

MARCH-APRIL 2018

£1.50

The Gospel Magazine



Peter's Denial of Christ • The Olive Tree • Former Days

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1766–2018

*Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.
Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God.
Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*

These texts, which have been associated for so many years with *The Gospel Magazine*, give some indication of what this bi-monthly stands for. We seek to present the Lord Jesus as the only Saviour for a lost world: to edify the people of God; and to promote unity among believers, 'the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace'.

The Gospel Magazine is believed to be the oldest religious periodical still being published. One distinguished former editor was the Rev. Augustus Toplady, whose famous hymn, 'Rock of Ages cleft for me, Let me hide myself in Thee', was first published in these pages.

The Trust Deed of *The Gospel Magazine* is defined in terms of the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion of the Church of England, but the magazine itself is non-denominational. We aim to provide variety in unity, publishing articles from a wide diversity of past and present writers committed to 'the faith once delivered to the saints'.

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Gospel Magazine*, in Sterling.
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payment is appreciated.

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Bi-monthly, **£8.50 a year**
Previous issues, where available,
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Current copies **£1.50**
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THE GOSPEL MAGAZINE

Incorporating the Protestant Beacon and the British Protestant

Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.

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New Series
No. 1719

MARCH–APRIL 2018

Old Series
No. 2719

EDITORIAL

RECENT reports concerning the recreational activities of some charity relief workers in Haiti, and perhaps elsewhere, have no doubt shocked as well as deeply disappointed those who have read them. Such is the nature of those activities that they will not be named here. Suffice it to say that such behaviour, more associated with the decadent antics of ancient Rome, in the final years of her imperial decline.

The charity sector in our nation is huge, powerful and respected. People tend to give very generously to appeals, and the big annual fund-raising events seem to break records year after year. The senior leadership of the biggest charities are paid the kinds of sums one would associate with the chief executive officers of major international corporations.

Of course, the vast majority of charities do not feature in such lists. Most are small. Most struggle to raise the funds needed to be very effective in fulfilling their aims and objects. Some struggle so much that they are forced to lay staff off. How many that we

know of have moved, selling up in a wealthy area and moving to a less expensive one? Small charities live hand to mouth, and cannot sufficiently raise their profile to command attention, and therefore support.

Christians have long been supporters of charitable activity. The major charities operating today usually have roots in the nineteenth or early twentieth centuries, often—but not always—with a distinctively evangelical Christian motivation behind them. That Christian concern for those who suffer, or those who live with the consequences of fewer opportunities, is much to be commended; it reflects a scriptural concern for the fatherless and widow, the orphan and the stranger.

Over time an ever-widening gap has opened up between that Christian concern and the way in which charities operate and deliver their support. This has allowed specifically Christian charities to fill a gap. As those older, and often larger, charities lose their Christian distinctive, so they become

less distinguishable from more recent societies that have no Christian basis. Newer, and older, organisations that are distinctively Christian become more relevant as a consequence.

The great necessity for charities is to prove that they provide a public benefit. If, for instance, a scheme were to be launched to benefit home-owners who grew at least one monkey-puzzle tree in their front garden, it is hard to see how they would receive charitable status; how is this aim a public benefit? It is a reasonable requirement.

The greatest public benefit is surely the preaching of the pure and authentic gospel of grace. Any organisation that employs, trains and sends out missionaries and evangelists is doing more good to society than all the food banks and so on. Alongside gospel preaching goes the making available of the Scriptures, without which those who hear preaching will be unable to know the fullest extent of the truth. Christian publications, such as this one, that seek to promote gospel understanding also provide a tangible public benefit. Other areas of endeavour could be included.

Anyone involved with such organisations and charities knows that it is the big names who attract the support, and who are recognised by a sufficiently large portion of the population. People support charities, sometimes sacrificially, and volunteer time and effort to assist those less fortunate than themselves.

The problem with the current scandal is that it reveals something about the way charities see themselves. A child of God knows that all our good deeds are nothing worth. We cannot earn the favour of God, nor bring the Lord into obligation to us by anything we can do. We know that whatever we do out of love, and in obedience to Scripture, is nothing more than our minimum duty, even if

our motivation for so doing is not duty but compassion for others and thankfulness for what we have received. If a leading member of a Christian charity, organisation or society were discovered to have acted sinfully their former good reputation would not save them from embarrassment and shame. People would not say, Let's forgive him because of the good work he does. We would say, For the sake of the work the society does that man must go.

The big charities appear, if the present scandal is any indication, to think differently. It appears as if their guiding principle is, Having done some good, we are free to indulge ourselves. It is as if the good works done during the day are counted as offsetting the sinfulness of the night. There is something entirely natural about this, in a non-commendable way. My late father used to say that it was possible to judge the honesty of a Moroccan shop-keeper by the size of the water container; the larger the supply of water for passers-by outside, the less honest the scales inside. Human nature is ready to accept the concept of good deeds outweighing bad deeds, not least because it ascribes so much more merit to the 'good' than it does evil to the 'bad'.

Christians who know the Scriptures will not be so surprised that man is capable of such behaviour. Before we came to faith in Jesus Christ, and were made new creatures, who knows what we did, or might have done had the opportunity presented itself? When we see the way in which praise is heaped on those who give to charities we know that the principle taught by our Lord Jesus is unknown to most. 'When thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth' (Matthew 6:3). May Christ be our motivation in all we do, to the glory of his name. ¶

'GOD DID SEND ME BEFORE YOU TO PRESERVE LIFE'

A SERMON BY THE EDITOR on Genesis 45:5

The Old Testament records that part of the history of the world, and of the Hebrew nation, which the Spirit of God deems suitable and necessary for the instructing of all mankind in matters of eternal importance. For this reason the narrative sections, and the lives of those we find there, are both instructive for themselves, and for the lessons they teach us. Some, seeing the latter part, deny the reality of the former—they say that these are myths from which we are to draw lessons. Others, emphasising the first part, deny in practice the second, and linger long over the details of the events recorded but make no practical application of them for the benefit of anyone. The life of Joseph, and his many and varied experiences, are both of interest as historical facts, and for the lessons they teach. Since we are to find Christ in all the Scripture, for they testify of him (John 5:39), there can be nothing more important than seeing our Saviour displayed here.

We find Christ displayed in the life of Joseph in two things—the sufferings he endured, and the work he accomplished.

1. The sufferings of Joseph

The sufferings of Joseph began *because his father would show that his beloved son was different from all others*. He dressed him in a garment that set him apart. Whether it was of many colours or pieces, let the linguists determine; the effect of this garment was that Joseph enjoyed his father's love apart from works, while his brothers laboured for their father's love. It was they who were out

tending the flocks, and he who was at home, Genesis 37:12–14.

The sufferings of Joseph were made worse by *the hatred of his brethren*. This hatred had its origin in that display of partial rather than impartial love, 37:3–4. It was made hotter by Joseph's dreams, which he recounted to his parents and siblings, 5–11. It was not that he shared his dreams that bothered them, but that his dreams showed him to be better than them. The day would come when his parents and brethren would bow down to him, a notion abhorrent to the pride of the heart.

The sufferings of Joseph were made worse still by *the envious actions of his brothers*. Pontius Pilate knew that our Lord was delivered to him by the Jews for envy, Matthew 27:18. Envy can lead to terrible actions. Their action was to sell him as a slave, and they considered themselves well rid of him.

The sufferings of Joseph increased further *because of his love for the Lord God*. When in the house of Potiphar, undertaking his master's business, he found himself in a serious situation. By choosing to honour God he condemned himself in the eyes of his master—or at least, gave his mistress a (false) ground on which to accuse him, 39:7–20. For this he was cast into prison. No doubt he was expected to die there.

The sufferings of Joseph continued *because of the faithlessness of men*. When in prison he showed himself to be honourable and trustworthy, so much so that the keeper of the prison left Joseph to take all responsibility for what happened to the inmates,

39:21–23. When two notable prisoners came, the baker and the butler to Pharaoh, they made known the dreams they had dreamed, and Joseph correctly interpreted them. According to his interpretation the baker was put to death, and the butler restored. Joseph's final words to the butler had been, 'Think on me when it shall be well with thee, and shew kindness, I pray thee, unto me, and make mention of me unto Pharaoh, and bring me out of this house...' (40:14). Of course, the butler forgot, as many do who have found a temporary blessing in Christ, but who then quickly forget their vows and tears, and act as if they had this blessing on some other ground.

To all this we can add one other great suffering endured by Joseph, which was that *he was cut off from his father and brethren for many years*. This would not have been a cause of suffering to him had he been of the same spirit as his brethren, who only thought of him, if indeed any of them ever did, with a sense of guilt and shame. Joseph, however, never ceased to love his father and brothers, in spite of all he suffered. See how he could scarcely keep from pouring out his heart to them when he first saw them, 42:7, 43:40. He had to put on a hard face at the first meeting, and he sought privacy to weep at the second. This is all the more remarkable considering that his father's unwise love, and his brethren's terrible jealousy, were the cause of his sufferings. We would understand if he had used his power to condemn them, and we marvel at the love he retained for them in the face of so much provocation.

So much for the sufferings endured by Joseph. We turn now to the second part.

2. The work he accomplished

That Joseph accomplished any work might have been a source of wonder to his brothers,

who had never seen him do anything while he was with them. However, there is a great difference between not doing and not being capable of doing. Joseph was, by the gracious providence of God, more than capable. If we wonder why he was able to manage a household, and one that would, no doubt, have involved many servants and expenses, remember that he came from a large family, with many servants, and would have known how to manage such a household. He was prepared for this, whether he knew it or not. As to the work itself, it amounted to the preservation of life, as our text declares. Within that purpose we see a number of parts.

Joseph knew the will of God. The dreams of Pharaoh were a divine revelation—not a revelation of the divine, but *from* God. We have the Scripture, the written record of God's revelation to his creation. The Scripture is, at its oldest, very ancient, and it seems beyond marvellous to many today that it should be so old. However, if we rightly take and understand the doctrine of the providential preservation of Scripture, it is no wonder to us; our heavenly Father has preserved his Word in a pure and complete form, in spite of the ravages of time and the enmity of fallen human nature. Yes, there are supposed alternatives, in the form of manuscripts which some hold to be more ancient and more authentic, but if we know anything of Church history in the first five or so centuries AD, we know that we cannot trust the minority text. God has given us a pure Word, and for this we should be truly thankful.

Joseph knew the will of God, not by innate cleverness, nor by any means; he knew it because God revealed it to him. In both the cases of the baker and butler, and of Pharaoh, the Lord gave Joseph understanding. He said as much to the two men in prison, 40:8—'Do not interpretations belong to God?' Thus he

gave God the glory before he had even heard what the two men had dreamed. Our Lord Jesus gave the true meaning of God's Word to the people of his day, as, for instance, in the interpretation of the Law we have in Matthew 5:21–48.

The will of God that was revealed to Joseph was the coming of judgment and death. A great and terrible famine was going to overtake Egypt, and it would last for seven years. Before it came, however, there would be seven years of abundant harvests. Had the nation not known that the seven lean years would follow the seven fat, they would in all probability have squandered the blessing in the mistaken belief that this was the new future, and that wealth and happiness were assured to them. Since Joseph had foretold the seven good years, they believed him concerning the seven bad year to come. There are many who enjoy the blessings of this life without any thought to the judgment yet to come. Those of us who have received the revelation of the divine will, in that we have read and believed the Scriptures, know that we shall be called to account one day. By God's grace we have taken the appropriate action to be found safe in that day, having fled to Jesus for redemption.

Joseph spoke with authority. How else do we explain a despised Hebrew prisoner being given all the power in the great kingdom of Egypt, coming second only to Pharaoh himself? Those who hear Christ speak and teach declared, 'Never man spake like this man' (John 7:46), and said that 'he taught them as one that had authority, and not as the scribes' (Mark 1:22). We should not think of Joseph as possessing a natural authority or commanding presence, rather that he was endowed with authority from on high. Moses would be granted this same authority to stand before Pharaoh and command the release of

the people. The reason why authority is given is not that the speaker might be elevated, but that the truth he speaks might be received as the truth, believed on, and acted on. One of the terrible effects of the liberal attitude to the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the familiar way in which he is addressed in worship, and spoken of in writing and sermons, is that people no longer consider him to possess any authority. Only a right view of Christ, in his offices and his majestic glory, will preserve us from such error.

Joseph was wise in his counsel. He advised the doing of four things.

i. *Let Pharaoh look out a man discreet and wise*, 41:33. That is, a man who is clear-minded and wise. It would be easy to begin to panic in the face of such a future, but the salvation of the nation depends on having a clear-minded person, who will act wisely in the circumstances. The Scriptures set before us many types of the Redeemer, as Moses, David and Josiah, but none of them were both discreet and wise in all things. Only Jesus Christ is truly discreet and wise, and therefore only he is set before us as the true Saviour. He could discern the thoughts of men's hearts, and understood the true nature of their questions and actions.

ii. *Set him over the land of Egypt*, 41:33. He must be given true authority. Many are willing to receive the blessings of Christ, in so far as they understand those blessings, but how many submit to his lawful rule in every area of life? The discreet and wise man must be allowed to exercise his wisdom and discretion, so that those who need his work will benefit from it.

iii. *Let him appoint officers over the land*, 41:34. Not that he is not capable of doing the work himself, but the provision of suitable persons to carry out the will of this discreet and wise person is a great aid to those

who need that help. Moses was advised by his father-in-law to appoint men under him, to take on the burden of the more mundane matters demanding attention. Our Lord chose out twelve disciples, and they appointed others after them, that the work of the gospel might continue and spread through all the world. The lack of suitable ministers today is evidence of the hand of God being against us, and the need ought to drive us to prayer, and to repentance. Let only those who the Lord chooses dare to take up the office of minister in the Church. Let all who are appointed know that they serve the Lord who chose them. They are to do his bidding, enact his will, and live according to his command.

iv. *Lay up corn*, 41:35. This corn is the fifth part of the land, the benefit of the years of plenty. If one fifth is taken up, four fifths remain to feed the nation during the years of plenty. But note that Joseph does not advise Pharaoh to command the people to make this provision for themselves, but to appoint a suitable person to oversee it, and guard it. Greed, fear or the hope of short-term gain would mean that much of the plenty would be lost long before the famine came. The ministers of God are to lay in store all that is needful against the lean times. In practice, this means being students of God's Word, so that they are able to teach it readily. It means instructing the people in all the necessary matters of the Christian faith, not just those that are popular or fashionable. Some do not like to hear of sin, unless it is to condemn the sins they disapprove in others. Some are content to hear of the love of Christ, but not of the warnings of wrath to come. The whole counsel of God must be set forth, and God's ministers must bring forth things old and new from their treasures. They must prepare the generation before them to instruct the generation that will come after. They must

continue to build the Church, as far as it is our calling to do so.

More than that, we all need to ensure we have laid up corn, in that we have laid up treasure in heaven. There must be that depositing of all we long for, hope and love, in the place where it is guarded and kept against all loss. The things of this earth will pass, and nothing here will outlast the final judgment. Only that which has right and title to heaven will be kept safe. Our only entrance into this glorious hope is Jesus Christ. If we have faith in him, if our sins are forgiven for Christ's sake, and if we are children of God by grace, then we have treasure laid up in heaven. But let us be sure that we know this is our treasure. Let our affection be set on things above, and not on things beneath. Let Christ be first and last in all we say and do. Let us lay up corn, as wise, discreet Joseph taught Pharaoh.

Joseph was faithful in his actions. Being appointed to the very office he had advised, he discharged all his duty faithfully. The grain stores were built, the plentiful harvests were gathered and stored, and, when the time came, the grain was made available to all who came seeking it. This was not just the Egyptians, but included Jacob's family from Canaan, and not doubt others in the region. In particular, note the faithfulness of his actions towards his own family. He did not deny them the grain they needed, even though he accused them of spying. He restored the money they paid for the grain, and, according to the testimony of his steward, who said, 43:23, 'I had your money', paid the price himself.

In all his actions towards his brothers Joseph allowed their sense of guilt concerning their behaviour towards him to work on their consciences. They came to the point when they had to face up to their wickedness,

and accept that they were greatly at fault. In all this Joseph only masked his love for them, he never acted without love. So does Christ, in all his dealings with us, work them for our good. We may be pained, and wish things were done differently, but all is done for our good. The faithfulness of Christ in his dealings with us is a mark of his graciousness and love towards sinners. Let us be encouraged by it to trust him more, and to love him more.

Finally, note that *Joseph was successful in all he did*. The goal was to save alive his family and many others. They were saved alive. This was not a good plan that went wrong, but a wonderful plan that accomplished its purpose. So the plan of salvation, the sending forth of the Lord Jesus Christ, to die in the place of sinners, and to make atonement for their sins; to rise again from the dead,

and to ascend into heaven; to send down the Holy Spirit upon his own, that they might be new creatures and inheritors of the blessings of eternity. All this was accomplished. When our Lord cried, 'It is finished' from the cross, he was declaring the truth; redemption was accomplished, and the way to life stands open.

There is something better than the grain of Egypt, in a place more wonderful and secure than the cities of that great land. There is a better Ruler than Joseph from whom may be had the bread of life, for he is the bread sent down from heaven. There is a reconciliation to be had that is more important than the restoring of love between Joseph and his family. May we all know Christ through his gospel. May our hearts and our hopes be set in heaven. May we be children of God by grace. AMEN. ¶

PETER'S DENIAL OF CHRIST

I do not know the man (Matthew 26:72)

Peter's denial of Christ is a perfect example of the weakness of faith as it really is, compared with the opinion of faith we have in our minds. As such, it stands as a solemn warning to us, not to think more highly of ourselves than we ought. No doubt the background is familiar to us. Christ had warned the disciples, 'All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered abroad' (Matthew 26:31). This was not a word of condemnation, nor even of warning, but of fact. Not only did our Lord tell the disciples that this would happen 'this night',

but he added immediately, 'But after I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee' (v.32). This shows that this offence would be as prophesied, and so could not be avoided. It must occur, in that the scattering of the sheep can only happen when the shepherd has been smitten. Had the disciples not been offended, once key testimony to the person and ministry of Jesus Christ would have been omitted.

Again, the information that Christ would go before them into Galilee following his resurrection shows that he expected them to come after him. Their being offended in

Christ would be temporary, and they would come into his presence again shortly.

That was not the end of the matter. Peter sought to outdo his fellow disciples, declaring, 'Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended' (v.33). Christ told him that he would deny him three times before cock-crow. Peter replied, 'Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee' (v.35). Lest we think Peter to have been uniquely foolish and bold here, note that Matthew adds, 'Likewise also said all the disciples.'

What we have is evidence of a common attitude among the eleven disciples, than they would be prepared to die with Christ rather than deny him. The reality would prove to be rather different. Nine would flee, one would enter as known to the high priest (John 18:15), and that one would obtain leave for Peter to enter (John 18:16). Peter, who had been so bold as to lead his fellow disciples in his declaration of loyalty, would make the public denial, 'I do not know the man.'

As to the words themselves, there is nothing here that needs explaining; it is a simple denial of knowledge, as Peter seeks to distance himself from Christ as far as possible. Out interest lies in two things, the affirmation of willingness to die that preceded the denial, and the actual reason why the denial was forced from Peter.

As to the first, we have said already that there is almost always a discrepancy between our view of our faith and our faith as it really is. No doubt Eve would have professed complete trust in the Lord God and his word, right up until the moment the serpent turned her to look at the forbidden fruit as something desirable. No doubt Aaron would have affirmed his faith in the Lord who delivered the Hebrews from Egypt, right up until his fear of the people caused him to fashion the

golden calf. Faith, in our view, is strong; in reality, it is usually weak.

If we ask why this should be, let us consider the great error that underlies this readiness to fall. It is that we view faith as being something we have worked, improved or guarded. We do not see it as being a spiritual work done in us, but as a matter for which we take responsibility, and credit. In fact, faith is trust, and the test of trust is that we rely only on the object of faith in the moment of choice. Moses was presented with a moment of choice when he came of age (when he was forty years old, Acts 7:23); to enjoy the pleasures and benefits of being the son of Pharaoh's daughter for a season, or of identifying with and entering into the afflictions of God's people (Hebrews 11:24–25). He chose the latter, when all the world would have urged him to choose the former. Such was his faith that he saw through the glitter of present happiness to the true riches that are ours only in Christ. Here, Peter came to the moment of decision; did he love the Lord Jesus in deed, or in word only? How should he respond? His response, of denial with oaths, that he ever knew Christ, revealed the true state of his faith more than his former bold words did. Let us be warned not overestimate the strength of our faith, but to have an accurate estimate of it.

As to the second, note how Peter was brought to this denial. His path begins with a wrong view of Christ and his office—he was not come to be a king like David, and to lead the nation in armed force against the Romans, but to save his people from their sins. Had Peter understood this (as he would in due time) he would not have been shaken by the events that unfolded in the garden.

That wrong view of Christ was a serious problem. It misinformed all his views and decisions that related to it. When approached

by one called a 'damsel', Matthew 26:69, and told that he was also with Jesus, he said she did not know what she was talking about. The word translated 'damsel' signifies a servant-girl, a nobody in the eyes of most, who could pose no threat to Peter. Yet her words were sufficient to cause him to express his fear and doubts, and to deny knowing the Lord Jesus. Shortly after, another servant-girl told those who stood by that Peter was one of those who had been with Jesus. Again, he denied knowing Christ. It would appear from this that someone had informed the servants that Peter, the stranger who warmed himself at the fire, had come from the same place where Jesus had been arrested. He was known as one who had been with Jesus at that specific time. His denial, therefore, was unconvincing, since he had been seen by witnesses. Later, Peter would affirm his role as witness, 1 Peter 5:1.

The final denial came when those who had been told about Peter's presence in the garden of Gethsemane came and spoke with him. They had obviously overheard him speaking, and perhaps only to reply to the two servant-girls. His accent gave him away as a Galilean, and that could only mean one thing—that he was one of those who had come with Jesus of Nazareth, and so was 'one of them'. It was this that Peter began to curse and swear, and to deny Jesus for the third and final time.

Except, of course, this was not to be the last time Peter would deny the Lord Jesus Christ. There would come a time when he would deny him once more, and that would be the most dangerous time of all. When Peter came to Antioch he ate with the Gentile converts, but when Jewish believers came he separated from the Gentiles, and ate only with the Jews. Paul rebuked him to his face for this, Galatians 2:11–21, because he saw clearly both that Peter acted out of fear, v.12, and that the effect of his action was to deny the gospel. Why? Because to separate like this is to make the death of Christ of none effect, to say that a person is not saved because Christ atoned for their sins, but because they were obedient to a set of rules and so earned the reward of forgiveness and eternal life. By his former actions, of eating with the Gentiles, Peter affirmed the efficacy of Christ's death; by withdrawing from the Gentiles and eating only what the Mosaic law permitted, Peter effectively denied it.

This stands as a lesson to us, to be taught in the Word of God as to the true meaning and power of the atonement. This also stands as a warning to us not to over-estimate the strength of our faith, or of our understanding. Let Christ be our rock, our anchor and our hope. Let us bring every part of ourselves, our minds, our belief and our trust, to Christ, to be approved or reproved by him. May he be all to us. AMEN. ¶

The Gospel Magazine Trust holds a complete set of bound volumes of the magazine from 1768 to date apart from the years 1772, 1799 and 1824. Additionally the volume for 1783 contains only January–September, missing October–December and January 1784, which was the final issue before a break in publication. If any of our readers can assist in locating the missing volumes with a view of acquisition, please contact the Editor. The set of volumes is currently held at St Mary's Library, Castle Street, Reading, and is available for reference and study *by prior arrangement*. In addition a full set of the issues held has been scanned to the website at www.gospelmagazine.org.uk.

KINDNESS

CARINE MACKENZIE

Our friend Clark is a really kind man. Nothing seems to be too much trouble—a lift to church, help in the garden, a good turn done willingly with a smile. I am sure you can think of someone you know who always seems to have an encouraging word, sends a thoughtful email or letter or drops in with an unexpected gift. We love to be recipients of such kindness and thoughtfulness but do we seek to practise it ourselves?

God in his word often instructs us to be kind. We can be critical, or envious or bitter about someone but God tells us to be ‘kind one to another, tender hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you (Ephesians 4:32).

Joseph was treated badly by his brothers—thrown into a pit and then sold as a slave to passing merchants who brought him to Egypt. Years later Joseph’s circumstances changed. He was in a powerful position in Egypt, with the upper hand over his brothers. When they realised who this powerful man was, they were afraid that he would take revenge for their bad treatment of him. But no. Joseph realised that God was in charge of all circumstances. ‘You thought evil against me,’ Joseph told his brothers, ‘but God meant it for good.’ Instead of getting his own back, he comforted them and spake kindly unto them (Genesis 50:21)—truly forgiving them and shewing godly kindness.

Sometimes we can experience an act of kindness from a stranger. Two elderly friends of ours had a puncture in their hired car and were struggling to change the wheel. A young man noticed their predicament and interrupted his journey to do the heavy work of changing the wheel.

Jesus told the story of a man getting into trouble on a lonely road. He was attacked by robbers and left injured. Two men walked past but a stranger, a Samaritan, stopped, treated his wounds, took him to a safe place and left enough money for his lodgings. This act of kindness illustrated the meaning of being a neighbour, the one that the law of God tells us to love as ourselves.

David went out of his way to find Mephibosheth, his friend Jonathan’s son, so that he could show him kindness for his father’s sake.

Ruth was so kind to her mother-in-law Naomi, refusing to leave her on her own. She declared her determination to stay with Naomi and worship Naomi’s God. They returned together to Bethlehem. There Ruth in turn received great kindness from Boaz. When she was gleaning corn in his field, he instructed his reapers to let some stalks of grain fall on purpose for her to pick up easily.

Kindness is one of the signs of true godly love (1 Corinthians 13:14)—the love that God puts in the heart of his people. Kindness can be shown by putting others first. ‘Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love, in honour preferring one another’ (Romans 12:10). How prone we are to look after our own interests above all. ‘Me first!’ ‘I want that!’

Moses showed a kind attitude when he arrived at a well in Midian. Seven young women came to the well to fetch water for their father’s flock of sheep. Some rough shepherds came

along and tried to chase them off but Moses stood up and helped them, not only dealing with the shepherds but drawing the water from the well for them, putting their interests before his own.

Jesus told his disciples that the servant spirit of putting others first, was a sign of real greatness. He even did the lowly work of washing his disciples feet. If I then your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, he also ought to wash one another’s feet (John 13:14). He gave them and us that example of humility and kindness. Jesus is the supreme example of greatness. He ‘came not to be ministered unto but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many’ (Mark 10:45).

Jesus demonstrated the greatest love and kindness when he laid down his life to satisfy divine justice and save his people from their deserved punishment.

He gives a kind and loving welcome to sinners. ‘Him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out’ (John 6:37). We need to come to him every day for cleansing from sin, and he will have mercy upon us according to his loving kindness.

Bible Search

Find the missing word from each text. The initial letter from the correct answer will spell out a word found in the story.

1. To shew forth thy loving kindness in the morning and thy faithfulness every _____ (Psalm 92:2).
2. Put on therefore, as the _____ of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering (Colossians 3:12).
3. And the Lord make you to _____ and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men even as we do toward you (1 Thessalonians 3:12).
4. And he said, O LORD God of my master Abraham, I pray thee, send me _____ speed this day, and shew kindness unto my master Abraham (Genesis 24:12).
5. Now therefore, I pray you ... since I have shewed you kindness, that you will also shew kindness to unto my father’s _____, and give me a true token (Joshua 2:12).
6. And the _____ people shewed us no little kindness: for they kindled a fire, and received us every one, because of the present rain, and because of the cold (Acts 28:2).

7. And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became _____ unto death, even the death of the cross (Philippians 2:8).
8. Pure religion and _____ before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world (James 1:27).
9. I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment and _____, in the earth: for in these things I delight saith the LORD (Jeremiah 9:24).

CHRIST AND BELIAL

PART VI

BY THE REV P LOS

Supplied by A W DE LANGE (Scherpenzeel, The Netherlands)

We see it. Such as the King is, so are his subjects. The King hath written in the certificate of citizenship those words: 'In the world ye shall have tribulation' and in the book they are noted as being without possessions and are described as 'poor, destitute and needy!'

Behold, my reader, the description of the King and his subjects!

But now we shall turn the page and let us read on the one side everything that goes against flesh and blood, the other side shows something different.

The by the Father anointed One hath shed His soul onto death, and let his blood stream down the cross, and fulfilled the law of the Lord completely, so that He could say: Which of you convinceth me of sin? This he suffered and did in order to purchase his subjects as his possession, to conquer death for them and to impute his holiness and righteousness

to them. And when that was done, He ascended his seat and took his place at the right hand of his Father in the highest heavens, in order to prepare a place for all his own. There he waiteth for them all, when they have finished their time on earth and exchange the strangers land for their heavenly homeland and every grieve and oppression makes place for eternal glory and faith is changed in an eternal sight.

We find their names written in the previous Bible and if you desire, my reader, to read the long list of some of them, open the eleventh chapter of the letter of Paul to the Hebrews. There we see that they all went the same road as their King, namely through suffering to glory. Do not think that it was different in the time of the apostle Paul than now. Oh no, the privilege is the same for all: oppression in the world. And that shall remain

so, because the King wanteth to prepare his subjects thereby. Not one come in without oppression, because he scourgeth every son he receiveth. And because this is connected to it, nobody wants to come after this King, because one has to deny himself, take up his cross, not look after him. Otherwise he is not fit for the kingdom of God.

But if nobody wants to follow him, how do his subjects come? I shall tell you. They all come as not wanting and rebels, as enemies. It is only by his irresistible grace, that they are brought there, because the Lord God wanteth them there. And everyone will admit this freely, yes even more, that if his strong hand did not hold them, they yet would run away from behind him. This makes the wonder even greater, that that King desireth such subjects and therefor it is written that it is God Who justifieth the ungodly.

How are you, my reader! Is this your King? Or is it Belial. I think that many of you say: 'It is not very alluring to serve this King, because the world shall despise me!'

Surely she shall. In her eye it is the greatest shame to follow Christ. Not to be called by his name, not to take his name in vain, not to be religious. No, that is not a shame to the world. But to follow Christ, to bear his shame, to forsake unrighteousness, to cry with the publican: O God, be merciful to me a sinner! That is a shame, that is unbearable to her and if you come to that, she shall persecute you and shower you with contempt, taunt and smear.

That is not very pleasant.

No, it isn't. Nobody wants that. So it is an

evidence that nobody shall ever follow Christ by his own will.

No, there is nobody, who follows him by His own will. All people are by nature children of Belial and serve the king to whom they have willingly bound themselves to and forge their own chain, whereby they shall be bound eternally. But there the anointed King looketh upon them, for whom He gave Himself unto death. He seeth them amidst the flames of hell. He seeth them chained to Beelzabul. His reins rumble of compassion. He taketh them out of the midst of the fire, as attributes that are ready to be burned and already have received deep burns. He taketh them, healeth their wounds, bringeth them in his Kingdom, prayeth for them, striveth for them, watcheth over them, girdeth them with power from on high, clotheth them, careth for them and bringeth them onto unspeakable glory. And this he doth all, their King. They to nothing and learn from their anointed King a secret of salvation, that nobody is able to understand, than those who are lead into his cabinet and that secret of salvation is called: 'let ye be saved.'

And thereby the subjects of both kings are now revealed. Those of Belial seek to save themselves and they cast themselves in the eternal abyss and those of Zion's King are saved by their King, do nothing, but sink in adoration and wonder at his feet and cry: Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but unto Thy name give glory. And this shall be also the substance of the song, that they shall sing eternally, when the shall be no time anymore.

TO BE CONTINUED

SUICIDE AND EUTHANASIA

BRIAN GARRARD (Basingstoke)

Do thyself no harm (Acts 16:28)

SO cried the Apostle Paul with a loud voice when he witnessed an attempted suicide. While in prison for his faith, the Apostle and his companion had prayed and sang praises to God when at midnight there was an earthquake. This caused the prison doors to spring open and the chains binding the prisoners to be broken. On thinking that all his charges were escaped, the jailor drew his sword and sought to take his own life. Note the instant reaction of Paul who 'cried with a loud voice' and urged him not to injure and destroy himself. It raises the vexed and serious matter of suicide and euthanasia generally and we need to be aware of what Scripture teaches. There are only three accounts in the Bible of suicide and all were committed by evil men. They were King Saul, Ahithophel (David's trusted counsellor who betrayed him) and Judas. Each one is a warning to us and we ought to watch our own hearts and minds for nothing can justify self harm at all. At this point some may immediately raise the issue of insanity and the 'balance of the mind being disturbed'. This does need to be taken into account and we ought to exercise sympathy and understanding and we shall endeavour to discuss the matter later on. Even so this still does not excuse the taking away of our own life.

Historical background

The matter of euthanasia is very topical at present and as society becomes more godless and atheistic in its orientation so it will seek

to take the matter of life and death into its own hands. This is no new thing, for ancient Greece and Rome allowed euthanasia and made it permissible to help others to die in certain situations. Infanticide could be practised on children who lacked 'health and vigour' according to the Greek writer Plutarch and both Socrates and Plato commended suicide in particular cases. Voluntary euthanasia for the elderly became acceptable in many ancient societies and it was not until the rise of Christianity that the whole practice was deemed to be a great evil. Judaism and also Islam condemned it and it was not very long ago in this country that anyone attempting suicide could suffer sanctions under law.

The teaching of Scripture

Things have now changed and once again many great evils fill our land which brings forth the question, is euthanasia ever right and ought Christians to contemplate it? Indeed, is suicide in any form ever justifiable especially when others may help in this? From a biblical and Christian perspective the whole thing has to be condemned and regarded as unlawful. We have no choice in the matter for the following reasons:

1. *It is an act of disobedience to the Law of God as well as contrary to natural law.* As to the latter, normal behaviour leads us to protect our own life and that of others. To do otherwise is to act against reason and proper, sane conduct. Concerning the Law

of God, Exodus 20:13 says, 'Thou shalt not kill' which refers to the deliberate and wilful taking away of the life of another and that of ourselves. The Shorter Catechism, Questions 68 and 69 tell us in its answers that the Sixth Commandment requires 'all lawful endeavours to preserve our own life, and the life of others.' In addition, it forbids 'the taking away of our own life, or the life of our neighbour unjustly, or whatsoever tendeth thereunto.' The Decalogue still stands and applies to all societies, times, situations and religions and any who would act otherwise or excuse this sin will have to answer at the Great Judgment at the end of time.

2. *It is an affront to God's sovereignty for he alone is the Lord of life and death.* He grants conception and birth and then takes away life as Psalms 139 and 31:15 makes clear. God's understanding is infinite (Psalm 147:5) as is his wisdom (Romans 16:27) and this 'only wise God' does all things well. This not only includes our lives but also the manner and time of death. Some he chooses to remove from this world in a relatively quick and perhaps painless way while others are struck down with terrible disease and unspeakable pain. C.H. Spurgeon experienced times of indescribable pain in his life yet he could say, 'I feel more grateful to God for the bodily pain I have suffered, and for all the trials I have endured of different sorts, than I do for anything else except the gift of his dear Son. I am sure I have derived real benefit, permanent strength, growth in grace, and every precious thing from the furnace of affliction than I have ever derived from prosperity.' It has been my experience to endure considerable and continual pain throughout most of my adult life and at times been confined to bed for a week or more because of its intensity. In addition, I have known other more serious

and weakening conditions which have led to premature retirement yet I can also say with Spurgeon that 'I have often looked gratefully back to my sick chamber. I am certain that I never did grow in grace one half so much anywhere as I have upon the bed of pain.' The same principle applies to our dying, for God chooses the manner and the time of it and it is not for us to question that infinite wisdom of his but submit to it. We must be under no illusion and think death is an easy and pleasant thing for it is a serious and sobering matter. Refuse to be like the sceptical unbeliever who dies without hope and joy and leaves his relations 'whistling in the dark'. The death-bed of a believer may not be easy yet years of pastoral experience have confirmed to me that 'the end of that man is peace' (Psalm 37:37). Equally we have found that it is not the case for the cynical unbeliever who may arrogantly declare all is well but his end is a sad one.

3. *Attempting to take our own life reveals distrust of God to undertake for us in our final days and hours.* We do not go alone into darkness and oblivion but are conducted to the heavenly realm by God's angels (Luke 16:22). Some even believe that Christ himself also comes to greet his people but before that happens we are assured that we shall be given divine aid to endure whatever we might be called upon to suffer. 1 Corinthians 10:13 holds good for life and for death when it promises that God is faithful and will not suffer or allow us to be 'tempted above that ye are able' but will make an escape and enable us to bear whatever he places upon us. Therefore let us trust the Lord for all things.

4. *Suicide and euthanasia are the ultimate in atheism and unbelief.* By these means great contempt is shown for the living and true God who gives life to all. From a physical

standpoint life is a wonderful gift and favour from God and is the most precious thing we have in this world, the Lord Jesus Christ excepted of course. By stretching out the hand to remove our own life or helping another to do the same is shaking the fist at God, throwing his gift of life back in his face and bordering on blasphemy.

5. *The desire to remove our own life does not originate from good thoughts and an excellent spirit but from the darkness and bitterness of soul.* An example of this is seen in the Old Testament when the Hebrews were in the wilderness and complained against God's providence. In their murmuring they wished that they had 'died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt' (Exodus 16: 3). They recalled what they thought were better times but this memory was somewhat perverted and partial; then they resentfully accused Moses and Aaron of bringing them into the wilderness in order to kill them all with hunger. The goodness, promises and presence of God were forgotten and instead they sank into angry despair. This must never be the way however much we suffer, for once again we must affirm that life is a precious gift and is granted only once. Therefore let us strive to preserve it and allow only the divine hand to take it away. Christian believers who have God's grace in the heart will always view things differently and, however much they are tried, cry out in praise, 'As for God, his way is perfect' (Psalm 18:30) and 'we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose' (Romans 8:28). Contrary to the now popular opinion amongst believers, God appoints all things for us including the hard providences. Everything has been decreed by our loving Heavenly Father and fulfils his glorious purposes.

6. *Suicide and euthanasia always forget what God can and may do in his merciful providence.* Who can truly say the end has come until we finally die? Doctors have been mistaken and even the best are prepared to acknowledge this. Job was desperately ill but God restored him (see chapter 42) and his latter end was blessed more than the beginning. Charles Simeon, the noted Anglican clergyman, suffered for thirteen years from a weakening illness, but he continued to do what he could for the Lord. At the end of that period when he was sixty he suddenly and mysteriously recovered and was able to resume his normal work again until his death. Who knows but in the providence of God new treatments, drugs or therapies may come available to cure disease or at least prolong life and give a reasonable degree of health? God is omnipotent and can work in a mighty way. Simeon saw in his restoring no miracle in the common understanding of the word but God's mighty and remarkable providence, and we must remember that in our own lives. Providence! This is a blessed word and doctrine where we understand that God governs every area of our lives and upholds, directs and leads us in all our affairs. Leave all with him including the manner and time of our departing. Countless Christian believers have suffered without our modern advantages but did not contemplate euthanasia therefore let us glorify him in all things.

Extra material could be added to the above for keep in mind that many volumes have been written on the subject by highly qualified and knowledgeable people. However the treatment here of the issue has been kept deliberately short yet hopefully this will provoke serious thought and prayer. It is not possible to let the matter rest at this point for a number of reasons. Atheistic

humanism with its nihilism and a pessimistic view of existence no longer regards life as being totally sacred but in some circumstances can be terminated. Medical science has made tremendous advances in recent years but with them have come ethical dilemmas that need to be resolved. In addition, many are no longer grounded and reared in a true Christian faith but live and think as they please. To these and other matters some response, however brief, is necessary.

Questions and objections

What is so wrong with suicide and euthanasia; after all my life is my own?

This question is based upon a misconception for our life is not ours but God's. He has made us, maintains our existence and as said above, he determines the manner and time of our end in this world. Besides, none of us truly live or die to ourselves but everything we do and are affects someone else in some way or other. Dying by our own hand diminishes our humanity and that of others and reduces us to the level of animals that are to be 'put down' at the end of their lives. Death is final and serious enough without us hastening it.

It is cruel to condemn suicide and euthanasia especially when it is done for compassionate reasons. Is it not better to put people out of their misery than seek to prolong life?

On the contrary, it is not compassion and kindness to take away life but gross inhumanity. Life is the most precious gift that we have and the concern of all should be to preserve life not bring it to an end. The possibilities now exist as never before to keep the terminally ill comfortable and reasonably pain-free and the same applies to those who have conditions like Alzheimer's disease, etc. A society that is truly compassionate and

merciful ought to be ready to accept the responsibility of caring for the sick and dying until they die naturally. Of course it is hard on the patients and their relations but life is not an easy option and must be lived to the full even if for a number there is little fullness to be enjoyed.

What about those on life-support systems? Is it ever right to turn them off and thus remove their lives?

This question has the potential to lead us into a moral 'mine-field' with the difficulties as to what constitutes death. This is compounded by the modern ability to sustain the respiratory and heart functions by mechanical means. As a result the idea of 'brain death' has become accepted when brain activity is said to finally cease. Yet the recent case of the Belgian man reveals that it could be very dangerous to try and determine brain death and thus terminate life as a result. It was discovered that he is very much alive and communication of some sort has been established with him. So the moral problem of defining death legally becomes even more complex. Yet if we are to be consistent is it not right to assume that once a person is placed on a life-support system then they ought to remain in such a state until it is clearly obvious that they are dead? This may become almost impossible to determine at times but what is the alternative if we are to be unswerving in our condemnation of suicide and euthanasia? The consequences are too serious and shocking to take any other action and we do well to remember the history of Eugenics especially in Nazi Germany. The 'euthanasia committees' had the power to condemn and kill anyone regarded as a burden to the state and the horror of the 'Final Solution' concerning the Jews is still a dreadful spectre that effects us all. Those who want euthanasia legalised are

quick to condemn all these evils of course, yet we stand near to an abyss of moral problems and difficulties and we do well to draw back despite the promised safeguards. The role of doctors and nurses could be discussed here and whether they should be permitted to help people end their lives. The answer ought to be a definite 'NO' for their only concern must be the maintaining and preserving of life and the healing of disease. A reference to abortion is also apposite for is it right for medical authorities to be involved in the death of the unborn? Ought they not to be engaged in saving life instead of destroying it? The difficulty is that when a society allows the one it is very hard to disallow the other.

Keeping people alive on life-support systems for many years is uneconomic. Money spent on them could be better used in helping others in the fight against disease.

It is at this point that modern medical science throws up yet another difficult ethical problem. There will never be enough money to cure all sickness and disease and rising medical budgets will always be a problem. This applies to public health care and possibly private as well although not to the same degree. In addition, we acknowledge that life-support systems are expensive to operate and maintain but in that case, do we turn them off and allow patients to die? If we do so for monetary reasons then we need to know that we are advocating and approving a form of euthanasia. If we merely agree that this is an option then we are still guilty of the same. Difficult though the moral, ethical, and financial choices are we must always be consistent if we are to oppose any form of suicide and euthanasia. Those who want a change in the law to permit such practices are quite right to accuse us of being contradictory when we waver over the issue of life-support systems.

What about professing Christians who commit suicide or endorse euthanasia? Does not 1 John 3:15 say that 'whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him'?

The sixth Commandment, which states, 'Thou shalt not kill', not only includes the proper endeavours to preserve our own life and that of others, but it forbids the unjust taking away of our life and our neighbour's. To do any of these things is to make us murderers and as the Apostle John says, this deliberate and wilful sin reveals our true state. Consequently, professing Christians should take note of this and refrain from endorsing euthanasia in any way. As to the matter of Christians actually committing suicide, the question is a difficult one. However, I have known a number of fine and very genuine believers who have taken their own lives and also some who have attempted this. Others I have known about and in most cases, if not all, the mind was affected in some way. Some have been suffering from mental illness, usually clinical depression, while a few others have experienced personal sorrow sometimes because of tragic happenings. To a greater or lesser degree the mind has been diseased and they have not acted rationally, therefore we ought not to jump to wrong conclusions about their eternal state but leave all with God and also show great compassion, love and understanding. Even so, this does not excuse the evil of suicide or euthanasia and both ought to be shunned by us as Christian believers. Indeed, we must not even entertain the very thoughts of such things however much we are tried. I know that to suffer physically and mentally is no easy thing and to feel one's self on the brink of death is a very fearful matter but, dear fellow believer, never ever contemplate the taking away of your own life by any means. It is

a great sin, dishonours God and is a terrible witness to a watching and needy world. Be in no doubt that the Lord will forgive this particular sin as well as others but it is better not to have even tried in the first place. Should we be called to suffer then glorify God in it. John 21:19 says, 'signifying by what death he should glorify God.' So whether we live or die let us live to the honour and praise of our God.

Last word

Christians need to stand very firmly against

euthanasia and suicide (as well as abortion) and make their convictions known. In addition, they ought to pray for doctors, nurses, carers, families and the individuals involved in all these issues. Special prayer should be offered for professionals who are Christians and who may become involved in difficult ethical and moral choices in the years to come. Cry to God that we as Christians shall raise a gracious testimony against this wickedness and resist any pressure or temptation to have our lives ended prematurely. ¶

THE OLIVE TREE

JOHN HOOPER (Saltash, Cornwall)

To the children of Israel, knowing their Old Testament Scriptures, the figure of an olive tree would have been very familiar. It was, after all, one of the names that God had given to them: 'The LORD called thy name, A green olive tree, fair, and of goodly fruit' (Jeremiah 11:16). His visitations in judgment were likened to 'the shaking of an olive tree' (Isaiah 17:6; 24:13). Thus we see the olive tree symbolizing the family of God in the old dispensation. We see the tree growing and shooting out its many branches as generations of the descendants of Abraham were born, branches that the apostle Paul would designate 'natural branches' (Romans 11:21). These made the tree almost exclusively a Jewish organism as for many centuries God's people were limited largely to the physical offspring of Abraham.

Severed branches

But within those natural Jewish branches there was a distinction to be made. In

Romans 11 the apostle Paul tells us of some that had been broken off (v.17) while others remained on the tree. He identifies the removed branches as characterized by unbelief and indeed it was because of that unbelief they were broken off (v.20), but who exactly do they represent?

One possibility might be that they were individual believers who had fallen away into apostasy and were now cut off for ever from the Christ who redeemed them, but this is simply not credible in the light of Scripture. The Bible teaches that believers are preserved in the faith by their Lord and they will most surely persevere to the end. A sample would include the following:

'Teach me, O LORD, the way of thy statutes; and I shall keep it unto the end' (Psalm 119:33)

'And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up

again at the last day' (John 6:39).

'We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not' (I John 5:18. See also Isaiah 45:17; Jeremiah 32:40; Philippians 1:6; I Peter 1:5 and many other passages).

So if the branches that were cut off from the olive tree to lie dead upon the ground cannot be individual believers, what are they?

It is a principle in Scripture, sadly misunderstood and neglected today, that God gathers his people chiefly through the lines of generations. This also means that when he does call sinners out from unbelieving families, as each new convert is grafted into the olive tree by saving grace, it is not with a view simply to that individual but with a view also to their children and succeeding generations. This is taught throughout the Scriptures but a few verses will have to suffice here:

'The children of thy servants shall continue, and their seed shall be established before thee' (Psalm 102:28).

'But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children' (Psalm 103:17, 18).

'And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation... As he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever' (Luke 1:50, 55).

'For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call' (Acts 2:39).

This principle is in fact an integral part of the covenant promise that God had given to Abraham: 'And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee' (Genesis 17:7). As can be seen from

the quotes above, this was recognised as an enduring truth by both Mary in her hymn of praise and Peter on the day of Pentecost.

In Romans 11 too it is the apostle's purpose to portray this organic growth and development of God's people over a long period of time, indeed many generations, and to this end the picture of the olive tree serves him well. Those generations of the Lord's people are represented by the branches.

Family lines can and most certainly do fall away into unbelief. They can be and most certainly are broken off from fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ and his church. Sadly we see this in our own families, whole branches of whom may live and die in unbelief. But we also know it authoritatively from Scripture itself, New Testament as well as Old. In John 15 the Lord employs a picture very similar to that in Romans 11 when he likens himself to a vine, some of whose branches are unfruitful and must be cut off by the husbandman.

The language of cutting off is a powerful one and frequently used in Scripture. Throughout the chequered history of Israel there were a great many individuals who through unbelief were separated from the nation and from the fellowship of God's covenant and people. 'For evildoers shall be cut off...' (Psalm 37:9). One might think of Ishmael and Esau, of Korah, Dathan and Abiram, of Achan, of Jeroboam and Ahab. Not only were these men cut off as individuals but as family heads so that their children too were separated from the covenant people. In some cases they would give rise to new nations who would become fearsome enemies of God's people. Concerning such men God says, 'Let his posterity be cut off; and in the generation following let their name be blotted out' (Psalm 109:13). 'The LORD loveth judgment, and forsaketh not his saints; they

are preserved for ever: but the seed of the wicked shall be cut off' (Psalm 37:28). God visits the iniquity of the fathers 'upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation' (Exodus 34:7; Numbers 14:18). This is a principle enshrined in the moral law (Exodus 20:5 and Deuteronomy 5:9).

Reflecting again on our own families, we know all too well that when a relative brought up from his or her mother's knee under the nurture and admonition of the Lord, in the very environment of the gospel, rejects that gospel, living and dying in unbelief, it is not only that individual who departs from the faith of his fathers but the entire line of their children and succeeding generations. They are branches whom God cuts off through unbelief.

Returning to Romans 11 we can understand now that the severed branches of the olive tree represent those generations of ethnic Jews who, though outwardly members of God's people and of the offspring of Abraham according to the flesh, stumbled at the Stone whom God lay in Zion. They are the unspiritual, the unfruitful, the Christ-rejecting branches. In unbelief they did not believe the promises, and when Messiah came they refused to receive him and believe his gospel of salvation. They would not enter Messiah's kingdom so God cut them off.

The branches that remained on the tree, however, were those generations of faithful Jews who did not stumble at the Stone laid in their midst, but having seen his marvellous works and heard his life-saving gospel, they believed. On such branches belonged the shepherds who came to Bethlehem, Anna and Simeon, Matthew the tax collector and the other disciples, despised Zaccheus, and the dying but repentant thief.

Grafted branches

The faithful branches were very few in number at the time of Paul's writing, representing a mere remnant according to the election of grace (v.5). With so few limbs on it we might picture the olive tree as being a sorry sight indeed, a tree ready to be dug up and discarded. But what does the heavenly Tree Surgeon do? Does he abandon his old olive tree? Does he root it up and throw it away in favour of a wholly new and flourishing tree? 'Hath God cast away his people? God forbid' (v.1). In his sight it is still 'a good olive tree' (v.24). It is still a tree that has life in it. He loves it and has plans for it. He keeps it and in the place of the branches that he has broken off he grafts in branches from a wild olive tree (v.17). The old olive tree whose natural branches are Jewish now receives branches from another tree, a tree whose natural branches are not Jewish but from all the nations of the world.

Even from the outset of the covenant with Abraham this in-grafting of Gentiles into the olive tree was prefigured. God commanded Abraham that not only the eight-day-old boys born into his own family were to be circumcised but also 'he that is ... bought with money of any stranger, which is not of thy seed' must also be circumcised (Genesis 17:12, 13), thus initiating the idea of proselytes being incorporated into the people and nation of Israel.

Any definition of the biblical significance of 'Israel' must not fail to include this dimension. 'Israel' cannot be restricted in its essence to an ethnic community. Israel must include the proselyte who does not belong to 'Israel' according to the flesh, but is absorbed into Israel by process of ingrafting.¹

¹ O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing Co, 1980), p.39.

There is an important point here that we dare not miss. The olive tree that existed and grew during that old dispensation, which was Jewish, and the olive tree into which Gentiles have been grafted and on which the branches of their generations flourish today, is the same olive tree. It has lost branches, yes, and it has received branches from another tree, a wild tree even, but it retains its integrity and identity, 'For the same olive tree always remains.'² It continues to grow and develop in the same organic manner as before, still sending out its branches along the lines of the generations of the Lord's people, but now those branches comprise generations of Gentiles as well as generations of ethnic Jews. There are generations of Europeans and Indians and Africans, and so forth across the whole world, all being grafted by grace into a spiritual organism that was once almost exclusively confined to one nation. And these Gentile generations are given a solemn warning lest they too should fall into unbelief and be cut off: 'For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee' (v.21). This is a warning for us and for our children.

One Church

When reading Romans 11 we might possibly draw the conclusion that the olive tree represents the nation of Israel, but that would be a mistake. The olive tree has never represented the nation of Israel. When Gentile branches are grafted into it they are not made proselyte Jews, as though becoming members of an earthly race and nation. They are being made members of the church. This is evident from the fact that it is not blood and ancestral

² Heinrich Bullinger, 'The One and Eternal Testament or Covenant of God', in *Fountainhead of Federalism* by Charles S. McCoy and J. Wayne Baker (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), p.118.

descent that has ever caused a branch to remain in the tree but faith alone: 'Because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith' (v.20). This should be borne in mind when we consider the meaning of verse 26, 'And so all Israel shall be saved'.

That it is by faith that branches remain in the tree confirms the unchanging identity of the church throughout all ages. Whether in Old Testament or New, faith is the one thing needful. Moreover the root too is the same, and although the root is not specifically identified in the passage surely we can see Christ here as the source of all spiritual good, the fount of every blessing and never ceasing grace. In him alone the branches are nourished and grow. The tree grows today as it has always done and still some branches prove unfaithful and unfruitful so need to be cut off. The one great change that has taken place in New Testament times has been the grafting in of branches from the nations of the world, but in all other respects the tree remains the same.

That Gentile branches may be still cut off by the Lord through unbelief (vv.21, 22) tells us something else about the olive tree, namely, that it does not represent the church in her purity, as the company of the elect alone, but as the church manifest in this present sinful world. There are Christ-rejecting branches. The number of true believers as a proportion of the wider professing church is a very small one, just as it was in Israel of old. The idea of the faithful church being a remnant, a small remnant even, recurs throughout Scripture and today too the believing remnant is a small and side-lined minority, a little flock (v.5). Today too 'the daughter of Zion is left as a cottage in a vineyard, as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city' (Isaiah 1:8). But this is the way the Lord would have it to be. It is the way he has purposed for the sake of his own glory (1 Corinthians 1:27-29).

It is striking too that the professing church, the false church even, grows from out of the true. The branches grafted into the olive tree bring forth good fruit, but within a generation or two, as those branches grow and send forth yet more branches, unfruitful boughs appear. We can see the evidence of this in church history as again and again faithful churches and denominations have grown unfruitful, unfaithful to the Lord and even apostate. But once again we must say that this is the way that the Lord would have it to be so that the glory is always his alone.

If further proof were needed that God has

only one olive tree, it can be found in verses 23 and 24. There we find that Jews who 'abide not still in unbelief' but humbly confess that Jesus is the Messiah, their Lord and Saviour, are said to be grafted back 'into their own olive tree.' Thereby they become one body, incorporated into one organism, with Gentile believers. Whatever blessing God has in store for Jews will be found only in the church of Jesus Christ alongside believing Gentiles in the one olive tree and family of God. What a powerful metaphor this is, symbolizing the over-arching principle that the church of Jesus Christ is one, spanning old covenant and new.

TO BE CONCLUDED

PATTERNS FOR ORGANISATION AND WORSHIP OF THE CHURCH WHICH CALVIN SOUGHT TO DEVELOP IN GENEVA

WILLIAM T. FOLEY (London)

We need to discuss Calvin's doctrine of the Church in the context of his reform programme in Geneva. We see him in major discussion on this point from Book Four of his Institutes where he expounds: the true church with which as mother of all the godly we must keep unity; he discusses, too, a comparison of the false and true church; sets forth the doctors and ministers of the church, their election and office. He discusses the condition of the ancient church and the kind of government in use before that papacy; the primacy of the Roman Church;

the origin and growth of the Roman papacy until it raised itself to such a height that the freedom of the church was oppressed, and all restraint overthrown; the power of the church with respect to articles of faith and how in the papacy, with unbridled licence, the church has been led to corrupt all purity of doctrine. Calvin examines the councils and their authority; the power of making laws, in which the Pope, with his supporters, has exercised upon souls the most savage tyranny and butchery; the jurisdiction of the church and its abuse as seen in the papacy;

the discipline in the church; its chief use in censures and excommunication; vows and how everyone rashly taking them has miserably entangled himself; the sacraments, how infant baptism best accords with Christ's institution, in his view, and the nature of the sign; the sacred supper of Christ and what it brings to us; the Papal Mass, a sacrilege by which Christ's Supper was not only profaned but annihilated, the five other ceremonies, falsely termed sacraments hitherto, they are proved not to be such and their real nature is shown. Lastly, he deals with civil government.

Certainly Calvin leaves no reader in the dark as to what his conception of the way the church should be governed. According to McGrath (Ibid, p. 137), however, 'although Calvin deals with the subject of the (church) in the first edition of the *Institutes* (1536), he was then quite innocent of any experience of ecclesiastical management or responsibility, which accounts for the curiously unfocused nature of his discussions. By the time the second edition of this work appeared, Calvin had gained more experience of the problems presented to the new evangelical churches.'

Without question Calvin perceived that the basis of the true church should be where the Word of God was preached and the sacraments properly celebrated. There was no ambiguity in his thinking in these matters and this is clearly reflected in his writings. McGrath notes that Calvin has a 'minimalist definition of the church.' He writes (Ibid, pp.137-138),

the true church is to be found where the gospel is rightly preached, and the sacraments rightly administered—and understood to be included within the definition is a specific form of ecclesiastical institution and administration. Calvin set forth the 'order by which the Lord willed his church to be governed',

and develops a detailed theory of church government based upon the exegesis of the New Testament, drawing extensively upon the terminology of the imperial Roman administration.'

Calvin sets forth (they are translated selections from the Calvin *Commentaries*, pp.361-406) his views in a series of Biblical texts under the heading: The Church (1) on the condition of the church (2) the ministry (3) on preaching and teaching. Themes for Calvin's preaching would have comprised such matters as the Bible, the knowledge of God, Jesus Christ, the Christian life, faith, providence, election and predestination, ethics and life and church order, etc.

To Calvin the structure and administration of the church are set forth in Scripture and the ministerial government of the church is divinely ordained as is the offices of the church. Calvin went further than Luther, who had defined the church in terms of the ministry of the Word, by insisting that the same Word of God specified one particular form of church government. This became his tool in measuring the Catholic Church and the Radicals.

We need to understand too Calvin's concept of the role of the State and the Church. Clearly he viewed both as separate and distinct. He saw the role of the Christian minister was to preach the Word of God and the role of the magistrate was to govern according to its precepts. He recognised that 'man is under a twofold government' and that this is a divinely established order. The two governments are not antithetical, but complementary; their responsibilities were not competitive. The difference between the two was in their spheres of activity and means of action as agents and servants of the same God. The Anabaptists disagreed with Calvin in the

area of Church discipline; they believed it was the sole responsibility of the Church to discipline.

Calvin's view was (*Institutes*, IV. XX. 3) 'I ... commit to civil government the duty of rightly establishing religion'. His reasoning was 'the church has not the right of the sword to punish or restrain, has no power to coerce, no prison nor other punishments which the magistrate is wont to inflict. The object in view is not to punish the sinner against his will, but to obtain a profession of penitence by voluntary chastisement. The two things, then, are widely different, because neither does the church assume anything to herself which is proper to the magistrate, nor is the magistrate competent to what is done by the church' (McGrath, Ibid, p.152, quoting from Calvin). Calvin allocates to the magistrates two roles: (1) the preservation and upkeep of political and ecclesiastical order and (2) making provision for the teaching of correct doctrine. In Calvin's thinking the preachers had authority over the magistrates, or the Church had power over the State. It was the State's duty to pass laws which helped to extend Christ's Kingdom on earth.

When Calvin went first to Geneva his concept of ecclesiastical discipline suggests that it should rest with the body known as the Consistory which comprised pastors and twelve magistrates of their choice. The Consistory had the right to excommunicate anyone whose moral behaviour or religious belief were inappropriate. McGrath (Ibid, p. 151) writes, 'The magistrates, scenting a challenge to their authority, vigorously affirmed their right over all temporal powers. A compromise was reached, which Calvin interpreted as recognition of the right of the Consistory to recommend excommunication, and the magistrates interpreted as recognition of their authority to

excommunicate. The history of Geneva over fifteen years indicated how unsatisfactory this compromise turned out to be.' In spite of this, Calvin does not appear to have been a dictator, though some would question this in the light of his dealings with Sebastian Castellion (he criticised Calvin's interpretation of Christ's descent into hell and the canonicity of the Song of Songs) in 1543, and Jerome Bolsec (he questioned Calvin's doctrine of double predestination) in 1551, and Michael Servetus (he was burned as a heretic on 27th October, 1553, for destroying Trinitarian doctrine). Also, Calvin deeply mistrusted monarchy; he was not even a citizen of Geneva, but only a member of the Consistory whose influence and authority in social and religious organisation spread far and wide. The Puritans seem to have taken his social vision to the New World. From an evaluation of the evidence Calvin did not have any selfish reasons for his programme in Geneva, but desired God's Glory and Christ's Kingdom to be extended throughout the earth, a view which would seem to accord with the doctrine of postmillennialism or perhaps reconstructionism (theonomy) today.

Finally, we need to discuss in particular Calvin's view of the Lord's Supper. Calvin deals with this specifically in his *Institutes* (IV. XVII. 1-50). The Catholic church believed in transubstantiation (and it still does) which held that the bread and the wine in the Mass, when consecrated, retained their outward appearances, but are transformed respectively into the body and blood of Christ. This was probably influenced by Aristotelian ideas. Whilst Luther believed in 'consubstantiation', Zwingli viewed the emblems as being symbolical. However, Calvin's position appears to have come about as a result of his defence of Martin Bucer at the Synod of

Berne, held in 1537, before Calvin settled in Geneva. The concern of the Swiss churches at this Synod was whether Bucer had given too much away, in terms of the concessions, to Luther on the Eucharistic doctrine. Calvin proposed an interpretation which centred in pneumatology. Chauna writes (Ibid, p.132) penetratingly, 'Between the two extreme positions—Luther's which got tangled up in a realism resembling the scholastics', and Zwingli's, which followed the exigencies of rational thought to the point of mere symbolism—Calvin proposed an interpretation oriented entirely towards the operation of the Holy Spirit.' Chauna continues (Ibid, p.135), 'As early as the eucharistic interpretation which the Reformer developed for the *Consensus Tigurinus*, the Holy Spirit appears as the one who 'joins earth and heaven' to make possible contact with Christ elevated into his eternal glory. Christ's glorified humanity, and so his body and blood, like his whole incarnate being, does not in the Eucharist condescend to a new 'humiliation' as at the moment of his conception in the Virgin's womb. It is not 'enclosed' in the elements of the bread and wine nor tied to them in an ontological way whether by 'transubstantiation' as imagined by Aquinas or by 'consubstantiation' as proposed by Luther. It is the Holy Spirit who brings about the meeting between the heavenly Christ and the earthly communicants. Through his 'virtue', Christ presents himself to the faithful in his totality and in all reality. The difference between Christ and the elements subsists, without any confusion, at the very heart of the Communion; nevertheless this communion brings a real and not merely symbolic union between the Lord and those who believe in him. Thanks to the mysterious but efficacious operation of the Spirit, there is a meeting between them.' (Note that John Calvin

is widely known as the 'theologian of the Holy Spirit.' Today's misguided charismatics should read the writings of John Calvin on this very point.)

Calvin's views on the Lord's Supper are articulated in the *Institutes* (IV. XVII. 1–50). He robustly shows that the papal mass was a sacrifice by which Christ's supper was not only profaned but annihilated. The Mass Sacrifice is not scriptural. It nullifies the Lord's Supper (See IV. XVII. 1–20).

Furthermore, Calvin's arguments are complimentary to what he said in the Short Treatise on the Holy Supper of the Lord, (Calvin: *Theological Treatises*, pp. 142–177) where he explored the reason for the institution and benefits, the right use of it, the errors corrupting the Supper and the dispute between Luther and Zwingli. Probably the key point in Calvin's thesis is when he writes, (*Institutes* IV. XVII. 43) 'though it seems unbelievable that Christ's flesh, separated from us by such great distance, penetrates to us, so that it becomes our food, let us remember how far the secret power of the Holy Spirit towers above all our senses, and how foolish it is to wish to measure his immeasurable-ness by our measure. What, then, our mind does not comprehend, let faith conceive: that the Holy Spirit truly unites things separated in space. Now, that sacred partaking of his flesh and blood, by which Christ pours his life into us, as if it penetrated into our bones and marrow, he also testifies and seals in the Supper—not by presenting a vain and empty sign, but by manifesting there the effectiveness of his Spirit to fulfil what he promises.' This is clearly a view in between the doctrine of transubstantiation and Luther's ubiquity of the body. Calvin discusses the proper celebration of the Lord's Supper (*Institutes*, IV. XVII. 43), and argues that it is not important whether it is red or white wine, leavened or

unleavened bread or how the bread is broken. It should be done once a week. The feast should begin with prayer, followed by a sermon, the minister 'should repeat the words of the institution, recite the promises, excommunicate those who are 'debarred by the Lord's prohibition.' Afterward, the minister 'should pray' and then 'psalms sung or something read' (probably a reference to the scriptures) while the faithful partake. After the Supper there is to be an 'exhortation to sincere faith' to love and proper behaviour among Christians. Finally, thanks and praises are to be sung to God with the church 'dismissed in peace' (*Institutes*, IV. XVII, 43). Calvin believed that the occasion should be celebrated frequently so that 'all Christians in order that they might frequently return in memory to Christ's passion, by such remembrances to sustain and strengthen their faith, and urge themselves to sing thanksgiving to God and to proclaim his goodness' (*Institutes*, IV. XVII. 44). Calvin's unvarying rule was that 'no meeting of the church should take place without the Word, prayers,

partaking of the Supper, and almsgiving' as he believed that there was Biblical warrant for this (*Institutes*, IV. XVII. 44).

Certainly Calvin's *Institutes*, and his brilliant writings, would leave us in no doubt as to the pattern for organisation and worship which Calvin sought in the Genevan Church. Today we benefit from his work and, therefore, can praise and thank God for his ministry. Especially, Calvin was a great exegete of the Word of God and pastor to the saints in the Church, though his 'City of God' programme was a failure. He firmly believed in his theology that the glory of God was to be uppermost in everything the child of God should believe and do. Thank God for his legacy and the doctrines of grace which are known as Calvinism, and which are linked to his name. The Bible teaches the doctrines of grace, and John Calvin found them in the teachings of the apostle Paul, like every Christian can if they study and faithfully follow the Word of God, and bow their will to the sovereignty of Almighty God, and his tender mercy in Christ. ¶

FORMER DAYS

BEING A SUMMARY OF PAST ISSUES FROM THE GOSPEL MAGAZINE

250 years ago: March & April 1768

The first item in the issue is a piece entitled, 'Of the benefits true believers partake of at death'. In it the blessings of the soul being with Christ, while the body rests in the grave awaiting the resurrection, are set out in some detail. Various particular benefits are traced out, showing that the state of the believer at death is indeed a happy one.

Next comes an engraving of Dr John

Owen, which precedes a biographical sketch of the great theologian. At 18 pages, it is not short, but for those who know little about John Owen, well worth reading.

The 'Dialogue between Christian and Truth' examines the parable of the great supper, from Luke 14. It sets forth an interpretation of the parable that focuses on the grace of the gospel as being to both Jews and Gentiles, whose reception of it might differ.

The Casuistical Divinity question asks, 'Why is the pardon of sin more to be desired than deliverance from the greatest afflictions and judgments that can befall us?' The answer aims to show that sin ought to be a matter of great sorrow in us, more than our fear of eternal damnation. Love for Christ rather than the terror of hell is to be our motivation.

Two letters follow, in which the case of the six students is set out. Those who know of this incident will be interested in the letters, which provide a contemporary account of the infamous matter. Three rhymes relate to this matter. The final one reads,

Where Cranmer died, where Ridley bled,
Martyrs for truth sincere,
See Cranmer's faith and Ridley's hope
Thrust out and martyr'd there.

A number of poems conclude the issue.

The April issue opens with a piece on Obedience to God's revealed will, and shows that Adam was under a moral law. 'Moral' is defined as belonging to manners. An exposition of part of the Ten Commandments is included. There is a discussion of the threefold division of the Law (Ceremonial, Judicial and Moral), of the use of the Law to the believer and the unbeliever, and of the end of the Law as being Christ. The moral law does not preach Christ, but prepares us for him,

One aspect not in view, but of some concern now, is whether the Ten Commandments was a republication of the covenant of works given to Adam. We argue that it was not.

The biographical sketch takes Bishop Polycarp as its subject. There is an engraving; how authentic it is one cannot say.

The Dialogue examines some of the similes and metaphors of the Song of Solomon. This much-neglected portion of God's Word, which was so beloved of the Puritans,

deserves to be studied afresh.

Casuistical Divinity asks, What are the means whereby men obtain mercy with God for pardon of their sins? 'No mercy can be expected from God but through Christ only.' This is why Christ must be set forth as the only hope of sinners.

An open letter to the Liverymen who elected a certain representative to Parliament is reproduced, in which the representative's blasphemous actions are exposed. The aim of the letter is to call those who elected the man to account for their actions, especially if any professed to be Christ's people.

This is followed by a letter to the Vice-Chancellor of Oxford, expressing deep concern over the expulsion of the six students. Poetry concludes the issue, the last two of which are appeals to careless sinners and mockers to consider their danger.

200 years ago: March & April 1818

The source of the Christian life is the subject of the first piece, being a treatment of John 6:57. The writer focuses on the fruitfulness of our being in Christ, without which we can only be barren.

Remarks on the Epistle to the Hebrews follow, continuing the portion from the previous month.

'A crumb for the Lord's children', Luke 14:17, is a meditation on the gospel feast.

The Theological Review takes a look at a memoir of John Calvin, then in its second edition. The Editor chose to include a lengthy extract dealing with Calvin and Servetus, since that episode was then being used (as it is at times today) to blacken Calvin's name, and that of the Reformation.

A second review follows, of a sermon attacking 'fanatical, Calvinistic and Solifidian views of Christianity.' The reviewer exposes the inherent weakness of the argument.

Sermons on the death of Princess Charlotte are reviewed next, though only five of the sixty-four known to the Editor are included. Finally, a sermon on the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer is reviewed, and highly commended.

The April issue opens with a sermon on the text, 'Where is the God of Elijah?' Two questions from the January issue are answered, and the remarks on the Epistle to the Hebrews are continued. Another question, on whether Christ believed for his people, is answered next.

The experience of a writer at a court hearing, in which two sisters were convicted for stealing, and for receiving stolen goods, is the basis for a powerful reminder of our need of the Advocate. The two sisters, admitting their guilt, pleaded for one to speak in their defence. None would, and so both were condemned. How we need Christ to speak for us.

The Trinity is the subject of the next two items, and then a letter to a minister in trouble, which is full of comfort and grace. Something on the work of the holy Spirit concludes the number.

100 years ago: March & April 1918

'Christ the leader of his people' is the subject of the opening sermon, followed by appreciation for the news of General Allenby's liberation of Jerusalem. This is under the heading, 'Pray for the peace of Jerusalem', with reasons why Christian believers should so pray.

The course of the First World War was in

the mind of the author of the next piece, on Psalm 83:3, 'Thy hidden ones.' The prayers, fears and losses of believing parents for their sons serving overseas are encouraged and comforted in the knowledge that nothing separates Christ from his people. A sermon on prayer follows.

Hope is the subject of the next piece, hope rooted in Christ. This is followed by a meditation on 'The strength of our salvation', and on how seemingly hopeless families may yet rise to faith, taking the example of Simeon and Levi, and some who came after.

The next item is a defence of the doctrine of inspiration. Two short pieces later we have an obituary, a letter, and a warning of the danger of ecumenism. Notices and a brief book review conclude the issue.

The April issue

Two sermons open the issue, one on 'The promised land', other on 'The believer's joy'. A meditation on Hosea 6:1-3, a sermon on the forgiveness of sins, notes on Lovingkindness, and a continuation of the piece on the sons of Jacob follow. 'New things' and sermon come after, followed by the next part of the article on Inspiration.

Christ's self-offering, and notes on part of Psalm 119, brief notes, letters, a book review, and the conclusion of the piece on ecumenism take up the rest of the issue.

These issues may all be found on the web site, www.gospelmagazine.org.uk.

TO BE CONTINUED

The devil is indifferent whether we go to hell in the frequented road of profaneness, or in the smooth way of hypocrisy.

Ralph Venning

STUDIES IN II PETER

BY EDWARD MALCOLM (Reading)

2 Peter 3:10

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; Peter now adds a strong incentive to his readers to come to repentance without delay. These words have been subjected to intolerable abuse by dispensationalists, who forget that Scripture is to be interpreted by Scripture, and who instead impose their own peculiar views on the words. First, these words are written by the Apostle Paul, I Thessalonians 5:2, which suggests that they were in common usage in the Church at that time. Secondly, Paul gives us the true sense of these words in the very next verse, where he writes, 'For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape' (I Thessalonians 5:3). He then goes on to argue that believers, having been forewarned of this, ought not to be caught unawares, but rather are to watch, and be sober, v. 6. So Paul teaches that, as the thief does not announce his coming, but comes unlooked-for, so the Lord Jesus Christ will return at a time when he is not expected. Believers, knowing that he must return, ought always to be ready.

This doctrine was first taught by the Lord Jesus himself. In Luke 12:39f he uses the illustration of the thief who catches the householder out. We are to be warned, and to be ready for Christ's coming. The same warning is repeated, St. Luke 21:34, to believers, who are not to succumb to worldly pastimes and thus be unprepared for Christ's return.

So the first part of this verse concerns the unannounced nature of Christ's second

coming. It does not teach, as the dispensationalists do, that Christ will sneak in, remove his people, and sneak out. Rather, we are told that his coming will be 'as the lightning, that lighteth out of the one part of heaven, [and] shineth unto the other part under heaven' (Luke 17:24). It will be instantaneous, like the lightning, which lights up the whole sky in a moment. It will be visible like the lightning, which cannot be hidden. All will know when Christ returns, even the dead, I Thessalonians 4:16.

So this sudden, unlooked-for event, about which we have been warned, but of which there will be no prior indication, cannot be avoided. It follows, therefore, that wisdom dictates our humbling ourselves before the Lord while there is time. 'Kiss the Son, lest he be angry', wrote the Psalmist, 'and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him.'¹

in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise. That the day of the Lord could not possibly pass by unnoticed is so clearly stated in this next clause. Here we are not to enter into endless speculation about the exact nature of the events in which the world as we know it will cease to be. Let us rather be content to know that the whole creation will be purged by fire, I Corinthians 3:13, I Peter 1:7, so that it may be purified and become spotless again. This is about restoring the creation to its original state. What we see at the moment will disappear; pass away means vanish. The works mentioned

1 Psalm 2:12

here may well be the effects of God's six days' work of creation; the dry land, night and day, sun, moon and stars, all plant and animal life, etc. This would mean the complete dissolving (see v. 11) of everything God had made. The works could also refer to the actions of sinners in this world, which will come to an end. Seeing that a new heaven and a new earth will appear, v. 13, the latter seems more probable, since the former would suggest that there will be a whole new act of creation, rather than a reforming of what has already been made, but which needs to be purified. So Romans 8:21f etc.; how could the creature (the creation) await redemption if in fact it is to be removed for ever?

Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved. 'All these things thus being dissolved'; Peter states the certainty of what is to come. The word dissolved should be understood to be a contrast with the word standing in v. 5. There, the world consisted of things which were brought out of the water, which, at the beginning, covered the face of the earth. Now, says Peter, the time comes when the Lord God will loosen, or cause to separate, all that he brought together at the beginning. There will be an undoing of the order of creation, so that it returns to its first condition, of being without form and void. However, rather than being covered in water, it will be overtaken by fire.

what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, The reason why this matters is plain; we are to consider the manner of our living in the light of this knowledge. The coming of the day, and the

manner of the day, are beyond question. 'In what state ought it to *find us*?² The creation itself is not guilty of sin, but must nevertheless await purifying fire before it can be remade into the eternal heavens and earth. What of us, who are guilty of sin? We must show forth our present redemption by the manner of our living, so that our obedience bears testimony to our being justified in the sight of God through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Our conduct (conversation) and our godlinesses ought to be apparent. We will thereby give evidence that we long for the coming of the Lord as those who have cause to desire it, and not to fear it. Everything around will give way; our only protection in that day is the Lord Jesus Christ our righteousness.

Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God. This is a contradictory clause! We are to await (with patience) and hasten the day of the Lord. How can both be done? The answer is simple; we are to endure patiently the time until our Lord's return, with all the trials and griefs of life, and the opposition of ungodliness, until that day. At the same time we are to not endure so patiently that we fall asleep, like the foolish virgins or the careless servants.³ This is a hard lesson to learn, how to both wait with patience, and not allow ourselves to grow careless, or think that the urgency engendered by the knowledge of these things can be lessened through the passing of time. Note v. 4!

2 Christopher Wordsworth, *New Testament Commentary* on II Peter 3:11.

3 St. Matthew 24:42ff, 25:1-13.

TO BE CONTINUED

God made man in his own likeness. Man hath made sin in his own likeness. And sin hath made misery in its own likeness.

Ralph Venning

BOOK REVIEW

JAN HUS – Reformation in Bohemia

Oscar Kuhns and Robert Dickie

Reformation Press 208pp £9.75 (via Lulu Press) pbk ISBN 978-1-872556-29-1

The 500th anniversary of the Reformation in 2017 has led to the publication of many books, pamphlets and articles about all aspects of that great work of God. This book is a revision and update of **John Hus: The Witness** by Oscar Kuhns, originally published in 1907 and now updated and revised by Dr Robert Dickie. Reproducing Kuhn's original Preface, to which the editor has provided a brief summary concerning Czech pronunciation, the Publisher poses the question, 'Why has so little attention been paid to Hus in English popular religious literature?' Jan (John) Hus was born around 1369 in the south of Bohemia and spent most of his life in that area. Ordained priest in 1400, he was much influenced by the writings of Wycliffe, which he helped to circulate in Bohemia, and as a result of his reforming work he was excommunicated by the Pope of Rome in 1411. Brought to trial in Constance in 1415 he was martyred at the stake, and though he, like Luther for example, held doctrines and maintained practices which would be rejected by subsequent reformers, his influence lived on into the following centuries. Whilst the meat of the book centres on Hus himself, chapters one and two provide the background history and conditions in Bohemia which led to the developing reformation. The closing chapters cover the martyrdom of Hus's friend Jerome of Prague, and the Hussite Wars which raged for a number of years. In the concluding chapter we read of the diminishing influence of the Hussite movement in Bohemia until its disappearance there at the beginning of the eighteenth century, and of its revival in the Moravian Brethren and Count von Zinzendorf in Germany. In an appendix the author provides short biographical notes of the leading characters mentioned in the book. Though the question posed by the Publisher has not been answered directly within the pages of the book, Jan Hus is surely one with whom we should be better acquainted, and this book will assist towards that end. Buy it, and read it to obtain a more complete understanding of the events leading up to the great Reformation, and of one who played a prominent part in them.

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