book, its story culminating in the rising again of the Christ of God from a cold tomb, long after rigor mortis had set in. God's love makes Christians willing to go unresisting to death for Him, triumphant. We are more than conquerors. Alleluia!



• OFFERING TO GOD •

A SERMON BY THE EDITOR

"And the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering: but unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect" (Genesis 4:4, 5).

LISTEN to what is said at almost any funeral today, and you will detect a certainty that God – if there is such – accepts the dead person and they are happy in oblivion or heaven. The Bible says "No"! God is, and He accepts some, rejects others. This simple story from the dawn of time has the secret of acceptance or rejection by God.

It goes deeper than the difference between believers and unbelievers. Believers in the Lord Jesus will say to me, "All Christians who trust Christ are accepted, so this story does not apply to me. It is a story about a believer who was accepted, and a non-believer who was refused." That is true, but there is more in this story. Each believer has in them a Cain and an Abel, the "new" man and the "old" man. Abel is in the image of Christ, Cain in the image of Adam. We know this is true

because we have a battle between the two going on in our hearts. Are you satisfied with the way God has accepted your offering?

If it troubles you that God has not used you in the way you expected, when you first put your trust in Him, then do not be side-tracked by well-meaning comforters. Let your unhappiness bring you to face up to the problem. Some will say, "God is using you in ways you do not yet understand". Others, "God always uses every life brought to Him". Yet others will say, "This is a normal feeling for the Christian. Do not worry." Others, "God needs every sort, some are more obviously honoured than others". All this advice has one thing in common, "Be content".

All true, but I am not satisfied. The question burns on in my heart. I have one life. I have offered it to God, but He does not use it as I expected. I see others more used and the pain will not go away, but cries insistently in the night, why? why? and will not be still.

This story offers an answer. You have to look below the surface, as it hints rather than shouts. The hints are that man's judgment is useless, his estimate worthless; that God's judgment is right, but hidden; and third, the results.

Firstly, the most comforting thing is that man's judgment in this matter of God's acceptance or refusal of his life's offering, is almost worthless

Look at "Adam" in verse one. A subtle change has happened to the word. Up to now it was "the Adam" and meant "of the earth". Now, "the" is dropped and it is a man's name. This Adam, it says in chapter five, transmits his sinful image to his son. So expect worse of Cain. But Adam expects the opposite. Just look at what his wife said.

Eve's judgment concerning her eldest son Cain is worth little. Whatever language she spoke, Hebrew or not, Moses says Cain is a play on the sound of the word "gotten" or "acquired". She seems to believe the Lord was the One who gave her Cain. Modern translations make her say, "with the help of the Lord". That is a weak translation of the word "gotten". For millennia it has been translated along the lines of, "I have gotten a man – Jehovah".

What is she meaning? Is it a cry of triumph, making out herself to be a second creator, like God? Or is she saying, "I have gotten the promised Messiah, the One who should bruise the serpent's head"? To say that is too advanced an idea for such an early time, is to miss Jude's epistle, verse 14: "And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousand of his saints." If the seventh could, then the first from Adam could also expect Messiah. This, thought Eve, is my avenger on the serpent, "Ish", the man I was promised. She was utterly wrong.

See deeper – she said this by faith. She had a promise and believed it. God uses trust, even if not as we expected. He used her faith in to choosing the younger. Then also, just because she had a promise from God, that was not enough. Yes, God does give personal promises, but we gradually learn we had often misunderstood, misinterpreted. God takes a much longer view. God works to His

plan, not ours. It was thousands of years until the Messiah should come. That is a comfort to me when I think of how little use He has made of my offering.

But third, Eve seems to have on reflection grown to think differently. Why do we say that? Because when a second son was born to her – and there is no proof he was a twin, whoever says it – she called him Abel, Habel, “vanity”, “breath”. Why did she do this? Did she watch the behaviour of her older son? Mothers know their sons. There must have been things just not right. A boy who grows up to murder his brother, will display little warning signs, at least ones a parent, especially a mother, could read.

She must have seen sin was at work. Paradise was gone, hope dimmed, God no longer near, Cain a disappointment. It all comforts me. How useless is my judgment of whether God accepts or does not “have respect unto” my life laid on the altar as my “reasonable service”.

Secondly, we now turn to God's view of the matter, judging rightly

The boys begin to grow up, outwardly very similar. Abel keeps sheep, or small cattle as the word means, including goats. Cain is a tiller of the soil, a small farmer.

There is nothing to indicate Cain is wrong, or less acceptable to God than Abel. Indeed, outwardly he is closer to God's ideal pattern. Did not God tell Adam that he would till the soil, and live by the sweat of his brow? No, Cain appears just what God requires. It is Abel the shepherd who seems the less acceptable. Whatever rosy view of shepherds we have, in the Middle East they have not been well regarded, but seen as ignorant, immoral and dirty, a low occupation.

Consider that Abel is the younger, and the ancients valued the birthright of the eldest inordinately. See his name, “Vanity”, and compare “Cain”. The idea behind Cain's name is of getting and working, a name connected in Hebrew with being a smith or worker. Look at his descendants and their skills later in this chapter.

Cain seems on the surface altogether preferable. If you look at non-Christians as against Christians, or Arab against Jew, you will see why the average British man prefers the one to the other. Manly, hail-fellow-well-met, and likeable, as against the not very likeable, awkward and critical. It seems a foregone conclusion that God will accept the firstborn in preference to the younger. But No!

First, God sees parallels with the past. As the story unfolds, you can see the way God acts. In this and at the “Fall”, God is absent in both at the start, apparently not interested. Then the tone of the two stories is neutral. Then comes the test, failed in both. Then God enquires, questions the wrong doer and pronounces judgment. In all this comparison God is saying, “watch history repeat itself”. So we are repeating the mistakes and sins of our parents, and that is a clue as to how God views the offering of our lives.

But another hint – Cain is before Abel in the account at first, but in the second verse, the order is reversed and Abel is put first. God is preparing us for what is to come. He is justifying His actions to us in this little hint. And that name, Cain,

can mean, as we saw, a smith, or something worked. It gives a clue as to his approach to God. He grew his offering, it is his handiwork. It is faith he lacks.

The word Abel gives a clue too – as to shortness, and the disappointment of his life to his parents, especially his mother. Lives God uses are often brief. How many godly mothers have died young, often in childbirth, but left offspring God used, like John Newton's mother. Take Toplady, Brainerd, Henry Martyn, and with them the early missionaries, especially as they died like flies in Africa. A huge host of those of whom this world is not worthy went to step into their young shoes, and an early grave. Mackay of Uganda ended his farewell address to the CMS: "I want to remind the Committee that within six months they will probably hear that one of us is dead. Is it at all likely that eight Englishmen should start for central Africa, and all be alive six months after? One of us at least – it may be I – will surely fall before that. But what I want to say is this: when that news comes, do not be cast down, but send someone else immediately to take the vacant place." Whitefield, M'Cheyne, Blaise Pascal, and others burned for God bright and brief. Oh how they burned in the darkness, blazing up, touched by the coal from off the altar, then gone! They thus reflect their Master in His short but glorious life.

Now turn to the test itself, in the words "in the process of time", literally "at the end of days". Some see in this the Sabbath, then at the end of the week. Others say the end of month, but most naturally meaning "at the end of the year". Ripening crops, fattened animals, God was using time to differentiate and test – and the test came.

Our Lord Jesus was only used when he had passed a huge and impossible forty-day test. Only then did the voice testify from heaven, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased". Then followed the acceptance of His offering of Himself in ministry, God attesting Him with signs and wonders. No one, not one, will escape proving before God before using by God. This is a great reason God differentiates – the test passed or failed.

Most commentators say the difference lay in the offering of animals by Abel, as opposed to cereals by Cain. That comes from the third chapter, verse 21, "God made coats of skins". The argument runs that God slew animals, and in the blood God revealed the way back to Himself. Others add that all the earliest Middle Eastern sacrifices were propitiatory, to satisfy an offended God. Abel did this, but Cain disobeyed. The matter is by inference, not by clear proof. It is sometimes best to be humble and admit we do not know rather than go beyond what Scripture reveals beyond doubt.

Others say that animals and shepherds were acceptable to God, but this misses the fact that God told Adam to till the ground. The old Rabbis said Cain failed to do the ritual properly. That reads the Law of Sinai back into pre-flood times. The fact is that the story emphasizes the similarities between the two brothers, not the differences. There is little to distinguish between the two.

Third, however, God gives a reason in the words "had respect unto", or "looked closely into". What does it mean? Well, God saw clues as to the state of their

hearts. What we do is a reflection of what we are. "Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering." It never says the best. It could have been, but the inference is that he did not. Why do we say that? Because, "And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock, and of the fat thereof". The emphasis is on the firstlings, and on what was regarded by ancient man as the chief delicacy, the fat. That was the part most desired by the ancients. Leviticus 3:11 indicates that all the fat is the Lord's. Abel offered the pick of the flock, plus the best part of the animal.

Abel lived in a time when it appears man was not yet a meat-eater, as the permission to eat meat only comes after the Flood in Genesis 9:3. So killing one of his flock must have been an unusual thing, something much rarer and harder to do. Had he to force himself to do this, very much against the grain? You make sure you do the same when you bring your life an offering to God.

Offer your best, your youth. It is my personal greatest regret in life that I was called as a child to the mission field. Yes, alone in an attic in an old rectory, curled up in an empty packing case on its side in a shaft of warm sunlight reading Mary Slessor's life, I knew as surely as I write this, that God had called me. The tears ran down my face. I refused, and the story of my teenage years was a parting with God, only surrendering perhaps ten years later, at nineteen. That "if only" has haunted me ever since, like the twenty thousand ghosts (of slaves he had transported) haunted John Newton later in life. God, it says, "had respect". The word means "seek, recognise", "look closely into". God knows the difference accurately between the best and less than the best, giving all and withholding a portion.

The fourth clue as to why our offering of ourselves may be refused is that God did not just look at the offering. No! He looked first at the offerer. Hebrews 11:4 says: "By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and by it he being dead yet speaketh." A more glorious sacrifice of himself. A more excellent life in all its fullness. That is what every Christian who would be used of God must bring.

Cain had an attitude of "what I bring, God must accept". God refused. Abel acted by faith. He had his mother's faith, and it made his offering "more excellent", "worthy". Someone said, "He brought the best he had in his flock, and the best of those best". The sacrifice was accepted for the man, not the man for the sacrifice.

Abel had something else. It is stated by our Lord in Matthew 23:35, where he puts Abel in the line of the righteous, the other, Zacharias, being a prophet. The same is even more plainly put in Luke 11:50-51, "That the blood of all the prophets, which was shed from the foundation of the world, may be required from this generation; From the blood of Abel unto the blood of Zacharias". Abel had received the Word of God by revelation and as he was a true prophet, he had preached it to others. He could see spiritually. He believed, and obeyed what he received. Now, "he being dead, yet speaketh". Here is the secret of acceptance – faith.

Now turn once more to God's refusal of Cain. Why was he not accepted? Some say because God preferred shepherds to gardeners. Others that he did not bring a blood offering. Others, that God's motives are inscrutable.

The truth is, Cain's inner attitude of heart. That lies in his ancestry you may say, but both brothers had the same parents. The Bible answers in 1 John 3:12, "Not so, only outwardly". It says "Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous."

Adam's two sons are two seeds, Cain is the first of the line of the evil one in the world. Abel is the line of the righteous, the ancestor of Jesus the Christ. The one slew the other. The one line persecutes the other to this day, and will till the end of time.

Conclusion

No man may ever blame God or say, "I was born of the evil one and so I cannot be Christ's". The emphasis of the story is on choice. Both chose freely to offer to God. Only one chose to bring the best. That was because he was righteous. The other brought differently, because his works were evil. Your attitude is your responsibility. The whole business vindicated God. That is the greatest matter.

Cain knew with certainty he had been rejected. Abel knew just as surely he was accepted. If you ask, how did they know? I say, the answer reveals that no man on earth has any excuse whatsoever to be an agnostic or atheist or anything else than a believer in Jesus. It wasn't as some suppose, unfoundedly, that one lot of smoke blew sideways, the other went straight up. Nor that God sent fire like He did on Elijah's offering and other Old Testament offerings. The Bible does not say either of those. It is plain both knew. God speaks directly, even to evil men. God may also have spoken through His prophet Abel. They harden their hearts. They pretend. But this story shows every man on earth to be without excuse before God. Everyone, rejected or accepted by God, knows it without any outward sign from God.

But everyone rejected declares here and now that God is right. "Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell". I am speaking to those who "have religion". Cain had religion. His religion gave every appearance of formality, of deadness. It is the same today. The religious persecute us. They are wroth, and it is because God has refused their offering and they know it perfectly well. And they know God has accepted our offering.

You say, "that is going too far. How can you say such things?" Friend, Cain could not hide it, nor can they. "His countenance fell", is literally "his countenances fell". Why say that? His forehead wrinkled, his eyes flashed, his eyebrows went up, his mouth twisted into a sneer of loathing, and his whole countenances together involuntarily showed his violent jealousy and rage. His descendants gnashed their teeth at Stephen. Pride!

That is what is happening around us Christians today. I went into a shop before Christmas, and talking to the lady serving at the counter, she said to me, "I am a Christian too – a born again Christian". It is the new birth. Satan's seed can see we are God's seed, and that the Jews are God's people, if yet in unbelief. Their faces twist in hate. Their laws and reports lose all justice and balance as they revile God's choice of seed. Their lips curl in disdain, and finally they are driven to open rage. Ever experienced it? Then it is time you made your true position known to men.

The seed of religious Cain will kill us in the end. That is not morbid fancy. It has always been so. Proud resisters, having a form of godliness, but without the power thereof, hate the meek and mild. Especially they cannot abide prophets like Abel, believing men and women. Don't forget, there were women who prophesied in the Bible.

God takes up the rejects of this world and accepts their offerings: the younger sons, the cast-offs of society, the none too bright, the sheep of this world who are obviously short of what it takes. The least clever, the most unacceptable, fill the Church of God. Go call the unlovely. Accept them in your assemblies. Care not for outwards. God chose you just because the world rejects you. So doss down with the homeless, in a sense.



• FOR YOUNGER READERS •

C. MACKENZIE

THE BEST GIFT OF ALL

ISN'T it great to receive a gift? Sometimes we receive a present quite unexpectedly and that is very pleasing. We may look forward to getting a gift on our birthday or at Christmas or New Year and that is wonderful too.

The very best gift that we could ever think of has already been given. God has given us an unspeakable gift (2 Corinthians 9:15), a gift so great that no words can adequately describe it. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son (that unspeakable gift), that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). One of God the Father's gifts to us is His own dear Son, sent into the world to live and die to save His people.

Salvation is another of God's gifts. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8). We can do nothing to deserve salvation. It is given by a loving God by His amazing grace.

We only deserve death and punishment because of our sins. "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:23).

Repentance for our sins is a gift from God too – not something we work up ourselves. “Him (Jesus Christ) hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins” (Acts 5:31).

Even if you get the most wonderful toy as a present today, in a few years’ time it will be broken or forgotten or given away. But God’s marvellous gifts to us will always satisfy. The whole package of gifts – repentance, forgiveness, salvation, eternal life and many other things – all because of the greatest gift of all – the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

When someone gives us a present we often want to give something in return. What can we give to God in return for His gifts to us? The psalmist (in Psalm 116, metrical version) asked that question, “What shall I render to the Lord for all his gifts to me?”. His answer was, “I will take the cup of salvation”. In other words “I will take more of His gifts and kindnesses”.

God wants us to accept His gifts with a loving heart. He is wanting us to love Him and worship Him. He says, “My son, give me thine heart, and let thine eyes observe my ways” (Proverbs 23:26).

BIBLE SEARCH

Find the words missing from the texts. The initials of your answers spell out the subject of the story.

1. Every _____ gift and every perfect gift is from above . . . (James 1:17).
2. Jesus answered and said unto her _____ thou knewest the gift of God . . . thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water (John 4:10).
3. If ye then being evil know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your _____ give good things to them that ask him? (Matthew 7:11).
4. _____ be unto God for his unspeakable gift (2 Corinthians 9:15).
5. But not as the _____ so also is the free gift (Romans 5:15).
6. For by grace are ye saved through _____, and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God (Ephesians 2:8).
7. But unto every one of us is given _____ according to the measure of the gift of Christ (Ephesians 4:7).
8. For the Lord giveth wisdom: _____ of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding (Proverbs 2:6).
9. For the wages of sin is _____; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord (Romans 6:23).

• PROVE ALL THINGS •

Part 1

J. C. RYLE

"Prove all things; hold fast that which is good" (1 Thessalonians 5:21)

YOU live in days when the text before your eyes is one of the first importance. The truths it contains are especially truths for the times. Give me your attention for a few minutes, and I will try to show you what I mean.

There were three great doctrines or principles which won the battle of the Protestant Reformation. These were first, the sufficiency and supremacy of Holy Scripture, secondly, the right of private judgment and, thirdly, justification by faith only, without the deeds of the law.

These three principles were the keys of the whole controversy between the Reformers and the Church of Rome. Keep firm hold of them when you argue with a Roman Catholic, and your position is unassailable: no weapon that the Church of Rome can forge against you shall prosper. Give up any one of them, and your cause is lost. Like Samson, with his hair shorn, your strength is gone. Like the Spartans, betrayed at Thermopylae, you are outflanked and surrounded. You cannot maintain your ground. Resistance is useless. Sooner or later you will have to lay down your arms, and surrender at discretion.

Remember this. The Roman Catholic controversy is upon you once more. You must put on the old armour if you would not have your faith overthrown. The sufficiency of Holy Scripture – the right of private judgment – justification by faith only – these are the three great principles to which you must always cling. Grasp them firmly, and never let them go.

Reader, one of the three great principles to which I have referred appears to me to stand forth in the verse of Scripture which heads this tract – I mean the right of private judgment. I wish to say something to you about that principle.

The Holy Ghost, by the mouth of St. Paul, says to us, "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good". In these words you have two great truths:

1. The right, duty, and necessity of private judgment. "Prove all things."
2. The duty and necessity of keeping firm hold upon truth. "Hold fast that which is good."

I propose to dwell a little on both these heads.

1. Let me speak first, of the right, duty, and necessity of private judgment

When I say the *right* of private judgment, I mean that every individual Christian has a right to judge for himself by the Word of God, whether that which is put before him as religious truth, is God's truth, or is not.

When I say the *duty* of private judgment, I mean that God requires every Christian man to use the right of which I have just spoken;—to compare man's words and man's writings with God's revelation, and to make sure that he is not deluded and taken in by false teaching.

And when I say the *necessity* of private judgment, I mean this — that it is absolutely needful for every Christian who loves his soul and would not be deceived, to exercise that right, and discharge that duty to which I have referred; seeing that experience shows that the neglect of private judgment has always been the cause of immense evils in the Church of Christ.

Now the Apostle Paul urges all these three points upon your notice when he uses those remarkable words, "Prove all things". I ask your particular attention to that expression. In every point of view it is most weighty and instructive.

Here, you will remember, the Apostle Paul is writing to the Thessalonians — to a Church which he himself had founded. Here is an inspired Apostle writing to young inexperienced Christians — writing to the whole professing Church in a certain city, containing laity as well as clergy — writing too with especial reference to matters of doctrine and preaching, as we know by the verse preceding the text: "Despise not prophesyings." And yet mark what he says: "Prove all things."

He does *not* say, "Whatsoever apostles — whatsoever evangelists, pastors and teachers — whatsoever your bishops — whatsoever your ministers tell you is truth: that you are to believe." No: he says, "Prove all things". He does not say, "Whatsoever the universal Church pronounces true, that you are to hold". No: he says, "Prove all things".

The principle laid down is this, "Prove all things by the Word of God — all ministers, all teaching, all preaching, all doctrines, all sermons, all writings, all opinions, all practices — prove all by the Word of God. Measure all by the measure of the Bible — compare all with the standard of the Bible. Weigh all in the balances of the Bible — examine all by the light of the Bible — test all in the crucible of the Bible. That which can abide the fire of the Bible, receive, hold, believe and obey. That which cannot abide the fire of the Bible, reject, refuse, repudiate, and cast away."

Reader, this is private judgment. This is the right you are to exercise if you love your soul. You are not to believe things in religion merely because they are said by Popes or Cardinals — by Bishops or Priests — by Presbyters or Deacons — by Churches, Councils, or Synods — by Fathers, Puritans, or Reformers. You are not to argue, "Such and such things must be true, because these men say so". You are not to do so. You are to prove all things by the Word of God.

I know such doctrine sounds shocking in some men's ears. But I write it down advisedly, and believe it cannot be disproved. I want to encourage no man in ignorant presumption or ignorant contempt. I praise not the man who seldom reads his Bible, and yet sets himself up to pick holes in his minister's sermons. I praise not the man who knows nothing but a few texts in the New Testament, and yet undertakes to settle questions in divinity which have puzzled God's wisest

children. But still I hold with Bishop Bilson (1575), that "all hearers have both liberty to discern and a charge to beware seducers; and woe to them that do it not". And I say with Bishop Davenant (1627), "We are not to believe all who undertake to teach in the Church, but must take care and weigh with serious examination, whether their doctrine be sound or not".*

Reader, men may dislike the doctrine of private judgment, but there is no doubt that it is continually taught in the Word of God.

This is the principle laid down in the eighth chapter of Isaiah, 19th verse. These words were written, remember, at a time when God was more immediately King over His Church, and had more direct communication with it than He has now. They were written at a time when there were men upon earth who had direct revelations from God. Yet what does Isaiah say? "When they shall say unto you, Seek unto them that have familiar spirits, and unto wizards that peep, and that mutter: should not a people seek unto their God? for the living to the dead? To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." If this be not private judgment what is?

This again is the principle laid down by our Lord Jesus Christ in the Sermon on the Mount. Remember what He says: "Beware of false prophets which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruit" (Matthew 7:15). How is it possible that men shall know these false prophets, except they exercise their private judgment as to what their fruits are?

This is the practice you find commended in the Bereans, in the Acts of the Apostles. They did not take the Apostle Paul's word for granted, when he came to preach to them. You are told, that "they searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so", and "therefore", it is said, "many of them believed" (Acts 17:11, 12). What was this again but private judgment?

This is the spirit of the advice given in 1 Corinthians 10:15, "I speak as unto wise men; judge ye what I say"; and in Colossians 2:18 – "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit"; and in 1 John 5:1 – "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits, whether they are of God"; and in 2 John 10 – "If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house."

If these passages do not recommend the use of private judgment, I do not know what words mean. To my mind they seem to say to every individual Christian, "Prove all things".

* "The people of God are called to try the truth, to judge between good and ill, between light and darkness. God hath made them the promise of His Spirit, and hath left unto them His Word. They of Berea, when they heard the preaching of Paul, searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so as he taught them, and many of them believed. So do you: give heed to instruction and yet receive not all things without proof and trial that they are not contrary to the wholesome doctrine of the Word of God" – Bishop Jewell, author of the *Apology of the Church of England*, 1553.

Reader, whatever men may say against private judgment, you may depend it cannot be neglected without immense danger to your soul. You may not like it, but you never know what you may come to if you refuse to use it. No man can say into what depths of false doctrine you may be drawn if you will not do what God requires of you, and "Prove all things".

Suppose that, in fear of private judgment, you resolve to believe whatever the Church believes. Where is your security against error? The Church is not infallible. There was a time when almost the whole of Christendom embraced the Arian heresy, and did not acknowledge the Lord Jesus Christ to be equal with the Father in all things. There was a time, before the Reformation, when the darkness over the face of Europe was a darkness that might be felt. The General Councils of the Church are not infallible. When the whole Church is gathered together in a General Council, what says our Twenty-first Article? "They may err, and sometimes have erred, even in things pertaining unto God. Wherefore things ordained by them as necessary to salvation, have neither strength nor authority, unless it may be declared that they be taken out of Holy Scripture." The particular branches of the Church are not infallible. Any one of them may err. Many of them have fallen foully, or have been swept away. Where is the Church of Ephesus at this day? Where the Church of Sardis at the present time? Where the Church of Hippo in Africa? Where the Church of Carthage? They are all gone! Not a vestige of any of them is left! Will you then be content to err merely because the Church errs? Will your company be any excuse for your error? Will your erring in company with the Church remove your responsibility for your own soul? Oh, reader, it were surely a thousand times better for a man to stand alone and be saved, than to err in company with the Church, and be lost! It were better to prove all things, and go to heaven, than to say, "I dare not think for myself", and go to hell.

But suppose that, to cut matters short, you resolve to believe whatever your minister believes. Once more I ask, Where is your safety? – Where is your security? Ministers are not infallible, any more than Churches. All of them have not the Spirit of God. The very best of them are only men. Call us Bishops, Priests, Deacons, or whatever names you please, we are all earthen vessels. I speak not merely of Popes, who have promulgated awful superstitions and led abominable lives. I would rather point to the very best of Protestants and say, "Beware of looking upon them as infallible – beware of thinking of any man (whoever that man may be) that he cannot err". Luther held consubstantiation – that was a mighty error.

Zuinglius, the Swiss Reformer, went on to battle, and died in the fight – that was a mighty error. Calvin, the Geneva Reformer, advised the burning of Servetus – that was a mighty error. Cranmer and Ridley urged the putting of Hooper into prison because of some trifling dispute about vestments – that was a mighty error. Whitgift persecuted the Puritans – that was a mighty error. Wesley and Toplady in the last century quarrelled fiercely about Calvinism – that was a mighty error. All these things are warnings, if you will only take them. All say, "Cease ye from man". All

show us that if a man's religion hangs on ministers, whoever they may be, and not on the Word of God, it hangs on a broken reed. Never make ministers Popes. Follow us so far as we follow Christ, but not a hair's breadth further. Believe whatever we can show you out of the Bible, but do not believe a single word more.

Neglect the duty of private judgment, and you may find, to your cost, the truth of what Whitby says: The best of overseers do sometimes make oversights. You may live to experience the truth of what the Lord said to the Pharisees: When the blind lead the blind, both fall into the ditch. Reader, be very sure no man is safe against error, unless he acts on St. Paul's injunction – unless he “proves all things” by the Word of God.

Reader, I have said that it is impossible to overrate the *evils* that may arise from neglecting to exercise your private judgment. I will go further, and say that it is impossible to overrate the *blessings* which private judgment has conferred both on the world and on the Church.

I ask you to remember that the greatest discoveries in science and in philosophy, beyond all controversy, have arisen from the use of private judgment. To this we owe the discovery of Galileo, that the earth went round the sun, and not the sun round the earth. To this we owe Columbus's discovery of the new continent of America. To this we owe Harvey's discovery of the circulation of the blood. To this we owe Jenner's discovery of vaccination. To this we owe the printing press, the steam engine, the power-loom, the electric telegraph, railways, and gas. For all these discoveries we are indebted to men who dared to think for themselves. They were not content with the beaten path of those who had gone before. They were not satisfied with taking for granted that what their fathers believed must be true. They made experiments for themselves. They brought old established theories to the proof; and found that they were worthless. They proclaimed new systems, and invited men to examine them, and test their truth. They bore storms of obloquy and ridicule unmoved. They heard the clamour of prejudiced lovers of old traditions without flinching. And they prospered and succeeded in what they did. We see it now. And we who live in the 19th century are reaping the fruit of their use of private judgment.

And, reader, as it has been in science, so also it has been in the history of the Christian religion. The martyrs who stood alone in their day, and shed that blood which has been the seed of Christ's Gospel throughout the world – the Reformers, who, one after another, rose up in their might to enter the lists with the Church of Rome – all did what they did, suffered what they suffered, proclaimed what they proclaimed, simply because they exercised their private judgment about what was Christ's truth. Private judgment made the Waldenses, the Albigenses, and the Lollards, count not their lives dear to them, rather than believe the doctrines of the Church of Rome. Private judgment made Wyckliffe search the Bible in our land, denounce the Romish Friars, and all their impostures – translate the Scriptures into the vulgar tongue, and become “the morning star” of the Reformation. Private judgment made Luther examine Tetzel's abominable system of indulgences by the

light of the Word. Private judgment led him on, step by step, from one thing to another, guided by the same light, till at length the gulf between him and Rome was a gulf that could not be passed, and the Pope's power in Germany was completely broken.

Private judgment made our own English Reformers examine for themselves, and inquire for themselves, as to the true nature of that corrupt system under which they had been born and brought up. Private judgment made them cast off the abominations of Popery, and circulate the Bible among the laity. Private judgment made them draw from the Bible our Articles, compile our Prayer-book, and constitute the Church of England as it is. They broke the fetters of tradition, and dared to think for themselves. They refused to take for granted Rome's pretensions and assertions. They examined them all by the Bible, and because they would not abide the examination, they broke with Rome altogether. All the blessing of Protestantism in England, all that we are enjoying at this very day, we owe to the right exercise of private judgment. Surely if we do not honour private judgment, we are thankless and ungrateful indeed!

• TO BE CONTINUED •

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• JOHN NEWTON AND THE GOSPEL MAGAZINE •

* 1782 on notebook

Concluded

J. E. NORTH (Totton, Hants.)

John Newton's death

Newton moved from Olney to St. Mary Woolnoth in 1780 where he was to continue to minister for the remainder of his life. He died in 1807. His death was noted in the pages of the *Gospel Magazine*.

The *Gospel Magazine* had continued to be published until 1783 when, as Dr. Hindmarsh says, it "folded". He may be incorrect as to the actual year the *Gospel Magazine* ceased to be published (there is some debate among the trustees as to the actual date the *Gospel Magazine* ceased as there are various bound volumes which have still to be examined), but cease to be published it was, and for what reason is not now known. (Walter Row says that the *Gospel Magazine* ceased in 1781, but Hindmarsh appears to have had sight of volumes up to and including 1783). John Newton's final contributions to the magazine were published in 1777. We understand that John Newton wrote for the *Evangelical Magazine*, which was commenced by his friend Thomas Haweis in 1793, although we have not been able to verify this. The *Gospel Magazine* was re-commenced in 1795, Walter Row

being the editor. Walter Row was a publisher. He was also a friend and the literary executor to Toplady.

No full obituary was published in either the 1807 or 1808 volumes, but three notices are given. Two of these were notices of Richard Cecil's funeral sermon for, and his biography of, John Newton. A short obituary notice appeared in the October 1808 *Gospel Magazine*, giving "Further particulars of the Reverend Mr. Newton".

Walter Row, the editor, wrote that he did not "approve of his plan in preaching, nor of some of his maxims, yet his exemplary benevolence and piety may furnish a model well deserving the study and imitation of young persons who are training up, as it is called, for the ministry. He spoke as inwardly moved by his subject, and endeavoured, under the weight of those subjects he thought to be important, to impress the hearts of his hearers." Ever a stalwart for "high Calvinism", Walter Row, however, was highly critical of the biography that had been issued by Richard Cecil. He reviewed the biography later that year and was critical of Newton's "low" Calvinism (as he viewed it):

His amanuensis informs us that, one day, Mr. Newton said to him, smiling: I hope, I am on the whole, a Scriptural preacher; for I find that I am considered as an Arminian among the high Calvinists, and a Calvinist among the strenuous Arminians.

Now, was this criterion to be put up for to decide Mr. Newton's character as a Scriptural preacher, we would not hesitate to say whoever may frown disapprobation . . . and, whatever Mr. Cecil's opinion may be, we must say, such a delineation redounds but little credit to his departed friend. . . .

Walter Row was not alone in his criticism. Iain Murray cites William Jay:

John Newton, the Evangelical patriarch who died in 1807, was once in his latter years entertaining some friends to breakfast. "Pray, Mr. Newton, he was asked, "are you a Calvinist?" "Why sir," said Mr. Newton, "I am more of a Calvinist than anything else; but I use my Calvinism in my writings and my preaching as I use this sugar" – taking a lump, and putting it into his tea-cup and stirring it, he added, "I do not give it alone and whole; but mixed, and diluted.

Iain Murray goes on to comment:

There was value in the good man's comment but in the next 50 years the reliability of a "diluted" theology was out to the test. In the first half of the 19th century, Evangelicals, apart from the Wesleyans, were almost all of a Calvinistic outlook. But, speaking generally, their Calvinism was of the same character as Newton's – not militant and clear cut, but moderate and quietly taken for granted. The need for doctrinal precision and systematic theology was minimised and the emphasis in the best Evangelical circles

was on experimental and practical preaching. . . . This attitude, as history proves, was a downward path. . . . "Moderate Calvinism" was Calvinism in decay. . . . The results of this doctrinal weakening . . . were devastating.

Walter Row's obituary notice in the October 1808 issue was a more positive review of Newton's life and ministry:

His writings are well known, and highly esteemed, in the religious world, and not only give evident proof of genius, but display a mind cultivated beyond what would have been looked for in one whose early education and habits were so unfavourable. . . . Like a great apostle, he who had, before, been a persecutor and a blasphemer, became a zealous supporter of the faith which he once destroyed. . . .

John Newton's tomb

There is one final item which we must consider in this article concerning John Newton's connection with the *Gospel Magazine*. This respects John Newton's grave.

After his death, John Newton had been interred, with his wife and niece, in the crypt of St. Mary Woolnoth in London. A memorial tablet, which gives details of his life, and his epitaph was erected in the church and still exist. John Newton's coffin and that of his wife laid undisturbed until 1893. Both the *Earthen Vessel* and the *Friendly Companion* for 1893 reported that the church of St. Mary Woolnoth had become unusable because of "noxious smells" emanating from the crypt below the church. An "Order in Council" was made for the removal of "some 3,000 bodies" to Ilford cemetery so that the church could be used again for public worship. As the coffins were being removed, those of John and Mary Newton were discovered resting one on top of the other immediately below the communion table. Hasty action being taken by W. H. Collingridge, the then owner and publisher of the *Gospel Magazine*, prevented their being taken to Ilford. A special "Order in Council" was obtained to enable the remains to be taken to Olney where they were re-interred on Wednesday, 25th January 1893. The *Gospel Magazine* reported, at length, the details of the re-internment, including an address which would have been given by David Doudney, then editor of the magazine, had not extreme age prevented his doing so (he was 82 years old which, in those far-off days was considered to be ancient).

. . . The sentences at the graveside were impressively read by the Vicar, and the coffins were then slowly lowered into the grave. The grave is the family grave of the father of Mrs. Newton, and lies in a sheltered corner a few yards away from the east end of the church.



The Evangelical Awakening of the 18th century was a time of great blessing to the Church of God, particularly here in the United Kingdom. The Lord blessed the

church here on earth with "able ministers of the New Testament", not least of which was John Newton. Although, not without weaknesses which have been considered above, he was the Lord's gift to the church. His correspondence, some of which appeared in the pages of this magazine, is eminently practical and still a blessing to the Lord's people. His hymns breath a spirit of devotion and love to Christ. Who cannot be moved by such a sense of devotion when they sing such words as:

How sweet the name of Jesus sounds
In a believer's ear!
It soothes his sorrows, heals his wounds,
And drives away his fear.

As John Newton engaged in such a contemplation, he would have remembered that he had been "once an Infidel and Libertine, a servant of slaves in Africa" who "was, by the rich mercy of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, preserved, restored, pardoned, and appointed to preach the faith he long laboured to destroy. He ministered near sixteen years as Curate and Vicar of Olney, in Bucks, and twenty-eight years as Rector of these united parishes." As he contemplated the free grace of God displayed to him, he would no doubt have known and felt that which he wrote:

Weak is the effort of my heart,
And cold my warmest thought;
But when I see Thee as Thou art
I'll praise thee as I ought.

And his soul rises in aspiration:

Till then I would thy love proclaim
With every fleeting breath;
And may the music of Thy name
Refresh my soul in death.

We commemorate that life and that death which occurred 200 years ago on 21st December, 1807. We cannot better conclude this article than with the following quotation from John Newton himself. It is taken from the preface to a volume of sermons which he issued in January 1767, the year after the *Gospel Magazine* had commenced publication, and expresses the motive which guided his preaching, his pen and his verse, some of which have appeared in these pages down the years:

May it please the God of all grace to accompany my feeble endeavours to promote the knowledge of His truth with the powerful influence of His Holy Spirit? And I earnestly entreat all who know how to draw near to a throne of grace by Jesus Christ, to strive mightily in prayer for me, that I may stand fast in the faith, and increase in the knowledge of Jesus the Saviour;

and that, for His sake, I may labour, without fear of fainting, in the service to which he has been pleased to call me.

[The foregoing article has been compiled from the following sources: Bound volumes of the *Gospel Magazine*; biographies of John Newton by Josiah Bull, Richard Cecil and Bruce Hindmarsh; biography and studies of Thomas Haweis by A. Skevington Wood; The *Banner of Truth Magazine*].

• STUDIES IN EZEKIEL •

P. KING (Hailsham)

Learning from the prophecy of Ezekiel as explained and applied to the Christian Church

EZEKIEL, the son of Buzi, was deported to Babylonia, almost certainly with Jehoiachin, in 597 BC. He was settled in a village called Tel-abib by the river Chebar. It was not until five years later he was called to be a prophet at the age of 30. He lived at least another 22 years. His detailed knowledge of the temple in Jerusalem suggests he worked there. Although he was in an honoured position his prophecies were not well received (chapter 8:1). The complexity of his visions makes study of this book rather difficult, but the teaching is rich. The religious teaching of the book is the Word of God to a battered nation. Ezekiel seems to stress the point that the omnipotence of God cannot be limited by the failure of His people. The promise of restoration is no longer bound to the prior repentance of the people, but is an act of God's grace that leads to repentance. Because it is all of grace, the relationship of the individual to God depends neither on his past nor his family tree.

For the Christian almost every chapter has a Gospel message either to encourage or discipline. Israel is a picture of the Church of Christ in the Old Testament, so what happens to them is important for us. They were weak without God (chapter 15); they suffered from the sin of unbelief (chapter 11); and our most treasured possession will be destroyed as we cling to Christ alone (chapter 23). People's pride will be destroyed (chapter 27); the Church's enemies will at last be overcome.

As we walk with Ezekiel through this remarkable book it is essential we look at the "big picture" and avoid being overwhelmed with the details. Many times we shall see that all this is done that "they might know that I am the Lord". Selfishness is our enemy and a close walk with God requires self-denial.

It will be helpful if you read the chapter before the notes, so that you are familiar with the general outline of the subject. Some of the reading will be

difficult, but the studies are connected with a New Testament truth to relate it all to our everyday lives.

May the Lord help us to understand this fascinating but wonderful part of the Bible.

Chapter 1

PREACH THE WORD

Ezekiel was among the captives taken from Jerusalem when the Chaldeans, under Nebuchadnezzar, besieged the city, taking Jehoichin into captivity. One thousand miles from home Ezekiel is with his compatriots at the river Chebar in Babylon, where God spoke to him in visions and messages for his friends. The young man, only 30 years old, has a mission impossible, for the Jews would not listen to his preaching.

1. **The Call** (verses 1-3). The young priest had a commission from God to deal with the spiritual needs of the exiled Jews. Daniel, his contemporary, influenced government while in exile, but Ezekiel spoke to the hearts and minds of the people. Notice the pastoral nature of his ministry – “I was among the captives. . . .” This was the preacher calling for high spiritual living, yet remaining apart from his listeners.
2. **The Vision** (verses 4-28). Ezekiel saw the heavens opened (verse 1) – John on Patmos, after Christ’s resurrection, saw heaven already open. The Old Testament prophets looked forward; we in the New Testament age, look back. As Ezekiel had a call, he also had a vision, as all preachers must have.
3. **The Gospel of God**. The living creatures have four faces and four wings, meaning they could see and move in all directions. The first was like a man – Christ the Son of Man as seen in Luke’s Gospel. The second like a lion – Christ the Messiah as recorded in Matthew’s Gospel. The third like an ox, the beast of burden – Mark’s picture of Christ the servant. Fourthly like an eagle with searching powers – the divine nature – Christ the Son of God – in John’s Gospel. All of this is needed for the lost soul and seeking sinner – a message of hope and revival.
4. **The holiness of God**. The directing force in the wheels, shows the movement is organised; as one moves, so do the others. The persuading Spirit is always looking to God (verse 20).
5. **The glory of God**. The rainbow speaks of a Covenant of love (verse 26) God the Father – the cleansing fire (verse 27) – God the Holy Spirit, and peaceful reconciliation (verse 28), the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ – all essential elements in any person’s ministry.

Lessons for our day

No wonder Ezekiel fell on his face like John on Patmos, at such a sight. What does God's presence do to you?

All Christians are called into the service of Christ, but not all are called to preach the Gospel.

Abraham was called by God to leave his country and go to a land yet to be revealed to him (Genesis 12:1). Moses obeyed God's call to be saviour of God's people in Egypt (Exodus 28:1). Paul was challenged to stand on his feet when God told him he was to be a minister and a witness both of the things he had seen and those to be shown to him (Acts 26:16). God calls to the people of the world today as he did in Isaiah's time, "Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else" (Isaiah 45:22).

Are we listening to God's call to us or is life just a round of legal service to salve our conscience? We are not saved because of our works but works confirm our salvation.

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• EXPOSTULATION •

Part I

WILLIAM COWPER

Supplied by J. Dearing (Reading)

WHY, weeps the muse for England? What appears
 In England's case to move the muse to tears?
 From side to side of her delightful isle
 Is she not clothed with a perpetual smile?
 Can Nature add a charm, or Art confer
 A new-found luxury, not seen in her?
 Where under heaven is pleasure more pursued,
 Or where does cold reflection less intrude?
 Her fields a rich expanse of wavy corn,
 Pour'd out from Plenty's overflowing horn;
 Ambrosial gardens, in which art supplies
 The fervour and the force of Indian skies;
 Her peaceful shores, where busy Commerce waits
 To pour his golden tide through all her gates;
 Whom fiery suns, that scorch the russet spice
 Of eastern groves, and oceans floor'd with ice,
 Forbid in vain to push his daring way

To darker climes, or climes of brighter day;
 Whom the winds waft where'er the billows roll,
 From the World's girdle to the frozen pole;
 The chariots bounding in her wheel-worn streets,
 Her vaults below, where every vintage meets;
 Her theatres, her revels, and her sports;
 The scenes to which not youth alone resorts,
 But age, in spite of weakness and of pain,
 Still haunts, in hope to dream of youth again;
 All speak her happy: let the muse look round
 From East to West, no sorrow can be found;
 Or only what, in cottages confined,
 Sighs unregarded to the passing wind.
 Then wherefore weep for England? What appears
 In England's case to move the muse to tears?

The prophet wept for Israel; wish'd his eyes
 Were fountains fed with infinite supplies,
 For Israel dealt in robbery and wrong;
 There were the scorner's and the slanderer's tongue;
 Oaths, used as playthings or convenient tools,
 As interest biass'd knaves, or fashion fools;
 Adultery, neighing at his neighbour's door;
 Oppression labouring hard to grind the poor;
 The partial balance and deceitful weight;
 The treacherous smile, a mask for secret hate,
 Hypocrisy, formality in prayer,
 And the dull service of the lip were there.
 Her women, insolent and self-carress'd,
 By Vanity's unwearied finger dress'd,
 Forgot the blush that virgin fears impart
 To modest cheeks, and borrow'd one from art;
 Were just such trifles, without worth or use,
 As silly pride and idleness produce;
 Curl'd, scented, furbelow'd, and flounced around,
 With feet too delicate to touch the ground,
 They stretch'd the neck, and roll'd the wanton eye,
 And sigh'd for every fool that flutter'd by.

He saw his people slaves to every lust,
 Lewd, avaricious, arrogant, unjust;
 He heard the wheels of an avenging God
 Groan heavily along the distant road;

Saw Babylon set wide her two-leaved brass
To let the military deluge pass;
Jerusalem a prey, her glory soil'd,
Her princes captive, and her treasures spoil'd;
Wept till all Israel heard his bitter cry,
Stamp'd with his foot, and smote upon his thigh;
But wept, and stamp'd, and smote his thigh in vain,
Pleasure is deaf when told of future pain,
And sounds prophetic are too rough to suit
Ears long accusom'd to the pleasing lute:
They scorn'd his inspiration and his theme,
Pronounc'd him frantic, and his fears a dream,
With self-indulgence wing'd the fleeting hours,
Till the foe found them, and down fell the towers.

Long time Assyria bound them in her chain,
Till penitence had purged the public stain,
And Cyrus, with relenting pity moved,
Return'd them happy to the land they loved;
There, proof against prosperity, a while
They stood the test of her ensnaring smile,
And had the grace in scenes of peace to shew
The virtue they had learn'd in scenes of woe.
But man is frail, and can but ill sustain
A long immunity from grief and pain;
And, after all the joys that Plenty leads,
With tiptoe step Vice silently succeeds.

When he that ruled them with a shepherd's rod,
In form a man, in dignity a God,
Came, not expected in that humble guise,
To sift and search them with unerring eyes,
He found conceal'd beneath a fair outside,
The filth of rottenness, and worm of pride;
Their piety a system of deceit,
Scripture employ'd to sanctify the cheat;
The Pharisee the dupe of his own art,
Self-idolised, and yet a knave at heart.

When nations are to perish in their sins,
'Tis in the church the leprosy begins;
The priest, whose office is, with zeal sincere,
To watch the fountain and preserve it clear,

Carelessly nods and sleeps upon the brink,
While others poison what the flock must drink;
Or, waking at the call of lust alone,
Infuses lies and errors of his own:
His unsuspecting sheep believe it pure,
And, tainted by the very means of cure,
Catch from each other a contagious spot,
The foul forerunner of a general rot.
Then truth is hush'd, that Heresy may preach;
And all is trash that reason cannot reach;
Then God's own image on the soul impress'd
Becomes a mockery and a standing jest;
And faith, the root whence only can arise
The graces of a life that wins the skies,
Loses at once all value and esteem,
Pronounced by graybeards a pernicious dream:
Then Ceremony leads her bigots forth,
Prepared to fight for shadows of no worth;
While truths, on which eternal things depend,
Find not, or hardly find, a single friend:
As soldiers watch the signal of command,
They learn to bow, to kneel, to sit, to stand;
Happy to fill religion's vacant place,
With hollow form, and gesture, and grimace.

Such, when the Teacher of his church was there,
People and priest, the sons of Israel were;
Stiff in the letter, lax in the design
And import of their oracles divine;
Their learning legendary, false, absurd,
And yet exalted above God's own Word;
They drew a curse from an intended good,
Puff'd up with gifts they never understood.
He judg'd them with as terrible a frown,
As if not love, but wrath, had brought him down:
Yet he was gentle as soft summer airs,
Had grace for others' sins, but none for theirs;
Through all he spoke a noble plainness ran –
Rhetoric is artifice, the work of man;
And tricks and turns, that fancy may devise,
Are far too mean for Him that rules the skies.
The astonish'd vulgar trembled while he tore
The mask from faces never seen before;

He stripp'd the impostors in the noonday sun,
Shew'd that they follow'd all they seem'd to shun;
Their prayers made public, their excesses kept
As private as the chambers where they slept;
The temple and its holy rites profaned
By mummeries He that dwelt in it disdain'd;
Uplifted hands, that at convenient times
Could act extortion and the worst of crimes,
Wash'd with a neatness scrupulously nice,
And free from every taint but that of vice.
Judgment, however tardy, mends her pace
When obstinacy once has conquer'd grace.
They saw distemper heal'd, and life restored,
In answer to the fiat of his Word;
Confess'd the wonder, and with daring tongue
Blasphemed the authority from which it sprung.
They knew, by sure prognostics seen on high,
The future tone and temper of the sky;
But, grave dissemblers! could not understand
That sin let loose speaks punishment at hand.

• *TO BE CONTINUED* •

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AMAZING GRACE

W. A. BELL (USA)

EVERY time I hear "Amazing Grace" being sung by an individual or a crowd, I am greatly challenged, for I realise that in most cases, the person involved doesn't really understand what they are singing.

If this be the case, then the performance is a travesty. I write this article to confront this situation and to, hopefully, enlighten some as to the danger involved in not understanding.

"Amazing Grace" is a hymn that has been sung, played, or quoted again and again.

It was sung by the Cherokee as a requiem on the Trail of Tears. It was sung by Civil Rights protestors during Freedom Marches and on the day Martin Luther King, Jun., proclaimed his dream. It was sung when Nelson Mandela was freed from prison. It was sung when the Berlin Wall came down. It was sung on 11th September in New York City. Every type of person has sung this hymn from classical opera singer to rock star.

The question arises, however, do most people understand what they are singing or quoting? Do they see what John Newton says he saw – “I once was blind, but now I see. . . .”?

“See,” here, refers to the understanding – coming to a knowledge of something. What did John Newton, the former captain of a slave ship come to see or understand?

He came to understand that he was a wretch. He wrote: “Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a *wretch* like me. . . .” The synonyms are: worm, cur, swine. Newton came to “see” that he was by nature a deep-dyed sinner. This was another way of expressing his depravity. Newton came to understand that he was not born innocent, but when measured against God’s standard, His holy Law, as recorded in His providentially preserved Scriptures, commonly called the Authorised Version or the King James Version, that he was totally depraved.

He came to realise that there was no good in his nature. The Scriptures condemned him: “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing” (Romans 7:18); “Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me” (Psalm 51:5); “The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies” (Psalm 58:3); “As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one” (Romans 3:10); “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). Newton came to see that he was, indeed, a sinner by nature and by practice. How many who sing this hymn say this about themselves – “I’m a wretch.” More importantly, do you?

The next thing that John Newton said he saw was that he was lost: “I once was lost. . . .” Newton came to see that he was lost ~~was~~ as far as his relationship with the only true God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – was concerned.

He came to see that he was a wandering sheep – born with a nature that automatically wandered from God and His Word. He was, as the poet put it, “Out in the wilderness wild and bare, away from the tender Shepherd’s care”. Newton loved his own profits, pleasures and pursuits more than God his Creator and Sustainer. God was not in his schedule.

Newton came to see the truth of the following verses: “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way” (Isaiah 53:6); “Thus saith the Lord unto this people, Thus have they loved to wander, they have not refrained their feet” (Jeremiah 14:10); “They are all gone out of the way” (Romans 3:12); “But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost” (2 Corinthians 4:3). As the masses or individuals sing Newton’s words, do they really believe this about themselves? Do you, my reader, believe this about yourself?

In the third place, Newton also came to see that he was blind: “. . . was blind. . . .” He was blind to his true state before God: blind to his wretchedness and to his being lost. He thought that he was, to use the expression, OK. Newton was blind to the fact that the wrath of God was abiding upon him in this life with the threat of its continuance, in an even more violent form, in the next life in a place the Bible calls hell. Newton was blind to the fact that he was on the broad road

that leads to destruction. He was blind concerning whom Jesus really was and as to what He had come to earth to do and did.

Newton was blind to the meaning of: "they be blind leaders of the blind" (Matthew 15:14); "Having the understanding darkened . . . because of the blindness of their heart" (Ephesians 4:18); "But their minds were blinded" (2 Corinthians 3:14); "In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not" (2 Corinthians 4:4); "knowest not that thou art . . . blind" (Revelation 3:17). John Newton was as blind spiritually as a blind person is physically. All is darkness, he just cannot see. How many who sing this hymn think of themselves as being blind to its contents?

Newton, also, said that he did not fear God. This is implied when he wrote: ". . . He taught my heart to fear. . . ." He had no reverential fear of God, either with regards to His comforting promises or with regards to His terrifying threats. Newton couldn't have cared less. He was a man occupied solely with himself. ". . . no fear of God before his eyes" (Psalm 36:1); "There is no fear of God before their eyes" (Romans 3:18); ". . . feeding themselves without fear . . ." (Jude 12).

Newton also came to see that he was without saving faith. This is implied in his words: ". . . the hour I first believed. . . ." There was a point in time when he passed from not having faith to having it. Up to that point he was an unbeliever. He hadn't believed, with the understanding and from the heart, what the Bible teaches about God, man, sin, judgment, Jesus' work, heaven and hell. ". . . when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8); ". . . because of unbelief they were broken off . . ." (Romans 11:20); "For God hath concluded them all in unbelief" (Romans 11:32); ". . . because I did it ignorantly in unbelief" (1 Timothy 1:13); ". . . an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God" (Hebrews 3:12); "But without faith it is impossible to please him" (Hebrews 11:6).

Today many who sing this hymn are unbelievers in the Bible sense of the word. They have a faith and believe in their faith, but faith in faith is no faith. It must be settled upon the written Word of God to be saving faith. God, the eternal Physician, has prescribed His own way to healing. None other will do. By this faith, one comes to see what John Newton came to see. He came to see that by nature he was a wretch, lost, blind and without true fear of God.

If you are to sing this hymn with the understanding, you must see yourself as John Newton came to see himself. In reality, in spite of all the camouflage you may have sought as a cover, you must see yourself as really an unbeliever in the words which you are singing, when you sing "Amazing Grace".

Newton, however, obtained salvation: ". . . that saved a wretch like me. . . ." God gave him a new birth – a spiritual birth. Newton was born again – "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John 3:6); "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit" (John 3:8). Through the Holy Spirit using the Word written,

Newton had become a believer. He entered the state of salvation – “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved” (Acts 16:31); “That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved” (Romans 10:9).

Newton, like Saul of Tarsus, was changed – “But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother’s womb, and called me by his grace, to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood” (Galatians 1:15-16). Jesus’ work was fulfilled in him – “. . . and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21). Just as John Calvin, and others before him, obtained salvation, so Newton was saved from the wrath to come and from the life that he had been living – “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

John Newton had also come to understand the meaning of perseverance. “Through many dangers, toils and snares, I have already come.” God enabled him to live the Christian life, in spite of difficulties – “Grace hath brought me safe thus far.” He was experiencing this – “For a just man falleth seven times, and riseth up again” (Proverbs 24:16); “. . . he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:6); “Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (1 Peter 1:5); “Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling . . .” (Jude 24). The Christian life is not an easy life as Jesus’ followers share in the suffering of their Master. Newton had been preserved, prior to his effectual calling, through many dangers, toils and snares. After his conversion he would persevere through many more, plus many of a different kind. The elect may fall in grace, but never out of it.

Lastly, Newton came to see where the focus in heaven would be: “. . . to sing God’s praise. . . .” Heaven is a place where the saved worship God. This is quite a different view from that of many who sing this poem. Most never open a Bible or enter a church building, except upon special occasions. They really don’t want to take the time to worship God either privately or publicly. Their idea of heaven is simply that of a place where they’ll feel good and have all the sensual pleasures they desire – to them heaven is like a holiday resort.

Newton, however, came to understand this – “. . . lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt” (Matthew 6:20); “Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed” (John 6:27); “And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst” (John 6:35); “For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost” (Romans 14:17); “If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the

earth" (Colossians 3:1-2); "And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it. 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" (Revelation 21:22-23).

Here, then, is what you must ask yourself, as you sing this poem, this hymn – Have I had John Newton's experience? Do I really understand what I am singing? Have I come to see what Newton came to "see"? Even professing Christians need to ask themselves these questions for, sad to say, many don't really know what God's grace is. Many don't see how amazing it really is. It is not that God loves everybody and has a desire to save everybody. It is not that He sent Jesus to live and to die in order to offer salvation to all, so that if they choose to they might of their own free will close in with Him. This is not grace, let alone amazing. This is to present a God who is inept and depending upon the will of man. It reverses the order. The creature becomes as the Creator. It presents a pleading God who bows before man and says, "Won't you give Me a chance?"

This is not grace. Grace is something that is untouched by man in any way. It is God Himself at work. God alone. He doesn't need the help of man's faith to save. This very saving faith is a gift and part of amazing grace: "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). God's grace is specific. God, Himself, has ordained many to eternal life – "... and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed" (Acts 13:48). To these, and these alone, He gives spiritual life in order to their believing in a saving sense. They are born again – "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3); "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again" (John 3:6-7). Jesus' work was specific. He laid down His life for His sheep: "I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep . . . I lay down my life for the sheep" (John 10:14-15).

Listen to Jesus pray as recorded in John 17: "I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me . . ."; "I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me"; "And for their sakes I sanctify myself"; "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me" (verses 6, 9, 19 and 24). These whom the Father gave to the Son, and for whom the Son came and lived and died, are effectually called to Him: they come to Him. They believe on Him – "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out" (John 6:37); "Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified" (Romans 8:30). This is the glorious grace, the amazing grace that John Newton came to "see". This is what he wrote about.

Oh, that the great crowds and individuals that sing this hymn so often, understood what Newton came to understand! Oh, that professing Christians,

truly understood what grace is! "Sola gratia", grace only, is a precious term. It is to give God *all* the glory – "I am the Lord: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another" (Isaiah 42:8). Two (God and man) don't pull the plough to heaven, God alone pulls it. He is the omnipotent One and doesn't need man's help to save.

May those of us who "see", as Newton did, proclaim this truth far and wide, especially ministers who dilute biblical terms in order to avoid offence. The Bible doesn't do this, so why should we? Ministers are told to preach the Word and God's grace is part of it – indeed, its central theme.

Let the lion of truth loose and it will defend itself. Newton wasn't afraid to express his condition and its only cure. Neither should any Christian who has experienced amazing grace be afraid.

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• BOOK REVIEWS •

Editor's Note: We live, regretfully, in a day when most evangelicals have abandoned the Authorised (King James) Version of the Bible. Rather, therefore, than ceasing to review most books, we try to warn readers by stating if the book uses another version of the Bible. The position of the Gospel Magazine remains true to the AV as the best text and translation, in beautiful and formative English. That we name another translation does not mean we endorse it.

For Zion's Sake. Paul R. Wilkinson. Paternoster. pp. 308, paperback. £19.99. ISBN 978 1 84227 569 6.

There is no doubt that John Nelson Darby (1800-1882), a "leading man among the Brethren", caused much "ruffling of feathers" in ecclesiastical circles. Books came forth in abundance from his pen and it is true to say that opposition and even vilification came to be his burden. Dr. Wilkinson seeks to emphasise the importance of this most gifted and unusual man.

The major cause of disharmony was the subject of eschatology, where Mr. Darby's Zionist views were criticised as having originated not only from "ecstatic utterances" made by certain members of Edward Irving's Regent Square church in 1831, but also from certain books written by Jesuits. These matters caused a large amount of opposition, but his views have gained wide acceptance today. He has many admirers (the reviewer being among them), but it does not follow that his views of "the last things" should be accepted without question.

Dr. Wilkinson believes, with Mr. Darby, that "Zionism" is a necessary part of pre-millennial interpretation. The future will be a time of (Jewish) blessing, for the thousand years will be when (as another has expressed it) "the Jewish train will come out of the siding and will again take its place on the main line". For this, an assumption is made for the millennium to be a future event. Does Scripture require such an assumption? Also we are told by some "dispensationists" that, even though Jesus will then be reigning over the earth from His throne in Jerusalem, blood sacrifices will again be offered as a "memorial". What are we then to think of Christ's words "It is finished"? Though the Bible "says what it means and means what it says", we cannot take literalism to contradict the context in which it is found. We can take the word "Israel" as an example. Sometimes this may be the Jewish nation, or, as seems more probable in some instances, the spiritual Israel, the Israel of God, the circumcised in heart (the elect from all races). Dr. Wilkinson answers the attacks

recently made by Dr. N.T. Wright, Bishop of Durham, and the Rev. S. Sizer, whose writings support the demands made by the Palestinians and consider "Zionist" claims to have no biblical basis.

He has gone to considerable length to research his subject and throughout gives a masterly defence of Mr. Darby. The book has copious and helpful footnotes. We are given a very able treatment of an admittedly divisive and complex subject. It is well set out, informative and has eight chapters, a comprehensive index and bibliography. The book is far superior to many "theological" writings of the present day.

D.L.J.

Let Christ be Magnified – Calvin's Teaching for Today. J. H. Merle d'Aubigne. Banner of Truth Trust, 2006. pp. xxvi + 52, paperback. £5.50. ISBN 978 0 85151 959 3.

The fifth centenary of the birth of John Calvin in 2009 will doubtless spawn a large number of books concerning the life, teaching and legacy of the reformer, and rightly so. This small volume from Banner of Truth provides a foretaste of the banquet to come but also enables the reader to look back to an earlier occasion, the tri-centenary of Calvin's death and to see how his teaching was then appreciated by the Reformation historian, Merle d'Aubigne.

The book comprises an address given by d'Aubigne in Geneva in 1864, together with brief biographies of both Calvin and the author, added by the publisher. The latter provides a useful indication of "where d'Aubigne was coming from" – out of the Unitarianism which had stifled Calvin's influence in Geneva, in much the same way that it had overrun English Presbyterianism during the previous century. During his four years of study at the Academy of Geneva, prior to his ordination in 1817, "not one hour was consecrated to the study of Holy Scripture". Happily d'Aubigne and his contemporaries came under the influence of a Scotsman, Robert Haldane, who was a true disciple of Calvin, and revival followed.

Hence the author's emphasis is very much on Calvin's Christology, which he considers in terms of His Word, His Person, His Grace and His Life. Clearly in such a brief work there is nothing like the whole of Calvin's teaching but nevertheless it provides, as the author seems to have intended, a useful corrective to those who in his words believe that "Calvin's theology is only ideas, dogmas, formulae".

J.B.D.

The Gospel Advocate. Magazine of the Gospel Advocate Relief Fund. Obtainable from 18 Sadler Way, Brighton, East Sussex BN2 5PL.

This 16 page first issue is in fact a re-launch, the first *Gospel Advocate* having appeared in January 1869, but ceased production in 1921. The introduction says that the original aim was to promote Christian unity. It did this by an emphasis on free grace and experience that is "more than a notion" in the head.

The contents consist of articles on the magazine's aims; "Patrick – His Life and Times", an exposition of Psalm 121, and one on "G.A.R.F.'s Vision". There is also an account of the Annual General Meeting, with a sermon preached on the occasion by Pastor Tony Bickley on "Sowing the Seed". There are excellent quotations from past ministers and expositors placed amongst the articles. It is good to see the magazine is faithful to the AV, and may it continue to point the way out to a Christian in the way Mr. Evangelist is doing on its front cover.

E.M.

Divorce and the Bible – A Systematic Exegesis to Challenge the Traditional Views. Colin Hamer. Authorhouse. pp. 153, paperback. \$9.78. ISBN 1 4259 3355 6.

This thoughtful, well presented book by a capable evangelical layman challenges the traditional views on divorce, for which we are indebted, "to these great teachers of the Reformation." Our task as believers is "not to defend any particular body of doctrine, but to be always reforming, going

back to Scriptures to see new wonders and riches of grace there". Thus the book is an exposition of Scriptures, in order to establish a new position. There is only space in this review to deal with the main point of the book.

The contents include a preface, twelve chapters dealing first with what constitutes a marriage, then with divorce, remarriage after divorce and various objections considered, with full footnotes. It concludes with five appendices: Deuteronomy 24, the Levitical Death Penalty, Mark 10:12, Adultery, and "Agunah" or the Jewish divorcee who "cannot remarry in any recognised way in the Jewish community".

Some of the book is good, readable and acceptable exegesis of Scripture, if from the NIV. The introduction lays out his basis, including the five criteria he intends to use. The first of these is that no verse on its own can be considered to be the whole of Scripture's teaching. No, that is not so, for the position of Scripture laid down in Genesis is Scripture's entire position, and any later statements must fit Genesis. This book clearly says that marriage is based on the union of Christ the Bridegroom with the Bride of Christ, the Church, thus making marriage depend on somewhere later in the Bible than creation, namely Ephesians. Thus the way is opened for a new position.

That may look like a difference over mere names and words, but it is fundamental. The Bible position, taken by Christ Himself in Matthew 19 and Mark 10, is that the whole matter is decided by the Creation when He says, "but from the beginning of the creation". He refers the whole question back to that passage and makes it the arbiter of marriage, divorce and remarriage. Never accept any position that does not fit the absolutes of Genesis. Space fails me. Read this book, but not uncritically.

E.M.

Barnabas - The Encourager. Told by Carine MacKenzie, illustrated by Fred Apps. Christian Focus Publications. pp. 32, paperback. £1.99. ISBN 978 184550 290 4.

Jonathan - The Faithful Friend. Told by Carine MacKenzie, illustrated by Fred Apps. Christian Focus Publications. pp. 32, paperback. £1.99. ISBN 978 184550 289 8.

Mrs. Carine MacKenzie has supplied the pages in the *Gospel Magazine* "For Younger Readers" for a number of years, and needs no introduction to readers. These children's Bible stories are faithful to the Bible. They do not indulge in unwarranted flights of fancy. What makes her style so appealing to children is its simple directness. She has the gift of seeing the important things that need saying, and says them clearly, without wasting a word. She keeps the tempo going. The illustrations are of life-like figures, not cartoon characters, and the books tastefully done.

E.M.

"A Debtor To Mercy" - The Life and Experiences of Isabella Prentice. J. C. Philpot. The Huntingdonian Press, 72A Northam Road, Hedge End, Southampton SO30 4EB. pp. 44, paperback. £2.95.

Anything written by Mr. Philpot is worth reading, and here, published in a format exactly like *Altogether Lovely*, he recounts the conversion and inner life of a lady, Isabella Elliott, from the Borders. It is a story of misfortune, and loss of her parents. Being uneducated, though from a good home, she was obliged to set out on what was then called "service", as a servant in various places.

But the real story is the inner workings of her own heart, brought to a state of despair by all that had befallen her and by an overwhelming sense of unworthiness. In one of her lowest ebbs she recalls looking into a fire and thinking that were she put into it, her situation could not be worse than it was. It was at that point she was loaned a sermon. It was one that all at the church she attended were talking about. It was by Mr. Philpot on Isaiah 18:5-6, and was entitled *Winter Afore Harvest*. The theme was that God deals "winter", that is hard with a soul, before He

brings "summer", when any spiritual fruit can be expected. Such experimental preaching was what she needed, and she treasured that sermon through a life of trouble and feeling she could never believe.

By intricate workings of the providence of God, she was brought to cook for the author of the sermon, and to attend his ministry in Stamford. She married, and died after "confinement", aged only 48, at peace though in great pain. This vivid account of the Lord's dealings and of the devil's attacks upon her may sound strange to this age, but they are real to the child of God. Therein lies the attraction of the book.

E.M.

Altogether Lovely – George Rose. The Huntingdonian Press, 72A Northam Road, Hedge End, Southampton SO30 4EB. pp. 44, paperback. £2.75.

The first ten pages give a brief account of the life and ministry of George Rose, a good and faithful Strict Baptist Minister (1873-1965). He would not be well known to the Lord's people outside those circles. His awe of the ministry of the Word made him rely wholly upon his God, and his sermons are well worth the trouble of reading. Here are two of them.

Both expound the Song of Solomon 5:16: "His mouth is most sweet, yea, he is altogether lovely. This is my beloved, and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem." His subject is the best, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Bridegroom. The preacher desires his hearers, the Bride of Christ, to be better acquainted with Him. The points he makes are an appeal to his hearers to grow in the knowledge of Christ personally. His method is to take the actual words of the Scripture in the description of the Beloved in the verses following, using them as the points he makes.

His method and words are simple – a good recommendation. He uses quotations from hymns to bring his points home. The production is of a high standard, but with costs in mind, so is suitable for ministers and others of limited means.

E.M.

The Complete John Plowman. C. H. Spurgeon. Christian Heritage. pp. 120, paperback. £7.99. ISBN 978 1 84550 278 2.

This well-produced book is yet another re-issue of the popular books written by Mr. Spurgeon and originally intended "for ploughmen and common people". He says in his preface: "Refined taste and dainty words have been discarded for strong proverbial expressions and homely phrases. I have aimed my blows at the vices of many and tried to inculcate those moral virtues without which men are degraded."

It is divided into 38 short chapters, each having a suitable heading with such titles as "On Gossips", "Men With Two Faces", "Monuments" and (rather appropriate these days!) "Spending". It could be said that all aspects of life are considered. One rather amusing section is on "The Preacher's Appearance", where Mr. Spurgeon declaims against dirty collars and adds, "from a slovenly, smoking, snuff-taking, beer drinking preacher may the church be delivered".

The print is clear and well-spaced and there are a number of illustrations, many of which depict characters from a later period (1913). In many ways *John Plowman* is a relic of the Victorian era, but the sound advice and wisdom of his words remain true, for they are ageless.

D.L.J.

What the Bible Teaches about . . . Christian Parenting. Roger Ellsworth. Evangelical Press. pp. 110. £7.95. ISBN 0 86234 648 4.

This helpful book deals with the problems confronting parents. Modern living exposes children to many temptations and experiences with which parents have not themselves undergone, and consequently feel hard-pressed to solve. In dealing with these many problems, we are to look for help to the perfect and infallible guide, the Bible. This comes "not in the form of unproven theories,

but rather as guidance that is substantial and true. If we put its teachings into practice, we will do well in parenting."

There are fourteen chapters, covering many aspects of the subject. They are given a suitable heading, with a text of Scripture to be read in conjunction. Quotations are given from such as Bishop J. C. Ryle and Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones. It is well produced, with easy-to-read print. Your reviewer would have preferred the use of the A.V. instead of the N.K.J.V. Altogether a timely and Bible-centred book.

D.L.J.

Is That You, Lord? Hearing the Voice of the Lord. A Biblical Perspective.

Gary E. Gilley. Evangelical Press. pp. 92, paperback. £6.95. ISBN 13 978 0 85234 625 5.

This is a new book by Dr. Gary Gilley, who has been pastor of an American church for the past thirty-two years. He finds that there is a widespread wish among many people to feel and experience God's guidance in their day-to-day decisions in a direct, personal and intimate way, and in doing so they are in danger of being guided by their own thoughts or desires or imaginations. They are often drawn to attend churches where their emotions are moved by music and drama rather than hearing Scripture expounded.

The author carefully examines the validity of such an approach for discerning God's will and concludes that a subjective, mystical understanding of the Lord's leading through inner revelation rather than through Scripture, is not biblically founded (page 61). He contends that we are to concentrate on God's revealed will – the Bible – rather than trying to search out hidden mysteries. Subjective feelings and emotions should not reign supreme over the objective revelation of Scripture.

The vast majority of godly people in the Bible never heard personally from God concerning their individual lives and decisions. They were in the will of God by virtue of leading obedient lives and therefore had the freedom to make wise, godly decisions based upon the clear commands and principles of Scripture, so that they were "thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Timothy 3:17). A clearly reasoned and thoughtful book for a Christian in doubt about how to seek the will of God.

G.F.H.H.

Letters of Thomas Chalmers. Introduction by Iain H. Murray. Banner of Truth Trust. pp. xxxii + 538, hardback. £17.50. ISBN 978 0 85151 940 1.

Thomas Chalmers (1780-1847) was a spiritual and intellectual giant of his time, whose abilities and interests stretched beyond theology to moral philosophy, social policy, education and the natural sciences, as well as being a devoted pastor and a loving father of his family. These interests are reflected in his correspondence and Banner of Truth are to be congratulated at publishing this facsimile of the 410 letters included in the 1853 edition compiled by Chalmers' son-in-law and biographer, William Hanna.

The collection is prefaced by an introduction from the pen of Iain Murray which in 18 pages covers the main facts of Chalmers' life and his significance in the context of his times. It is perhaps regrettable, however, that it was not written especially for the purpose but extracted from another work of Murray's, so that there is no attempt to relate the letters to the life and indeed only one reference to one of the letters.

With the exception of a group entitled "Correspondence on the Church Question" and relating to the events leading to the Disruption in 1843 and the foundation of the Free Church, the letters themselves are arranged by recipient. There is an extended group of 64 addressed to his sister, Jane Morton, and the book concludes with 22 letters to a long-standing friend, Mrs. Dunlop. Few of Chalmers' correspondents are household-names today and the needs of the student and general

reader would have been well met by the inclusion of a "Who's Who", which would have placed them in the historical context.

Perhaps the strongest theme that runs through the letters and which makes their new availability most timely is the need of each Christian to experience saving faith and to seek to prepare himself for the moment of death. It is likely that very few letters are written on this theme today.

There are also lighter moments, for Chalmers was by no means the dour Presbyterian of caricature. A group of letters addressed to William Wilberforce includes several concerned with helping to arrange a tour of Scotland for the reformer and his family. This did not in the end materialise but later we find Chalmers successfully planning a similar itinerary for the French historian of the Reformation, Merle d'Aubigne.

J.B.D.

The Design and Origin of Birds. Phillip Snow. Day One Publications. pp. 256, paperback. £9.00. ISBN 1 84625 002 1.

As the creation/evolution debate seems to be hotting up, creationist books are appearing in increasing numbers from different disciplines. This is another such book by Phillip Snow, a wild-life and landscape painter and writer who says one of the aims of the book is to show that the complexity, variety and flying ability of birds could not possibly happen by accident. He says Bible writers like Job and Solomon, as well as Paul, told us to "look to creation" for instruction – and specifically birds. They are just one part of the whole exciting web of life (ecology) that is there both to delight, intrigue and educate us – and that we are instructed to look after. It describes how birds were wonderfully designed right from the beginning, but with built-in information so that they can adapt to their many changing environments.

This book is well illustrated with diagrams and explanations of bird design, feathers and flight, nests and eggs, and so on. It will be most welcome to bird lovers but it sticks well to its remit to spell out the design and origin of birds and points out evolution's fancies and forgeries. It is commended by Prof. Stuart Burgess and Prof. Andy McIntosh, well known Christian speakers and writers of renown.

The Scriptures are quoted throughout the book and it can be seen that Phillip Snow has an excellent grasp of his subject. He says that "Real science is not at all incompatible with the Bible, as the Christian faith of men like Newton, Kepler, Ray, Linnaeus, Pasteur, Kelvin, Faraday, and now Sir Ghillelan Prance of Kew Garden, and others, more than ably demonstrate. I am obviously not a scientist but an artist, yet trained to observe carefully. Remember, real science is about observing, thinking and testing – so we should all be able to do that to some degree or other. God has given us common sense, as well as putting 'eternity' (Ecclesiastes 3:11) and 'law' (Jeremiah 31:33) in everyone's hearts – remember: 'no excuse' for not believing in creation (Romans 1:20)". This is a most interesting book which I heartily recommend. Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version.

T.M.B.

Opening up Ezra. Peter Williams. Day One Publications. pp. 128, paperback. £5.00. ISBN 1 84625 022 6.

Ezra is the seventh book in the *Opening up* series and fulfils the publisher's stated aim of combining brevity, accuracy and readability for "the average person in the church". The introductory Overview with a chronology of Ezra and the main characters and a map, followed by a short background and summary, are a good preparation for chapter by chapter study. Various points from the text are highlighted in bold print on the page as a reinforcement of their importance, but putting the questions for further study and discussion at the end of the chapters in small, light print on a grey, grille-patterned background does not help weak or ageing eyes!

The author draws many matters out of the text of Ezra which are of concern to Christians today, such as: the prevalence of external religiosity shown in outward forms and buildings; the need for balance in emotion in worship; the reason for the widespread use of horoscopes and mediums; wrong ways of attracting people into church; and the doctrine of personal responsibility as opposed to blaming our heredity or environment. Much of value is packed into this short book. G.F.H.H.

Elijah. Encountering Elijah the Fiery Prophet. Face2Face Series. Simon J. Robinson. Day One Publications. pp. 79, paperback. £4.00. ISBN 1 84625 011 0.

The days of deep spiritual darkness in Ahab's reign, when Elijah lived, are reflected in our own times. Simon Robinson uses the remarkable evidences of God's sovereignty in human affairs shown in His direction of Elijah's life as an encouragement to us not to be intimidated: Elijah "was a man subject to like passions as we are . . ."; "earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us" (James 5:17; 2 Corinthians 4:7).

The questions for further study and discussion at the end of each of the twelve chapters (averaging 6 pages) should provide much thoughtful searching about the life of the readers' churches. The references to other texts freshens acquaintance with well-known passages of Scripture and suggest ways of application revealed in Elijah's life. The modest price is an incentive for group study. G.F.H.H.

Prepared to Preach. Greg Scharf. Mentor, Ross-shire. pp. 176, paperback. £10.99. ISBN 1 84550 043 1.

This is probably one of the most wide-ranging books on the subject of preaching, yet one of the most brief. The author has managed to cover many issues connected with preaching in a well-organised, easily-digested manner.

He seeks to ground his arguments in Scripture (usually ESV), and addresses a wide range of cultures, denominations and traditions, giving advice that can be easily adapted according to local situations. He accepts women as preachers as a matter of course.

His aim is to help novice and inexperienced preachers to work on the gifts they have. Scharf is clear that all true preachers are called and equipped by God, but he is also clear that such preachers must do their part. No preacher can be effective unless he prays and reads the Scriptures for his own edification. There is useful advice on how to dress, behave and speak. Untrained preachers will find this book worth reading and trained ones may find it a good "refresher course", helping to avoid the staleness that can afflict a long pulpit ministry. As ever, not everyone will agree with everything the author has to say, but that is to be expected. E.J.M.

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Peter King, Secretary