

THE GOSPEL MAGAZINE

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

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

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EDITORIAL

The religious scene continues to present a spectacle of increasing confusion. In England a prominent evangelical co-operates with an R.C. in a mission. In South Africa an evangelistic mission in one of the Universities has a combined sponsorship from the R.C. chaplain as well as all the other shades in the ecclesiastical spectrum. In Ireland Catholic Pentecostalism is welcomed by evangelicals who share in the prayer gatherings which have sprung up all over the country.

Some will claim that this is not confusion but light breaking in on a dark situation. Indeed, they may well conclude that any criticism of what is happening is the predictable reaction of one who ministers in Ulster, and has an in-built anti-Roman attitude!

In fact the opposite is true. The bitter and at times the vicious bigotry of a nominal Protestantism in Ulster is more likely to drive a man to the other extreme of being more tolerant of Rome. When you have listened to the diatribes which go by the name of argument, your reaction is more liable to be a growing sympathy with ecumenical developments. So it is in spite of bigotry, and not because of it, and indeed because of a concern for those inside the Roman system as well as those outside, that I feel the vigour of biblical protest—in the true sense of that word—is sorely needed. Testimony to the truth and against error must be maintained.

But Rome is changing, we are told. That is true; but we must ask in reply, in what way is she changing? Is she moving

in the direction of a biblical reformation? The answer is an emphatic 'No'. On the one side the traditionalists in Rome are fighting hard to maintain the old position. On the other side the progressives move steadily away from traditional dogma, but tragically not in the direction of biblical truth. True, they are open to listen to others as never before, but the tragedy is that they are open not only to truth but to error. So today many Roman Catholic priests are in the morass in which much of Protestantism has long since been trapped. Liberal theology is destroying Roman dogma just as it destroyed evangelical preaching within Protestantism. The end results are sadly similar!

But Catholic Pentecostalism is surely different! Here are men and women who rejoice in meeting with Christ. Here is an interest in Bible Study which must be a matter for praise. Here are spontaneous prayer meetings and fellowship gatherings which have the mark of true spirituality. Surely if we cannot rejoice in this there is something grievously wrong with our own spiritual experience.

Well, at the risk of being dismissed as harsh or censorious or worse, I must still enter some critical comments, and I do so in the name of Christ, whose glory is being obscured. In doing so I am not questioning the spiritual experience of individual Roman Catholics who claim that they have met with the Lord. I dare not even attempt this, for I have not got the omniscience of God to read men's hearts. But their doctrine I may assess. Indeed, the New Testament would be even more emphatic that I must assess it and bring it to the touchstone of the Word of God.

What, then, do I find in the doctrinal statements of Catholic Pentecostalism which causes me deep concern? I find a firm commitment to the old and utterly unscriptural sacramentalism of Rome, so that the 'baptism in the Spirit' is said to be the open manifestation of the grace received earlier via baptismal regeneration. I find a deeper devotion to Mary with the saying of the Rosary presented as one of the fruits of the new experience. I find a deeper commitment to the dogma of transubstantiation, to the mass and to the cult of the reserved sacrament—the opening prayer meeting of the movement in Dublin was accompanied by worship of the blessed sacrament as part of the invocation of the Spirit. I find the claim that nothing in the movement's teaching conflicts with the teaching of the Pope—no wonder the present Pope has given them his commendation. One of their leaders even goes so far as to

claim that the dogma of 1870 declaring papal infallibility was as much a work of the Spirit as is the present movement. All this and much more you may read for yourself in a newly published book in 'The Charismatic Renewal and the Irish Experience', by Thomas Flynn, published by Hodder and Stoughton.

All this calls for a firm insistence that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth. He does not, and indeed cannot, contradict Himself. He will not glorify Christ and at the same time exalt Mary. He will not teach, as He does in the Epistle to the Hebrews, the perfection of Christ's work, and at the same time endorse the sacrifice of the mass, with its implication that the work has to be supplemented. He will not subordinate the Scriptures which He Himself has given to the traditions of men or the dictates of the papacy.

But why have Evangelicals succumbed so badly? Why this widespread failure to exercise a true discernment? The answer would require an examination of the history of the last hundred years. Here we can only indicate some reasons and suggest them as pointers to further study.

There has in the first place been a subordination of doctrine to experience. Of course, we do not belittle experience. The New Testament is too full of joy to do such a thing. The Psalms with their exuberant delight in God are a call to us to seek from God a like joyful worship. But always our experience must be tested by the Word if we are not to be side-tracked. Sadly it must be said that the present trend is quite different. Now experience is the supreme criterion and it even influences the way we read our Bibles and colours the interpretation fastened on the Word.

This lack of balance may be seen in various areas. It may be detected in the preaching of today in which a serious attempt to grapple with the text often gives way to a shallow anecdote-laden address. It may be seen in the strong emphasis on testimony-giving which competes with the pulpit ministry as a communicator of the gospel—sometimes, indeed, the sermon, if such it could be termed, is simply the application of the testimonies. It is seen in the sad degeneration of evangelical hymnody, in which the great objective truths of the hymns of Wesley, Watts and Newton have been superseded by the 'Now I am happy all the day' approach.

Another serious factor in the downgrading of doctrine has been the emphasis on results. The reformed pastor is not

averse to results. Indeed he longs to see results, but he wants to see the results of God's activity rather than of man's cleverness. But the pragmatic approach which makes results the supreme concern ignores the fact that truth is the major consideration. To argue that if a thing works it must be true is to forget that the devil can produce results and so also can the carnal wisdom of man. The false workers of Egypt could do wonders similar to Moses and Aaron. Those rejected by Christ could yet claim the ability to exorcise demons, to prophesy, and to perform miracles. All our activity and all our plans must be brought to the judgment of the Word.

Allied to this departure from doctrinal standards has been the emergence into sharper focus of a false view of man. It is the view against which the Reformation was a mighty protest, and against which reformed preaching must still mount an assault. It is the view which says that man can contribute to his salvation. It appears in the Roman doctrine of merit, which teaches that the sinner can prepare himself for the grace of supplication. It appears among evangelicals when they make repentance and faith man's contribution which leads to God's response which is regeneration. It is not surprising, then, to discover that Roman Catholics and Evangelicals are coming together, for the semi-Pelagian stream of Rome and the Arminian stream of many Evangelicals have a common source in a false view of man stemming from a denial of the sovereignty of God.

What is our reply to the situation? It is certainly not to lose heart! This is an intolerable reaction if we believe in the sovereignty of God Almighty. He is on the throne. He will accomplish His purposes. But we must be up and doing! We must pray that God will make us not only clear in our minds as to the doctrines of grace, but passionately convinced that they are the answer to the present hour. The truths which split the monolith of Rome four centuries ago are still the only answer. But we do not want a dead theoretical Calvinism; we need rather a warm, vibrant, living and aggressive Calvinism which will thrust us out with vigour and enthusiasm and determination to challenge error, and to summon men to the truth. Such an attitude can never be produced by human zeal. So we pray to God that the Holy Spirit of truth will come upon us in a new way, that His truth may grip us, His love fill us, and His power control us. And all this is with our ultimate aim in view—the greater glory of our God.

H.M.C.

The Authentic Gospel

H.M. CARSON

A sermon preached in Hamilton Road Baptist Church, Bangor, N. Ireland, on Sunday morning, 21st February, 1971, on Acts 10 : 34-43.

We turn this morning to the tenth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. We have already looked at it on two previous occasions, and we have seen it, I trust, as a very significant chapter because it marks the great new departure, the great forward step, as the door is opened to the Gentiles. What has been a gospel largely circulating in a Jewish Community in Jerusalem is now going to reach out to the uttermost parts of the earth. We looked on the first occasion at Cornelius. We saw a man seeking the Lord with all his heart, and we found that man coming to a living experience of God in Christ. We looked again at the chapter and we saw Peter being weaned from his prejudice and from his traditional attitudes until he was ready to be directed and led by the Holy Spirit. Now we come back to it this morning and this time we are examining the gospel as Peter proclaimed it.

I believe it is very important that we should look at this statement of the gospel, because if we are Christians we want to know what the gospel is. Some may assume that if we are Christians we already know what the gospel is. But I have discovered that sometimes Christians are far from being clear on the subject, so that if you put them alongside a non-Christian, an unbeliever, for example, who is wanting to know what the gospel is, you find sometimes that they flounder or they give an inadequate presentation. That is why I believe it is important we should see what the apostolic gospel really was, what the message was which these apostles declared to men and women. It was a message, after all, which turned the world upside-down. It was this kind of preaching, in the power of the Holy Spirit, which made a tremendous impact on the immediate circle of Cornelius and his friends, but ultimately it was to shake the very Roman Empire to its foundations, such was the power of this gospel. So I say, we want to know what are the elements of the gospel, what is the essential message, what was the word which these men preached. We

want gospel preaching in our pulpits, and so we want to know how to test gospel preaching. How do you know whether it is faithful gospel preaching or not? Well, here is the standard. Here is an apostle. Here is a man who has been entrusted with the task, and here he is in a situation where there are men waiting to hear what this gospel is. They are asking the way of salvation. What do you say to a man in this situation? You preach the gospel. What do you preach? Well, here it is; this is the standard to judge whether it is faithful gospel preaching or not.

It is very interesting to notice that Peter's gospel preaching is much fuller and richer than some gospel preaching which goes by that name. We may be familiar with the description of the gospel in terms of the ABC of the gospel. The ABC of the gospel is—All have sinned; Behold the Lamb of God; Come unto Me. Well, those are of course essential elements in the gospel. But it is very interesting to notice that Peter has much more in his gospel than that. He does not just speak about sin and about the Cross and urge people to come to the Saviour. He has a lot more to say about it; and because of the things he has to say he would probably be accused by some ardent evangelicals of not really preaching the gospel but of dealing with something else. But for the apostle Peter this fuller message is all part of the gospel. He cannot call these men to repentance and faith, he cannot urge them to trust the Saviour, unless he gives them the whole message. There is no point giving them something partial. he must deliver the whole counsel of God.

So he speaks to them; and we listen to him in order that we may grasp what, in the view of the apostle, is the essence of gospel proclamation. One emphasis that comes out straight-away is that this message, this gospel, is a word from God, this is the word which God sent to the children of Israel. This is not, says Peter, something which we have dreamed up; this is not the result of our religious meditation. We have not been considering ultimate issues and then come up with this answer. This is a word which has come from heaven. When Paul is writing to the Thessalonians he speaks in vivid terms about the *gospel of God*; it is God's gospel! When he is writing the epistle to the Romans, speaking about this same gospel, he says, 'I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth'. It is God's powerful word which changes men's lives. This is the undergirding assurance which enables us to tell forth this

message. It is God's gospel. It is not man's theory. It is not the point of view of a church or a group of churches. It is supremely the gospel of God.

It is the gospel which God planned. The gospel was not something that happened by chance. It was not mere coincidence that dictated the progress of Jesus' ministry. It was all according to the eternal plan and purpose of God, for it was planned before the world began. It is God's gospel. It was procured by God at every point; from the moment when Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the virgin Mary, right through His ministry to the Cross, to the resurrection, to the ascension, it was procured by God. God was at work. God was working out a perfect salvation through the blood and the sweat and the tears of His own beloved Son.

It is true, of course, that it becomes our gospel when we embrace it, so that when we speak to others we can speak of 'my gospel', 'my gospel which has gripped my heart and which I want to share with others', but even then it is still God's gospel. It was God who laid hands upon us. 'By grace,' says Paul to the Ephesians, 'you have been saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works lest any man should boast.' So right at the outset Peter is emphasising the point that this is God's gospel; and we need to emphasise this point with the seeker. We must never give the impression that this is simply our religious point of view, nor must we give the impression that it is the brilliance of our arguments or the eloquence of our approach which are the determining factors. A Christian may be stumbling in his approach, his arguments may not be very good, his illustrations may be inadequate, but he comes with authority from God! We need to have this starting point when we speak to men about the gospel—we are speaking with the authority of God Almighty.

There is a further note about the gospel. Peter is emphasising, and to him this is a great new truth, that this is a gospel for the whole wide world. 'God,' he says, 'is no respecter of persons. In every nation he that feareth him and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.' Now you must not pervert what Peter is saying here and imagine that he is teaching that if anybody is sincere, then that is sufficient. This would be a complete contradiction of his gospel; indeed, it would make what he is about to say completely pointless. If sincerity is enough, well, why bother about gospel preaching? If sincerity is sufficient, why go to men and bid them be reconciled

to God? Peter is not saying that. Peter's point is surely this—the gospel which we Jews have received, I realise now, by the grace of God, is for men and women of every nation. It matters not what nation a man comes from or what language he speaks, if with all his heart he truly seeks God, he shall surely find Him. Here is Cornelius, a Gentile, an outsider as far as Peter is concerned—well, says Peter, this gospel is not only for Jews, it is for Gentiles. Tragically, some of us need to do a bit of thinking and reverse that these days. We have got to say that it is not only for Gentiles, it is also for Jews, because we have so taken the gospel to ourselves that we forget we have a continuing mandate from God to take this gospel of salvation to the Jewish nation. However, whether it is believing Gentiles for whom Jews must be concerned, or whether, as in the case of Peter, it is a Jewish believer who has to see that the Gentiles are also involved, the great thing is that this gospel of God is a gospel for men and women of every tribe and nation.

This is why you cannot really be faithful to the gospel unless you are missionary-minded. You can never really preach the gospel unless all the time you are thinking of the wider fields. You may have read a famous little book called *Mary Jones' Bible*, the story of the girl called Mary Jones who trekked across the Welsh mountains more than 150 years ago in order to buy a Bible. It was in a day of grinding poverty and to gather together the money to buy a Bible was, of course, quite an achievement. It was a day without transport facilities; you simply trekked across the mountains—if any of you have holidayed in Wales you will know that the Welsh mountains are not exactly easy going. What a disappointment, then, when she got there to find that every Bible had been sold. But out of her concern was born the Bible Society, for when the ministers met to discuss the problem, they discussed the possibility of a Bible Society for Wales so that everybody in the Principality might read the Bible in their own mother tongue. Then someone in the meeting asked, 'If for Wales, why not for the Kingdom, and if for the Kingdom, why not for the world?' And the echo of the Acts of the Apostles is 'Why not?' because the gospel can never be circumscribed by national boundaries; the gospel can never be thought of in terms of one particular nation or people. The gospel is essentially the gospel for the whole wide world.

So Peter begins at this point: 'I am talking,' he says, 'about God's gospel, the word which God has sent; and it is a gospel, Cornelius, not only for me, but for you, and for men and

women of every nation.' And what is it about? What is the message of this gospel? Well, in verse 36 you get it, it is the gospel which preaches peace by Jesus Christ. It is a gospel which is talking about peace. Now you cannot really understand what peace is unless you think about war. Peace means the ending of hostilities. Peace means that the war is over. So when the gospel is presented as the gospel of peace, he is emphasising the fact that men and women in sin are rebels against the King of kings. They have defied their Creator, they are living in rebellion, and because of their rebellion they are under God's judgment, for God does not lightly tolerate man's defiance. 'The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.' We have moved into a day of shallow gospel preaching, when the solemn realities of judgment have receded into the background. But when you turn to the Acts of the Apostles, and when you listen to Jesus Himself, you find this solemn note coming in. This is a gospel of peace, and if there is no peace the only other alternative is war; and war, when a man is involved with his Creator, will always be a losing battle as far as the man is concerned, because the God against whom he rebels is the Lord God Omnipotent. For a man to defy his Creator is an utterly futile operation, he will inevitably be defeated, he will inevitably come under God's wrath and judgment. But, says Peter, the gospel I bring you is a gospel which speaks of peace, peace with God through Jesus Christ. It speaks of reconciliation. It speaks of a gulf being bridged. It speaks of men being brought from rebellion into a condition where they are loyal bondslaves of the King of kings.

It is the gospel of peace. So when we meet men and women, when we meet young people, who obviously do not know the meaning of peace in their hearts, who are dissatisfied, and are turning in this direction and that direction, looking for thrills and pleasure to try and fill life out with meaning—you have got to probe their condition and show them that what is really wrong is that they do not know peace with God. That is why they are in such a dissatisfied frame of mind, why they see so little purpose in life. They do not know peace with God, and the result, of course, is that they do not know the peace which comes from God. It is only the gospel which bridges the gulf, only the gospel which brings a man this reconciliation so that he has peace with God. As a result he has the peace of God in his heart. He has a purpose and a sense of direction. He has some aim in life now that he knows what it means to live a life

in which the glory of God and the honour of Christ are his great concern. So it is the gospel of peace.

Then Peter reinforces the basis of this gospel. He says that this gospel has been rooted in history. So he begins with the story of the Lord Jesus, and you will notice that he does not immediately go to Calvary. He will come to that in due course, but he does not begin there. He begins further back, with the commencement of the ministry of the Lord Jesus; and that is where gospel preaching must begin. If you open Mark's gospel, you will find the same pattern. The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ was when He was commissioned publicly for His ministry, when He was baptised in the river Jordan. Now what was involved in the baptism of Jesus that is so important to the gospel? Well, at His baptism the Spirit came upon Him and He was commissioned by the Father, He was filled with the Spirit, to go out and to accomplish His ministry. But not only that, at His baptism there came a voice from heaven, 'This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased'. This is a vital element in the gospel. It is no use talking about Jesus going to Calvary unless you first establish the point that the One who went to Calvary was indeed the Son of God. After all, if it was only a man who went to Calvary, it was wonderful but it was rather tragic, and certainly it could have no bearing on us apart from possibly inspiring men as Socrates' death inspired many a Greek. But the gospel begins with the fact that this Jesus Christ was authenticated from heaven—'My beloved Son!' That lights Calvary up with meaning! When I look at the Cross I am not seeing an innocent man being hounded to death by unjust and jealous religious leaders; I am seeing One whom His Father has already declared to be His beloved Son. The gospel is about a Man called Jesus of Nazareth, but He is more than a man; this is the God-Man, this is the Son of God who has taken human nature and has become man for us and for our salvation.

So Peter begins at that point, with the commencement of Jesus' ministry. Then he moves on. But he is not at the Cross yet—he has something else to talk about before he can go to the Cross. He wants to talk about the ministry of the Lord Jesus, and so he speaks about His going about doing good and healing all those who were oppressed by the devil. You may say—but this is not the gospel, Peter; you had better move on or some of your hearers will be saying that you do not really preach the gospel. But Peter would surely reply—Wait a moment. We have got to get the full gospel if we are going to bring the word of God home to the hearts of these seekers.

This is an essential part of the gospel, to know what kind of Jesus, what kind of Saviour, this is. Is He someone who is simply working out a great eternal plan? No, He is something more than that, He is a sympathetic, understanding Saviour. There is nothing cold and remote about this Christ. This gospel is not an academic theory that you dress up in certain doctrines, so that the hearer has only got to understand the argument, and when he has grasped the argument he is saved. O no! Peter says, it is not a remote and hard gospel. This Christ went about doing good. He was sympathetic, He was understanding. He met a leper in his uncleanness and even touched him—something that people could hardly conceive possible—and said, 'I will, be thou clean'. He took little children up in His arms and He blessed them. He encountered the sick, the blind, the sorrowful, and He met their needs. He went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed with the devil. This is the kind of Saviour I am talking to you about, says Peter. He is a real man, a man who really took our nature, God incarnate, this sympathetic Jesus of Nazareth.

This is the One, says Peter, whom they killed. They slew Him, they hung Him on a tree, and in hanging Him on a tree they were rejecting Him out of hand. They were saying—He is a blasphemer, He claims to be God and we simply cannot accept this claim; we will show what we think of His claim, we will crucify Him, and in crucifying Him we will show our contempt for Him, accursed fellow. That is what they said when they nailed Him on a tree, remembering the Old Testament words, 'Cursed is everyone that hangs on a tree'. It was a mark of the extremity of judgment on a criminal whom they were dismissing out of hand. Indeed, when they hung Him on a tree they showed their contempt to the ultimate point because they put Him between a couple of thieves, and as far as they were concerned He was on the same level. The three of them hung together as common criminals. He was despised and rejected of men. He was an outcast.

Yes, said Peter, He was accursed, but in a far deeper sense than in the facile and superficial opinion of these men. He came under the curse of God, because when He went to the tree He went there as a Saviour. He had gone about doing good, healing those who were oppressed of the devil, but that was not the whole purpose of His coming. His ministry demonstrated His love and concern and sympathy for men; it demonstrated also His mighty power. But you must go on to the very heart of the gospel—He went to Calvary, He died, the Just for

the unjust, that He might bring us to God. Indeed, what I have been talking about, His healing ministry, His kindness, His gentleness, His goodness, all these stand out in bold relief at Calvary. This is what they did to the Healer, the sympathetic Friend; they took Him and they nailed Him on a tree. That is what sin is like. It is ugly, it is foul, it is something that really demands the judgment of heaven. And there at Calvary in the darkness, under the curse of God, He died.

But, said Peter, God raised Him up the third day. This is the point, you will notice in the Acts of the Apostles, that they always reach—Christ died, He bore our sins in His own body on the tree, but that was not the end of the story. There comes the great climax—God raised Him up! Here is the intervention of the Almighty! Here are men jostling around that cross. Even in His dying moments of agony they are not content to leave Him to die; they are mocking and ridiculing Him to the very end. But God from heaven intervenes in this situation. The despised and rejected One, the object of contempt and ridicule, the One who has been cast out—God takes Him from the power of the grave, raises Him, and sets Him at His right hand. This is the gospel I have for you, says Peter. It is a gospel of hope, it is a gospel of power, it is a gospel of life, because I am speaking about a Saviour who came to needy men and women and died in the room and stead of the sinner, and He rose again. He is a living Saviour and He is able to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by Him. That is why when I preach this kind of gospel there is something within which responds and my heart thrills to it. I know, too, that when the child of God listens to this kind of gospel his heart thrills in response. It is because we are talking about the triumphs of our Saviour, we are speaking about the victorious conquest of the Son of God, we are speaking of the breaking of the power of sin and death and hell. Christ the One who died in the darkness and was laid in the tomb, and who to the world seemed to be defeated—‘Up from the grave He arose, the mighty Victor o’er His foes.’ This is the Christ who is the very heart of the apostolic gospel, and this is the Christ whom Peter presents.

But he reinforces it: he says there are two testimonies, there are two witnesses. If a barrister is presenting a case in court, and it is an important case, it is essential that he should have witnesses, those who can speak with authority. So there are two sets of witnesses. On the one side there are the apostles, and Peter is one of them. Why are they important? Well, says

Peter, because we were there from the very beginning of the gospel. One of the first things He did was call us. We were fishermen up there in Galilee; we were mending our nets the day He passed by, and He said, 'Come after me and I will make you to become fishers of men'. We did not fully understand then what was involved, but there was something so compelling about it that we just left everything and we went after Him. And from then on, right the way through, right to the Cross, right to the resurrection, we were with Him. We are not spinning fairy tales, we are telling you solid facts; we were eyewitnesses.

Is it necessary to labour this point? In fact this is a point that we desperately need to hammer home today, because we are increasingly facing a situation in the churches where men and women are denying the resurrection of Christ. Many of the so-called leaders in the churches are preaching a 'gospel' (and you have to put that word 'gospel' in quotes because it is no gospel at all), they are preaching a message in which the resurrection of Christ is being pushed to one side or forgotten or even rejected. They are preaching some kind of spiritual resurrection in which the memory of Jesus lives on, and we have got to fight hard against this today. This is the kind of teaching, for example, they will propagate in our colleges of education and it will percolate through to our schools and it will affect the children who are being taught in the schools. Men deny the resurrection of Christ. What then do we reply? We say—Look, the men who preached this gospel in the first instance were not trying to give some explanation of a deep religious experience they had had; they had seen the Lord. Peter emphasises it here. This is gospel preaching. He says, We ate and drank with Him! Did He rise? Were we imagining something? Was it some kind of hallucination? Not a bit of it! We really saw Him. He was there; He took a piece of broiled fish and a honeycomb and He ate it. He really did rise from the dead. If He did not rise, then we have no gospel, and we are simply deluding ourselves.

What then of the other testimony? Peter refers to the prophets. What happened, said Peter, had been foretold centuries before. Micah spoke about Bethlehem where He would be born. Isaiah spoke of the virgin birth, 'A virgin shall conceive and bear a son'. Isaiah spoke later of His death, 'Wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities'. David spoke about His resurrection centuries before, 'Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, nor wilt thou suffer thy holy One to see

corruption'. Turn to the Old Testament, read the Scriptures, listen to the witness, listen to their testimony, and what they say we are echoing, says Peter. They looked forward and they knew what was going to happen because they were enlightened by God. We know what has happened because we were there and with our own eyes we saw it; with our own ears we heard the voice of the Son of God. This is a gospel which we speak with authority and with deep conviction; Christ died for sinners, He rose from the dead, He lives, He is able to save.

So Peter comes to the application of it, and you will notice where he begins in his application. He does not begin with—Jesus is the Saviour, now turn to Him. He begins by saying—Jesus is the judge. This is the first item in his gospel: 'He commanded us to preach unto the people and to testify that it was he which was ordained of God to be Judge of the living and the dead.' The gospel is not something that can be treated lightly. The gospel is not like an after-dinner speech, or a lecture on some interesting subject that you can listen to for a time and then forget. The gospel is a desperately solemn matter. This Jesus Christ has been ordained of God to be the Judge of the living and the dead, and men will one day be compelled to face Him. They may now treat the gospel as of little consequence; they may be able to shrug it off, but one day there will be no shrugging off the gospel, there will be no ignoring it; they will have to confront Christ the Judge. So the gospel comes with this note of warning; the gospel is set in the context of desperate solemnity, of eternal issues. This gospel, you see, is a matter of life or death, heaven or hell, peace with God or outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. When the gospel is preached men do well to take it seriously.

He is the Judge, says Peter, but He is also the Saviour. Through Him forgiveness is offered, free and full forgiveness. How then does this become a reality for the sinner? Well, it is a reality for those who believe on Him. So Peter brings you to the climax of it—your response to the gospel. To respond is to understand in some measure what he has been saying, that it is God's gospel, that God has done it all. He sent His Son, He authenticated His Son; He said, 'This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased'. So the One who went to Calvary was indeed the Son of God, and there He died; there He bore the penalties that were due to the sinner. And He rose again and He lives. What does failure to submit to Him mean? It means judgment. But, says Peter, to turn to Him, to believe in Him,

to trust in Him, means forgiveness. Pardon for sin, peace with God, new life—these are the gospel blessings.

There may be someone this morning in this congregation and you are rather like Cornelius. You have been wanting to know the way. Well, Jesus Christ is the way! What then is the response to this Christ? It is simply to turn and to put your trust in Him as your Saviour, and your Lord. Today, by God's grace, the great experience can be yours, the knowledge of sin forgiven, peace with God and hope of heaven. If you are a believer, then your task is to go out and to share with men and women the gospel. And here is the gospel, it is the gospel of the Son of God who loved us and gave Himself for us, who rose from the dead and ever lives to save those who come unto God by Him.

O, it is no common mercy to descend from pious parents. Some of us do not only owe our natural life to them, as instruments of our beings, but our spiritual and eternal life also. It was no small mercy to Timothy to be descended from such progenitors (2 Timothy 1:5), nor to Augustine that he had such a mother as Monica, who planted in his mind the precepts of life with her words, watered them with her tears, and nourished them with her example.—JOHN FLAVEL.

If no sin were punished here, no providence would be believed; and if every sin should be punished here, no judgment would be expected.—AUGUSTINE.

Do not meddle with that which you cannot recommend to God in prayer for a blessing.—JOHN FLAVEL.

Wise providence considers our condition as pilgrims and strangers and so allots the provision that is needful for our passage home. It knows the mischievous influence of fulness and excess upon most men though sanctified and how apt it is to make them remiss and forgetful of God (Deuteronomy 6:12) so that their heart, like the moon, suffers an eclipse when it is at the full; and so suits and orders all to their best advantage.—JOHN FLAVEL.

That we may please Christ the better, labour to be cleansed from that which is offensive to Him: let the spring be clean. Therefore, the psalmist, desiring that the words of his mouth and the meditations of his heart might be acceptable before God, first begs 'cleansing from his secret sins' (Psalm 19:12).—RICHARD SIBBES.

Doctrinal Definitions

PAUL TUCKER

PRAYER II

I. THE DEFINITION OF PRAYER.

We give a definition of prayer by Thomas Watson. 'Prayer is an offering up of our desires to God in the Name of Christ for things agreeable to His Will.' We shall look at some of the words that are carefully chosen in this definition.

1. *Prayer is an offering.* When we go back to the Old Testament we read there of the many offerings that were used on the brazen altar. But we know that the believer is not required to bring that type of offering to God because all these Old Testament offerings have been fulfilled in the Person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ. So the offerings that God requires of us are not ceremonial but spiritual offerings. Remember 1 Peter 2 : 5. Here the great doctrine of the priesthood of all believers is taught. We are called upon to offer up spiritual sacrifices unto God by Jesus Christ. And one of those spiritual sacrifices is prayer. Hebrews 13 : 15 amplifies this. Just as the priest of the Old Testament offered up ceremonial sacrifices upon the brazen altar, so we who belong to this covenant and dispensation are to offer up sacrifices of praise and prayer and devotion to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. There is something elevating about prayer. When we pray we are not simply asking God to come down to our level, but in the deeper sense we are asking Him to lift us up into fellowship with Him.

2. *Prayer is an offering up of our desires.* That word 'desires' comes again and again in Scripture in connection with prayer. And it is used in two different ways. It is used first of all as the unspoken desire, the longing of the heart. We get this in Psalm 10 : 17. The silent desire and the open desire are brought together in Psalm 21 : 2. So in this matter of prayer the desire may be spoken or unspoken. If it is communion with God, then it is prayer whether audible or silent.

3. *Prayer is an offering up of our desires to God.* So God is to be the object of our prayers. Prayers are not to be offered to anyone other than to God. Now, Scripture is very explicit about this. Addressing persons in prayer other than God makes us idolaters. See Colossians 2 : 18-19. 'The humility

condemned is not Christian humility, but a false and perverted lowliness which deemed God was so inaccessible He could only be approached through the mediation of inferior beings.' That kind of humility is a false philosophy, so Paul comes down very strongly against this worshipping of angels.

(a) *We are not to call upon anyone in prayer in whom we have not savingly believed.* In whom are we trusting for salvation? Are we trusting angels or the Virgin Mary or saints? See Romans 10 : 14. 'How shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed?'

(b) *God is the only One Who hears prayer.* 'O Thou that hearest prayer, unto Thee shall all flesh come.' In order to hear and answer prayer, that Being must be possessed of certain qualities of infinity. (i) *He must be omniscient.* He must be able to isolate each individual prayer and give it the maximum of attention as if that were the only prayer coming up to Him. (ii) *He must be omnipotent.* He must have all power to answer our prayers.

4. *It is fitting for us to ask ourselves what is the Scriptural order of approach to God.* He is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It cannot be wrong to pray to the Lord Jesus Christ, because He is God, manifest in the flesh. The disciples came to Him and prayed to Him virtually; people who needed healing knelt down before Him, and Stephen in his dying moment addressed the Lord Jesus. In 2 Corinthians 12 : 8 it was to the Lord Jesus that Paul prayed. Nor can it be wrong to pray to the Holy Spirit, because He also is God and has all the qualities of Deity. In Ezekiel 37 : 9 we find the prophet in that vision virtually appealing to the Holy Spirit. We know that the breath there is a type of the Holy Spirit. But it is true to say from the Word of God that the normal approach to Deity is to address God the Father through the Name or merit of the Lord Jesus Christ, by the influence and help of the Holy Spirit. See John 16 : 23-24; Romans 8 : 26-27; Ephesians 6 : 18. Note also Ephesians 2 : 18. The Goal of our praying is the Father; we have access unto the Father. The Door through which we enter into the audience chamber to have fellowship with the Father is the Lord Jesus Christ. But the Usher (if we dare to use that expression) who directs and guides us into the very audience chamber is the Holy Spirit. It is so easy to keep using the word 'Jesus' in prayer and not to have this larger conception of the whole Trinity being involved in the worship of God. God is my Father, the Lord Jesus is the Mediator, the Holy Spirit is my Helper and my Instructor.

II. SOME OF THE ASPECTS OF PRAYER THAT ARE MENTIONED IN THE NEW TESTAMENT.

Prayer is an expression of man's personal life with a personal God. When you and I engage in conversation we do not have a prescribed formula or order of talking with each other, nor do we always talk along the same lines. Similarly in our relationship with God. If we are true children of God, then we come to our Heavenly Father and according to our need and circumstances so we shall address Him. Prayer is like living. You cannot study it beforehand and prescribe and pre-arrange it. It depends really upon the living situation in which you find yourself. And there are various aspects of this ministry of prayer.

1. *Supplication and petition.* They mean that form of prayer that has to do with a definite asking and request. It is interesting to note that in the New Testament the word translated prayer more often than not refers to supplication and petition. There is more said in the New Testament about this direct asking than about any other aspect of prayer. See Philippians 4 : 6. And the Lord Jesus talked about asking, seeking, and knocking. The Heavenly Father wants us to come with our petitions and supplications. Sometimes we may ask selfishly or as James puts it ' . . . amiss . . . '. Sometimes we may ask ill-advisedly, not knowing all the implications, but if we really are sincere and are really seeking the Lord's best for our lives and for others, the Lord is a gracious Heavenly Father, knowing how to answer and how to reply. The fact that you and I can come with our petitions and supplications reminds us how precious is this relationship to God.

2. *Thanksgiving.* Ephesians 5 : 20; 1 Thessalonians 5 : 18. It is so easy to ask, but it is also easy to forget to say thank you. And it is not good for us to be ungrateful, neither is it honouring to God. God delights in the gratitude that His children show toward Himself. Thanksgiving glorifies God. See Luke 17 : 18.

3. *Praising God.* If you go through the Psalms you will find that not a small portion of them is taken up with songs of praise. See Psalms 33 : 1; 65 : 1; 150 : 2. There is a very close connection between thanksgiving and praise. Sometimes they overflow into each other. And yet the early Church fathers separated them, and on Scriptural grounds, too! They said that in the Scripture, thanksgiving is giving glory to God for what He has done for us. That came out in Ephesians 5 : 20 and again in 1 Thessalonians 5 : 18. Praise, say the old divines,

is giving glory to God for what He is in Himself, not for what He gives, but for what He is, and this brings us into the realm of adoration. So it is one thing to thank God for His benefits and hope that He will continue to extend them towards us; it is another thing to praise God for what He is in and of Himself apart from any gift that He may lavish upon us. Praise is a real appreciation of the loveliness of God and the beauty of His character and the splendour and majesty of His attributes. God said, 'Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me'.

4. *Confession.* This is a very important element in prayer. God cannot look upon iniquity. Even the heavens are unclean in His sight. He charges His angels with folly. The highest heavenly intelligences, though they are pure spirit and holiness, possess a holiness that is but a pale reflection of the thrice Holy God and they cover their faces and feet and cry, 'Holy, holy, holy'. 'O how shall I whose native sphere is dark, whose mind is dim, before the ineffable appear and on my naked spirit bear the uncreated beam?' I can only come into the presence of such a holy God recognising my own unworthiness, confessing my sin, pleading nothing but the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. In the Church of England service, prayer always begins with the confession, and it comes right at the beginning of the service. I do not think that the Bible lays down any hard and fast rule about this matter. I have been looking at the prayers of Daniel, Ezra and Nehemiah and find that each of them ascribes glory and praise to God first, but very soon they come to this matter of confession, because we cannot come into the presence of God with unclean hands and hearts. We have to confess our sins and plead only the mediation and merit of our great High Priest. James 4 : 8.

NOTICES

Please note that magazine subscriptions and renewals should NOT be sent to the editor, but to the business manager at the office.

Mr. Carson is one of the speakers at the Annual Conference of the British Evangelical Council, to be held at Knighton Evangelical Free Church, Leicester, on Tuesday 5th and Wednesday 6th November. He will be preaching, D.V., on the Tuesday at 7.45 p.m. Other speakers include Revs. R. M. Horn, G. A. Hemming and K. I. Paterson, and Sir Fred Catherwood. Further details may be obtained from 21 Woodstock Road North, St. Albans, Herts. Phone: St. Albans 55655.

My Cross

H. P. WOTTON

A commentary on the hymn, 'Jesus, I my cross have taken', by Henry Francis Lyte.

Jesus, I my cross have taken,
 All to leave and follow Thee;
 Destitute, despised, forsaken,
 Thou from hence my all shalt be:
 Perish every fond ambition,
 All I've sought or hoped or known;
 Yet how rich is my condition!
 God and heaven are still mine own.

Henry Francis Lyte wrote this hymn in sincerity and from a deep experience of God's saving grace. But it is easier to affirm and to reaffirm our consecration to Christ and to His cross than it is to put it into practice. We may take up our cross indeed. But the all we leave to follow Jesus has a way of following on behind, hoping to be received once more into our hearts, always craving a favour as we press on to the mark of our high calling in Christ. The truth is that we cannot have Christ unless we keep everything else out of the throne room for Him to reign supreme.

Destitute of personal righteousness and clothed in the righteousness of Another. Destitute of spiritual strength to realise that 'His strength is made perfect in weakness'. Destitute, despised, forsaken, we cannot live with the Crucified unless we are crucified ourselves. Personal ambitions must be taken to the cross that the will of God may be done. When Samson returned after having slain a lion, he found honey in the carcase, and there is rich spiritual experience in the life of a crucified Christian.

Let the world despise and leave me,
 They have left my Saviour too;
 Human hearts and looks deceive me,
 Thou art not, like them, untrue;
 And while Thou shalt smile upon me,
 God of wisdom, love, and might,
 Foes may hate, and friends may shun me;
 Show Thy face and all is bright.

H. F. Lyte was under no illusion regarding the attitude of the world to Christ and to the Christian. When oil will mix with water and darkness have fellowship with light, then may we see unity in these two opposing principles.

But it will always be impossible for the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience to have unity with the children of God, who are born of the Spirit of God. Those who have turned their backs on the Saviour of the world will despise and turn their backs on His servants also. Human hearts and looks can and do deceive. Behind a smile there may be much that is untrue, but we know that if we have the smile of Jesus, we need fear no deception.

One look of love from Him is enough to convince us that He loves us with an everlasting love, and that He will never leave us nor forsake us. Foes may hate us and friends may avoid us, but the love of Jesus and His abiding presence more than makes up for these things.

Man may trouble and distress me,
'Twill but drive me to Thy breast;
Life with trials hard may press me,
Heaven will bring me sweeter rest.
Oh, 'tis not in grief to harm me,
While Thy love is left to me!
Oh, 'twere not in joy to charm me,
Were that joy unmixed with Thee!

Joseph was troubled and distressed by his brothers, who envied and hated him for his dreams. Their envy and hatred were put into practice when they sought to slay him. Finally, after having sold him to the Ishmaelites, they thought they were rid of him. But the things that were meant by Joseph's brethren for evil were meant by God for his good, for finally they led him to the high place, next to Pharaoh in the kingdom of Egypt, and his dreams *did* come true, and his brothers and his father *did* bow down to him.

If trouble and distress imposed upon us by our fellows drive us to the Father's throne and to the Saviour's breast, God has seen to it that they serve a good purpose indeed, far different from that which was intended.

Contrasts have a way of increasing and enhancing their opposites. The sun shines brighter after the darkest night, and sweeter will be the enjoyment of heaven's rest after earth's trials and tribulations.

The love of Jesus takes the evil from our grief and sees to it that no earthly charm can draw us away from the Beloved.

Take, my soul, thy full salvation;
 Rise o'er sin and fear and care:
 Joy to find in every station
 Something still to do or bear.
 Think what Spirit dwells within thee,
 What a Father's smile is thine,
 What a Saviour died to win thee:
 Child of heaven, shouldst thou repine?

Here the writer soliloquizes with his soul and orders it to do certain things—to *take*, to *rise*, to *find*, to *think*. The soul that is made alive in Christ is able to do these things. It has already *received* forgiveness and new life in Christ, and now it is commanded to take its full salvation here, that is, to rise up in spirit into the heavenly places where Christ sits on the right hand of God, far above all sin, and fear, and care.

The faithful soul does not make a division between the sacred and the secular by saying that God is in the one and not in the other. For he knows that just as God meets with His people in the sanctuary, so He is not absent from them when they are going about their daily business.

And the believer should remember to behave himself in this world according to his high and holy calling. He is indwelt by the Holy Spirit, by whom by the new birth he has been made a child of God and an heir to a great inheritance. All this was obtained for him at a great price—that of the precious blood of the Son of God, shed for him on the cross of Calvary. Shall he, in light of this, repine?

Haste then on from grace to glory,
 Armed by faith, and winged by prayer;
 Heaven's eternal day's before thee,
 God's own hand shall guide thee there.
 Soon shall close thine earthly mission,
 Swift shall pass thy pilgrim days,
 Hope soon change to glad fruition,
 Faith to sight, and prayer to praise.

The first line of this verse reminds us of the apostle's exhortation, in the epistle to the Hebrews, to 'run with patience the race that is set before us', and though to do this we are to 'lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us', we are not to run without armour. We must never forget that we need the shield of faith, and if prayer is 'the Christian's vital breath, the Christian's native air', we need to pray, lest we find ourselves out of breath.

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Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth

C. H. SPURGEON

*A sermon preached in the Metropolitan
Tabernacle on Sunday evening, December 27,
1874.*

‘Rightly dividing the word of truth’ (2 Timothy 2 : 15).

Timothy was to divide rightly the word of God. This every Christian minister must do if he would make full proof of his ministry, and if he would be clear of the blood of his hearers at the last great day. Of the whole twenty years of my printed sermons, I can honestly say that this has been my aim—rightly to divide the word of truth. Wherein I have succeeded I magnify the name of the Lord, wherein I have failed I lament my faultiness. And now once more we will try again, and may God the Holy Spirit, without whose power nothing can be done aright, help us rightly to divide the word of truth.

The expression is a very remarkable one, because it bears so many phases of meaning. I do not think that any one of the figures by which I shall illustrate it will be at all strained, for they have been drawn from the text by most eminent expositors, and may fairly be taken as honest comments, even when they might be challenged as correct interpretations of the text. ‘Rightly dividing the word of truth’ is our authorised version, but we leave it for a little to consider other renderings. Timothy was neither to mutilate, nor twist, nor torture, nor break in pieces the word, nor keep on the outside of it, as those do who never touch the soul of a text, but rightly to divide it, as one taught of God to teach others.

I. The vulgate version translates it—and with a considerable degree of accuracy—‘Rightly HANDLING the word of truth’. What is the right way, then, to handle the word of truth? It is like a sword, and *it was not meant to be played with*. That is not rightly to handle the gospel. It must be used in earnest and pushed home. Are you converted, my friends? Do you believe in Jesus Christ? Are you saved, or not? Swords are meant to cut and hack, and wound, and kill with, and the word of truth is for pricking men in the heart and killing their sins. The word of God is not committed to God’s ministers to amuse men with

its glitter, nor to charm them with the jewels in its hilt, but to conquer their souls for Jesus. Remember, dear hearers, if the preacher does not push you to this—that you shall be converted, or he will know the reason why; if he does not drive you to this—that you shall either wilfully reject, or cheerfully accept Christ, he has not yet known how rightly to handle the great ‘sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God’. Now, then, where are you personally at this moment? Are you unbelievers, upon whom the wrath of God abideth, or are you believers, who may lay claim to that gracious word, ‘Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believeth in me hath everlasting life’? Oh that the Lord would make His all-discerning word go round this place and strike at every conscience and lay bare every heart with its mighty power.

He that rightly handles the word of God will *never use it to defend men in their sins*, but to slay their sins. If there be a professing Christian here who is living in known sin, shame upon him; and if there be a non-Christian man who is living in sin, let his conscience upbraid him. What will he do in that day when Christ comes to judge the hearts of men, and the books shall be opened, and every thought shall be read out before an assembled universe? I desire to handle the word of God so that no man may ever find an excuse in my ministry for his living without Christ, and living in sin, but may know clearly that sin is a deadly evil, and unbelief the sure destroyer of the soul. He has indeed been made to handle the word aright who plunges it like a two-edged sword into the very bowels of sin.

The gospel ought *never to be used for frightening sinners from Christ*. I believe it is so handled sometimes. Sublime doctrines are rolled like rocks in the sinner’s way, and dark experiences set up as a standard of horror which must be reached before a man may believe in Jesus: but rightly to handle the word of life is to frighten men *to* Christ rather than *from* Him, yea, to woo them to Him by the sweet assurance that He will cast out none that come, that He asks no preparations of them, but if they come at once as they are He will assuredly receive them. Have I not handled the word of truth in this way hundreds of times in this house? Has it not been a great magnet attracting sinners? As a magnet has two poles, and with one pole it repels, so, no doubt, the truth of God repels the prejudiced, rebellious heart, and thus it is a savour of death unto death; but our object is so to handle it that the

attractive pole may come into operation through the power of the Spirit of God, and men may be drawn to Christ.

Moreover, if we rightly handle the word of God *we shall not preach it so as to send Christians into a sleepy state*. That is easily done. We may 'preach the consolations of the gospel till each professor feels, I am safe enough; there is no need to watch, no need to fight, no need for any exertion whatever. My battle is fought, my victory is won, I have only to fold my arms and go to sleep'. No, no, men, this is not how we handle the word of God, but our cry is, 'Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure. Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation. Reckon not yourselves to have attained unto perfection, but forget the things that are behind, and reach forward to that which is before, ever looking unto Jesus'. This is rightly to handle the word of God.

And, oh, beloved, there is one thing that I dread above all others—lest I should ever handle the word of God *so as to persuade some of you that you are saved when you are not*. To collect a large number of professors together is one thing; but to have a large number of true saints built together in Christ is quite another thing. To get up a whirl of excitement, and to have people influenced by that excitement, so that they think full surely that they are converted, has been done a great many times; but the bubble has, by-and-by, vanished. The balloon has been filled until it has burst. God save us from that. We want sure work, lasting work, a work of divine grace in the heart. If you are not converted, pray do not pretend that you are. If you have not known what it is to be brought down to see your own nothingness, and then to be built up by the power of the Spirit upon Christ as the only foundation, oh, remember that whatever is built upon the quicksand will fall with a crash in the hour of trial. Do not be satisfied with anything short of a deep foundation, cut in the solid rock of the work of Jesus Christ. Ask for real vital godliness, for nothing else will serve your turn at the last great day. Now, this is rightly to handle the word of God; to use it to push truth home upon men for their present conversion, to use it for the striking down of their sins, to use it to draw men to Christ, to use it to arouse sinners, and to use it to produce, not mere profession, but a real work of grace in the hearts of men. May the Holy Ghost teach all the ministers of Christ after this fashion to handle the two-edged sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

II. But now, secondly, my text has another meaning. It has an idea in it which I can only express by a figure. 'Rightly dividing, or STRAIGHT CUTTING.' A ploughman stands here with his plough, and he ploughs right along from this end of the field to the other, making a straight furrow. And so Paul would have Timothy make a straight furrow right through the word of truth. I believe there is no preaching that God will ever accept but that which goes decidedly through the whole line of truth from end to end, and is always thorough, honest, and downright. As truth is a straight line, so must our handling of the truth be straightforward and honest, without shifts or tricks. There are two or three furrows which I have laboured hard to plough. One is the furrow of *free grace*. 'Salvation is of the Lord'—He begins it, He carries it on, He completes it. Salvation is not of man, neither by man, but of grace alone. Grace in election, grace in redemption, grace in effectual calling, grace in final perseverance, grace in conferring the perfection of glory; it is all grace from beginning to end. If we say at any time anything which is really contrary to this distinct testimony that salvation is of grace, believe us not. This furrow must be ploughed fairly, plainly, and beyond all mistake. Sinner, you cannot be saved by any merit, penance, preparation, or feeling of your own. The Lord alone must save you as a work of gratis mercy, not because you deserve it, but because He wills to do it to magnify His abundant love. That is the straight furrow of the Word.

We endeavour always to make a straight furrow upon the matter of *human depravity*—to preach that man is fallen, that every part and passion of his nature is perverted, that he has gone astray altogether, is sick from the crown of his head to the sole of his foot, yea, is dead in trespasses and sins, and corrupt before God. 'There is none that doeth good, no, not one.' I have noticed some preachers ploughing this furrow very crookedly, for they say, 'There are some very fine points about man still, and many good things in him which only need developing and educating'. You may have read in the history of Mr. Whitfield's time what a howl was made at him because he once said that man was half beast and half devil. I do not think he ever got nearer the truth than when he said that; only I would beg the beast's pardon, for a beast would scarcely become so evil and vile as human nature becomes when it is left alone fully to develop itself. O pride of human nature, we plough right over thee! The hemlock stands in thy field, and must be cut up by the roots. Thy weeds smile like fair flowers, but the ploughshare must go right through them all till all

human beauty is shown to be a painted Jezebel, and all human glorying a bursting bubble. God is everything, man is nothing. God in His grace saves man, but man by his sin utterly ruins himself until God's grace interposes. I like to plough a straight furrow here.

Another straight furrow is that of *faith*. We are sent to tell men that he that believeth and is baptised shall be saved, and our duty is to put it so. 'Salvation is not of works'; that is not the furrow: not of prayers, that is not the furrow: not of feelings—that is not the gospel furrow: not of preparations and amendments and reforms; but by faith in Jesus Christ. He that believeth on Him is not condemned. As we begin the new life by faith, we must abide in it by faith. We are not to be saved by faith up to a certain point, and then to rely upon ourselves. Having begun in the gospel, we are not to be perfected by the law. 'The just shall live by faith.' We live by faith at the wicket-gate, and we live by faith until we enter into our eternal rest. *Believe!*—that is the grand gospel precept, and we trust we have never gone out of this furrow, but have tried to plough right across the gospel field from end to end, crying, 'Look unto me and be ye saved, all ye ends of the earth, for Jehovah is God, and beside him there is none else'.

Another furrow which some do not much like to plough, but which must be distinctly marked if a man is an honest ploughman for God, is that of *repentance*. Sinner, you and your sins must part. You have been married long, and you have had a merry time of it perhaps; but you must part. You and your sins must separate, or you and your God will never come together. Not one sin may you keep. They must all be given up; they must be brought out like the Canaanitish kings from the cave, and hanged up before the sun. Not one darling must be spared. You must forsake them, loathe them, abhor them, and ask the Lord to overcome them. Do you not know that the furrow of repentance runs right through the Christian's life? He sins, and as long as he sins he repents of his sin. The child of God cannot love sin: he must loathe it as long as he sees any of it in existence.

There is the furrow of *holiness*, that is the next turn the ploughman takes. 'Without holiness no man shall see the Lord.' We have preached salvation by grace, but we do not preach salvation to those who still continue in sin. The children of God are a holy people, washed, purged, sanctified, and made zealous for good works; and he who talks about faith, and has no works to prove that his faith is a living faith, lies to

himself and lies before God. It is faith that saves us, not works, but the faith that saves us always produces works: it renews the heart, changes the character, influences the motives, and is the means in the hand of God of making the man a new creature in Christ Jesus. No nonsense about it, sirs: you may be baptised and re-baptised, you may attend to sacraments, or you may believe in an orthodox creed; but you will be damned if you live in sin. You may become a deacon, or an elder, or a minister, if you dare; but there is no salvation for any man who still harbours his sins. 'The wages of sin is death'—death to professors as well as to non-professors. If they hug their sins in secret God will reveal those sins in public, and condemn them according to the strict justice of His law. These are the furrows we have tried to plough—deep, sharp cut, and straight. Oh, that God might plough them Himself in all your hearts that you may know experimentally how the truth is rightly divided.

III. There is a third meaning to the text. 'Rightly dividing the word of truth' is, as some think, an expression taken from the priests dividing the sacrifices. When they had a lamb or a sheep, a ram or a bullock to offer, after they had killed it, it was cut in pieces, carefully and properly; and it requires no little skill to find out where the joints are, so as to cut up an animal discreetly. Now, the word of truth has to be taken to pieces wisely; it is not to be hacked or torn as by a wild beast, but rightly divided. There has to be **DISCRIMINATION AND DISSECTION**. It is a great part of a minister's duty to be able to dissect the gospel—to lay one piece there, and another there, and preach with clearness, distinction, and discrimination.

Every gospel minister must divide between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. It is a very nice point that, and many fail to discern it well; but it must always be kept clear, or great mischief will be done. Confusion worse confounded follows upon confusing grace and law. There is the covenant of works—'This do, and thou shalt live', but its voice is not that of the covenant of grace which says, 'Hear and your soul shall live'. 'You shall, for I will': that is the covenant of grace. It is a covenant of pure promise unalloyed by terms and conditions. I have heard people put it thus—'Believers will be saved if from this time forth they are faithful to grace given'. That savours of the covenant of works. 'God will love you'—says another—'*if you*——' Ah, the moment you get an '*if*' in it, it is the covenant of works, and the gospel has evaporated. Oil and water will sooner mix than merit and

grace. When you find the covenant of works anywhere, what are you to do with it? Why, do what Abraham did, and what Sarah demanded, 'cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac'. If you are a child of the free-grace promise, do not suffer the Hagar and Ishmael of legal bondage and carnal hope to live in your house. Out with them; you have nought to do with them. Let law and gospel keep their proper places. The law is the schoolmaster to bring us to Christ, but when we have come to Christ we are no longer under a schoolmaster. Let the law principle go its way to work conviction in sinners, and destroy their ill-grounded hopes, but do you abide in Christ Jesus even as you have received Him. If you are to be saved by works, then it is not of grace, otherwise work is no more work; and if saved by grace, then it is not of human merit, otherwise grace is no more grace. To keep clear here is of the first importance, for on the rocks of legality many a soul has been cast away.

We need also to keep up a clear distinction between the efforts of nature and the work of grace. It is commendable for men to do all they can to improve themselves, and everything by which people are made more sober, more honest, more frugal, better citizens, better husbands, better wives, is a good thing; but that is nature and not grace. Reformation is not regeneration. 'Ye must be born again' still stands for the good as well as for the bad. To be made a new creature in Christ Jesus is as necessary for the moral as for the debauched; for, when flesh has done its best, 'that which is born of the flesh is flesh'; and men must be born of the Spirit, or they cannot understand spiritual things, or enter into heaven. I have always tried to keep up this distinction, and I trust none of you will ever mistake the efforts of nature for the works of divine grace. Do what you can for human reformation, for whatsoever things are honest and of good repute you are to foster; but, still, never put the most philanthropic plan, or the most elevating system in the place of the work of sovereign grace, for, if you do, you will do ten times as much mischief as you can possibly do good. We must rightly divide the word of truth.

It is always well, too, for Christian men to be able to distinguish one truth from another. Let the knife penetrate between the joints of the work of Christ for us, and the work of the Holy Spirit in us. Justification, by which the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us, is one blessing; sanctification, by which we ourselves are made personally righteous, is another bless-

ing. I have known some describe sanctification as a sort of foundation, or at least a buttress for the work of justification. Now, no man is justified because he is sanctified: he is justified because he believeth in Him that justifieth the ungodly. Sanctification follows justification. It is the work of the Spirit of God in the soul of a believer, who first of all was justified by believing in Jesus while as yet he was unsanctified. Give Jesus Christ all the glory for His great and perfect work, and remember that you are perfect in Christ Jesus and accepted in the Beloved, but, at the same time, give glory to the Holy Spirit, and remember that you are not yet perfect in holiness, but that the Spirit's work is to be carried on and will be carried on all the days of your life.

One other point of rightly dividing should never be forgotten, we must always distinguish between the root and the fruit. He is a very poor botanist who does not know a bulb from a bud, but I believe that there are some Londoners who do not know which are roots and which are fruits, so little have they seen of anything growing; and I am sure there are some theologians who hardly know which is the cause and which is the effect in spiritual things. Putting the cart before the horse is a very absurd thing, but many do it. Hear how people will say—'If I could feel joy in the Lord I would believe'. Yes, that is the cart before the horse, for joy is the result of faith, not the reason for it. 'But I want to feel a great change of heart, and then I will believe.' Just so; you wish to make the fruit the root. 'Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ', that is the root of the matter; change of life and joy in the Lord will spring up as gracious fruits of faith, and not otherwise. When will you discriminate?

Thus I have given you three versions of my text—rightly handling, straightly furrowing, and wisely discriminating.

IV. The next interpretation of the apostle's expression is practically CUTTING OUT the word for holy uses. This is the sense given by Chrysostom. I will show you what I mean here. Suppose I have a skin of leather before me, and I want to make a saddle. I take a knife, and begin cutting out the shape. I do not want those parts which are dropping off on the right, and round this corner; they are very good leather, but I cannot just now make use of them. I have to cut out my saddle, and I make that my one concern. Or, suppose I have to make a pair of reins out of the leather. I must take my knife round, and work away with one object, keeping clearly before me what I am aiming at. The preacher, to be successful, must also

have his wits about him, and when he has the Bible before him he must use those portions which will have a bearing upon his grand aim. He must make use of the material laid ready to his hand in the Bible. Every portion of the word of God is very blessed, and exceedingly profitable, but it may not happen to be connected with the preacher's immediate subject, and therefore he leaves it to be considered another time; and, though some will upbraid him for it, he is much too sensible to feel bound to preach all the doctrines of the Bible in each sermon. He wants to have souls saved and Christians quickened, and therefore he does not for ever pour out the vials, and blow the trumpets of prophecy. Some hearers are crazy after the mysteries of the future. Well, there are two or three brethren in London who are always trumpeting and vialing. Go and hear them if you want it, I have something else to do. I confess I am not sent to decipher the Apocalyptic symbols, my errand is humbler but equally useful, I am sent to bring souls to Jesus Christ. There are preachers who are always dealing with the deep things, the very deep things. For them the coral caves of mystery, and the far descending shafts of metaphysics have a mighty charm. I have no quarrel with their tastes, but I do not think the word of God was given us to be a riddle-book. To me the plain gospel is the part which I cut out, and rightly cut out of the word of God. There is a soul that wants to know how to find peace with God. Some other brother can tell him where predestination falls in with free agency, I do not pretend to know; but I do know that faith in Jesus brings peace to the heart. My business is to bring forth that which will save souls, build up saints, and set Christians to work for Christ. I leave the mysteries, not because I despise them; but because the times demand that we first, and above all other things, seek the souls of men. Some truths press to be heard; they must be heard now, or men will be lost. The other truths they can hear tomorrow, or by-and-by, but *now* escape from hell and fitness for heaven are their immediate business. Fancy the angels sitting down with Lot and his daughters inside Sodom, and discussing predestination with them, or explaining the limits of free agency. No, no, they cry, 'Come along', and they take them by the arm and lead them out, saying, 'Flee, flee, flee, for fire is coming down from heaven, and this city is to be destroyed'. This is what the preacher has to do; leaving certain parts of truth for other times, he is now rightly dividing the word of truth when he brings out that which is of pressing importance. In the Bible there are some things that are essential, without which a man cannot be saved

at all: there are other things which are important, but still men are saved, notwithstanding their ignorance of those things; is it not clear that the essentials must have prominence? Every truth ought to be preached in its turn and place, but we must never give the first place to a second truth, or push that to the front which was meant to be in the background of the picture. 'We preach Christ,' said the apostle, 'Christ and Him crucified', and I believe that if the preacher is rightly to divide the word, he will say to the sinner, 'Sinner, Christ died, Christ rose again, Christ intercedes; look to Him. As for the difficult questions and nice points, leave them for awhile. You shall discuss them by-and-by, so far as they are profitable to you, but just now believing in the Lord Jesus Christ is the main matter.' The preacher must thus separate the vital from the secondary, the practical from the speculative, and the pressing and immediate from that which may be lawfully delayed; and in that sense he will rightly divide the word of truth.

V. I have given you four meanings. Now I will give you another, leaving out some I might have mentioned. One thing the preacher has to do is to ALLOT TO EACH ONE HIS PORTION; and here the figure changes. According to Calvin, the intention of the Spirit here is to represent one who is the steward of the house, and has to apportion food to the different members of the family. He has rightly to divide the loaves so as not to give the little children and the babes all the crust; rightly to supply each one's necessities, not giving the strong men milk, nor the babes hard diet; not casting the children's bread to the dogs, nor giving the swine's husks to the children, but placing before each his own portion. Let me try and do it.

Child of God, your portion is the whole word of God. Every promise in it is yours. Take it: feed on it. Christ is yours; God is yours; the Holy Spirit is yours; this world is yours, and worlds to come. Time is yours; eternity is yours; life is yours; death is yours; everlasting glory is yours. There is your portion. It is very sweet to give you your royal meat. The Lord give you a good appetite. Feed on it; feed on it. Sinner, you who believe not in Jesus, none of this is yours. While you remain as you are the threatenings are yours. If you refuse to believe in Jesus, neither this life nor the next is yours, nor time, nor eternity. You have nothing good. Oh, how dreadful is your portion now, for the wrath of God abideth on you. Oh, that you were wise, that your character might be changed, for until it is, we dare not flatter you, there is not a promise for you, nor a single approving sentence. You get your food to eat and

your raiment to put on; but even that is given to you by the abounding longsuffering of God, and it may become a curse to you unless you repent. I am sorry to bring you such a portion, but I must be honest with you. That is all that I can give you. God has said it—it is an awful sentence—‘I will curse their blessings’. Oh, sinner, the curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked.

We have also to divide a portion to the *mourners*, and oh, how sweet a task that is, to say to those that mourn in Zion that the Lord will give them beauty for ashes. ‘Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.’ The Lord will restore peace unto His mourners. Fear not, neither be dismayed, for the Lord will help you. But when we have given the mourners their sweet meats we have to turn round upon the *hypocrites* and say to them, ‘You may hang your heads like bulrushes, you may rend your garments and pretend to trust, but the Lord, who knows your heart, will suddenly come and unmask you, and if you are not sincere before Him, if you are weighed in the balances and found wanting, He will deal out the gall of bitterness to you for ever. For His mourners there is mercy, but for the deceiver and hypocrite there is judgment without mercy’. It is a very pleasant thing, moreover, to deal out a portion to the *seeker*—when we say, ‘He that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.’ ‘Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden,’ saith Christ, ‘for I will give you rest.’ Take your portion and be glad.

We have to turn round, and say to others who think they are seekers, but *who are delaying*, ‘How long halt ye between two opinions?’ How is it that you continually hesitate and refuse to believe in Jesus, and stay in the condition of unbelief, when the gospel mandate is, ‘Believe—believe now and live!’ So we have to give to one comfort, to another counsel; to one reproof, to another encouragement; to one the invitation, to another the warning; and this is rightly to divide the word of truth.

Yes, and sometimes God enables His servants to give the word very remarkably to some men. I believe that if I were to tell a few of the things which have happened to me during the last one-and-twenty years they would not be believed, or if I were to tell you of passages of history which are known to me that have occurred in this Tabernacle to people who have come here, and to whom I have spoken the exact word, not knowing them for a moment, the facts would sound like fictions. I will give you one instance. Some of you will remem-

ber my preaching from the text, 'What if thy father answer thee roughly?' There came into the vestry after that sermon a venerable Christian gentleman, bringing with him a young foreigner whom he was anxious to satisfy upon one point. He said, 'Sir, I want you kindly to answer this question—have you seen me concerning this young gentleman?' 'No, sir, certainly not,' I said; and assuredly, though I knew the gentleman who addressed me, he had never spoken to me about the foreign stranger whose very existence was up to that moment unknown to me. Said he, 'This young gentleman is almost persuaded to be a Christian. His father is of quite another faith, and worships other gods, and our young friend knows that if he becomes a Christian he will lose his father's love. I said to him, when he conversed with me, come down and hear Mr. Spurgeon this morning. Here we came, and your text was, "What if thy father answer thee roughly?" Now, have you ever heard a word from me about this young gentleman?' 'No, never,' I said. 'Well,' said the young man, 'it is the most extraordinary thing I have ever heard in my life.' I could only say, 'I trust it is the voice of God to your soul. God knows how to guide His servants to utter the word most fitted to bless men.'

Some time ago a town missionary had in his district a man who never would suffer any Christian person to come into his house. The missionary was warned by many that he would get a broken head if he ventured on a visit. He therefore kept from the house, though it troubled his conscience to pass it by. He made a matter of prayer of it, and one morning he boldly ventured into the lion's den, and the man said, 'What have you come here for?' 'Well, sir,' he said, 'I have been conversing with people in all the houses along here, and I have passed you by because I heard you objected to it; but somehow I thought it looked cowardly to avoid you, and therefore I have called.' 'Come in,' the man said; 'sit down, sit down. Now you are going to talk to me about the Bible. Perhaps you do not know much about it yourself. I am going to ask you a question and if you can answer me you shall come again. If you do not answer it, I will bundle you downstairs. Now,' said he, 'do you take me?' 'Yes,' said the other, 'I do take you.' 'Well, then,' said he, 'this is the question—where do you find the word "girl" in the Bible, and how many times do you find it?' The city missionary said, 'The word "girl" occurs only once in the Bible, and that is in the Book of Joel, the third chapter and the third verse. "They sold a girl for wine."' 'You are right,' said he, 'but I would not have believed you knew it, or else

I would have asked you some other question. You may come again.' 'But,' said the missionary, 'I should like you to know how I came to know it. This very morning I was praying for direction from God, and when I was reading my morning chapter I came upon this passage, "And they sold a girl for wine"; and I took down my concordance to see whether the word "girl" was to be found anywhere else. I found that the word "girls" occurs in the passage, "There shall be girls and boys playing in the streets of Jerusalem", but the word did not occur as "girl" anywhere but in Joel.' The result, however, of that story, however odd it seems, was that the missionary was permitted to call, and the man took an interest in his visits, and the whole family were the better; the man, and his wife, and one of his children becoming members of a Christian church some time afterwards. What an extraordinary thing it seems; yet, I can assure you that such extraordinary things are as commonplaces in my experience. God does help His servants rightly to divide the word, that is to say, to allot a special portion to each special case, so that it comes as pat upon the man as if everything about him was known. Before I came to London, a man met me one Sunday, in a dreadful state of rage. He vowed he would horsewhip me for bullying him from the pulpit. What had I said, I asked. 'What have you said? You looked me in the face, and said, "What more can God do for you? Shall He give you a good wife? You have had one: you have killed her by bad treatment: you have just got another, and you are likely to do the same by her".' 'Well,' I said, 'did you kill your first wife by your bad treatment?' 'They say so; but I was married on Saturday,' said he. 'Did you not know it?' 'No, I did not, I assure you,' I replied; 'I have no knowledge whatever of your family matters, and I am sure I wish you joy of your new wife.' He cooled down a great deal; but I believe that I had struck the nail on the head that time—that he had killed his wife with his unkindness, and he scarcely liked to bring his new wife to the place of worship to be told of it. The cap fitted him; and if any cap fit you, I pray you wear it, for so far from shrinking from being personal, I do assure you I try to be as personal as ever I can, for I long to see the word go home to every man's conscience, and convict him and make him tremble before God and confess his sin and forsake it.

VI. You must give me a few more minutes while I take the last point, which is this. Rightly to divide the word of truth means to TELL EACH MAN WHAT HIS LOT AND HERITAGE WILL BE IN ETERNITY. Just as when Canaan was conquered, it was

divided by lot among the tribes, so the preacher has to tell of Canaan, that happy land, and he has to tell of the land of darkness and of death-shade, and to let each man know where his last abode will be. You do know it; you who come here do know it. Need I repeat a story that we have gone over and over a thousand times? As many as believe in Jesus, and are renewed in heart, and are kept by the grace of God through faith unto salvation, shall inherit eternal life; but as for those who believe not on God, who reject His Son, who abide in their sins, there remaineth nothing for them but 'a fearful looking for of judgment and of fiery indignation'. 'The wicked shall be turned into hell with all the nations that forget God.' 'These shall go away into everlasting punishment; but the righteous into life eternal.' 'Beware,' saith God, 'Beware, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces and there be none to deliver.' Oh, the wrath to come! the wrath to come!

Believer, there is your portion—in the blessed land. Sinner, except you repent, there is your portion—in the land of darkness and of weeping, and of wailing, and of gnashing of teeth. I take a religious newspaper from America, and the last copy I had of it bore on it these words at the end, in good large type, printed in a practical, business-like, American way: 'If you do not want to have this paper, discontinue it NOW. If you wish to have it for the year 1875, send your subscription NOW. If you have any complaint against it, send your complaint NOW. If you have removed, send a notice of your change of residence NOW.' There was a big 'NOW' at the end of every sentence. As I read it I thought, well, that is right: that is common sense. And it struck me that I would say to you on this last night of the year, if you wish to forsake your sins, forsake them NOW. If you would have mercy from God through Jesus Christ, believe on Him NOW. What fitter time than ere the dying year is gone—NOW, NOW, NOW? In that very paper I read a story concerning Messrs. Moody and Sankey to the same point. The story is that, while they were preaching in Edinburgh, there was a man sitting opposite to them who was very deeply interested, and was drinking it all in. There was a pause in the service, and the man went out with his friend; but when he reached the door he stopped, and his friend said, 'Come away, Jamie'. 'No,' he said, 'I will go back. I came here to get good to my soul, and I have not taken it all in yet, I must go back again.' He went back, and sat in his old place, and listened again. The Lord blessed him. He found Christ, and so found salvation. Being a miner, he went down the pit next day to his work, and a mass of rock fell on him. He was taken out; but

he could not recover. He said to the man who was helping him out, 'Oh, Andrew, I am so glad it was all settled last night. Oh, mon,' said he, 'it was all settled last night.' Now, I hope those people who were killed in the railway accident on Christmas Eve could say—'It was all settled the night before'. What a blessed thing it will be for you, if you should meet with an accident tomorrow, to say, 'Blessed be God, it was all settled last night. I gave my heart to Jesus, I yielded myself to His divine love and mercy, and I am saved'. O Holy Spirit, grant it may be so, and Thou shalt have the praise. Amen and amen.

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How wonderfully unable we are of ourselves to do anything. Like sheep we are so prone to wander out of the way when left to ourselves. But God does not leave us to ourselves. We have the Good Shepherd's hand to guide us, and He will surely do so all the way.

Time passes so quickly that he who has the most years to live can still say, with the hymn writer, 'Soon shall pass my earthly mission'. Then every believer shall see where the trial of his faith has led him, and that his 'light affliction, which is but for a moment', has worked for him 'a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory'.

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The Angel of the Lord

ROBERT RODGERS

It is a matter of regret that conservative Evangelicals have not afforded the subject of Angels the attention it deserves. It may not be amiss therefore if, in this article, we call attention to the subject in general and to one aspect in particular.

Exactly when the angelic hosts were created we do not know. It is a common assumption that they were present when God created the Earth, having been brought into being by a former creative act of God. Berkhof, however, cautiously says: 'The passage in the Book of Job (38 : 7) teaches, indeed, in a poetic vein that they (the angels) were present at the founding of the world just as the stars were, but not that they existed before the primary creation of heaven and earth . . . The only safe statement seems to be that they were created before the seventh day. This at least follows from such passages as Genesis 2 : 1, Exodus 20 : 11, Job 38 : 7, Nehemiah 9 : 6'. (Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, p. 144, Banner of Truth edition.)

Though we have no exact knowledge regarding the creation of the angels, we know from Scripture that their numbers are incalculable. They are called 'the host of heaven' and 'the host of God'. Reference is made to 'ten thousand of saints' (Deuteronomy 33 : 2) and Jesus could speak of 'more than twelve legions of angels' coming to aid Him if necessary. John 'heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands' (Revelation 5 : 11).

When the Bible employs such terms as Cherubim, Seraphim, Principalities and Powers, it is teaching us that there is order among the angelic host and differences among them in rank and dignity. Whilst Cherubim are mentioned often in Holy Writ, Seraphim are mentioned but once (Isaiah 6 : 2, 6). Nevertheless, it is clear that both stand close to the Throne of God ever ready to serve Him. Other angelic appellations such as thrones and dominions describe, not differences in nature, but differences in order and office among the 'sons of God'.

Mention of Office naturally introduces the subject of arch-

angels. Whilst some theologians would apply the term exclusively to Michael and Gabriel, others would widen its scope somewhat and would be content to speak of 'the seven angels which stand before God' (cf. Revelation 8 : 2). Clearly, the very special tasks are reserved for the archangels and they are always spoken of in lofty terms. (See Daniel 9 : 21, 10 : 13, 21, 12 : 1.) Such is the evident dignity of Michael and Gabriel that some commentators have entertained unwarranted speculation concerning them. Michael has been regarded by some as the Second Person of the Trinity, whilst Gabriel has been seen as the Third. No solid biblical basis exists for such a position and it is difficult to appreciate why it should be maintained.

In Scripture there is an Angel, the Angel of the Lord, who is absolutely unique and the references to Him leave us in little doubt regarding His real identity.

Consider first of all the story of Hagar in Genesis 16. In the narrative the Lord is spoken of in the third person (verse 11), yet in verse 13 the angel is identified as God. The name subsequently given to the well is also significant, 'the well of Him that liveth and seeth me' (cf. verses 13 and 14). Without employing an introductory formula such as 'thus saith the Lord', the angel commands Hagar (verse 9) and grants a promise (verse 10). Notice the personal pronoun—I will multiply thy seed exceedingly . . . Here, then, is an angel who commands men, dispenses blessings, speaks of Himself in terms which suggest identity with God whilst He is evidently distinct from God.

Again, in Genesis 22, the Angel of the Lord intervenes when Abraham is about to sacrifice his son Isaac (verse 11). In verse 12 God is spoken of in the third person, yet the angel goes on to say ' . . . seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from *Me*'. In other words, 'God' and 'Me' are interchangeable. Here again the name given to the location by the patriarch should not be overlooked—Jehovah-Jireh, 'the Lord will see' or 'the Lord will provide'. Verses 16 to 18 should be compared with Hebrews 6 : 13, where God swears by Himself because He can swear by none greater.

In Exodus chapters 13 and 14 we have the record of the flight of the people from Egypt together with some of their early experiences. Certainly they could never have survived had not the Lord graciously provided for them. Consider the protection they enjoyed. When Pharaoh repents of his decision to free the Israelites and sends his army in pursuit, the Lord

affords His protection in a most remarkable way. The Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light; to go by day and night (13 : 21). In the succeeding chapter, however, the angel of God is identified with the pillar of cloud (verse 19). The Lord, the pillar of cloud and the angel of the Lord are in these two passages spoken of as one.

A passage in Joshua chapters 5 and 6 records for us an incident in the life of Moses' successor similar in some ways to the great Lawgiver's experience at the burning bush. In Exodus 3 Moses relates how he saw a bush which burned with fire without being consumed. The angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush (verse 2). The Lord calls to him out of the midst of the bush (verse 4) and says 'Draw not nigh hither; put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground' (verse 5).

In Joshua 5, Joshua is confronted by a man with drawn sword who identifies himself as 'captain of the host of the Lord' (verses 13 and 14). The parallel with Exodus 3 must be drawn at verse 15. 'And the captain of the Lord's host said unto Joshua, Loose thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is holy.' When Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshipped the captain of the Lord's host (verse 14), no attempt is made to restrain him. This is in marked contrast to Revelation 22 : 8 and 9, where John fell down to worship an angel. Immediately his impulse is checked by the angel who says, 'See thou do it not: for I am thy servant'. Joshua chapter 6 verse 2 should not be overlooked, for there it is the Lord Who speaks. Chapter divisions are frequently misleading and in this instance the narrative should be read continuously, regarding verse one of the sixth chapter as in parenthesis. The 'captain' of 5 : 13 ff is therefore identified with 'the Lord' of 6 : 2.

(See also Genesis 31 : 11, 13, 48 : 15 and 16, Judges 6 : 11, etc.)

The conclusion is inescapable. The pre-existent Son of God manifested Himself to His people as the Angel of the Lord. He appeared to guide and instruct, to protect and deliver, to comfort and sustain. 'The paradox of this divine angel was not solved until the revelation of Him Who is both distinct from God and yet identical, Who, without diluting the divine holiness, yet kept company with sinners, and Who, without denying God's wrath, is yet the supreme outreaching of God's mercy, Jesus Christ our Lord' (J. A. Motyer).

Human Rights and Human Wrongs

(Expository Notes on Amos 1 : 2 - 3 : 2)

J. A. MOTYER

Samson would have understood what Amos implied in saying that 'the Lord roars'. His walk through the vineyards at Timnah (Judges 14 : 5ff) was rudely interrupted when a lion in its prime 'roared against him'. He was at once alerted, for it was the 'pouncing roar' of the lion, and as he whirled around to face the threat, he would have found the lion already in mid-air. The intention of the roar was to paralyse with terror the chosen prey, though in that instance the lion made a bad error of judgment in picking on Samson!

But what a remarkable—even unacceptable?—description of the Lord! Does He also select His prey, paralyse it with a terrifying roar, and pounce? The people of God are ever in peril of being selective in what they believe, and not least to choose the Lamb and forget the Lion (Revelation 5 : 5, 6). This complacency which we can so easily note in our own day was a marked feature of the time of Amos—and inexcusable in each case, for the God whom we and they address as 'the Lord' gave the basic meaning of His Name in the land of Egypt (Exodus 3 : 15) when, in one and the same act (Exodus 12 : 12, 13), He saved His people and judged His enemies. To hold to the former aspect and to forget the latter is to breed complacency, and complacency before a holy God is inconsistent with membership of His people. This, in fact, is the searchlight which Amos focuses incessantly upon the Israel of his day. They had forgotten that the Lord is a God of judgment, and because they had lost all sense of His blazing holiness they were unable with reality and benefit to seek His mercy.

If Israel had lost any sense of God's alienation from their deeds, how much more the surrounding pagan nations, and it is against them that we hear, through Amos, the first roars of the divine Lion (1 : 3-2 : 3). The recurring formula, 'for three transgressions . . . yea, for four' (verses 3, 6, 9, 11, 13; 2 : 1) speaks of the patience which watches and waits; the threatened 'fire' (verses 4, 7, 10, 12, 14; 2 : 2) indicates that the breaking

point has come; that has happened which God cannot overlook. What are the sins which bring the patience of God to an end?

The common denominator of these sins is inhumanity, but it takes many forms. In the case of Damascus (verses 3-5) it happened when war was waged without pity or remorse; all was subjected to national aggrandisement. The message of the verses is that war is no justification for inhumanity; exceptional circumstances do not relax human obligations. The inhumanity practised by Gaza (verses 6-8) arose out of commercial profiteering. They were in the slave-catching business, with Edom as their partners looking after the retail side of the business. Whole peoples—young, old, male, female, parents, children, sick, healthy—were carried off without thought for anything but their saleability. But the Lord will not allow man to make merchandise of man with impunity, no matter what the ethics of the business world may say.

At first sight, the accusation against Tyre is the same as the foregoing. But (verses 9, 10), the heart of the divine complaint is different; a treaty obligation was violated; a promise had been made and withdrawn. The 'brotherly covenant' was not upheld when it was no longer in the interests of Tyre to stand by his pledged word. But in the Lord's eyes, the broken promise was the breaking point. Tyre must perish.

In the case of Edom the cause inviting judgment was hidden away in the heart. The incessant warfare was not only unnaturally aimed at a 'brother' (verses 11, 12), not only pitiless, but sprang out of a ceaselessly fostered inner animosity. The penetrating gaze of the holy God saw into the hidden man of the heart.

Ammon (verses 13-15) played what we would now call 'the power game'. It is all one whether we speak of it in commercial terms, with one powerful enterprise forcing smaller competitors into mergers and implementing uninvited take-over bids, or whether we think (as Amos did) of a nation on the march, determined to extend its frontiers, and allowing nothing to stand in its way. The pregnant woman and the unborn child fell before Ammon's godless lust for expansion—but God saw and drew a line across His account of history. Ammon's day had ended.

But if Ammon warred against the unborn, Moab (2 : 1-3) warred against the dead. The crime perpetrated linked in no way with the fortunes of the people of God, but it is consistent with the monotheism of Amos that wherever sin is found, there

God is observing and noting it. The action of Moab is judged, because like those in the foregoing list, it is inconsistent with human behaviour.

And this is the inner force of the whole catalogue of crimes against which the Lord speaks with anger. They were inhuman—in the strict sense of that term: inconsistent with the innate standards of human nature. These nations had no special revelation from God, but they had the law of conscience, the law written by the Creator on the heart of His creature. Their downfall came when that voice went unheard.

If the Lord accused the Gentiles of failing to obey the voice of conscience, He turned to accuse the people of God of failing to obey His Word. This is the distinctive change of stance which comes as soon as Amos turns to address Judah: 'they have rejected the law of the Lord' (2 : 4), and the same is repeated in connection with the other half of God's people: 'You . . . commanded the prophets, saying, Do not prophesy' (2 : 12).

In the charge against Judah (2 : 4, 5) we see the essence of the matter, and in the charge against Israel (2 : 6-3 : 2) we see its outworking and consequences.

In principle, this is what happened: the Lord had come to them as their personal Teacher, but they rejected His law; He gave them unalterable statutes, but they sought to alter them; consequently they had nothing left but lies to adhere to; and added their own not inconsiderable quota of guilt to that indebtedness before God which was already theirs by inheritance (2 : 4).

What did this mean in practice? Just as the outward mark of lives not right with God among the Gentiles was inhumanity, so also among God's people. The word of God, special revelation, is intended to create true men, recreated in the image of God which is the perfect man. When the word is rejected, lives are dominated by a covetousness which expresses itself in inhuman disregard for the welfare of others provided only the purse is well lined (2 : 6, 7a). The same cancer eats into the relationship with God, resulting in a self-pleasing religion devoid of personal holiness (2 : 7b), so that even the altar of God, the place sought in order to experience divine mercy, becomes the place where man's inhumanity to man is precisely demonstrated (2 : 8).

And there is no excuse for this. Sin, in the people of God, is without excuse. Amos declares this to his own generation of the people of God as well as to us by indicating, first that

those who were so merrily sinning were those for whom God had wrought a full salvation (verses 9-11): He had given them victory over their enemies (verse 9); He had redeemed them from their bondage (verse 10); He had spoken directly and plainly to them so that they could not plead ignorance of His will—it had been displayed before them verbally by the prophets and visually by the Nazarites (verse 11). What is omitted from a salvation that caters for redemption (by the blood of the lamb from the land of Egypt), victory over contemporary foes, and a clear revelation for daily guidance? Are people with such possessions not inexcusable if they fall into sin?

In the view of Scripture they are, and none stated this more clearly than Amos. Consequently, he sees his people as without defence in the day of judgment (2 : 13-16), but he is really insistent in following them into their final house of defence as they would argue that their status as God's people renders them immune from divine chastisement and wrath. We may imagine that in addressing them as he does in 3 : 1 he is (as we say) 'taking the words out of their mouths'. He recalls their status, 'Israel'; their experience 'brought up out of the land of Egypt' (redemption); their privileged uniqueness, 'you only have I known'. Against the background of what he has already said, we may well say: 'Yes, it is all very well for them to plead status, experience and privilege, but with what reality can they do this if they are such as Amos has described in the foregoing verses? Surely theirs is a profession without substance!' To this we must read the reply in our own hearts. It is ever our way to derive our assurance before God from our spoken testimony; it is ever God's way to test the reality of that testimony by the evidence of our lives.

Amos cuts right to the bone with one word: 'Therefore' (3 : 2). The nearer people come to God the more they must learn to live with the light and fire of holiness. To be His unique people means to come under unique scrutiny. Marvelous indeed it is to say 'The Lord knows those who are His'. Scripture, Old and New Testament, will not allow us to subtract one grain of the endless and superb comfort those words bring, and bring eternally; but neither will God's Book allow us to evade their co-equal partners, 'Let every one who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity'.

Book Reviews

2 CORINTHIANS. 173 pp. 35p pbk.

GALATIANS. 127 pp. 35p pbk.

Geoffrey B. Wilson. Banner of Truth Trust.

Reading commentaries is rather like eating fish—one eats the meat and leaves the bones! Of course, in these days when there is such a demand for filleted fish, it is not surprising that there is also a demand for boneless commentaries—i.e., orthodox comment on Scripture without admixture of liberal ideas.

Mr. Wilson's commentaries fall into this category. They are 'digests of reformed comment' as the sub-title informs us, wherein the compiler seeks to bring together the 'insights of a wide range of commentators' to provide 'in brief compass the basis necessary for those who wish to possess a serious understanding of the Word of God'.

On the whole Mr. Wilson has succeeded admirably and his previous expositions on Romans, Hebrews, and I Corinthians, presented in the same style, have been so well received as to ensure a ready acceptance for these additions to the series. They will be particularly useful to the Bible Class leader and Sunday School teacher as they seek to appreciate the meaning of the Epistle under consideration.

Herein lies a danger, however, one to which we have drawn attention in a review of Mr. Wilson's earlier volumes. These commentaries are styled 'digests of reformed comment', and yet many authors are included who, by no stretch of the imagination, can be described as reformed. In *Galatians*, for example, at least 40 per cent of the bibliography is from non-reformed sources, and this to our mind, in view of the sub-title, is misleading. Their inclusion is apt to invest these books with a reformed character they simply do not have.

It is ironic that Mr. Wilson should guard against misunderstanding in his use of modern versions of the Scriptures. In his 'Acknowledgements' in *2 Corinthians* he writes, 'While I am glad to acknowledge the helpfulness of modern versions (RSV, NEB, and Moffatt) at certain points, their use should not be taken as a blanket endorsement of the theological liberalism they so often reflect'.

We greatly appreciate this caution and can only wish that something in similar vein had been written with regard to the commentaries in question. Apart from that defect, these books are helpful in content, attractive in format and inexpensive in price, and we wish them a large sale and wide distribution.

ROBERT RODGERS.

THE NONSUCH PROFESSOR. William Secker. Zoar Publications. 150 pp. 85p.

The full title of this book, which first appeared in 1660, is 'The Nonsuch Professor in his Meridian Splendour or The Singular Actions of Sanctified Christians'. The publisher's blurb informs us that little is known of the author apart from the fact that he ministered at Tewkesbury and later at All Hallows, London Wall. The epistle dedicatory is to Sir Edward and Lady Frances Barkham, which indicates that he had enjoyed their friendship. It is evident that Secker was deeply interested in the practical outworking of the faith, and if his book encourages the reader in that pursuit, its republication will not have been in vain.

Unlike some of his contemporaries, Secker is very easily read, having a style somewhat reminiscent of Thomas Watson. However, one must admit that his pithy sayings, often alliterative, do sometimes contribute to weariness. A few such sayings scattered throughout the book would be most acceptable, but when the book fairly teems with them it does at times tend to read like a series of aphorisms. A further small criticism must be levelled against the layout of the volume. The contents were originally delivered as a series of seven sermons, yet no indication is given in the book as to where one sermon ends and another begins. A little effort in this respect by the publishers would have greatly enhanced the book.

There is no doubt, however, that a reading of this book will encourage the child of God to translate his doctrine into practice and to seek the glory of God even in the more mundane affairs of life.

ROBERT RODGERS.

SCOTTISH THEOLOGY. John Macleod. Banner of Truth Trust. 350 pp. £1.65.

The course of lectures contained in this book was originally delivered in 1939 at Westminster Theological Seminary, which had been founded ten years previously to maintain 'the well-known Princeton tradition in the loyal defence and the unam-

biguous exposition and avowal of the Reformed Theology'. It was entirely fitting that Dr. Macleod should be invited to lecture there, since he had received his theological training under Professor Robert Watts of Belfast, who had been a student under Charles Hodge.

It is important to emphasise the full title of the book, which is *Scottish Theology in Relation to Church History*. This keeps within recognisable bounds what would otherwise be an impossibly immense subject. Dr. Macleod is dealing not only with 400 years of Church History, but with *Scottish* Church History with its long succession of secessions. Here we could have no better guide than John Macleod. His intimate knowledge of his subject and evident love for it too, combine to impart to his work a vigorous warmth that makes it difficult to leave the book down.

It is in many respects an *ideal* book. Its perfect blend of scholarship and simplicity makes it useful for both the specialist and the one who is approaching the subject for the first time. Indeed, one almost envies the one whose reading of this book will be their introduction to this particular theme. They must surely catch Macleod's enthusiasm, for it is contagious, and, like the reviewer, who long ago was smitten in like manner, they will learn to turn again and again to Macleod's choice treatise to stir up a languid spirit.

Not only does the author deal with the outstanding theologians and events of each succeeding generation, but finds a place for some of the lesser-known worthies as well. Says Professor G. N. M. Collins, 'To know Dr. Macleod was to become acquainted with the best school of Scottish Reformed Divines, in whose succession he undoubtedly had his place. William Cunningham, John Duncan, Hugh Martin, George Smeaton, James MacGregor and James Gibson stood high in his list of Scotland's great theologians, as this book reveals, and he spoke of them from such full and detailed knowledge as almost to suggest that he belonged to their generation. Certainly their own contemporaries were not more thoroughly acquainted with their thinking than he was'.

The book is beautifully produced and is enriched with a first-class index prepared by Mr. S. M. Houghton, of Charlbury, Oxford. One cannot speak too highly of this volume and we trust it will have the widest possible circulation.

ROBERT RODGERS.

Announcement**TO OUR READERS**

When it was decided to issue bi-monthly from the start of 1974, and to alter the price of **THE GOSPEL MAGAZINE** and the postal subscription per year, the Trustees hoped that it would be possible to hold the current price at least for some time.

This hope has not been fulfilled, for costs and expenses have rapidly increased, so that printing costs, for example, no longer hold steady over a period as they did in the past. Each issue of **THE GOSPEL MAGAZINE** in 1974 has brought a larger printer's bill than the previous one. Thus the printing of the July-August issue cost over one-fifth more than the December 1973 issue.

It is with regret that we announce an increase in the price of The Gospel Magazine for 1975. The price for a single copy will be 15p from and including the January/February issue 1975; while the annual subscription for 1975, post paid will be £1.10p.

We would invite the continued gifts of readers whose generous help in the past has been of such value. May we also suggest that Bequests and Legacies to **THE GOSPEL MAGAZINE TRUST** provide another way of aiding the free grace ministry we desire to exercise.

It has long been the policy of the Trustees gladly to send **THE GOSPEL MAGAZINE** to those who cannot afford current prices. We should therefore like to know of such in order that their names and addresses may be retained or placed on the mailing list.

The Chairman of the Trustees is the Rev. T. Shaw, M.A., Rector of Drayton, Banbury. With the loss by resignation of the Rev. C. R. Pridmore, Vicar of Christ Church, Lower Birling, Kent, and by death of Mr. Charles Burbridge, the Trust has been strengthened by the membership of the Rev. Maurice Handford, Minister of Trinity, Buxton; and Mr. D. C. Relf, LL.B.