

SEPTEMBER — OCTOBER 2001

# THE GOSPEL MAGAZINE

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**PUBLISHING THE TRUTH SINCE 1766**

# THE GOSPEL MAGAZINE

*Editor*

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## *Editorial*

*“Be content with such things as ye have” (Hebrews 13:5)*

CONTENTMENT in Christ has been called that “rare jewel.” Looking no further than my own heart, I would say it is the rarest of all Christian graces. Yet the greatest mark of the blessed Person of the Holy Spirit, is this contentedness to be effaced in order to magnify Christ. One of the strongest impressions left of my life is how the preaching of this grace touched the very fountain of my being, causing me to tremble inwardly, knowing that satisfaction was absent from my heart. I have actually been afraid to go to hear preachers, feeling that all must see my guilt in my face. George Whitfield looking at the thousands hanging on his words said, “My dear hearers, there is not a single soul of you all that is satisfied with your stations.”

Once a man sleeping on the ground near me was bitten in the groin by a scorpion. He said to me as we tried inexpertly to ease his pain, “My blood is on fire”. That is how discontent bites. Though we try inexpertly to salve it by redoubling effort, possessions, and success on Christ’s behalf, all is to no avail. We are gnawed by envy, racked by innumerable torturing, insatiable desires, held as in a vice by them. We wend along life’s path, this jack o’lantern dancing ahead, beckoning us ever onward to the land of unfulfilled desire. Thirst for more than our fellows in knowledge, in anything to prove our success, our superiority. The mirage shines, and as we reach each self-set goal, is still beyond us. We never cry, “Hold! Enough!” And we have the temerity to equate it with obedience, or defend it, saying ambition in Christ is a grace. All I can say is, such answers do not even fool one’s self. Back and back, faint yet clear, comes the voice of the Spirit: “Godliness with contentment is great gain.”

The verse says, "be content with such things as ye have". It is humanly impossible for we are a mass of desires. But the verse goes on, "for he hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee". That deals with the fears that motivate and drive our urge to make ourselves safe and prosperous, and our fears of being less than others, disregarded and despised by men. It is also a voice saying to us, "I, your Lord, am your one abiding possession; all else is a chimera composed of beguiling trifles. Let go! Relinquish all else! If I wanted you to have recognition, success, ease, I could have granted it. In death, I alone remain yours."

Henry Venn, a minister greatly used by God in the 18th century in Sheffield, lost his wife and was left with five young children, little money and a demanding ministry. He records how he felt anything but contentment with God over the situation. The door-bell rang, and there stood a woman with small children, barefoot in the snow, pinched with hunger. Calling him Sir, she said that she had found Christ under his ministry, and so much wanted to tell him how much Christ satisfied her, and to thank him. As she poured out her heart, he said that he felt terribly ashamed. He with so much, miserably discontented, and she with nothing, radiantly satisfied.

Lord, keep us from having to be taught some such way.

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## Sin's Hold

THE EDITOR

*"I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant; for I do not forget thy commandments" (Psalm 119:176)*

I WANT to talk plainly on struggling with besetting sin, as I take it that it is one of those horrible, recurring sins that the man is confessing. Now I do not usually mention my many sources in a sermon, as a housewife putting dishes of carrots and potatoes in front of the guests at dinner, does not mention their sources and raw state when she came to prepare them. Over-honesty might revolt the guests. However, the debt to Sibbes here would amount to plagiarism – stealing another man's sermon.

In verse 168 the writer says, "I have kept thy precepts and thy testimonies: for all my ways are before thee". The idea behind "precepts" is something placed in one's trust, committed there by God's appointment. It's to do with the conscience. The word "testimonies" points back to the ark with its two stone tables of the law within, and the tabernacle, testimonies to God's presence and revealed will to His people. Thus the general tenor of his life when he looks back over it, has the

**marks of a saved man** – he loves *all* God's laws – honestly before God, he has in general striven to keep them – he has been delivered from sin's bondage – he is in the way of holiness – his life is controlled, honest, open, prayerful – and can say this before the all-seeing God.

I often visit and pray for a man who claims conversion, and may well be right, in spite of the state of his foul, smelly, tower-block flat and of himself, and his drinking to excess. For his first memories in life are his father coming in drunk on a Saturday night and beating his mother, and of a terrible life-long feeling of cowardice at being – aged four – too scared to intervene whilst she screamed. Then the early death of his navvy father through pneumonia, caught whilst digging up Dublin's roads in all weathers, and of being turned out of their one-up, one-down labourer's cottage. Then spending his childhood's daylight hours on the streets, as the grudging, unwilling aunt who took them in would not have the children in the house by day, insisting his mother had to be out working, though it only brought in a pittance. But you yourself did not have to as a child depend upon a kindly woman in the street giving you a jam sandwich occasionally because you were so cold and hungry. Nor for your religious notions on an almost worshipped memory of a mother herself steeped in deepest Romanism. God judges His own. Nevertheless it is certain that if a man does not live by God's laws with a good conscience, then he is not the Lord's. If you do not keep the commandments, then you are not saved.

Yet here this psalmist, claiming to have lived in all good conscience before God, is now saying he has gone astray like a lost sheep. It appears the two are contradictory. How can one be holy and sinful at the same time? Some commentators get round it by saying Psalm 119 is *national* in character, not individual, and the man is confessing on behalf of his nation, like Daniel does in his ninth chapter during the captivity in Babylon, on behalf of his people. But see how often the man uses "I", in verse after verse. Daniel says "we". So I cannot agree with that solution to the problem.

Others explain the difficulty by agreeing it is a personal *statement*, but they say, not a confession of sin, rather of weakness, loneliness, desertion and feeling lost and friendless. Calvin holds this, and whilst there is a truth in it, both Jewish and Christian writers on this problem through the centuries have usually taken it of sinful error. It is common in Scripture to compare believers to sheep, and God as Shepherd. This gives the meaning that it is God, not human companionship, we have left. Now leaving God is sin and only sin cuts us off from God.

As believers we are in the main obedient – yet we far too often stray into sin – that is what the Psalmist is saying here. Many that are truly the Lord's and obey His precepts, go astray.

How can we get clear of besetting sin? That one sin that ruins so much of our usefulness here below, and turns our work from gold into stubble on the judgment day? I have often felt that the true underlying explanation, on some occasions, of why so many Christian's children have gone wrong, is that the parent who leads

in the faith has given way, and left room for the devil to sweep through the family. Like a barrier holding up a flooded river giving way, and all the weaker structures below in the path of the torrent being swept away. The same is true of the sins of leaders of Churches. I hasten to add this is not a universal explanation. But we do not know the effect of our secret sins upon others. Once God's Spirit is displeased with us, our prayers grow ineffective and the armour on the lambs is removed, leaving them an easy prey. Oh! How can I get clear of sin completely?

## 1. CONFESS – UNDERSTAND – ANALYSE

**Honestly confess it.** How? Negatively, do not blame circumstances or temperament, but do like the Psalmist –

**Compare yourself ruthlessly to a brute beast.** What carries a sheep off from the flock? Lust, not to put too fine a point on it. So Psalm 99:12 puts it: "Man, being in honour, abideth not; he is like the beasts that perish." The original can be translated, "Adam, being in honour, abode not for a night". The emphasis is on the immediacy of the departure. God gave me new life, pure, clean and free. But I, like a sheep, at once go astray – that is my mark – says this confession. Make no excuse whatever! Much modern thinking is really blaming sin, on their genes, circumstances or lack of money. Another way they clear themselves is to change the word to a respectable one. To give one example, "gay" has changed its meaning entirely. Be horribly frank with yourself and refuse excuses. "I confess I did it, with my eyes open and the fault is entirely mine."

**Go on comparing yourself to a sheep.** Appetite carries sheep away unless restrained by hedge or crook. Driving through the Marches I notice that to my inexperienced eye the fields have long looked overgrazed and an unhealthy white, far too many sheep in my view for the hillside fields. The grass is green and juicy on the roadside, and there a lamb, often its mother having broken through to be with it, is at danger on the winding road. So we love to wander to gratify our evil natures and fleshly desires. I note in passing that the visitation of foot and mouth has brought back the fields of flowers, left the birds and wild things to nest and feed through these months whilst keeping man out, and obliged a Sabbath on the greed for gain that has removed her rest from our beautiful countryside. Every plague from the Lord has its blessing in it, for those with eyes to see.

**Blame your heart** as in the *Venite*, Psalm 95:10: "It is a people that do err in their hearts." Trace the whole matter back to the heart. What we need is not more teaching from Scripture – Oh! we need that – but much more to obey from the heart what is already familiar. It is not the complicated places in Scripture that I find difficult, but the easy ones. Obedience is what is hard.

**Remember Augustine's comment.** Augustine wrote two commentaries on this Psalm – and in them had a vision of the hundred and nineteenth Psalm rising like a tree of life in the paradise of God. He said, in beautiful Latin, "Lord, I could go astray myself, but I cannot return myself". Confess honestly, "I go astray

**whenever** I want, but I cannot return. Only Thou can bring me back into holiness." Hosea said: "Thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thine help." Take God's side. speak to yourself. Sin is madness, but speaking aloud to oneself when the conscience is on fire with self-recrimination, is not the first sign of madness. I can defile myself, but God alone can recover me.

**Admit it was easy.** Sheep in Scripture are frequently represented as straying, it's their nature. Now a sheep needs the company of a flock to stay alive. It cannot live alone. Sheep need the shepherd, but unrestrained they wander off. One goes, all follow and then scatter. I am prone to wander from the Shepherd, I find it so simple that to tell the truth, underneath I live in continual dread of doing so, for it is my natural, sinful bent. Yet I am the Lord's and would be horrified to be thought of as other than that.

**It is easy because of sin within,** so examples to imitate abound, making it a catching disease. I lived in France with a godly man and his wife, formerly missionaries with WEC in the Congo. They often told me of the day and hour which each could remember, the exact moment when they became holy and had never sinned since, and clearly wanted me to share this blessing. The husband had, it must be confessed, some rather difficult ways, one of which was to stick the butter-knife like a spear downwards into the middle of the butter. At this his wife got upset, and what looked remarkably like a tiff took place. Afterwards, *a propos* of nothing, she remarked that whilst they were sinless, they still had imperfections. Later I learned reading Brengel, that Holiness teaching makes this distinction. For me, I can only admit in honesty that I go astray like a lost sheep still. It's all too easy. That is how to confess: hide nothing, analyse, blame yourself.

## 2. WHAT TO CONFESS

**That I am as weak as water.** Romans 7:15: "What I hate, that I do", and 19: "The good that I would I do not; but the evil that I would not, that I do," fits my case exactly. In verse 23 it is "bringing me into captivity to the law of sin". The word means takes me prisoner at spear-point. Sin, as a warrior, comes in and disarms me, forcing me to drop my weapon and submit, then leads me off a captive to go where my captor says – into sin.

**I am miserable,** too weak and frail to keep holy. If I could, I would abolish the whole body of sin and strictly obey God and my conscience, but "I know that in me (that is in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not". However I hate sin, I go and do it. Not always obviously and grossly, I can keep up respectability, but sin never comes out of my innermost heart. Every place the British went they took the Australian Blue Gum tree, useful because it grows in the dry, and whilst useless for workable wood, makes fine charcoal. Ever watched charcoal burning? The idea is to cover the stacked cut wood with clods and earth so the fire

smoulders, but never bursts through, night or day, until the whole is cooked into charcoal. Smothering is what I do to my sin, but the fire breaks through, do as I will.

**What makes it worse** is that some sinful things I could have got rid of by the ordinary grace of God. But I never broke with them in those early years when life was malleable and character pliant, not yet formed. No, I deliberately chose them, and now relapse into them. It's the old story of the conquest of Canaan, the nations Israel did not destroy, remained as goads and thorns to plague them. God meant it for good, so that the next generations should know war.

**Worst of all** we must say with the psalmist: "Lord, having written a hundred and seventy five most spiritual things, having tried sincerely to be holy, I now come to the end, the hundred and seventy sixth, and have to make a confession. I am exceedingly conscious of sin remaining. I have been genuinely inspired as all admit, yet underneath, I am ashamed to confess, but must do – I am just a lost sheep, and have strayed into sin again. What a world of bitterness is in those words. A lifetime past, all the opportunities for reformation used up, and here I am Lord – nowhere. My only hope is confession and God's grace."

### 3. FACE UP TO THE CONSEQUENCES

**"Before I was afflicted I went astray,"** said this man in verse 76. God knows exactly how to deal with besetting sin, by the rod. We grow complacent, but God knows exactly the bitter medicine we need, the punishment that fits the crime. When He chastens a man for sin, he knows precisely where to strike, publicly before men or secretly, and He means it to hurt. Never try shrugging it off. Spurgeon said he knew a woman whose baby died, and said she never cried, but made herself feel it no more than a gnat. Foolish woman, said Spurgeon, God meant it to hurt you, and you to acknowledge His hand. He makes our beauty to consume away like the moth, so that the moth-eaten thing of a life which emerges, has a healthy fear of sinning. "Go thy way and sin no more," is the Word of the Lord Jesus. "But let them not turn again to folly," says the Lord of His saints. "Let him no more lie down in sin," is the object God has in mind.

**The reason is He knows I am imperfect.** Grace healed me, but not totally. Some sins God abolished. I can honestly say they have never troubled me since. But some, God left to try me. Why did He do this? Because I left them in my life. If you have just been converted, make no parley with sin, cast it out, make a clean break. Anything left will stay and trouble you right up to death. Now as every penny has two sides, when God makes a human being, that person has certain strong points. Yet these very points are their weak ones. They may be say, gentle, or brainy. But those very things are their most vulnerable points, Satan's way in to their lives. Gentleness has a reverse side, weakness, indulgence and uncritical acceptance of evil. Intellect is peculiarly liable to trust in the mind of the flesh, be proud and despise others as if the ability were self-created.

**God leaves us certain things** to show us what we are really like, after our most spiritual flights, like the author of this Psalm. We so quickly get false ideas about our own innate natural goodness.

**That brings us to consider the matter more deeply.** But considering consequence alone, though good, is not enough to overcome the power of sin. I sit. I gaze within. Inside I am made up like an army. Part of me is the general, who plans and orders. Another part of me consists of the officers and NCOs, who will the army to do what the general directs. And the part of me I call my soul, is the soldiers waiting to receive clear commands.

But what do I actually see as I look inside? The general, my brain, is cloudy and unclear over God's will. The officers and NCOs are bad at carrying the matter through, lacking the will. And so the soul is left not knowing what to do. The whole army sincerely wants to win, but it is in such a mess, that the men love sin and ease, and far from the officers and NCOs willing them to obey the general, why, the soldiers' inclinations overcome the officers'. My brain follows my feelings.

Galatians 6:1 says "if a man be overtaken in a fault" – meaning from nowhere the fault surprises him, ambushes him unexpectedly. This I find to be the truth about myself. Suddenly the fault presents itself, some temptation or other. The soul inclines to it. The will is so fleshy, so different to the steadiness in duty it ought to present, that I take my orders from the bottom upwards.

It happens thus: the soul has inadequate views of God and heavenly things. The will is obstinate, even rebellious, and overcomes the reason. So I find this, I am upside down, led by emotion, not reason. Now if the world has one favourite belief about itself, it is that it is led by pure reason, by logic. They love the notion. They frequently talk about it as something settled, past argument. But what I find is the opposite. Sin comes in as an emotional flood and sweeps away the soul in a rush. The officers, are not strong-willed, but weakly obstinate and, amazingly they put their weight into helping the men sin! What does my general, my boasted intellect do? He takes a mental holiday, goes AWOL and joins in the rebellion, or does nothing to stop it at any rate. Yes, grace put me right, but I get complacent, the lower part of my nature rebels, and all of me gives way and follows – against my better judgment!

**Temptation comes with huge violence.** We are hurried into sin which rationally considered, we would not do of ourselves. It works by *blitzkrieg*, shock tactics. Like French troops in a battle, it wins by hurling itself in with *élan et vivre*.

**God deliberately withdraws His help and felt-presence.** No, He never actually leaves. He does this for two reasons, first to teach us our weakness and inability to defend ourselves, so as to make us rely on Him in future. However, there is a second, less creditable reason. Because the Holy Spirit has been grieved by the way we have been behaving in what may appear a very small matter, but signifying something important in His sight. We provoke Him into withdrawing, and then we are unable to stand.



**4. IN CONCLUSION**

**Pray** "seek thy servant". I am helpless. Here I stand, I am ashamed of what I have done, but have no power of myself to help myself. Seek me just where I am, which is not where I ought to be, but in sin and mess. Cleanse me and return me to Your care. I will accept whatever is laid upon me in chastisement – please let me back.

**Plead**, for why should God hear? The Psalmist goes one further: "for I have not forgotten thy commandments." Because my real self, my saved man, born of God a true son, has not altogether joined in this rebellion, but all along known I was doing wrong, even at the height of giving way to temptation. Good Shepherd, who gave Thy life for the sheep, restore my soul. I cannot even say, to my shame, that I will never sin again. Why, the psalmist says this at the end of a long and holy Psalm. If a man inspired could not promise, much less can I!

**Learn Scripture by heart.** The Rev. Henry Martyn in the year 1805 was in Shiraz in Persia, deeply desiring to get back to the girl he loved in Cornwall, named Lydia. Sick, opposed by Muslims, their Mullahs arguing incessantly daily over the Gospel, and without any convert to show after years of witnessing. In the loneliness and heat, greatly tempted, he wrote that he learned the 119th Psalm to strengthen his spiritual life. In 1819, William Wilberforce was fighting the powerful vested interests of the slave trade year upon year, facing many slanders. He records in his diary: "Walked from Hyde Park Corner, repeating the 119th Psalm, in great comfort." In the last war the Scottish Chaplain in Paris aided trapped British remnants from Dunkirk to escape, and was caught and put in solitary. He said he only stayed sane by knowing and reciting the 119th Psalm through those years.

You may not be up to that – although you might try – but why not learn this verse by heart? You could get a child to learn it. David Livingstone learned the Psalm as a lad of nine and got a Sunday School prize, a year before before starting work in a cotton mill, although he was only saved when twenty years old.

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## For Younger Readers

CARINE MACKENZIE

### PLAY BY THE RULES

Do you play football or hockey or some other team sport at your school? Every game has different rules and if you want to enjoy the game you have to learn the rules and play by them. The referee is the person who makes sure that every player keeps to the rules. If one player infringes a rule, he blows the whistle and

stops the game. The other side will be given a free kick or throw to compensate. If a team member continues to foul then he might even be sent off. If the referee is penalising your team, you might feel he is very hard and is spoiling the game. But just try to play a game of football or rugby or hockey without a referee. The result would soon be chaos and quarrelling and fighting. The referee and the rules are there to make the game more enjoyable.

God in his Word has given us rules to live our lives by. The rules are summed up in the Ten Commandments given to Moses by God on Mount Sinai – Do not worship any other god. Do not make any idols. Do not use God's name in vain. Remember to keep the Sabbath day holy. Honour you father and mother. Do not murder. Do not commit adultery. Do not steal. Do not lie. Do not covet.

Those who do not love God find keeping the commandments a chore, something they think spoils their fun. In actual fact the rules are there for our benefit, to make life better. "If you love me," says Jesus, "keep my commandments." "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." Man's chief end (or purpose in life) is to glorify God and to enjoy him for ever.

Just as a football match becomes chaotic with no rules or referee, so life becomes miserable and chaotic if we do not pay heed to the rules that God has laid down for us. How do we learn the rules to live by? God has given us His Word which carefully tells us what He requires. Never take for granted the privilege of owning a Bible and of being able to read it for yourself. It is a great mercy, too, to hear God's Word preached and explained. How thankful we should be for the preaching of God's Word. God has given us all a conscience. He speaks to us through our conscience – troubling us when we do wrong and being at peace when we do right. No animal has a conscience. This is something that God has given only to human beings.

Jesus promised His followers that God the Father would send another Comforter, the Holy Spirit. He would teach them all things and bring to remembrance the words that Jesus had said. It is important for us to read God's Word and to try to memorise it and to pray that the Holy Spirit would bring it to our minds to guide and help us in every time of need.

### **BIBLE SEARCH**

Use your Bible to find the missing words. The initial letters of the correct answers will spell out some good advice for us.

1. All that the Lord hath said will we do and be \_\_\_\_\_. Exodus 24:7.
2. So they read in the \_\_\_\_\_ of the law of God distinctly. . . . Nehemiah 8:8.
3. Give \_\_\_\_\_ unto the law of our God. . . . Isaiah 1:10.

4. Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free and be not entangled again with the \_\_\_\_\_ of bondage. Galatians 5:1.
5. I will instruct thee and \_\_\_\_\_ thee in the way which thou shalt go. Psalm 32:8.
6. But be ye doers of the word and not \_\_\_\_\_ only. James 1:22.
7. The commandment of the Lord is pure, \_\_\_\_\_ the eyes. Psalm 19:8.
8. Till I come give attendance to \_\_\_\_\_, to exhortation to doctrine. 1 Timothy 4:13.
9. Do not my words do good to him that walketh \_\_\_\_\_? Micah 2:7.
10. A new commandment I give unto you, That ye \_\_\_\_\_ one another. John 13:34.
11. Ye do \_\_\_\_\_ not knowing the scriptures nor the power of God. Matthew 22:29.
12. If any man \_\_\_\_\_ me let him follow me. John 12:26.

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## Apostasy

DAVID N. SAMUEL

JOHN OWEN is one who has written comprehensively on this subject. I have, therefore, taken his writings as the basis for what I want to say, while drawing on the contribution of others here and there, and interjecting some comments of my own.

By way of definition, Owen helpfully says that "apostasy is the relinquishing of any important truth or way in religion; and heresy is the embracing of any new distinctive opinion, or principle, or way in the profession of it." A man may be an apostate by partial apostasy, that is, depart from the profession of some truth he had formerly embraced, or from the performance of some duty which he had engaged in, without being a heretic, or choosing any new opinion which he did not before embrace. Conversely, a man may be a heretic, that is, choose and embrace some new false opinion, which he may invent out of his own imagination, without a direct renunciation of any truth which he had held before.

On these grounds, Owen argued that the Church of Rome is both apostate and heretical. Apostate because it has renounced the great truths of the Gospel, and heretical because it has invented and coined many articles of pretended faith,

which the old Roman Church never had. We shall come back to the subject of the Church of Rome later. For the moment the definition of apostasy, and its distinction from heresy, is an important one to bear in mind.

I propose to divide this article into five parts. Firstly, *Man's Apostasy from God*. Secondly, *The Apostasy of the Church of Rome*. Thirdly, *The Causes of Apostasy Amongst all Persons in all Ages*. Fourthly, *The Question Whether a True Believer Can Fall from Grace and be Lost*. Finally, *Some Directions on How to Avoid the Prevailing Apostasy*.

## 1. THE APOSTASY OF MAN FROM GOD – THE REJECTION BY MAN OF THE IMAGE OF GOD

When God created man, He made him in His own image, and by so doing He distinguished man from all the other works of creation. Genesis 1:26-27: "And God said, Let us make man in our image . . . in the image of God created he him." Nowhere else is there any such emphasis of expression concerning any work of God. There was an involvement of all the Persons of the Trinity. "Let *us* make man. . . ." God intended three things by this communication of His image to man.

1. To make a representation of His holiness and righteousness. "The heavens declare the glory of God" – His eternal power and Godhead – but none of these things was able to receive impressions of His righteousness and holiness. It was this that God intended when He made man in His image. And when it was lost in Adam it was restored in Christ.

2. It was meant to render actual glory to God. However wonderful and beautiful the works of creation were, without the image of God here below, there was nothing to understand and appreciate them.

3. It was intended to be the means to bring man to the eternal enjoyment of God. This was to be done by way of obedience – "This do and live." But we were only enabled to do it by the image of God in our natures. The image of God in man was, therefore, the crowning expression of all the outward works of God in nature. In man, made in the image of God, the circle of creation was complete.

But the apostasy of man from God, by sin, defaced the image of God in man, and at the same time subjected the whole creation to vanity or futility. There is, in consequence, no way left by which the glory of God might be manifested in the creation to His praise and glory. The nature of man alone was designed to that end and purpose. He, therefore, not only fell himself, but dragged down the whole of creation. In his debased condition he worshipped the heavenly bodies above as his gods, and those creatures below he abused with his lusts. Therefore God was dishonoured in every way, as Paul declared to the Romans, in chapter 1 of that great epistle.

When we consider the greatness of this apostasy from God, we have to acknowledge that the recovery of a portion of mankind from this miserable state was an act of free-will on the part of God. He had no obligation to do so. It would

not have been inconsistent with the nature of God's righteousness to have left the whole of mankind to perish eternally. Therefore, wherever there is any mention made in Scripture of the restoration of mankind, it is constantly said to be of the mere sovereign grace and mercy of God (Ephesians 1:3-11).

Those who make objection to this do not seem to understand the nature of our original apostasy from God, nor the righteousness of God in dealing with the angels that sinned. Man had voluntarily broken all the relations of love and moral good between himself and God, had defaced His image – the only representation of His holiness and righteousness in the lower world – and deprived Him of all His glory from the works of His hands, and had allied himself with the devil. What dishonour would it have been to God if He had left man to His own choice, and the consequences of it?

Here, in the original apostasy of man from God we have the source of all subsequent defection and falling away from God in the history of the world and of the Church. It all partakes of this evil and rebellious character, in seeking to frustrate and oppose the purposes of God. This brings us to the second head of this paper –

## 2. THE APOSTASY OF THE CHURCH OF ROME

When God, in the fulness of time, put into execution His plan to save and redeem a people, through His Son Jesus Christ, the second Adam, and thereby to restore the fallen creation, the devil sought to counter and overthrow that plan. This he did, and does, through the "mystery of iniquity", which he sets to work in the Church in opposition to the "mystery of godliness". Even in the apostle Paul's days, Satan was initiating that apostasy which, beginning in small ways in the Church, would in time grow to be universal.

"A mystery," says Poole, in his commentary on this passage in 2 Thessalonians, "is something which is abstruse, intricate, and not easily discerned. There are mysteries in doctrine and in practice, mysteries of godliness and mysteries of iniquity; mysteries of the kingdom of God and the devil's kingdom. So there are the deep things of God, and the depths of Satan."

The mystery of iniquity is not open sin and wickedness, but dissembled piety, specious errors, wickedness under a form of godliness cunningly managed. It works specially to undermine Christianity and the peculiar doctrines and practice of it. The early assaults on Christianity came from without, in the form of the Gnostic heresies, arising from heathen religion and philosophy, but this was to come from within, and to prove to be far more insidious and pervasive. I am alluding, of course, to the manifestation of this apostasy in the power of the Church of Rome, which growing from small beginnings led to the almost universal corruption of the doctrines and practices of the Christian faith in the medieval papacy.

Dr. Martyn Lloyd Jones, in a sermon on Ephesians 6, spoke of the Church of Rome as "Satan's masterpiece" for this very reason, that it seeks to overthrow

**Christianity** not by open, frontal assault, but by counterfeiting its doctrines, and presenting its own version to the world as the truth. The differences, and yet apparent similarities, between the true catholic Church of Scripture and the apostles, and the false Roman Catholic Church is set out by Francis Turretin, the 17th century Protestant theologian who most ably followed in Calvin's footsteps at Geneva. He wrote:

"Christ wills that *sola Scriptura*, inspired by God be received by us as the perfect rule of faith and morals. The Pope denies Scripture alone is an adequate rule of faith, unwritten traditions must be attached. These traditions, together with Scripture, are to be equally adopted and venerated. They are to be held alike as the means of influencing godliness.

"Christ wishes His Word to be believed on its own, because it does not take its authority from man. In our estimation, the Pope wishes the authority of the Word to be derived from his Church. Christ wishes no supreme judge to be acknowledged in ruling on controversies other than God speaking through Scripture. The Pope sacrilegiously claims this prerogative for himself.

"Furthermore, Christ teaches that He alone is the Mediator, appointed by the Father, who alone is the way, the truth and the life, without whom no man can come to the Father. Yet the Pope forces innumerable mediators upon us. Mediators who, he says, are to reveal the way to heaven for us. Also, Christ testifies that there is no other sacrifice apart from His own; no other satisfaction by which we may obtain remission of sins and the reward of salvation. But the Pope insists on human punishments and satisfactions, while demanding a new propitiatory sacrifice called the Mass.

"Though Christ established that men are to be saved by grace through faith alone, the Pope includes works as well. Whereas Christ institutes only two sacraments, the Pope decrees seven. Christ ordains that no one but God be the object of cult and adoration, yet the Pope worships creatures as well. Christ declared Himself the sole Head and Groom of the Church, but the Pope grants this to himself as well. Christ subjects Himself to the magistrates, ordering His servants to be likewise subject. Nevertheless, the Pope subjects the magistrates, rulers and emperors to himself.

"Can it truly be said that those who teach such doctrines and defend such dogmas keep the faith of Christ? Or are they not adjudged guilty by the deserts of defection and the fact of apostasy?"

Thus Turretin on the Roman Catholic apostasy. This was a view shared by all the Reformers and Puritans.

It is true that the Church of Rome suffered a great setback at the Reformation, and her deceptions were unmasked for very many. Bunyan, in *Pilgrim's Progress*, depicts Giant Pope sitting at the mouth of his cave, an old man, grown so crazy and stiff in his joints that he cannot come at pilgrims as they go by, which was indeed true of the situation in England at the height of the Reformation. But since then the Roman Catholic apostasy has revived. The deadly wound which the beast received has been healed and the whole world wonders after it. Today, the Church of Rome claims one billion members world-wide, which makes its power greater than at the time of its ascendancy in Europe in the Middle Ages. And besides that we must take into account its leading and dominating role in the ecumenical movement.

The Protestant Churches, having largely abandoned the biblical doctrines of the Reformation, which were their *raison d'être*, are capitulating to the leadership of the papacy and to Roman Catholic doctrine. There are, indeed, other ways that men and Churches may apostatise from the faith – into liberalism, for example, or other faiths – but Rome remains the great threat to the Protestant churches, Satan's great masterpiece, his counterfeit Christianity by which he deceives the nations.

Of course, the Church of Rome boasts that it cannot fall away because it has the special privilege of indefectibility. But, as John Owen says: "It has fallen out with Rome as it did with him from whom she falsely claims to derive her indefectibility. When our Lord said that all men would forsake Him, Peter claimed exemption for himself. However, Peter was the only one who, in fact, forsook and *denied* his Lord. Likewise, the Church of Rome, with its special claim, distinguishes itself with a peculiar apostasy above all the Churches of the world."

He then adds what must possibly rate as the most damning indictment of the Church of Rome that has ever appeared in print. "If the kingdom of Christ – which once was a kingdom of light and truth and holiness, separation in principles, affection and conversation from the world; of communion with God and loving-kindness towards men; of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost – may become and is become a kingdom of darkness, pride, ignorance, ambition, persecution, blind superstition and idolatry, then and not else doth it visibly remain among them [i.e. the Romanists] and they have nothing apostatised from the laws and government of it."

So much, then, for the Roman apostasy. Let us now turn to our third head.

### 3. THE CAUSES OF APOSTASY AMONGST ALL PERSONS IN ALL AGES

**The first cause, says Owen, is this: a rooted enmity in the minds of men to spiritual things, remaining uncured under the profession of the Gospel**

"The carnal mind is enmity against God" (Romans 8:7). Men take to themselves the profession of the Gospel while this enmity remains in their minds. Many will entertain evangelical truth in the mind, but resent it when it begins to work in the

conscience. They have received the truth, but not the love of it. Thus where you have a merely intellectual or formal profession of true religion you will have a great falling off from it, when carnal interests begin to come into conflict with it. That is the real test that we are witnessing today. With the growing influence of the ecumenical movement and broad and liberal views of Christianity gaining ground, the tide has turned in the churches from Reformed and Evangelical religion. Those who look for worldly advantage in religion must begin to look elsewhere. Loyalties are being tested and tried.

If there has not been a real work of grace in the heart there will be a falling away. We have seen it happening. The evangelical constituency has changed profoundly in my time, in the Church of England, which can only mean that there were a great many whose profession was merely formal and superficial, when it seemed the right and proper thing to be an evangelical, and even certain advantages were to be gained from it.

### **Secondly, darkness in spiritual matters is another cause of apostasy**

Man in his natural state stands in need of *illumination*. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him" (1 Corinthians 2:14). His mind must be transformed by grace; and where men's minds have not been so transformed as to apprehend the truth, they have no stable grounds on which to abide in the profession of the truth. Here we have another cause of apostasy from the Gospel after it has been professed. Owen says: "We have seen, in all ages, men learned and skilled in the doctrines of the truth, so as they might have been looked on as pillars of it, yet to have been as forward as any unto apostasy from it *when they have been tried*; yea, such have been the leaders of others thereunto." Again, to my mind, this seems to account for the defection of many evangelicals in recent years from the truth.

Owen goes on to say: "No man who forsakes the truth ever saw the glory of it, or had experience of its power." They treat it with a degree of detachment and objectivity; they will talk and dispute about it with the greatest indifference as to what is true and false. They do not seem to recognise the wickedness, the confusion and the heinousness of error. They appear to regard truth and error with equanimity. They do not have that holy love of truth and equally holy hatred of error that would secure them against apostasy.

I think this explains the ease with which many in recent years have been able to enter into dialogue with Roman Catholics and even Muslims and Hindus. It demands a certain detachment from the truth to be able to do that. You are obliged to put a question mark over it, otherwise you are not genuinely engaging in dialogue, which means, at least in principle, you are prepared to change and qualify your beliefs. I think we must be very careful to distinguish between dialogue and controversy. Dialogue carries with it implicitly this assumption, that you will be prepared to modify and change your position, in the light of the debate, if it so requires you. But controversy, in which all the Reformers engaged,



is quite a different thing. You start from what you know and believe to be the truth, and your object is to expose the error and confusion of the opponent's position and, if possible, persuade him of the truth. It was dialogue in which Satan engaged Eve in the garden. She would have been safe if she had insisted on controversy. When men have not a fervent love of the truth and no sense of abhorrence of error they are in the anteroom of apostasy. It is said that the apostle John fled from the public baths, where Cerinthus the heretic appeared, lest they should fall on him. Today some evangelicals would be glad to stay and engage in friendly dialogue.

The reason for this is that the truth does not hold and control them, but they hold and control it, and therefore they think that they can change and modify it. But if a man has been apprehended, arrested and captured by the truth of God's Word, he has no power to do that, and therefore is not in danger of falling away from it. For example, if justification by faith is just one doctrine amongst many, which you happen to hold in a theological system, you may feel quite relaxed about discussing it with others who hold different views, and even making some concession in the interest of agreement. But if justification by faith is the only ground by which you can stand and exist before a holy and righteous God, and any change in the terms of it would mean your damnation, then you will not have such a relaxed attitude to it. It is the difference between holding the truth *existentially* and merely *intellectually*.

### **Thirdly, ignorance is another cause of apostasy**

Ignorance of any kind exposes people to great danger, and this is specially true with regard to the Christian faith. "The ignorant," says Owen, "are like children 'tossed to and fro and carried about by every wind of doctrine', a prey to seducers, and exposed to the blandishments of Rome, which teaches a religion that is readily appreciated by an unregenerate mind, by the natural man. When men are called to give an account of their faith, they are at a loss, and can quite easily fall away to popery or some other creed. Ignorance is therefore a fatal danger."

In our society today there is growing ignorance, a general lowering of standards, a "dumbing down" process going on. People wish to be entertained, not edified. There is resistance to any strenuous effort of the mind and the will. And since this tendency is present generally in society it invades the churches too. It is seen in the bland and trite songs that are replacing hymns and psalms, in the dialogue and chat-show type of interviews that replace sermons, and in the general relaxed and free-wheeling format of worship generally.

The Reformation of the Church consisted in the deliverance of people from darkness and ignorance, and if they are reduced to the same condition again, they become a ready prey to popery. Is it any wonder that Rome is making such remarkable advances amongst Anglicans, Lutherans and the Free Churches? These are precisely the conditions in which she can flourish. Some are surprised that she is able to call Protestants "separated brethren" and think that this arises

**out of charity.** In fact, it is attributable to the Roman Catholic doctrine of "invincible ignorance". Those Protestants who no longer understand their own faith (and that is now the large majority) and therefore do not knowingly reject the teachings of Rome, are technically in a state of "invincible ignorance" and on those grounds may be termed "separated brethren". Of course, those relatively few who are not in that position, and deliberately and knowingly reject the pope and the teachings of Rome, are heretics still.

This is a very serious matter, for it shows the desperate condition into which Protestantism has now fallen and the very real danger to which ignorance has reduced the once live and flourishing Protestant Churches.

#### 4. PRIDE AND VANITY

The innate pride and vanity of men's minds is, says Owen, another thing that leads to a falling away from the faith. The design of the Gospel is to "cast down imaginations and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God". But the mind of man would be the measure of all things.

1. It exalts imaginations of its own which it loves and applauds.

2. It makes itself the sole and absolute judge, without desire or expectation of supernatural guidance or assistance.

Men cannot receive the Gospel where the former is not mortified and the latter is not eradicated by spiritual light. The Gospel must not be received as the word of man, but as the Word of God, which it is, with submission. Unless we deny ourselves and become humble and teachable, we can never be saved or acquainted with its mysteries. "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him."

There is nothing in revelation, says Owen, that is opposed to reason, but there is much that is above it. There are divine mysteries in the Word that we may understand, but which we cannot comprehend, for reason is finite. "Can men by searching find out God?" This is not because of the corruption of our nature but because of its constitution. But there are things in the Gospel that are contradictory to reason as it is corrupted. Reason is no longer just finite, but also depraved. It is not able to judge spiritual things, and is subject to prejudices.

So first of all, the Gospel requires men to believe in things that are above their comprehension, "things that eye hath not seen", etc. And secondly, it requires men to believe in things that are opposed to their corrupted reason, for their minds naturally act in contradiction to the revealed will of God in the Gospel with enmity and hatred. Thus the wise men of Athens rejected the doctrine of the apostle. The design of the Gospel, in all its special truths and mysteries, is to bring every thought into subjection to the obedience of faith. "If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise" (1 Corinthians 3:18). Thus, some when they have embraced the outward profession of the Gospel, find it contrary to their corrupt reason, and seek to re-enthroned reason. Some from the outworking of their own rational

faculties, withdraw their minds from a humble attitude. All ancient heresies sprang from this root.

Such was the case, said Owen, with Socinianism. What is above reason – the doctrines of the Trinity, the Incarnation – they reject as against reason. The same is true, in our day, of liberalism. They bring to Scripture the template of their philosophical presuppositions and their rationalistic notions of God. If anything in the Bible agrees with what they think, they accept it; if it disagrees, they reject it. In this way they make to themselves an idol, and apostatise from revealed truth. The pride of men's minds has been in all ages the great principle of opposition to, and apostasy from evangelical truth. A humble subjection of the mind and conscience to the authority of God in His Word is the only security against such a tendency.

In these several ways which we have enumerated here are to be found the chief causes of apostasy both in the past and the present. It is important that we be aware of them and use them to test the soundness of the teachings that are current in the churches today.

#### 4. IS IT POSSIBLE FOR A BELIEVER TO APOSTATISE?

I must say something about this question. The *locus classicus* for this is Hebrews 6:4-6, and Owen deals with it in the following way. He says that it is given as a warning and to stir up those to whom the apostle is writing. The privileges referred to in the passage and enjoyed by those who fall away, were "not such things as accompany salvation", which he is assured of in those to whom he writes, and who give evidence of persevering in the faith. "This whole description therefore," says Owen, "refers to some special Gospel privileges, which professors (that is, those who made an outward profession of being Christians) in those days were promiscuously (generally) made partakers of." What were these privileges?

1. "Once enlightened." Owen considers this was baptism, which in the early Church was called illumination. But it can also mean instruction in the Gospel.

2. "Tasted of the heavenly gift," seems to refer to the Holy Spirit, since in the New Testament "the gift of God" is understood to be the Holy Spirit.

3. "And tasted of the good word of God" – "to taste" is to make experiment of something, but not to eat it fully. "The meaning, then, of the character given to these apostates is, that they had some experience of the power of the Holy Spirit from heaven, in Gospel administration and worship." But in what sense were they said to be partakers of the Holy Spirit? Not, says Owen, with regard to "personal inhabitation", nor in respect of "spiritual operations". In the first way the world cannot receive Him, and therefore it cannot apply here; and in the second, since Peter said to Simon Magus that he had no part in spiritual gifts, neither does that apply. But since the Holy Spirit pervades Gospel ordinances, to that degree they have been partakers of the Holy Spirit, but not in the full sense. They are said to

have “tasted of the word of God”, that is, they have heard the Gospel of Christ preached, but did not sincerely obey it. They took some delight in the Word of God, but were not renewed by it.

Lastly, “the powers of the world to come.” This can mean the days of the Messiah; the Gospel age. They would have witnessed the things spoken of in the Acts of the Apostles, but were not changed by them.

Therefore, these are not true and sincere believers. There is no reference to them being born again, or called according to God’s purpose, or justified, or sanctified. They are compared to ground that receives rain, but brings forth nothing but weeds and briars. So there is nothing in this passage to contradict the general teaching of the Bible on the indefectibility of grace and the final perseverance of all true believers. Apostasy can only take place in those who have never been truly renewed and justified.

Martyn Lloyd Jones, in his exposition of this passage, differs in some details from Owen, but comes to the same conclusion. But before tackling this passage, he lays down certain general principles for dealing with, and interpreting all, such difficulties in Scripture, and it is worth our while recalling them and keeping them constantly before us.

*First, we must deal with Scripture alone* – that is, we must keep to Scripture and not allow philosophy to intrude. It is no good allowing human ideas of what it might be thought appropriate for God to do, to influence our thinking. Our minds must be moulded by the Word of God.

*Second, there can be no contradictions in Scripture.* We must compare Scripture with Scripture to get the true interpretation. One part of Scripture ought not to be so expounded as to be repugnant to another part. This is called “the analogy of faith”.

*Third, we must start from the great positive statements of Scripture.* There are certain things that are clearly and unequivocally stated in the Bible, and we must employ these to throw light upon the more difficult and obscure passages. In this way Scripture is its own interpreter; a principle laid down by the Reformers, which is further expression of the analogy of faith, but often neglected today.

An illustration of this is, for example, John 10:27-29. Here we have a clear unequivocal statement that the Lord will never allow His people, His sheep, to perish; they can never fall away because their security is guaranteed by God Himself. So it is an impossibility. Now it is from such statements, and there are many of them in the Bible, that we must proceed to interpret and understand those, such as the passage in Hebrews 6:4-6, that appear to present a difficulty. Lloyd Jones does this and comes to a similar conclusion to Owen; namely, that the passage does not refer to real believers, those who are truly regenerate, but those who have experienced something of the privileges of Church membership, its worship, preaching and ordinances, but are not grafted spiritually into the body of Christ.

On one point he differs from Owen, and that is on the meaning of the word “tasted” – “have tasted of the heavenly gift”. Of this Lloyd Jones says: “Dr. Owen

suggests that it means tasted but never thoroughly masticated and swallowed. I cannot accept that suggestion." He goes on to give his reason, which is a good and valid one. It is this: the same apostle says that Jesus, "by the grace of God, tasted death for every man". It is the same word exactly as in this passage. But our Lord did not merely taste death in his mouth, as it were. He drained the cup. "He experienced death in a manner that none other will ever be called on to know. He knew it in all its fulness and bitterness, in all its terrible character." I fully agree with that, and it makes Owen's suggested interpretation untenable.

The word translated "tasted" means "being acquainted with" and even "experiencing", and Lloyd Jones says we must give it that value here. These people have experienced something of "the heavenly gift". But what ever it was, on the principle of the analogy of faith, and the clear statements elsewhere in Scripture on the final perseverance of believers, we must conclude that it was not an experience which resulted in the renovation and regeneration of their natures. It fell short of the new and justifying faith.

"Nowhere are we told that these people were born again, that they were regenerate; nowhere are we told that they were justified and sanctified; nowhere are we told that they were sealed with the Spirit of God; nowhere are we told that they were adopted into God's family.

"When reference is made to true believers, these are the terms that are used in Scripture. For example, 1 Corinthians 6:9-11: 'Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you.' But you are no longer people who can be so described, says Paul. Why? What does he say about them? Does he say, You were enlightened, you have tasted of the heavenly gift, you have been made partakers of the Holy Ghost, you have tasted of the good word of God and the powers of the world to come? No! what he says is this: 'But ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.' But not one of these terms is used in Hebrews 6. What we are told about these people is not that they are unregenerate, not that they are justified, not that they are reconciled to God, but that they have had certain experiences which have brought them into the church and made them think, and made everyone else think, that they were truly Christian. . . . That surely is the only adequate explanation of this passage in the Hebrews."

Thus Martyn Lloyd Jones on the subject, and his conclusion, with the exception of the point that we have mentioned about the meaning of the word "tasted", is the same as that of John Owen. Those who apostatise, who fall away from the faith, are not true and real believers. The consistent testimony of the Word of God is that those who are truly God's children by adoption and grace shall persevere to the end.

## 5. SOME DIRECTIONS CULLED FROM OWEN ON HOW TO AVOID THE PREVAILING APOSTASY

We live in such days ourselves. If Owen thought of his times as apostate, what would he think of the state of things now? I see that the Archbishop of Canterbury says that the tone of our society is now atheistic. We are seeing a great forsaking in the land, and the enemy is coming in like a flood. All the Churches have lost many members, and are no longer able to disguise the fact or explain it away. All this would come as no surprise to Owen, who said that where there was a prevailing nominal Christianity, there would be, when circumstances changed to make it no longer of material advantage to be known as Christian, a great falling away. What steps then can be taken to avoid the prevailing apostasy?

In such times, says Owen, *we should above all be concerned for the glory of God*, as Moses was when the Israelites rebelled in the wilderness, and Joshua later, when he said, "What wilt thou do unto thy great name?" They were not so much concerned for the people, but for God's glory in the world. Yet the concern and preoccupation today seems to be with the church, the image of the church, and how that will suffer. But what if the image of the church is wrong, and God is judging it for its apostasy? Our first concern in this situation should be for the glory of God, that His Name should be vindicated and honoured.

If we do that we shall *mourn* for the present state of Christianity in the world for the dishonour that it brings upon the Cause of God. "Rivers of water run down mine eyes," says the Psalmist, "because they keep not thy law." God sets a mark upon those who so mourn. The Lord said to Ezekiel: "Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof." Likewise, our Lord said: "Blessed are they that mourn." Is there much of this spirit about in this present age of apostasy, or is there not rather a vain self-confidence, that given a break and the right marketing technique, some imaginative advertising, and some new gimmick, we can crack the problem? What happened to that great new initiative that was going to turn the tide – the Decade of Evangelism? The time for self-sufficiency is not merely past, but never was for the true Church. When the enemy comes in like a flood, it is only the Spirit of God that can raise up a standard against him (Isaiah 59:19). And He will do it through the meanest instruments.

*We should pray continually.* There is nothing too hard for the Lord, and He can save by many or by few. This is the way the Church of old was delivered. "I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace day nor night: ye that make mention of the Lord, keep not silence, and give him no rest, till he establish, and till he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth" (Isaiah 62:6-7).

*Then there is constancy of testimony:* an open and avowed profession of, and contending for the faith and the truth of the Gospel. "The public contempt and scorn, that is by a prevalent fashion cast upon some evangelical truths, is a cause

of discouraging many from owning the profession of them." How true that is. It only needs a few leading churchmen to express disapproval of some particular teaching or to distance themselves from a clear evangelical truth for many to back off from contending for it. I have seen this happen, and it accounts for the weakness of the public testimony in these days for the old paths. It also shows the astuteness and cunning of the opponents of evangelical truth in going for the names of evangelical leaders and involving them in such ecumenical initiatives as Evangelicals and Catholics Together.

Those who would be preserved from apostasy must also *keep a careful watch over their hearts*. In the beginning the declension is in the heart. "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life" (Proverbs 4:23). Literally: "Above all keeping, keep thy heart." Men show great diligence in keeping other things, but not their hearts. The heart is deceitful and wayward, which is why it needs keeping and constant watchfulness. We must keep our hearts awake and attentive to Christ, for it is He alone that can keep us in the hour of temptation. Do not trust, says Owen, to Church ordinances as ends in themselves. They are only means to an end, which is union with Christ.

Finally, in times of apostasy, such as ours is, *beware of the infection of national vices*, for their commonness will take off the sense of their guilt and remove shame. If we adopt indiscriminately the customs and habits of the times we shall be carried down stream with them.

These are some of the directions that Owen gives for avoiding the prevalent apostasy of the times.

We have looked, then, at —

1. The beginning of apostasy in the fall of man.
2. Its continuation in the "mystery of iniquity" that is still at work in the Church. I mean, of course, the visible Church.
3. Some of the causes of apostasy in all ages.
4. The question of whether it is possible for the true believer to finally fall away.

And lastly, some of the directions that may help us to watch and guard against the prevalent apostasy of these times.

## THE REV. W. J. PARKER

We were sorry to learn of the passing of Mr. Parker, aged 91 years. For many years he was a regular contributor to our pages as well as undertaking the majority of the book reviews. He was well read and held firmly to the faith once delivered to the saints. He was ordained in 1937 to the curacy of the Albert Memorial Church, Manchester, and exercised a faithful ministry in several parishes.

We express our warm sympathy to Mrs. Parker and the family at this time. They will be comforted in the knowledge that he is with the Lord whom he loved and served.

# The True Christ

D. J. BRADSHAW (Brooke Chapel)

*"In him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily" (Colossians 2:9)*

**THIS** awesome and Christ-filled letter to the Colossians is absolutely central in the teaching of the New Testament. It stands in a blaze of glory which is fundamental to the Gospel, and particularly to the great doctrine of the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. Before we can rightly understand this text, which seems to me to be the cornerstone of the whole letter, it is vital to grasp the main reason for its writing.

The letter was written from Rome. Paul himself had never been to Colosse. The church, under God, had been founded by Erastus and others, but it had become infiltrated with false teaching which had crept in from other religions and thought forms. Instead of the absolute purity of the Gospel, and above all the absolute centrality of the doctrine of the Person of Christ, it had become mixed up with bits of teaching from pagan religions and human philosophies, with strains of paganism and Greek thought. This kind of religion is known as "Syncretism", which means built up from bits and pieces from all sorts of religions. It was very much alive in those days, and is terribly alive today. People sincerely believe that they are alright, when in fact they are sincerely and desperately *wrong*. And to be wrong here is to be wrong for eternity. A greater catastrophe cannot be imagined. Syncretic religion includes some real elements of truth, but mixes them up with fatal error.

It is perhaps more widespread today than ever before, due to the widespread use of mass communication, mixing up of ideas and forms of worship. If you are a New Age thinker, or a Muslim, Hindu, or Roman Catholic, it does not really matter so long as you are sincere and try to lead a decent life – this is the great danger of syncretism. Even in so-called Christianity there is much of it today. Many have some sort of belief in God and in Christ, but they do not have *the* truth. This is particularly true concerning the doctrine of the Person (and, of course, the work) of the Lord Jesus Christ. Let us settle it once and for all that there is *no hope* for any human soul without faith in the *true Christ*. And there is only One such and He is marvellously described in this glorious phrase which I have taken as our text today. He is the One in whom dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. It is a vast, breath-taking statement, and I tremble before it with a profound feeling of inadequacy in seeking to expound it.

## *1. What, then, is meant by the fulness of the Godhead?*

We are taken straight to the doctrine of *God*. He is full and complete *in Himself*, and He is *filled with Himself*. He needs nothing outside Himself to complete His Being. We simply cannot fully take this in.



He lived from eternity when there was *nothing* else. No stars, planets, angels or anything – no universe as we now know it. So was it all just empty space? No! He filled all space – all of infinity – with His fulness. Did the Godhead then have to, as it were, move about in this infinity of empty space? No! He filled that infinity. He took no journeys, for there was nowhere where He was not already present in all the fulness of His Godhead. He did not move around in space, He *filled* it. We cannot properly take this in. The thought of a Being so vast that He has *no limits* in space or time simply baffles our imagination totally.

When He created this unthinkable vast universe with its stars and planets, He was, and still is, still infinitely beyond it – not contained within it. He spoke the innumerable stars, planets and galaxies into being from nothing and, we are told, called them all by name.

He knew all there was to be known, and He makes no new discoveries. He never experiments or “tries things out”. He has never learned anything new. His knowledge is as infinite as Himself. All the great discoveries that men have made have been known to Him from eternity.

He is utterly unchangeable – never grows bigger or smaller – never learns anything new. He cannot change for the better for He is already perfect. He cannot change for the worse for then He would cease to be perfect, and that is impossible to Him. His Name is *I am that I am*, and we read of Him in the Psalms: “Thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end.”

He is a “simple” Being, and by that I mean He is not made up of parts, or dividable into parts. He is not made up of love, grace, mercy, wrath and kindness as if these were parts of Him – all of these are essential attributes of His one Being itself. He *is* love and light and beauty and holiness. And He is not stretched out, as it were, throughout the universe – *all of Him is everywhere*.

So far I have spoken of what theologians call God’s incommunicable attributes – that is they cannot be communicated to any other being. But God has also attributes which can in measure be communicated to others. He is *love*, and He communicates love to others. He is *truth*, and He communicates truth to others. He is goodness and mercy and holiness and righteousness, and He communicates these in measure to men and women. The subject of God’s fulness in all His attributes is a vast one. Those who wish to take it further would do well to study Berkhof’s *Systematic Theology* – it is far too great for a single sermon. However, Paul refers in our text to the Lord Jesus Christ, and makes this tremendous, mind-blowing statement about Him.

## ***2. In Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily***

We have looked briefly at something of the fulness of the very Being of the Almighty God. But now, to our amazement, we are told categorically that in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ there dwells *all* this fulness of the Godhead *bodily*. And this brings us to the unspeakably glorious truth that there was nothing of the Godhead which did not dwell in Him. The Son was not in any degree less

than fully and wholly God. It is true that He humbled Himself to be formed as a human baby in the womb of Mary. It is true that His human body could only be in one place at a time. It is true that He knew our human frailty and weariness – that He knew human hunger and thirst, human sorrow, poverty, frustration and disappointment. But still it rings out as a breathtaking, world-shaking eternal truth that in **Him** dwells all the fulness of the Godhead **bodily**. He who, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, constitutes one eternal Godhead, dwelt permanently in the human body of Jesus of Nazareth. He is not less than God the Father, but one with Him in all the fulness of His eternal deity. It was not that the Holy Spirit came upon Him for a season, or that God the Father gave Him certain gifts and attributes. It was that the fulness of the very Godhead dwelt in His human body, and is and for ever will be united to it.

His was the full Godhead when they arrested Him. He could have blown them all to pieces – one word from Him and they did, in fact, go backward and fall to the ground. He was not forced to undergo the suffering, the buffeting, the scourging, the stripping, the thorn-crowning and the crucifixion. We may with reverence and godly fear say in truth that **God** underwent and submitted to all those things **bodily** in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. And He did so freely and voluntarily in order to save such as you and I, in His infinite love and mercy.

The fulness of Calvary is utterly overwhelming. I say to you today, Look afresh at the Cross. See a Human Being nailed to it in indescribable agony, yes. But see Him in whom dwelleth **all the fulness of the Godhead bodily**, bearing human sin in His body on the tree. How can salvation by so great a Saviour ever fail? In Stainer's oratorio, *The Crucifixion*, the Rev. Sparrow Simpson wrote a hymn from which I quote just a few verses.

“Cross of Jesus, Cross of sorrow, where the blood of Christ was shed,  
Perfect Man on thee was tortured. Perfect God on thee has bled.

Here the King of all the ages, Throned in light ere worlds could be,  
Robed in mortal flesh is dying, crucified by sin for me.

O mysterious condescending! O abandonment sublime!  
Very God Himself is bearing all the sufferings of time.

Who shall fathom that descending from the rainbow-circled Throne  
Down to earth's most base profaning, dying desolate, alone?”

See again, and may the Holy Spirit help us, the sheer magnificence of the Divine Person who died for human sin. And what are the abiding lessons for us?

### 3. *The greatness, the magnificence of our salvation*

Are you looking unto **Him** – our Lord Jesus Christ – for the pardon of sin, for peace with heaven, for eternal hope? You cannot look in vain. Your salvation is absolutely complete – filled out – finished – nothing left to do or pay.

What did this great, this utterly glorious Person, really *do* on the Cross? He, in whom dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily, gave *Himself* for the price of your sin. *Only He* could bear the weight that He carried into the sea of God's forgetfulness, so that it could truly be said, "their sins I will remember no more". He has utterly exhausted the *whole* of righteous divine wrath in all its awesomeness which was due to your sins and mine. There is now *nothing* to pay as far as you are concerned – the debt is absolutely cleared. And what is more, you are fully clothed in His divine righteousness reckoned to your account. He in whom dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily has actually completed this indescribably great work, and He could, and did so, because of the indescribable Person that He was and is.

He is mightier than all your sins, and all the sins of believers everywhere throughout all the thousands of years of time. He is indeed "Mighty Christ from time eternal". He was strong enough to bear all the punishment of all these sins and carry them away. And when from the Cross He cried "*finished*", it meant that all was finally done. For believers from the beginning to the end of time itself there was *no* sin left unpardoned, and *no* debt left unpaid. Nothing for believers to do, save only to look to and believe on *Him*. On the Cross surely He carried out the mightiest work ever seen in time or eternity. The mightiest act ever done in the whole of human history. Because He was the mightiest *Person* ever seen or known in human history for in Him dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. The children's hymn puts it with beautiful simplicity –

"There was no other good enough to pay the price of sin.  
He only could unlock the gate of heaven and let us in.

But I want to take the liberty of changing a word there, and say: "There was no other *mighty* enough to pay the price of sin." I do not know how to describe this power – it is beyond my utmost ability.

And having borne our sins and carried them away, He died. But it was quite impossible for Him to remain in the grave. So mighty was and is He in whom dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily, that –

"Death could not keep its prey.  
He tore the bars away –  
Jesus, my Lord."

And those wounds in His blessed hands and feet are now "still visible above, in beauty glorified" – in the emblems of honour to Him for His great salvation which He *accomplished*. There is a real and blessed sense in which that glorious death of His in love for you and me was not something done *to* Him, but something accomplished *by* Him. And now He reigns, and ever lives to make intercession for *you*, believer.

Let us look again as we close, at the indescribably glorious Person of Him in Whom dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. If your eternal hope is in Him alone, then your salvation is as secure as God Himself can make it! Your heaven is as secure as if you were already there in glory. You are complete in Him who is the Head of all principality and power. May God help us to see and rejoice in what is yet to be, when we shall see Him as He is, and be with Him and be *like Him*.

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## The Veil of the Temple

R. STONELAKE (Uxbridge)

THE word "veil" in English usually means a thin covering worn by a woman over her head and in front of her face. In the Scripture passages which follow, however, the word means a heavy curtain. I am not sure why the English Bible translators called the curtain a veil, as the Hebrew and Greek words for the curtain are quite different from the words for the woman's head-dress. But as the expression "the Veil of the Temple" has become accepted for that particular curtain, it is retained here. (In the Authorised Version, rather confusingly, it is spelt in the Old Testament: "vail".)

**Exodus 26:30-34.** Part of the Lord's instructions to Moses for the construction of the tabernacle in the wilderness:

"And thou shalt rear up the tabernacle according to the fashion thereof which was showed thee in the mount. And thou shalt make a vail woven of blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine twined linen of cunning work: with cherubims shall it be made: and thou shalt hang it upon the four pillars of shittim wood overlaid with gold: their hooks, shall be of gold, upon the four sockets of silver. And thou shalt hang the vail under the taches, that thou mayest bring in thither within the vail the ark of the testimony: and the vail shall divide unto you between the holy place and the most holy. And thou shalt put the mercy seat upon the ark of the testimony in the most holy place."

**Matthew 27:45-54.** The death of Jesus.

"Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Some of them that stood there, when they heard that, said, This man call for Elias. And straightway one of them ran, and took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave to him to drink. The rest said, Let be, let us see whether Elias will come to save him. Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost. And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from top to bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent; and the graves were

opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many. Now when the centurion, and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God."

**Hebrews 9:1-15 and 10:19-22.** The spiritual meaning of the tabernacle and the veil.

"Then verily the first covenant had also ordinances of divine service, and a worldly sanctuary. For there was a tabernacle made; the first, wherein was the candlestick, and the table, and the shewbread; which is called the sanctuary. And after the second veil, the tabernacle which is called the Holiest of all; which had the golden censer, and the ark of the covenant overlaid round about with gold, wherein was the golden pot that had manna, and Aaron's rod that budded, and the tables of the covenant; and over it the cherubims of glory overshadowing the mercyseat, of which we cannot now speak particularly.

"Now when these things were thus ordained, the priests went always into the first tabernacle, accomplishing the service of God. But into the second went the high priest alone once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself and for the errors of the people: the Holy Spirit this signifying, that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest, while as the first tabernacle was yet standing: which was a figure for the time then present, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices, that could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience; which stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation.

"But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us. For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of the eternal inheritance."

"Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; and having an high priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water."

We all know what curtains are for: we have them in our houses to keep out the daylight, if we go to bed before it gets dark or get up after it gets light, and to preserve our privacy when we have the lights on indoors on dark evenings. In the

**theatre** the curtain hides what is going on before the performance or while the scenery is being changed. In both cases the curtain makes a division between the outside and the inside.

The veil of the temple mentioned in the account of the death of Jesus was not the same curtain as the veil for the tabernacle referred to in the passage in Exodus, but both curtains served the same purpose. *The tabernacle* was made according to God's very detailed instructions (they take up four chapters in Exodus); it was all made in such a way that it could be dismantled when God told the children of Israel to continue their journey, and carried to the next stopping place. The veil of the tabernacle was 10 cubits (15 feet or about 5 metres) square. The Tabernacle remained in use until Solomon's day, when he built *the first temple* in Jerusalem between 960 and 950 BC. (This is described in 2 Chronicles 3 and 4). It was not a very large building, but it was very luxurious. In chapter 3 verse 14 we read that Solomon had *a new veil* made: "He made the vail of blue, and purple, and crimson, and fine linen, and wrought cherubims thereon". It was very similar to the original tabernacle veil. It may have been necessary to replace the original curtain because the old one was worn out, but more likely because the Temple needed a bigger one. The veil measured 20 cubits square (30 feet, or about 10 metres). Solomon wasted no expense in having the Temple made to be very beautiful and very elaborate. It contained many buildings in addition to the Sanctuary, where the worship of God was held, and it was surrounded by a number of courtyards, covering an area 500 cubits square.

This temple was destroyed by the Babylonians in 587 BC (see 2 Chronicles 36:19) and all its contents either destroyed or plundered. The temple was rebuilt by *Zerubbabel* in 516 BC (Ezra 3:8-6:14). Some of the implements of worship were not replaced; there was no ark and only one lampstand. This second temple was replaced by *Herod the Great* in 20-19 BC, more to satisfy his vanity than for love of God. He was the same Herod as tried to kill Jesus by having all the baby boys under the age of two years killed. Herod's Temple was built on the site of Solomon's Temple and was much larger, more than doubling the area of the earlier building to about 35 acres (15 hectares). The Sanctuary was 100 cubits high at its highest point, and 100 cubits wide at its widest, a tenfold increase over the dimensions of the Tabernacle. The veil was 40 cubits high and 20 cubits wide, and consisted of 72 squares joined together (12 x 6). These pieces were woven on the Temple site by a team of 82 women, who had to provide a replacement twice a year. Herod's Temple was destroyed by the Romans under the Emperor Titus in AD 70.

The *pattern* for this curtain was contained in the instruction given by God to Moses for the tabernacle (Exodus 26:31). It was to divide the Holy Place, the larger of the two spaces in the Tabernacle, from the smaller Most Holy Place. Moses was told what colours to use – blue, purple and scarlet – very vivid and eye-catching; it was part of God's plan that this should be colourful and beautiful. It was made of the best materials, fine woven linen of skilful work, no ordinary curtain, but very special. It was decorated with figures of cherubim.

There were three-dimensional representations of *cherubim* in the Most Holy Place behind the veil. In the instructions for the Ark of the Covenant (Exodus 25:17-22) Moses was told to have a cherub at each end of the mercy seat, that is, the covering of the Ark. They had *wings* which met above the mercy seat, and they had *faces*. It may not be correct to imagine the cherubim to be human-like figures. The children of Israel had been expressly forbidden to make any representation of human or animal figures. The cherubim may have consisted just of symbolic wings and faces, without a body. There are very strange figures mentioned in the first chapter of Ezekiel's prophecy with four faces and four wings. They had faces to show they were intelligent beings, and wings to indicate speed in carrying out God's instructions and conveying His messages, as angels are often described in the Bible as having wings. Wings have another function referred to in Psalm 91: "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust. Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler and from the noisome pestilence. He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler." Wings were also to protect; when Jesus wept over Jerusalem he said: "How often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chicks under her wings, and ye would not" (Matthew 23:37).

So the wings indicated that the cherubim were protecting and guarding the Ark of the Covenant in the Most Holy Place. The two-dimensional representation on the dividing curtain was a reminder of that *protecting presence* behind the veil. Cherubim were also placed in the garden of Eden to keep Adam and Eve out after they had sinned. So they were seen on the dividing curtain as a reminder that the people were to be kept out of the Most Holy Place, where the presence of God was in a very special way.

Nobody was allowed to go into the *Most Holy Place behind the veil* except the High Priest, and then only once a year. On the Day of Atonement the Priest went in with the blood of a goat which had been sacrificed, and the live goat, the scapegoat, was taken to a distant place in the wilderness, symbolically bearing away the sins of the people which had been confessed over it, to be lost for ever (see Leviticus 16). So the veil kept out from the presence of God everybody except the High Priest, and all those priests from Aaron onwards looked forward to the Great High Priest, Jesus, who offered Himself once for the sins of all His people.

This division between God and man only came because of *sin*. Before sin there was perfect harmony between God and Adam and Eve. We read that when the world was created everything was very good; there was nothing wrong with it. There was free communication between God and Adam; God brought all the animals to Adam and told him to give them names. It was not until Adam and Eve sinned that they were afraid of the presence of God.

The veil that was placed in the tabernacle and in the later temples is a type of sin, as Isaiah says (59:2): "Your iniquities have separated between you and your

God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear." The curtain reminds us that sin has separated each one of us from God ever since the Fall in the Garden of Eden.

The veil is also a *type of Jesus*. The elaborate beauty and highest-quality materials of the Temple veil represent Jesus' sinless humanity. Jesus was "*made sin for us*". Paul writes: "He hath made him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (2 Corinthians 5:21). At Sunday School once one of the teachers brought some rotten and mouldy food and asked the children to think up words to describe it. The strongest word the little ones could think of was "horrible"; perhaps the older ones were thinking of "revolting", "disgusting", "loathsome", and the like. Even the strongest words are not adequate to describe what sin is in the eyes of a holy God. Yet we are told that Jesus was made sin for us. Am I saying then that Jesus was made all of those words we thought of for sin? Yes, I am. Does that thought shock you deeply? I hope it does, because the atonement is a deeply shocking truth. Jesus had to be made sin for us, because that was the only way we could have the righteousness of God in Him. The first part of the verse above is the bad news – Jesus, who knew no sin, was made sin for us – Jesus, who was holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, was really made sin for us. The good news is in the second part of the verse – that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. If Jesus became in His Father's eyes sin in all its ugliness and loathsomeness, can you wonder that He cried out in His agony, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"? He endured all the wrath of God directed at our sins on Himself at that moment.

That is why we read in Hebrews 10:20: "... by a new and living way which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, *his flesh*". When the veil, in all its elaborate beauty and exquisite workmanship, was torn in two, it showed that Jesus' human body, perfect and sinless, which was being tortured to death, had finally yielded up His spirit. But it also showed that the division between His people and God had also been torn apart and was there no longer. Did you notice that it was torn *from the top* to the bottom? If we had gone into the Temple and had attempted to tear the curtain in two we would have had to start at the bottom because we could not reach the top. The tearing from the top was done by an invisible, supernatural hand, the work of God and not of man.

The body of Jesus had to submit to death to open the way to God for His people. Chapter 5 in 2 Corinthians says a lot about *reconciliation*; the letter to the Hebrews speaks of Jesus the Mediator. When two people quarrel, there is a barrier between them, they stop talking to each other, perhaps they seem to stop loving each other. Becoming reconciled means taking that barrier away; sometimes a third person is needed to bring them together. That is just what Jesus has done. He stood between a holy God and sinful people, He became the barrier, the go-between; he had to die so that that barrier could be torn apart.

What is the point of telling you all this? Is it just to remind you about one of the many Old Testament types of the Lord Jesus? I hope you have found it



interesting from that point of view, but my real purpose is to ask you *a question*, or rather to get you to ask yourself a question. There is a lovely old negro spiritual which starts: "*Were you there when they crucified my Lord?*" There was, of course, no question that those slaves were at Calvary in 33 AD when Jesus was crucified, but they were asking each other and themselves: were you there in spirit? Was it for you that Jesus was crucified? So my question to you now is: Were you there when the veil of the Temple was torn in two from the top to the bottom? I hope that as you read this you can say, Yes, you were there; you can see with the eye of faith that the dividing line of sin between you and the holy God has been taken away by the blood of Jesus, and I would rejoice to know that you could say Yes to that question.

But there can be only two answers to that question: either Yes or No; no in-between answers are allowed. Sometimes when you are answering a questionnaire with tick boxes you are allowed to tick "Yes" or "No" or "Not applicable" or "Don't know". But you cannot say that this question does not concern you, because it concerns everybody. Nobody *can opt* out of knowing the answer to that question; either you were there and it happened for you, or you were not and it did not happen for you.

Can you be content not to know the answer to that question? "Don't know" is not an option either. If you have only just this minute started to think about it, perhaps it is permissible for a short time, but you cannot be a *permanent "Don't know"*. Can you really bear to have that question unanswered once you have asked it? Surely if there were a question about an everyday matter which you wanted answered, you would not want to remain in permanent ignorance. If you were awaiting a letter telling you whether you had a college place or a job, when the letter came through the letter-box, you would not let it lie on the doormat indefinitely, you would be there opening the envelope because it was of the utmost importance to you to know the answer, and if the answer were not in the envelope you would be on the phone pestering somebody until you had an answer. If the person you love above everyone else will not give you an answer to the question "Do you love me?" you will ask again and again until you know. Surely the question about your interest in the torn veil of the temple is much, much more important than any other question you can imagine. If you really do not know, do not give God a minute's peace until you know for sure. Be at the throne of grace every day and do not give up until you know the answer to that question. The old spiritual goes on to say: "Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble". Doesn't it cause you to tremble if you do not know the answer?

Another answer which is not really allowable for this question is: "I'm not telling you". If you do know the answer, it is really your duty to *make it public*. If we have good news we ought not to withhold it. If we do, we are being disobedient. Jesus told his apostles to go and make disciples and to baptise them. That is the right course of action for us. There are very severe warnings for God's people when they are disobedient. Amos has this message: "Behold, the days

come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord" (Amos 8:11). This message was sent to a people who were disobedient, and their punishment was to be deprived of hearing the Word of the Lord. Perhaps you feel that God has not been speaking to you much recently, perhaps your Bible reading has not been as inspiring as you would like it to be. Is the reason for this that you are being disobedient? You cannot expect God to go on speaking to you if you are not doing what He has clearly commanded you to do.

On the other hand there is a very sweet *promise* connected with *obedience*. "Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine" (Exodus 19:5). What a contrast – between disobedience, which brings a famine of the Word of the Lord, and obedience, which makes people a special treasure.

Surely, if you know the answer to that question, you will want to obey and to know that you are God's special treasure. It is right that we should *respond* if we know that Jesus died for us and that when the curtain, the way into the presence of God, was torn in the death of Jesus on the Cross, it was done for us. We should respond in the way Paul does in his letter to the Galatians: "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:20). Paul almost anticipates the question in the spiritual – not only was he there when they crucified his Lord, he can even say he is crucified with Him. That is the testimony of somebody who believed and really could not keep it to himself. Again and again in his letters he testifies to his own conviction and assurance.

Isaac Watts' lovely hymn is thought to be one of the first in the English language which contains the pronouns "I" and "me" – to express the personal nature of Christian experience focusing on the Cross and the One whose flesh was torn as the veil of the Temple was torn in two:

"When I survey the wondrous cross,  
On which the Prince of Glory died,  
My richest gain I count but loss  
And pour contempt on all my pride."

If your answer to the question: "Were you there?" is still "No" or "Don't know" or "I'm not telling you", can you fail to be moved by the last verse of the hymn?

"Were the whole realm of nature mine,  
That were an offering far too small;  
Love so amazing, so divine,  
Demands my soul, my life, my all."

Meditate on the Cross today and on the stupendous events which accompanied the tearing of the veil.

## Book Reviews

***The Westminster Confession of Faith: Milestone, Millstone or Manifesto?* Rev. Hugh M. Cartwright. The James Begg Society. pp. 25. £1.50. ISBN 0 9526799 7 3.**

The Rev. Hugh M. Cartwright refers briefly, maybe intentionally so, to Professor John K. S. Reid's view of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* as a "milestone and millstone" (see his article 1982) and concentrates attention on the Confession as a manifesto. Subscribers to the Reformed doctrine and Presbyterian government of the Kirk in Scotland would agree with Cartwright's four general points and acknowledge that, with the rapid drift from Scripture *sola*, the need for systematic teaching of biblical truth is urgent – therefore a Confession of Faith.

The third point of the address, as expected of a former Professor of Church History and Church Principles in the Free Church and now a minister of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland, includes a historical survey of "explanatory Acts, Declaratory Acts, changed Formulas or just plain breach of ordination vows" in Reformed denominations. Throughout the address there are relevant but long quotations from many outstanding evangelicals.

For those not of the Reformed Faith, the omission of explicit references to the Confession's doctrinal and scriptural contents might mislead readers. The Confession was the work of biblical and prayerful men, who contended for the faith to the glory of God. The fine picture on the front is of Westminster Abbey, London, where the Westminster Confession of Faith and other important documents of the Church were formulated between 1643 and 1652.

The address, with thirty endnotes, is well constructed and advocates strict adherence to the Confession by ministers and elders.

D.L.W.

***The Hidden Pathway.* Compiled by G. D. Buss. Gospel Standard Trust Publications. pp. 189 hardback. £3.50.**

The recollections of a pastor's wife during the first half of the last century form the major part of this attractively produced book. Elsie Dawson, the wife of Herbert Dawson, pastor for 54 years of Union Chapel, Bethersden, Kent, recalls memories from childhood through teenage years to the subsequent years of married life. We are given a very personal glimpse into her spiritual walk, from the earliest beginnings at the age of five, the advances and setbacks, the hopes and fears, and see the way in which she proved time and again the all-sufficiency of Jesus Christ her Saviour. Dogged by ill-health, faced with near poverty, and frequently on her own whilst her husband was away preaching, Mrs. Dawson records the struggles and hardships, both of bringing up a family which grew to ten children, and of occupying the role of a pastor's wife. Her obvious love for hymns and her own poetical ability is revealed in the inclusion of a selection of original compositions.

The latter part of the book comprises Herbert Dawson's own testimony of his call by grace, and of his call to the ministry at Bethersden, and concludes with a brief appreciation of "My Wife – an Indelible Memory". Here is a book which will have particular appeal to the Gospel Standard Strict Baptists, but is also worthy of a wider readership and will, surely, in these days of affluence and ease, challenge us to look critically at our own walk with God.

J.P.W.

***Burial or Cremation: Does it Matter?* Donald Howard. The Banner of Truth Trust. pp. 32. £1.25. ISBN 0 85151 803 6.**

A useful little booklet on an important subject, especially as many today agree to cremation without sufficient thought. Mr. Howard is a retired Australian minister and has gone into this subject thoroughly and scripturally, warning against it. "The dissolution of the body is not a natural process which we are at liberty to hasten or delay at will. It is the punishment which God has inflicted upon sin" (Genesis 3:19) (page 23). He traces the history of burials throughout the Old Testament, ending with Christ's burial and resurrection.

In tracing the origins of cremation in England he mentions it was legalised in Italy in 1877 and the first Cremation Society was formed in England in 1874, the practice being legalised by Act of Parliament in 1902 but many Christians were against it on scriptural grounds. Although he says the Roman Catholic Church was against it for 100 years, he does not mention that that Church, considered to be a leader in opposition, capitulated to it in recent years, leaving other Christians more isolated – the Roman boast of *semper eadem* did not seem to apply! He also quotes Francis Schaeffer: "The spread of Christianity in Europe can be established by examining the cemeteries: Romans burned their dead while Christians buried theirs" (page 14). Howard adds: "Christian burial was one further custom to accentuate the difference between believers and those around them. In itself it served as a protest against paganism and was recognised as such."

The author gives counsel on the need to grieve and to plan one's own funeral – his approach being based on the glorious privilege of being united to Christ in His death, burial and resurrection.

One small criticism is the use of modern versions; e.g., when he quotes 1 Corinthians 15:17: "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile" (NIV) (page 23), the words seem to lose some of their force. What could be clearer than the bold, grand words of the AV, "If Christ be not raised, your faith is vain"? The prayer in one of Toplady's hymns is apt: "Prepare me, gracious God, to stand before Thy face." Highly commended.

D.C.R.

**Romans 12 – Christian Conduct.** D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones. The Banner of Truth Trust. pp. ii+513 hardback. £19.95. ISBN 0 85151 794 3.

This twelfth volume in the series is the longest to date. The thirty-five addresses begin with an explanation of why it has taken so long to expound this epistle – it is a synopsis of the whole Gospel, and so must be unpacked carefully; the first ten chapters are an exposition of the first two verses.

Romans is usually divided between the first eleven chapters (doctrinal) and the remaining five (practical). Many conservative evangelical preachers today do reasonably well at the doctrinal part of their sermons, but many are weak on application, which is either non-existent or mostly irrelevant. ML-J's prime concern is to bring home the unavoidable connection between doctrine and practice: "Our conduct as Christians is always a deduction from our doctrine" (page 26). Living differently to doctrinal knowledge is condemned: "Fancy glorying in a knowledge of doctrine that does not affect your life! The thing is ludicrous" (page 27). The previous eleven chapters lay the basis for the practical teaching beginning here. The aim is to conform the will, and "the will is determined ultimately by the mind and by the heart" (page 34).

Not only is this volume a valuable addition to any preacher's library as a tool for expounding Romans, it is also a valuable lesson in how to apply the Christian Gospel to our hearers. There is an error on page 58: for "Paul" read "Peter".

E.J.M.

**Southern Presbyterian Leaders 1683-1911.** Henry Alexander White. The Banner of Truth Trust. pp. 512 hardback. £13.50. ISBN 0 85151 795 1.

First published in 1911, this book provides a fascinating history of the Southern Presbyterian Church in the United States from its establishment in the latter part of the 17th century to the beginning of the 20th century. The author, by means of biographical sketches, interwoven with historical narrative, paints a picture of hardship, courage, faith and perseverance through many turbulent years, describing how the Churches spread from the eastern seaboard right across the southern states. From the time when Francis Makemie, an Ulster Scot, organised Churches at Snow Hill, Maryland, and Pocomoke, Virginia, the preaching of the Gospel was carried forward into the towns and villages. Makemie himself, like many after him, suffered persecution, being imprisoned for the "crime" of preaching in New York, and though cleared of any wrong-doing was fined \$400 to meet the expense of the trial! Familiar names are expectedly encountered – Archibald Alexander, James H. Thornwell, William S. Plumer, Robert L. Dabney, as well as less well-known ones such as David Caldwell, Moses Hoge, Benjamin Palmer. Others appear, perhaps, unexpectedly – Flora

McDonald, who aided Bonnie Prince Charlie in his escape after the Battle of Culloden in 1746, was in later years a member of the congregation at the Barbacue Church on the Cape Fear River.

The influence of the Churches was profound. For example, David Caldwell established a classical school in his own home and of his students five became state governors, several were made judges, some fifty became ministers of the Gospel, and others lawyers and doctors. In the second half of the 18th century the movement towards independence from British rule was led by the Scotch-Irish Presbyterians of Virginia and North Carolina, many losing their lives before their aim was achieved. Again, in the Civil War, 100 years later, the Southern Presbyterians played a prominent part in defence of the Confederacy. Dabney was chief staff officer in General Stonewall Jackson's army, and he, like many other pastors, took on the role of army chaplain during the conflict.

The book is well produced with an attractive cover, though the inside typeface used gives it a somewhat old-fashioned look. Many of the more than fifty chapters are short, which makes for quite easy reading, and portraits of the more famous men are included. However, at times the multiplicity of names and geographical locations becomes somewhat overwhelming and the publishers could well have provided some sketch maps to assist the reader. For those with a special interest in the work of God in the United States, this is a valuable reference book, but for the general reader, perhaps the money could be better spent elsewhere.

J.P.W.

## JOHN FRITH – SCHOLAR AND MARTYR

by BRIAN RAYNOR

*£14.95. 176pp, illustrated, hardback*

*Available through the Secretary, "Holme Regis", Old School Lane,  
Stanford, Biggleswade, Beds. SG18 9JL*

Although Frith deserves prominence, there is little available – in print now – concerning him. He was an outstanding Cambridge mathematics scholar, who translated into English the influential work on *Justification by Faith*, by Patrick Hamilton, the Scottish Reformer, and in addition helped Tyndale translate the Bible.

His writings, for which he was hounded by Sir Thomas More, then cruelly treated and burnt whilst still a young man, posthumously influenced the other reformers, and thus the 39 Articles of the Church of England.

## FROM THE SECRETARY'S DESK

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*The Secretary is responsible for all the administration of the Trust, including the accounts. The records are currently held on a home computer running Microsoft Works database software. Please pray that the Trustees will be led to someone who has a heart for the Gospel and the Magazine's long history. Any communication should be sent to:*

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