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The Gospel Magazine

The pre-eminence of Christ • Covenant communion with God • Seriousness in religion

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1766–2022

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'.

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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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EDITORIAL

THE world is in a mess. Nations are at war with nations. Economies are in a poor state. Prices are rising. Food is becoming expensive as it becomes more scarce. Fuel prices are pushing many things beyond the reach of a growing number of people. Public morality seems to be at an all-time low. There seems to be no behaviour for which our politicians consider it necessary to reign. Confusion about gender and the insistence that all have to bow before the claims of the few are threatening freedom of speech and the very safety of our young people. The leaders of our churches seem not to realise that the church is not a branch of any one of the political parties. False religion grows ever more confident in our cities. Paganism is increasingly public.

It would not seem unreasonable to respond to these things with a growing sense of despair, even of fear. What is to become of us? What hope is there for the future? If we know and love the Lord Jesus Christ, we know what is to become of us. We know what hope there is, both now and for the future.

Jesus Christ is the Redeemer promised from the beginning. That beginning was marked, not with the glorious creation of the world, but with the inglorious entrance of sin through the rebellion of Adam. Jesus Christ did not come to a perfect world and then watch it fall into ruin; he came into a ruined world with the promise of restoration to perfection through the grace of God. We have no reason to despair in the face of sin for Christ came forth in the fulness of the time to make anew the creation of God, and to do so in the face of its ruin. He who made the world out of nothing by the word of his power is more than able to remake the world according to his perfect will.

Jesus Christ is the propitiation for our sins. All the behaviour mentioned in the opening paragraph has one thing in common, sin. Everything we hear and see is affected and infected by sin. There is no part of life, no aspect of ourselves or our society, that is not corrupted by sin. Jesus Christ came to deliver us from sin and to cause us to stand as justified before God. Sin is not a matter he

cannot conquer, for he has conquered it already. We may see the steady, even headlong rush, of society into sin, but Christ is able to take men and women up from the mire and stand them on the rock. He turns our darkness into light, taking away the filthiness of our flesh.

Jesus Christ is the way, the truth and the life. The world goes after sin, and expresses its hatred of others—and especially of the household of faith—because it is ignorant of the truth. It is so ignorant of the truth that, but for the grace of God, it denies that the truth is true when confronted by it. Only when the Holy Spirit works in the heart and mind of an individual is he able to see the truth as it is in Christ Jesus. Jesus Christ is the truth, and to see it is to see him, and to see him is to see it. We may feel at times that we are inadequate when it comes to answering the challenges of the ungodly. Such answers will never come from our wisdom, and we know only to speak that which we have been taught by the Incarnate Word. Such words cannot fail, for they are as light to make manifest that which is otherwise hidden.

Jesus Christ is Great Physician. As the good shepherd he admonishes the false shepherds in these words. ‘Ye eat the fat, and ye clothe you with the wool, ye kill them that are fed: but ye feed not the flock. The diseased have ye not strengthened, neither have ye healed that which was sick, neither have ye bound up that which was broken, neither have ye brought again that which was driven away, neither have ye sought that which was lost; but with force and with cruelty have ye ruled them’ (Ezek. 34:3–4). As the good shepherd he leaves the ninety and nine to seek the lost sheep. As the good shepherd he heals the sick, and strengthens the weak, and lifts up the downcast. He heals all our spiritual diseases, so much so that we obtain from

him a greater gift than life from the dead: we obtain life everlasting!

Jesus Christ is the eternal King. The kingdoms of this world are momentary, fleeting things that vanish like morning mist. Great powers arise and appear to be permanent and indestructible: God moves his finger and they fall. Only one kingdom stands and lasts for ever, and that is the kingdom ruled by the eternal King. We must of necessity be citizens of some earthly kingdom or nation, and we confess with Isaiah that we dwell among a people of unclean lips. We are ashamed at their behaviour, as we are ashamed at the remembrance of those things we once were before grace brought us to the knowledge of the truth. Christ’s kingdom is yet growing, as he brings into it all such as should be saved. Let us hope for others, and bear witness to Christ and his grace before them.

These things speak to us of the great love and mercy of our heavenly Father, who has provided such a Saviour. We look around us at the state of our world and we know how greatly it needs our Saviour. In truth many will perish in their sins, either refusing the gospel or never having heard it. Not one of them will be unjustly damned, for by nature all deserve hell. If the mercy of God has caused us to hear and believe the gospel, that is not our wisdom but grace that has worked in us.

Therefore if we are concerned about the state of our world, let us be assured that its only hope is Christ and his sacrifice to save sinners. That portion of mankind which is not the elect will never have this, no matter who preaches it to them. All who are heirs of the kingdom, the elect of God, will enter into their Lord’s joy. They will sit down with him to sup in the heavenly places. If we are numbered among them, let us give thanks to him, and live joyfully before him. ¶

THE PRE-EMINENCE OF JESUS CHRIST

A sermon preached by THE EDITOR at Lanford Wood on Good Friday 2022

'For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell.' Colossians 1:19

IN Colossians 2:8 Paul warns his readers against receiving any doctrine of men that are intended to make up any alleged defects in the gospel, confirming this in v. 9. The Judaizing preachers who claimed the authority of the Jerusalem church for their ministry were determined to bring Gentile believers under the law through the imposition of circumcision. Their method was to claim that Paul had made a fair start at introducing them to the way of salvation, but that they, the Judaizers, were there to perfect that way. This perfection could be had through circumcision. Elsewhere Paul declares plainly that to follow such teaching is to deny the cross of Christ. The Colossians had another problem. They believed that Jesus Christ had saved them from their sins, but who would save them from the power of devils, and how should they approach angels and other spiritual beings? Paul uses the same words here as he will concerning the matter of 2:8 to show Christ's pre-eminence, who is our Redeemer, v. 14, the image of the invisible God, v. 15, by whom are all things, v. 16, who is eternal, v. 17, and head of the church, v. 18. Thus the widespread application of the words here become focused on one matter in 2:9.

We take the widespread application of these words, considering first their sense:

i. Where the fulness of the Godhead dwells—*In him*, in the man Christ Jesus, the incarnate Son of God, a servant before men,

Phil 2:7, but glorious to God

ii. Who is it who dwells therein—the *fulness of the Godhead*, not just some attributes or graces but the whole Godhead. He laid aside his glory, Phil 2:7, but remained fully God

iii. How he dwells—*bodily*, that is, not symbolically as God so dwelt in the temple by the ark; but personally, the Godhead and humanity so joined as to be one new man

Hence our doctrine, that Jesus Christ is truly God and truly man in one person, sometimes called the hypostatic union. That this is so is taught by 1. Scripture testimony; 2. Scripture types; 3. Christ's office.

1. The testimony of Scripture proves Christ to be both God and man in one person

i. Note, first, that the New Testament controversies were not over whether the Christ could be a man, but if that man was Jesus of Nazareth: that Christ is both God and man was agreed. The Christ would be from David's line, and so from Bethlehem. Our Lord's upbringing at Nazareth was known, but his birth at Bethlehem was not widely known, in spite of the witness of the shepherds.

ii. Then, consider the promises. See how often we are told to look for one who is both God and man.

Genesis 3:15, the promise is made of one who should descend from the woman, and who should bruise the serpent's head and

receive a bruise in his heel. This can be understood in no other way than to promise a human child who can defeat Satan, Rom 16:20. Given that Adam in his innocence before the Fall could not resist, never mind defeat, Satan, it follows that the one who shall must be more than a man. He must be God, yet since he is also the seed of the woman, he must be both God and man.

Genesis 22:18, the promise is made of one who, being of the seed of Abraham, will bring a blessing to all the nations of the earth. As a child descending from Abraham, he must be a man. When we see the definition of the blessing, given in Acts 3:25f, we know that he must also be God. For who but God can send his Son to bless us, in turning away every one of us from our iniquities?

2 Samuel 7:12f, the promise is of a descendant of David who should reign for ever. That he is of seed of David declares that he must be a man, but in that he is also an everlasting King, he must be God. Ps 45:6 declares that God's throne is for ever and ever, which declaration is applied to our blessed Lord Jesus Christ in Heb 1:8.

Job 19:25, the hope is expressed by holy Job that he shall see his redeemer, who shall stand upon the earth. That the Redeemer is seen on earth declares that he is a man; but in his flesh Job will see God, v. 26. Thus Job, possibly the earliest written book of the Bible, expresses the hope of a Redeemer who is both God and man.

Isaiah 7:14, the promise is made of a sign to unbelieving Ahaz. The child to be born is the seed of a virgin and so a man; but he is called Immanuel, God with us, so he is also God.

Zechariah 12:10, the speaker (the Lord God) promises that he will pour out spiritual gifts of grace and supplication, so can only be God. Yet the people to whom he speaks

will gaze on him whom they have pierced, who must be a man. Thus he must be both God and man in his being pierced.

John 20:28, Thomas calls Christ God, seeing his wounds, but God is spirit, Jn 4:24, and therefore without a body to bear wounds. Thus he confesses the man Jesus Christ to be God.

1 Timothy 3:16, God was manifest in the flesh, one person who is both God and man. Modern versions follow a corrupt text and translate 'who was manifest in the flesh', but our version rightly states the wondrous gift, that God should take frail flesh and die.

There are more promises at which we might look, but it ought to be evident that at every stage of Israel's history, and in all parts of God's revelation to his people, the same truth has been put forth plainly and unmistakably: the promised Saviour is both God and man. Since Jesus Christ is that promised Saviour, it follows that he is both God (the incarnate word) and man (the seed of the virgin).

2. The types of Scripture prove Christ to be both God and man in one person

That one can be two things together is seen in Joseph, who, being both Egyptian and Israelite, was both able to help his brethren (as the high official of Egypt with power over the distribution of corn) and willing to help his brethren because they were his brethren. Had he been only an Egypt he would have had not reason to help them, and had he been but an Israelite he would have had no power to help them. In this, Joseph is very much a type of our Lord Jesus Christ. There are more.

i. *Melchisedec*: we meet this man in the account in Genesis 14. There we find, v. 18, that the king of (Jeru)Salem brought forth bread and wine to Abraham and his men,

the action of a man. He was also priest of the most high God, and this again is the role of a man. In Heb 7:2f we are told that he was without beginning or end, not literally, but as far as the scriptural record goes. This means we are shown one whose birth and death are not recorded, so that he retains an element of eternity. Of course, as a man he had human parentage and the common death of all flesh; as far as the record states, his origin and end are not recorded. He is a type of an eternal person.

ii. *Jacob's ladder*: which may not be considered a type were it not for Christ's words to Nathanael in John 1:51. Angels ascended and descended on the ladder, Gen 28:12, and would be seen to do so on Christ, Jn 1:51. Thus the place where Jacob met God becomes the one in whom we meet God. The covenant was renewed with Jacob in that place, and the underlying message of the covenant is redemption. If we would obtain redemption we must find it in the one in whom the covenant is renewed, even Jesus Christ.

iii. *The tabernacle*: which, being given by revelation of God on the mountain, was the perfect form a place and pattern where the worship of Almighty God was to be maintained. There at the heart of it was the mercy seat. This is properly propitiation, or the place of propitiation, Heb 9:5, and this is a word to describe Jesus Christ, Ro 3:25. Thus what was true of a place once more becomes true of a man. Since the work of propitiation is initiated by God for the benefit of sinners, and since the place of propitiation was decreed by God, it follows that his making one man both the worker and the place points us to the fact that Jesus Christ must be God and man. Since no man can atone for his own sins, let alone the sins of another, the propitiatory sacrifice must be in a victim of far

higher worth than a man. But since the place is located in the body of a man, that man must be God.

These Scripture types by themselves may not prove the point, but following on from the promises they give weight to them, showing how the promises are fulfilled. The types therefore have an important place in our understanding of the atonement, for they show us that God's promises are not hard to be understood, but that he has given us plain pictures in which to see them.

3. The offices of Christ prove him to be both God and man in one person

i. First, generally, as he is the mediator of the new covenant, Heb 12:24. To meditate, one must be acceptable to both parties, Job's daysman, Job 9:32f. Men are easily satisfied with this, as Moses, refusing to speak to Pharaoh, was perfectly content that his brother Aaron should undertake the task. God, on the other hand, is not so easily contented. Abraham abased himself when he looked to speak with the Lord about the fate of any righteous who may have been in Sodom and Gomorrah, Gen 18. If Eglon king of Moab had been less proud he might have suspected Ehud, when he came as the spokesman for Israel; instead, he perished at that man's hand. God will not be satisfied with the complaining words of men, as when Cain stood before the Lord to answer for his jealousy, and then for his murder of his brother, Gen 4. No, God will require one to speak who walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night, Ps 1:1-2. Only in kissing the Son is there refuge from the wrath of God, Ps 2:12. The mediator of the new covenant, to be acceptable to God,

must be God; to be able to speak on behalf of fallen sinners, must be a man.

ii. Secondly, particularly, as he is our prophet, priest and king

a. *As prophet.* Moses, the greatest of the Old Testament prophets, wrote the law of God on tables of stone. In this absolute sense they remained external to the hearts and consciences of the people, although we know that God has also written his law within us, Rom 2:15. The heart of man is by nature a stony heart, Ezek 11:19, and God promises to put the law within the hearts of his people, Jer 31:33. It is Christ who writes the law in the heart, Heb 8:10, showing that he is a superior prophet to Moses, and the one who works that work which God alone can do, in writing to law in our hearts. As prophet, therefore, he is both God and man. He is a man, being taken from among his brethren, Deut 18:15, yet he is greater even than Moses, Heb 1:1f, being the final revelation of God to his people.

b. *As priest.* The high priest made the sacrifice of atonement once a year, first making his offering for his own sins, Heb 7:27. Our Lord Jesus Christ is perfect, and offers no sacrifice for his own sins, v. 28. Since all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God through our descent from Adam, it follows that this high priest must be more than a man. Yet at the same time he must be a man to be made sin for us, since God cannot be sin, or even look upon it. Our high priest must be God that we might made be the righteousness of God in him, 2 Cor 5:21. He must be a man that he might die, John 15:13, and God that he might live, John 10:17f.

c. *As King.* That he is our king is evident, for he is the son of David whose kingdom is without end. He who smites the nations, Rev 17:15, is KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS. The greatest enemy of

man is Satan, and man has no power in himself to resist, never mind overthrow, the devil. Therefore our King must be God to have power to cast out Satan, Rom 16:20, while being a man that he might be the firstborn among many brethren, Rom 8:29.

iii. More generally, he must be God, for we have sinned against God, come under Satan's power, and are lost. Given that Jesus Christ is the only way, the only truth and the only life, and given that there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved, it follows that the one who redeems must be the God we have offended. For what manner of God would that be who, being offended by his creation, sends another god to redeem his creation? Would not the glory and honour belong to that other god, and not the Maker? Therefore he must be God who is also Saviour. At the same time he must be man, for since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead, 1 Cor 15:21f. He must be a man to restore human nature; to unite us to God, Heb 2:11.

Use: this is the mystery of godliness, the one who is worthy of all worship, honour and glory, the only fit object of faith.

Let this doctrine underpin our praise and worship of the Triune Godhead. God is worthy of all worship and glory in his own self as God, for as God is alone is glorious majesty. Yet our knowledge of him comes, not as the great God who is there, but as the great Saviour of his people. We know him because he has revealed himself, which he has not done for the revelation's sake, but for the sake of those who, receiving the revelation, are taught that God is both willing and able to save all who come to him. Yet he cast man out of his presence, placing cherubim and a flaming sword to guard the way to the tree of

life. If we would come to him for life, we need his revelation of that way. He has given us his revelation, and it is perfected in Jesus Christ his Son. Therefore we lift up our hearts and voices in praise and worship of the one who is worthy of far more than we can offer.

Let this doctrine confirm our faith, as we know that our salvation is not to be taken away. It is God who moved it, and it is God who has accomplished it. This is not the temporary salvation that a man can bring to another, saving him one day from one trial only to see him fall fatally in another the next day. Our God saves to the uttermost, meaning that his salvation is without repentance. He will not cause us to believe in him for our eternal salvation and then fall short of actually saving us. He who has done all things well has decreed the salvation of his elect, and they are saved. Our faith is not in vain, for it is in the one who alone saves.

Let this doctrine guide our footsteps throughout this life. Jesus Christ the Son of God has shown us the way we are to go. It is a way of obedience and suffering, yet lined with the blessings of grace. It is a hard way as the world opposes itself at every step, yet it is the right way for it is the way decreed by God. When Israel came out of Egypt they were commanded to go in one particular direction, and to avoid the way of the sea, the shortest route to Canaan. They even avoided the main route across the Sinai peninsula since it would have been too easy for Pharaoh

to overtake them in that way. Instead they were sent the hardest way, but the Lord went before in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. And so they reached the Red Sea, and crossed on dry land, the Egyptians perishing behind them. We may, like Israel, wonder why the Lord leads us the hard way, but Christ has shown us that the hard way is the only way, and it is the right way. If Jesus Christ our Saviour, who is both God and man, must go that way, shall not we willingly do the same?

Let this doctrine confirm our hatred of sin. If the only Redeemer from among the whole mass of mankind from the beginning of the world until its end is also the Son of God, it follows that within me, that is within my flesh, dwelleth no good thing. One must come from outside the descendants of Adam to save Adam's posterity; yet that one must be one with Adam's posterity for the very same reason. Since it was sin that necessitated his coming, and since it was the only one who is without sin who has redeemed me from sin and death, it follows that sin and I can have nothing in common. I may have to stand against the world, the flesh and the devil, but I do not stand in my own strength, and I certainly do not stand in vain. My Saviour has gone before and he has bruised the serpent's head. My victory is certain in Christ, and so I stand in the strength he supplies.

Let each one own him as Lord and Saviour. Amen.

Resolution passed by the Trustees at their 2022 AGM

'We, the Trustees of *The Gospel Magazine*, offer our heartfelt and loyal congratulations to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth on the recent happy occasion of the Seventieth Anniversary of her accession to the throne of this Realm. We are grateful to Almighty God for the peace, prosperity and gospel liberty which our nation has enjoyed during her reign, and pray that these may long continue.'

THE SUN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

by CARINE MACKENZIE

God's promises are sure and steadfast. He never goes back on his word. One promise that God made to mankind after Noah came out of the ark. 'While the earth remaineth' God promised, 'seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease' (Gen.8:22). What an amazing provision for us all. How thankful we should be that every morning the daylight appears. The sun rises every day. Even on a dull rainy day, the sun is still shining above the clouds. The weather can sometimes be changeable and unexpected but God has given us the seasons and the farmer is very aware of this as he plants the seed for his crop and as he waits for suitable weather to harvest the grain or the fruit or vegetables.

We are dependent on the sun for light and warmth to make the grass grow and to produce fruit and flowers and crops. When Moses blessed the tribe of Joseph before he died he mentioned specifically 'the precious fruits brought forth by the sun' (Deut.33:14). That blessing promised to Joseph's descendants is a blessing that we enjoy too.

We are dependent on the sun for our health also. The scientists tell us that sunlight strengthens our immune system. It also maintains strong bones. Being out in the sunlight for twenty minutes helps our body to create vitamin D. We all know that we feel more cheerful and energetic on a bright sunny day, so the sun helps to reduce stress.

The prophet Malachi spoke of the 'Sun of righteousness arising with healing in his wings' (Mal.4:2) to those who feared God. They would see God's righteousness as clearly as a bright sunny morning.

The Lord our Righteousness (Jer. 23:6) is a name of the Lord God—Jehovah Tsidkenu.

Zacharias, John the Baptist's father alluded to the rising sun when he prophesied about the coming Messiah. 'Through the tender mercy of our God, whereby the dayspring (or sunrise) from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.' The healing from the sun of righteousness points us to the Lord Jesus Christ who heals us of our greatest disease, sin. By his wounds we are healed (Isa. 53:5).

The sun is a gift and blessing for all mankind not just the Lord's people. Jesus in the sermon on the mount urged his hearers to love their enemies and to pray for those who persecute them. God shows his love by making 'his sun rise on the evil and on the good' (Matt. 5:45).

The Lord is the great helper and keeper of his people. In Psalm 121 the psalmist speaks many times of the keeping that the Lord provides. 'The Lord is thy keeper; the Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand. The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night' (vv. 5–6)

When the Lord Jesus Christ was suffering on the cross, an amazing thing happened. When the Lord of glory was dying for the sin of the world, the sun which he had created was darkened. As God's judgement fell on his beloved Son who was the light of the world, God turned off the light of the sun. The prophet Amos had prophesied such a judgement many years before—'and it shall come to pass in that day, saith the Lord God, that I will cause the sun to go down at noon, and I will darken the earth in the clear day.' (Amos 8:9). Everything is in God's

power and is used by him for his own glory.

In the book of Revelation, John gives us a description of heaven, the new Jerusalem. In this magnificent place there is no need of the sun or the moon to shine there because ‘the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.’ In the beginning God created the light before he made either the sun or moon. And at the end of time he is the light—no need of sun or moon.

God has given us the sun for our good. And like all his gifts we have to use it wisely and be thankful. But we have to remember his most precious gift the Lord Jesus Christ, who endured darkness at Calvary so that we might have eternal light with him.

Bible Search

Search the Bible for the missing words. The initials of the correct answers will spell out two words connected to the story.

1. Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your _____.
(Ephesians 4:26)
2. They shall fear thee as long as the sun and moon endure, throughout _____ generations. (Psalm 72:5)
3. Then shall the _____ shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. (Matthew 13:43)
4. And they gathered it (manna) every morning, every man according to his eating; and when the sun waxed hot it _____. (Exodus 16:21)
5. Their line is gone through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them (the heavens) hath he set a _____ for the sun.
(Psalm 19:4)
6. They shall not hunger nor thirst; neither shall the _____ nor sun smite them: for he that hath mercy on them shall lead them. (Isaiah 49:10)
7. So let all thine enemies perish, O Lord; but let them that _____ him be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might. (Judges 5:31)
8. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for _____ in righteousness.
(2 Timothy 3:16)
9. For the Lord God is a sun and shield: the Lord will give _____ and

glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.
(Psalm 84:11)

10. And as he (Jacob) passed over Penuel the sun rose upon him, and he
_____ upon his thigh. (Genesis 32:31)

11. And he shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, even a
morning without clouds; as the _____ grass springing out of
the earth by clear shining after rain. (2 Samuel 23:4)

COVENANT COMMUNION WITH GOD

by JOHN HOOPER (Saltash)

11. Touch Not the Unclean Thing

THERE is one more crucially important characteristic of the covenant that we dare not overlook, though it is sadly neglected in our day. It is that the covenant is antithetical. What does that mean?

We are probably familiar with the word as meaning opposite or contrasting and that is a good place to start. As a theological term the antithesis is much more commonly used by our Dutch Reformed brethren than in the UK, but it is a helpful term because it highlights the truth that the covenant has both positive and negative aspects. God has not only brought us into something—covenant with himself—but he has also taken us out of something else—fellowship with the world and with Satan. I think we can see how the terminology of antithesis, or opposite and stark contrast, were brought into use to describe an important aspect of covenant theology and the believer's covenant life.

The idea of separation was made abundantly clear to the children of Israel: 'I am the LORD your God, which have separated you from other people. Ye shall therefore put a difference between clean beasts and unclean, and between unclean fowls and clean ... And ye shall be holy unto me: for I the LORD am holy, and have severed you from other people, that ye should be mine' (Leviticus 20:24–26). Never did a moment pass when the Israelites were not confronted with the lesson that they were a people separated unto God from Egypt and the many nations around them.

The same idea is made clear to us in the New Testament. God has 'delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son' (Colossians 1:13). And again, God has called us 'out of darkness into his marvellous light' (1 Peter 2:9). God has created an

antithesis. This does not mean that we have been separated physically, nor does it mean that we must take ourselves apart and live in a monastic cell or commune. It means that we are a people whom, by his grace, God has spiritually separated, severed, set apart from this world and all its wickedness. We are in the world but not of it. This is why Scripture teaches us that we cannot have both darkness and light, Christ and the world. No one can serve both God and mammon (Matthew 6:24). The message of Genesis 3:15 and all of Scripture that follows it is that we are either the friend of God or we are the friend of Satan. We cannot be both. There is no middle way. There is no having a foot in both camps.

Regrettably this principle of separation from the world, which includes separation from the world's behaviour, attitudes, thought patterns and ethics as being contrary to God's Word, is rarely known today. Yet it is a principle that is intrinsic to our calling to holiness and central to our covenant Christian life. It is sounded out loudly and clearly in Paul's letters. He exhorts the Ephesians, 'have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them' (Ephesians 5:11). They had been called out of those things. Those were things that belonged to their past, to the darkness of the Gentile idolatry from which they had been delivered. They were now to walk as children of light (v. 8).

Interestingly, in his second letter to the Corinthians it is back to the old covenant distinction between clean and unclean that the apostle directs his readers: 'Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? ... for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing: and I will receive you' (2 Corinthians 6:14-18). Notice that the people of God are to come out not in order that they might become the temple of the living God but because they are the temple of the living God having already been called out by his mighty grace.

If God dwells with us and walks with us, if he is our God and we are his people, should not these things have a powerful impact on the way we live our lives? As his covenant people we are a people who have been changed, we have been given a new heart and a new Spirit with new desires and new loves. 'A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them ... and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God' (Ezekiel 36:26-28).

Our priorities, our choice of friends, how we use our time, the places we visit and the places we don't visit, the way we bring up our children, how we spend the Lord's Day, all these and many more are radically changed by the Spirit and grace of God that have brought us into covenant relation and friendship with Him. With David we will want to turn our backs on the tents of wickedness and dwell, or even be just a doorkeeper, in the house of our God.

This is not to say there is no battle, no struggle. The flesh is still with us, the old man is never far away, Satan and the world are always at hand to tempt us to leave the God we love. But greater is He that is with us than he that is in the world. It is a great comfort for us to know that God is with us

and that he 'forsaketh not his saints' (Psalm 37:28). The testimony of the Psalmist was, 'I am continually with thee: thou hast holden me by my right hand. Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory' (Psalm 73:23-24). When the many afflictions, sorrows and difficulties of this life crowd in upon us and we are beside ourselves to know which way to turn, we may rest assured that our covenant God is with us and has not forgotten us. His eye is ever upon us and his ear ever open to our cries. Even the chastenings of the Lord, severe and grievous though they may sometimes be, are for our good (Psalm 119:71). And when Satan, the flesh and this world assault us with fears and doubts or tempt us with their alluring charms, the ever present arm of the Lord will keep us safe and secure.

In Isaiah 43 the Lord gives us a glorious promise of his abiding presence that should be a great comfort and encouragement when adversity comes into our lives: 'When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee' (Isaiah 43:2).

One of the many lessons we can learn from Old Testament history is that the safety and security of Israel lay not in making alliances with her enemies, for then she only made herself weak and vulnerable. Her safety was found in standing alone and walking in obedience to her covenant God: 'Wherefore ye shall do my statutes, and keep my judgments, and do them; and ye shall

dwell therein in safety' (Leviticus 25:18). Likewise our safety in the face of many powerful spiritual enemies lies not in striking bargains with them, compromising with the flesh and the world, but in remaining faithful to the Lord our God and Saviour.

In almost the final words of the Pentateuch we find another promise that would have been of immense comfort and encouragement to Israel and continues to be so for all of God's covenant people through the ages:

There is none like unto the God of Jeshurun, who rideth upon the heaven in thy help, and in his excellency on the sky. The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms: and he shall thrust out the enemy from before thee; and shall say, Destroy them. Israel then shall dwell in safety alone. (Deuteronomy 33:26-28)

Are you and I alone? Sometimes we might feel that way, and in the eyes of the world we are a small and despised people, but what a God we have and what covenant blessings are ours! We are on the side of the God of Jeshurun who rides upon heaven to come to our help! No less than the Eternal God has taken us to be his friends, establishing with us his covenant of love, and he is our refuge in the storms of life. His everlasting arms are beneath us to hold us up when we would faint or fall, and just a word from him is sufficient to scatter all those who would seek to do us harm.

As the covenant friends of God we dwell in this world alone, but in perfect safety! ¶

'A Christian lives by faith, just as Esau lived by his sword. He did not live upon his sword, that would have been hard living indeed; but he lived on what his sword brought him. So the believer does not live upon his faith itself, but by it; that is, he lives upon what faith brings home to him, even the love, the righteousness, the atonement, and intercession of Christ.'

Augustus Toplady

‘AN ILLUSTRATION OF 1 CORINTHIANS 15:29’ CONSIDERED

by EDWARD MALCOLM (Reading)

IN the previous issue of *The Gospel Magazine* we reproduced a short passage from the Works of Augustus Toplady in which he offered some observations on 1 Corinthians 15:28. Turning the page we come to ‘An illustration of 1 Cor 15:29’. We begin by quoting the passage in full, before proceeding to consider an alternative explanation.

It may be remarked on this portion of sacred writ, that superstition, and a too great stress on the mere opus operatum or ordinances, began, very early, to encroach on the simplicity and spirituality of the gospel. Hence, by degrees, the sacrament of baptism was considered as inseparably connected with the absolute and plenary forgiveness of sins, from this mistaken idea, many weak believers were postponing their own baptism until their last moments. The consequence of which was that some (through sudden death, or other unforeseen exigencies) actually died without having been baptised at all. Their surviving relatives, equally superstitious with the deceased, imagined, that, in order to remedy, so far as could be done, the loss of that rite, it would be a deed of charity for one of them to be baptized in the deceased person’s name and stead; begging of God at the same time to accept the baptism of the proxy as though it had been administered to the principal.

If this corrupt practice obtained in

some of the first churches so early as the days of St. Paul (which, however, we will not venture to affirm), the solution of the text in question will be very easy. The Apostle, not from any approbation of this superstitious custom, but merely with a view to convince the Corinthian, of the certainty of a resurrection, by an argument *ad hominem*, ie. by an argument founded on their own principle and practice; reasons thus: ‘What shall they do who are baptized [*huper ton nekrein*], for or ‘instead of, the dead?’ ie. What can or be the design of them, who act in this manner, but to benefit (as they fondly suppose) the persons who died unbaptized? But, if these persons so died, as not to live again, your imaginary labour of love can answer no valuable end whatever. Ye are, therefore, O Corinthians, self-convicted of the grossest absurdity, as many of you as are baptized for your departed friends, and yet doubt the future resurrection of your friends departed.

Toplady does not insist that this is the correct historical setting for the Apostle’s teaching, but only shows that, if this situation did prevail, then this would be the explanation for the verse. If this is not the correct historical context—that is, if there is a different explanation of ‘baptized for the dead’—then we must seek an alternative.

A useful survey of the wide range of opinions is to be found in Anthony C. Thiselton's commentary on 1 Corinthians, in the International Greek New Testament Commentary series. Without necessarily recommending every aspect of the work, this section is of particular value.

i. Theodore Beza and Henry Bullinger (among others) understand the baptism to be the washing of dead bodies for ritual cleanliness: Paul's language cannot bear this meaning.

ii. Bishop Lightfoot understands the baptism to be that of suffering and martyrdom: there is no evidence that martyrdom was ever understood in this way in the early Church.

iii. Aquinas and others understand 'for the dead' to refer to so-called deadly sins.

iv. Luther understood this to refer to a supposed practice of getting baptised over the tombs of departed believers: there is no evidence that this ever occurred.

v. Calvin came to the view (in common with many others) that this refers to death-bed baptisms—why put off the benefits of baptism until death if there is no resurrection of the dead, since the benefits to be had in life will all be missed?

vi. A minority view holds that a definite number must be baptised 'for' or 'to replace' the dead.

vii. Another minority view holds that some, witnessing martyrdoms, are moved to get baptized. If so, why should Paul mention baptism, and not faith, without which baptism is of no benefit?

viii. Some, from John Chrysostom to Erasmus, held that 'for the dead' is shorthand for the baptismal creed, and thus refers to all believers who know that they will put off this mortal body in expectation of the resurrection. If there is no resurrection, why

believe or be baptized? If this view is to be accepted, it requires the supply of a whole creedal statement into the verse, which is hardly obvious from the language.

ix. Another more recent view re-punctuates the verse to read, 'Else what shall they do who are baptized? It is for dead persons if the dead rise not.' This reading is hardly obvious from the language.

x. A recent view is that Paul is referring ironically to those who have been converted through his gospel as opposed to the so-called gospel of the false apostles. If Paul, having asserted that he is a witness to the resurrection, knew there was no resurrection, why would he continue to preach the gospel? This view is considered to be of some value, but ultimately strains the overall context, especially of v. 30.

xi. The eleventh view is divided into three subsections, but they have in common the opinion that this refers to a form of vicarious baptism. The first two understand 'baptism for the dead' to be a rite undertaken by believers on behalf of deceased non-believing friends and relatives, or for believing but unbaptized friends and relatives. If this were the case, we cannot think that the Apostle would pass over such an error in just one short verse. The third view is the one taken most seriously by Thiselton (although, as ought to be apparent, he does not dismiss all of the other views out of hand). The final view is that dying believers exhorted their unbelieving spouses, children, parents, other relatives and neighbours to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Those who believed and were baptized would see one another again in glory. Some, hearing this impassioned and selfless plea, and moved by the manner in which it was made as well as their love for the dying person, began to attend services and by grace were converted. They could

be said to have been baptized for the dead, because it was the dying believer whose testimony had been instrumental in their conversion. This view would explain why Paul does not criticise the practice, but only the point of it if there is in fact no resurrection of the dead. In such a case there would be no reunion, and the dying person would have deceived the loved one to whom they had witnessed in this manner.

If we accept that final view as being the best explanation of Paul's words, this leads us to consider another and rather difficult matter. How should we prepare ourselves for what is termed 'end of life care'? How many of us will find ourselves in a hospital, hospice or at home, suffering the torments of a very painful and incurable disease? How will we react when we are offered pain relief? There is no doubt that modern medicine is able to ease the dreadful pain of disease, and many have no doubt been very grateful for that—not just the sufferer, but loved ones also who must otherwise watch as their dying husband, wife, parent or child writhes

and screams in agony? Suppose the dying person is a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, and among those who gather at the bedside is one or more who is not. If the dying person is affected by pain medication, which means opioids, will they be able to speak about their faith in Jesus Christ? Will they be able to say anything coherent? And if the dying person is not a believer, will a believing visitor be able to speak to them about the finality of death and reality of the judgment, about Christ and his mercies, and about repentance and faith?

There are no easy answers here, and there is little doubt that we are not as good at bearing pain as was the case in former generations. However, given that the probability of our having to face this situation is at least equal to the probability of our not having to, it would be well for us to ponder this matter, and to pray for wisdom and guidance. It may be in the Lord's mercy that our witness will be used to bring another to be baptized for the dead, in the hope of the resurrection to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. ¶

THE LORD, THE SHEPHERD OF HIS PEOPLE

by JAMES NORTH (Landford Wood)

2. The Shepherd

'The Lord is my shepherd.'

The analogy of the Shepherd is frequently used in Scripture. We are, of course, familiar with the tenth chapter of John's Gospel in which the Lord Jesus Christ refers to himself as the Good Shepherd, but there are other

references, too numerous to be referred to in the scope of this article. Ezekiel 34 speaks of the hireling shepherd and the Lord as the Shepherd of his sheep. Ezekiel identifies the sheep as being the Children of Israel and the Church of the Living God: 'Thus shall they know that I the Lord their God am with

them, and that they, even the house of Israel, are my people, saith the Lord God. And ye my flock, the flock of my pasture, are men, and I am your God, saith the Lord God' (v. 30f). He also identifies the Shepherd: 'And I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd. And I the Lord will be their God, and my servant David a prince among them; I the Lord have spoken it' (v. 23f). Obviously Ezekiel is not referring to the literal king David, but the Messiah who would come in the fulness of the times, even the Lord Jesus Christ who identified himself as the Shepherd of the sheep (Jno 10:11, 14). We will have cause to return to this chapter, God willing, in a future article. There are numerous other texts of Scripture which refer to the Shepherd of Israel, and often in the case of Israel being portrayed as wandering, rebellious and backsliding sheep. Psalm 80 addresses this case: 'Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, thou that leadest Joseph like a flock; thou that dwellest between the cherubims, shine forth. Before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh stir up thy strength, and come and save us. Turn us again, O God, and cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved' (vv. 1-3). In these and other verses of Scripture we can see some of the characteristics of the characteristics of the Lord Jesus Christ in his pastoral concern and love for his people, the flock of his redeemed people. So we turn to consider some of those characteristics.

(a) *The Lord Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, is the Smitten Shepherd.* 'Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of hosts: smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered: and I will turn mine hand upon the little ones' (Zech. 13:7; cf. Matt. 26:31, Mk. 14:27). In what way was the Lord

Jesus Christ smitten? The members of the Sanhedrin smote him. The Lord Jesus had been asked by the High Priest, 'tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God.' He replied, "Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven." And we are told that 'they did spit in his face, and buffeted him; and others smote him with the palms of their hands' (Matt. 26:57-68). The Roman soldiers smote him. They mocked him, 'and they spit upon him, and took the reed, and smote him on the head' (Matt 27:30 cf. Mk 15:19, Jno 19:3). But that smiting was but little compared to the smiting he experienced when he was 'smitten of God, and afflicted' (Isa. 53:4). In what way did the Father smite his Son? He was smitten with sin. He who knew no sin was made sin for us (2 Cor 5:21). He was holy, harmless and undefiled by sin; he was tempted in all points as we are, yet without sin but the guilt and punishment of sin was laid upon him. He carried our sorrows, he was afflicted by sin and he was cut off out of the land of the living. The Psalmist tells us: 'For they persecute him whom thou hast smitten; and they talk to the grief of those whom thou hast wounded' (Ps 69:26). But why? Because there was none other who could pay the full penalty of sin. He was the only one who could take the book and open it (Rev 5).

(b) *The Lord Jesus Christ is the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep.* Consider the words of the Lord Jesus Christ as spoken by him to the Jews: 'As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep;' 'Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have

power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father' (Jno. 10:15; 17,18). We see this taking place as recorded in the Gospel records. His life was not taken from him. He was not overtaken by events which pushed him into a corner out of which he could not escape. No! He came from the glory of Heaven to give his life a ransom for many. Peter tells us that our Lord Jesus Christ was delivered to death, not by the priests, not by the Sanhedrin, not by Pilate, not by the soldiers, but by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God (Acts 2:23). Paul likewise tells us that the Lord Jesus Christ was found in fashion as a man, that he humbled himself and was obedient unto death, even the death the death of a cross (Phil. 2:6-10). The Gospels record that the Lord Jesus Christ was the one who was in control of the situation. The Roman authorities may well have thought that they were in control of the crucifying of the Lord Jesus Christ, but they were just the servants of Almighty God in the drama of redemption. Had it been that the Roman authorities had been in control, the Lord Jesus Christ would have died a long, lingering death, but that was not the case. He laid down his life. See what the Gospels have to say: 'And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost' (Lk. 23:46); 'When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost' (Jno. 19:30). Luke expressly writes under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost that 'he gave up the ghost,' that is, that he, the Lord Jesus Christ of his own volition, after he had made full atonement and paid the full penalty of the law gave his life as a ransom for many. The Good Shepherd gave his life for his sheep, his flock.

(c) *The Good Shepherd seeks for his lost*

sheep and finds it. We are familiar with the parable of the lost sheep as recorded in the fifteenth chapter of Luke's Gospel. The wording is very special with regard to the lost sheep. The Shepherd not only leaves the remaining ninety nine sheep in the fold, but he goes out to find the lost sheep. There is no question of his leaving the lost sheep in the wilderness. There is no question as to how long he will continue to look for the sheep before he gives up and returns to care for the remainder of his flock. He continues to search for his sheep 'until he find it' (Lk. 15:4). There is no question that he will find his sheep! It is an impossibility that he will not find his sheep. Our Good Shepherd came from the glory of heaven to find each one of his sheep, those given to him in covenant bond. John Kent writes in one of his hymns:

There is a period known to God
When all his sheep, redeemed by blood,
Shall leave the hateful ways of sin,
Turn to the fold, and enter in.

Glory to God, they ne'er shall rove
Beyond the limits of his love;
Fenced with Jehovah's shalls and wills,
Firm as the everlasting hills.

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

(d) *The Good Shepherd secures his sheep.*

The Good Shepherd seeks until he finds his lost sheep. Then we are told that 'he layeth it on his shoulders' (Lk.15:5). The sheep would have been a heavy beast to carry, yet the Shepherd is able to carry him. 'Their Redeemer,' says Jeremiah, 'is strong' (Jer. 50:34) and he pleads for them. He carries his sheep back to the fold from where he will

not wander. If we turn to John 10 we find not only the statement of the Lord Jesus Christ that he is the Good Shepherd and that he lays down his life for his sheep, but we also find that he secures them from all danger. He has called them by name and his sheep know and understand his voice, and, says Jesus: 'My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand' (Jno. 10:27-30). The great Doxology as written by Jude follows a similar understanding: 'Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen' (Jude 24, 25). Notice exactly what he says; that God, the Triune God, keeps his people from falling and he presents his people faultless, that is, without sin because the Lord Jesus in his expiatory sacrifice has dealt with all his people's sin and they stand completely cleansed from all sin. They cannot fall away from Christ. He then presents his people to his Father: 'Behold, I and the children whom the Lord hath given me are for signs and for wonders in Israel from the Lord of hosts, which dwelleth in mount Zion' (Isa. 8:18, cf. Heb. 2:13). Safe for time and eternity. The price has been paid in full.

Payment God cannot twice demand,
First at my bleeding Surety's hand,
And then again at mine.

3. The Supplier

'The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want'
What a mercy it is that the Lord Jesus Christ cares for his people and provides for them.

As the Good Shepherd he conducts his sheep into green pasture which we will, God willing, consider in the future. But here the Psalmist is speaking of the Lord's continual care of his sheep in such a manner as they will never be in want. It is as if David is saying, 'The Lord is my Shepherd, I will never be in need.' In another place he says, 'I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread' (Ps 37:25). And again, he says, 'The young lions do lack, and suffer hunger: but they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing' (Ps 34:10). What a mercy it is that the Lord provides for his people in such a manner that they will never lack anything that is necessary for both their daily life and also for their spiritual life. The Lord looks after, cares for and provides for his people in two distinct and separate ways. He cares for and provides for them in his providential leadings and also in his dealings with us by his grace.

Let us look, then, at the Lord's providential leadings with his people. To listen to some Christian believers one would think that Almighty God is not in complete control of the universe that he created. They speak of the Lord of having many and varied wills and the Christian believer may be living in 'God's second best' for their lives. This cannot be true! Almighty God is Almighty. 'Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world' (Acts 15:18). 'In whom (The Lord Jesus Christ - JEN) also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will' (Eph. 1:11). The purposes of God do not just refer to eternal matters of salvation or the walk of the Christian, but they refer to all things. 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' (Rom. 8:28). Note that the Apostle Paul refers to 'all things.' That does not just include the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer, but it is all those things that happen to the child of God during their lives as the kind providence of God. But that does not just apply to personal matters, but it applies to all events national and international. The writer's late wife was brought into this world under a kind providence which occurred some forty or so years before her birth. Her grand-parents had been booked on to the Titanic and, for various reasons, the tickets were given to other people who wanted to have a new life in Canada. Her grand-parents never did go to Canada. Some forty or so years after the sinking of the ship my late wife was born. Had her grand-parents gone on the Titanic they would have been drowned, her own mother would never have been born, nor would she have been born. Chance? Luck? Or Divine Providence? They hymn writer puts it like this:

Sovereign Ruler of the skies,
Ever gracious, ever wise;
All my times are in thy hand,
All events at thy command.

He that formed me in the womb,
He shall guide me to the tomb:
All my times shall ever be
Ordered by his wise decree.

Plagues and deaths around me fly;
Till he bids, I cannot die;
Not a single shaft can hit,
Till the God of love sees fit.

J Ryland

but as we wrote earlier, it is not just personal events which are in the providential

care of God, but all the political events in the history of time both past and present are guided by the kind providence of Almighty God. Luke tells us of the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ and included the great political events of that time: 'And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.). And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:) To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child (Luke 2:1-5). The movements of history are not haphazard, but are guided by the hand of God to His own glory. Consider the period of the Reformation. That could only have been guided by the Hand of Almighty God.

So we turn now to the leadings of God in Grace. What a mercy it is to know that the dealings of the Lord with sinners is in according with his sovereign will. The promise of redemption was made to Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden and that redemption was given in 'type' to them by the shedding of blood and the clothing of them with the animal skins. But the redemption was in the mind of the Triune God from eternity past. Speaking of the redemption that is in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Apostle Peter says that we have been redeemed by the blood of Christ who was, in the mind and will of God, predestined to shed his precious blood for lost sinners: 'ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, ... but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest

in these last times for you' (1 Peter 1:18–20).

We can trace through not only the Scriptures the mind and work of God in his gracious dealings with sinners, but can we not also trace the gracious dealings of God with us in our own life and personal history? Why were we in a certain place to hear the gospel proclaimed? It would most certainly not have been by our own desire. We only have a desire to seek after the Lord when we have been born again of God's Spirit. This is what Paul means when he writes to the Ephesians, 'And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins' (Eph 2:1). Before we were born of God, we had no desire for the things of God. We would never of our own volition seek after God. Again, Paul makes this quite clear in his Epistle to the Romans: 'As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips: Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness: Their feet are swift to shed blood: Destruction and misery are in their ways: And the way of peace have they not known: There is no fear of God before their eyes' (Rom 3:10–18). But the Lord by his Spirit works in the hearts of his own dear people, they are quickened by his Spirit, they are made alive unto God, they are brought to see their sinfulness and they are brought to see the Lord Jesus Christ as the only way of salvation, as the only Saviour of sinners.

But it does not end there. For we do not have an inherent ability to call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ for our salvation. We are given the gift of faith; faith to believe, faith to call, faith to trust in Christ

Jesus the Lord. In those most famous of verses of Scripture, Paul explains that faith is not of ourselves, but is a gift of God's grace. 'For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works' (Eph. 2:8–10).

Faith! 'tis a precious grace,
Where'er it is bestowed;
It boasts of a celestial birth,
And is the gift of God.

To him it leads the soul,
When filled with deep distress;
Flies to the fountain of his blood,
And trusts his righteousness.

Since 'tis thy work alone,
And that divinely free,
Come, Holy Spirit, and make known
The power of faith in me.

B. Beddome

The Children of Israel asked in unbelief: 'Yea, they spake against God; they said, Can God furnish a table in the wilderness?' (Psalm 78:19). They had seen the provision of God. They had daily received the manna. They had provision of water from the pool at Marah and also from the stricken rock. The Lord sent quails and fed them. For forty years these things were provided for them by the hand of God. Oh, can we not see, then, the provision of the Triune God for his people both in providence and in grace? What a mercy if we are brought to that place.

Trust him, he will not deceive us,
Though we hardly of him deem;
He will never, never leave us;
Nor will let us quite leave him.

Joseph Hart

‘THE CRETANS ARE ALWAYS LIARS, EVIL BEASTS, SLOW BELLIES’

by EDWARD MALCOLM (Reading)

HE is an unwise preacher who sets out at the beginning of his sermon to arouse the opposition of his hearers by insulting them as much as possible. When Stephen was brought before the Council, Acts 6:12ff, he gave them both barrels, so to speak. They in turn stoned him to death. Why should Paul write such things to Titus? Does this not sound more like the attitude of a Middle Ages bishop commanding his underlings to treat the peasants with contempt, suffering no nonsense from them, and considering that some form of corporal punishment inflicted on one or two will do wonders for the subjugation of the rest?

When we see just how Paul raises the subject, and what he makes of it, we see that there is a useful lesson to be learned.

The source

This is not Paul's opinion—at least, Paul is ascribing the insult to ‘one of themselves, even a poet of their own.’ Scholarship has identified this poet as Epimenides, who according to John Trapp, ‘had divine honours done unto him after his death.’ This suggests that the Cretans did not refuse this description, and perhaps even counted it an honour to be painted in such colours—or else perhaps they were convicted by the poet and changed their mind concerning the subject, Zeus. The Cretans held that Zeus was mortal, and this poem was intended to counter that belief by asserting that Zeus was

immortal. The lying Cretans were not to be trusted, for in Zeus the people lived, moved and had their being.

That Paul should ascribe this to the true and living God is a matter for later. The fact remains that Paul was obviously familiar with this man and his work. Paul quoted the same poet—and the same poem—in Acts 14:27. He mended a serious theological error and used the words to shed light into dark places on both occasions. The carnal wisdom of Epimenides was turned to the glory of God through the use of far greater wisdom, that wisdom that is from above.

The meaning

What did Epimenides and Paul mean by these words? Paul accepted them as true, saying, ‘This witness is true.’ As far as Epimenides was concerned, the Cretan belief that Zeus was mortal when (in his opinion) Zeus was immortal, meant that they were not to be trusted in anything. If anyone refuses to accept the immortality of divinity, can they be believed concerning anything else they say? Bishop Ryle reminds us that ‘the testimony of an avowed atheist goes for nothing in a court of law.’ If a person denies the existence of God (or, in the case of the Cretans, ascribes a truly human quality to a supposed god, namely mortality) then that one has no higher authority to whom he answers. If he swears on the Bible in a court of law, how can he be trusted, since to him

the Bible is a mere fable?

The Cretans are ‘evil beasts’. According to quoted sources, Zeus met his end when he was ripped up by a wild boar. Classical scholars get very excited about this, as it apparently comes from an altogether different legend: this does not concern us, however. What does concern us is the connection between evil beasts and wild animals that kill a supposed deity. What manner of judgment might have been meted out to the guilty pig? What attitude would the worshippers of Zeus have taken to the animal that killed their supreme being? What attitude should Christians have towards those who deny the Lord Jesus Christ to be God, or to have died on the cross and risen again the third day, or to have ascended bodily into heaven? That atheistical spirit that refuses to even countenance the claims of truth, preferring instead to mock the most glorious aspects of our faith, is truly the spirit of a wild beast, and worse than a beast because that was not made in the image of God. We dare not entertain such views, but must resist them at every turn.

The Cretans are ‘slow bellies’. That is, they are idle creatures, lazy, indolent and in great need of being rebuked sharply. Claiming that Zeus was dead, they built a tomb to him. Yet, as the poem goes on to claim, Zeus was not dead but alive, and that in him we live and move and are (or, have our being). Although Paul does not quote the third and fourth lines of the poem here, it is surely highly likely that Titus, being in Crete, was well acquainted with the poem and could supply the missing lines for himself. The meaning, then, is this. Whereas mankind owes its existence and continuation to the immortal Zeus, the lazy, wicked, lying Cretans claim he is dead and make no effort to explain how we are still living. When in Athens, Paul

applies the latter part of this poem to the true and living God, showing that the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ is the great evidence to the whole world that there really is an immortal God. Atheists and advocates of natural evolution fall into the same trap as the slow-bellied Cretans. Denying the evidence before their very eyes, they lazily claim that the world and all life came into existence by mere chance, and that the process of evolution over a very long time gave rise to life as we know it. Anyone who looks into the evidence will see that such claims have no foundation whatsoever, but most are contentedly lazy, and will not stir themselves to enquire. Of course, without the illumination of the Holy Spirit, such looking will only go so far, but even then it will be enough to remove the false foundation even if it does not lead by itself to the true edifice.

If Epimenides is Cretan, and Cretans are always liars, how can we be sure that his testimony concerning them is true? That possible paradox is one for the philosophers to ponder.

The use

Paul drew an obvious conclusion, saying, ‘Wherefore rebuke them sharply.’ Do not let them think that they can rest on this false conclusion. The laziness of their thinking is not confined to this matter of whether or not Zeus was killed by a boar and lay buried in their country. It affects every aspect of their thinking, so that they have a natural tendency to shut their ears to all claims of truth. They must not be allowed to remain in this condition, but Titus is to use every means at his disposal to shake them out of their state and to bring them to face the truth.

The same is true for all preachers, and so this acts as a warning to all who hear preaching, and to all who refuse to hear it. Natural

laziness, the refusal to engage in hard thinking on matters we may prefer not to have to notice—to say nothing of stubborn pride—is the manifestation of our fallen condition. Just as Balaam beat his ass that saw the angel when he was blind to the sight, so we are accused of asinine thinking if we humble ourselves before Christ and his gospel. Yet we are the ones upon whom the light has shined. We have been turned from darkness, and our feet have been set on the rock.

All who know the Lord Jesus Christ, in whom the work of grace is ongoing, can and

must testify to what the Lord has done for us. We must not let our voices be lost in the hubbub, but must speak out. The truth is not to be hidden away, but is to be set free. If people refuse it, as many will, let us be comforted in the knowledge that the truth cannot become untrue just because it is refused. In the end, the truth will return to convict the world, although for many it will be too late to repent, for when Christ returns the day of grace is done. Until that day, let the world hear the truth. ¶

FORMER DAYS

BEING A SUMMARY OF PAST ISSUES FROM *THE GOSPEL MAGAZINE*

250 years ago: July & August 1772

The **July** issue is not available on the website, and we have no physical copy in *The Gospel Magazine* library. Readers are asked to see the message from the Trustees at the foot of p. 128, where a short list of missing volumes is to be found. Any assistance in supplying them will be gratefully received.

For **August** we begin with the consequences of the breaching of the covenant of works by Adam, to p. 354. A query from March, on the faith that saves, is answered. It consists in believing in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Lest any should say they have this faith in vain, the writer explains the truth of his definition at length. The same writer then answers another query concerning the time when a person may conclude he has come to Christ aright. The error, he asserts, is in thinking that we come to Christ without understanding that Christ comes to us first.

The second stage of grace, the ear of Mark 4:28, is considered. This is that stage when the soul gains assurance that it is Christ's, and that Christ is it's. Christ's claim to divinity in saying he has power to lay down his life and power to take it again, from John 10:18, is argued with some force. On p. 367 we find a letter to a friend in affliction, and then an account of the death in 1681 of Lawrence Homma of Amsterdam. Poetry concludes the issue.

150 years ago: July & August 1822

The first article in the **July** issue begins to examine the spiritual nature of the church. The writer intends to show by a comparison of Ezekiel's calling with the calling and ministry of John the Baptist that it has always been so. The article is to be continued. The next piece is on the first or grand cause of a sinner's salvation. 'When I look in Jeremiah 31:3. I see the first grand cause of

the salvation of all the elect, which is the everlasting love of God to them: consequently it must be an unchangeable love, though the Lord's chosen ones are changeable creatures, yet it is their mercy the Lord changeth not, therefore we are not consumed.'

Next comes an oration exposing the desire of many to eat from the tree of life unlawfully. It is guarded by cherubims and a flaming sword, yet these things do not put off the 'formal, pharisaical, self-righteous people' who believe they have right to it. The writer exposes the sinfulness of the unregenerate, who, knowing nothing of their sin, attempt to climb the wall into the garden, and eat.

A letter to a young minister advises, 'I therefore say to you as a friend, let Christ be your one sole and entire subject; search the scriptures, and that, to the intent you may know him, and apprehend him, and see him, in the light and glory, in which he is revealed, and shines forth in the same.' Such searching and such finding will have a blessed effect in a man's preaching. Much more sound advice follows.

The description of human nature found in Jeremiah 13:23 provides a text for a writer to show that it is not in the power of any creature to change; only grace can effect that necessary change in us. Another writer takes up the theme of Christ's glory on the throne from Ezekiel 1:26f. Another writer answers a charge that he is at fault for stating that the church's present weakness is due to its living below its privileges. In answer to this he lists some of those privileges. A correspondent attempts to answer a query, whether the sinner is condemned for his sins or for his rejection of Christ, but denying the former and affirming the latter. The Editors take him to task for this, pointing out that according to Scripture, 'the soul that sinneth, it shall die.'

They go on at some length.

Skeleton 34, from p. 108, is continued. This is an exposition of Isaiah 59:5. Skeleton 35 is of Isaiah 55:1, Skeleton 36 is of Malachi 3:16, and then we have Skeleton 37, from 1 Corinthians 9:27. Tomlinson's attempt to rescue Scripture from the ridicule and objection of unbelievers continues, in which the learned author delves into the Hebrew pointing of certain words and argues that the English version may need to be corrected in certain important places. The debate largely rests on the confidence or otherwise had in the authenticity of the Hebrew vowel points: Tomlinson lacks that confidence. Notices of forthcoming publications and poems conclude the issue.

Come **August** we are treated to A Few Remarks on the love of Jehovah. It is eternal love, unchangeable love, sovereign, unmerited and free in its operations; and it is effectual. A writer describes the character and teaching of Pelagius, and draws comparisons with the Arminians and Evangelicals of his day. Much of his criticism is still applicable. Another writer answers a request for an explanation of the blessings that are ours in Christ, from Ephesians 1:3. He lists ten: our election, sanctification, adoption, acceptance, redemption, our mystical union in Christ, our inheritance, our character as attached to the glory of Christ, our dependence and security, and our future residence. A number of points of application follow.

The description of human nature from Jeremiah 13:23 in the July magazine gives a writer cause to ponder the sinfulness of all mankind, including believers. He points out, from Song of Solomon 4:7 that, like the Ethiopian, we are all black in our own eyes, or in the eyes of God. The believer is also black in the eyes of the unbeliever. However, the words of comfort spoken are these, 'Thou

art all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee.' As we are in Christ, so we are perfect, our sins being washed away through the blood of the Mediator.

Another writer complains that a previous contributor has made a very grave error in stating that the sins of the elect are the meritorious cause of their salvation. He insists that it is the shed blood of Christ that is the meritorious cause. To this the Editors add their own note. They accept that the first writer may have been careless in his expression, but believe the second to be making too much of it. Were it not for our sins, they argue, Christ would not have come forth to redeem us.

The piece on the spiritual nature of the Church from Ezekiel's calling is continued, and is followed by the Theological Review. Here, a short pamphlet showing the growth of missionary work calls forth a lengthy response from the Editors, who fear (among other things) that much of what passes for missionary work is nothing of the sort, since the gospel preached is not the authentic gospel. Thomas Millers Village Sermons are recommended. The doctrine of the Trinity is attacked by another writer, under the guise of entering into an examination of a sermon preached many years previously by John Wesley. The reviewer points out that taking Wesley as an opponent is as brave as tilting at windmills or fighting a straw man, given that he was unclear in so much of what he said! The disputes between Baptists and paedo-baptists, aired in a review published in an earlier issue, are neatly done away with by another author: he contends that there is no scriptural command to baptise with water since the baptism of the Holy Spirit as superseded the old ordinance! The attitude of the reviewer is that the mode of baptism is of far less significance than the spiritual reality

of our being washed from our sins. The final review is of two tracts, one purportedly from the pen of Thomas Goodwin, in which he is made to deny the divinity of Christ. The reviewer asks the author of the first tract (who is suspected of being the author of the second as well) to verify the quotation from Goodwin. We do better, says the reviewer, to adore the Triune Godhead than try to understand the mystery of the Trinity.

100 years ago: July & August 1922

The first article in the **July** issue takes the tree of life, from Genesis 2:9, and compares it with the tree mentioned in Revelation 22:14. Attention is drawn to the fact that there is one other Scripture reference to the tree of life, in Proverbs 3:18. From these passages the Editor draws out three points: the literal tree of life, Christ the three of life now, and Christ the tree of life hereafter. The same author follows this up with a discourse on Daniel's faith, who was taken up unhurt from the den of lions.

We are invited to consider the weight and range of our Lord's burdens during his time on earth, in the light of the statement in Mark 1:35, that he arose very early to pray. Then we have a summary of a sermon on the subject of whether Christ is God: the author is in no doubt that he is! This is followed by another sermon, preached by Samuel Waldegrave, late Bishop of Carlisle, on Psalm 19:1-11. He shows that the glories of heaven and the whole creation, praiseworthy though they be, cannot compare with the revelation God has given of himself in his word.

A sobering report from China records the state of missionary work in that great land. According to Dr W.H. Griffith Thomas, who had lately visited many mission stations there and had spoken on subjects that ought

to have been uncontroversial, there was a division among the missionaries. Some held to conservative views on all his subjects, but Modernism had infected a large portion. Among the concerns expressed by the former Principal of Wickliffe Hall was the deception being practiced on supporters of missionary work in Britain and the USA, who had no idea their money was being spent to advance grievous errors.

Next comes a piece on the blood of sprinkling, from Hebrews 11:28–29. One of Cowper's hymns provides the introduction to a meditation on the reality of suffering and the promise of blessing, because the Lord holds our soul in hand. Another writer considers the Bible and its adversaries—Satan, false religion, wilful neglect, refusal to believe and pride. Nettie asks, 'Art thou only a stranger?' and answers that Christ is not a stranger to his people, even though it may appear to us that he is absent. The Editor's reply to an enquiry about inspiration is reproduced for the benefit of others. The query concerns the damage done to the doctrine of plenary inspiration by the presence of variant readings. The Editor's answer reflects the state of conservative biblical criticism in his day, but is unlikely to satisfy readers today who are acquainted with the subject. As an example, he is ready to reject the authenticity of 1 John 5:7, which we could not do.

A moving account from a man who was converted under the ministry of John Berridge, almost at the end of that preacher's life, is followed by news that Widcombe Baptist Church, Bath, was withdrawing from the Baptist Missionary Society because it would not commit to only sending men who held to the inerrancy of the Bible. Both the London and Church Missionary Societies are brought into the same criticism. Further brief correspondence follows.

The Protestant Beacon draws attention to a recent Anglo-catholic Convention, and points out that it is neither Anglican nor Catholic, but only Roman. The issue concludes with report from an Aged Pilgrims' Friend Society anniversary meeting, and is followed by a review of a book which is a history of that society.

August opens with a sermon on the life-giving, or quickening word, of Psalm 119:50. The Lord uses his word to quicken those who are dead in sin, and to revive his regenerate people. The harvest at the end of the world, from Matthew 13:39, is the text for a second exposition. Here, the writer proposes his points as follows: a harvest implies a Sower; a harvest implies a sowing with seed; a harvest implies a growing time; a harvest implies a reaping time. Wellsprings takes as its theme the meeting of our Lord with the two Marys, recorded in Matthew 28:9. The comfort of Christ's presence in times of grief is well illustrated. This is followed by the first part of a sermon by James Ormiston from 2 Chronicles 1:3–5. Solomon went to Gibeon to offer sacrifice because the altar was there, and this is taken as a type of our coming to Christ.

Notes of a sermon on John 10:15, of Christ laying down his life for the sheep, come next. Christ lays down his life for sheep. The preacher points out that we do not become sheep through believing but through election. Christ lays down his life for the sheep, in the sense that he becomes the bridge over which they pass in order to enter the kingdom of heaven. To any who ask if they may know that they are Christ's sheep, the preacher replies that two things tend to keep us from knowing this: ignorance of God's plan of salvation, and the want of experimental knowledge of that salvation. Help is then offered to show us what, in particular, is

intended by experimental knowledge.

The substance of the Collect from Holy Communion (BCP) is illustrated with examples drawn from Scripture. The prayer is, 'Almighty God unto whom all hearts be open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid, cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of thy Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love thee, and worthily magnify thy holy Name; through Christ our Lord.' The people of Noah's day, and Haman, are used to show the secrets of the unregenerate. Caleb is used to illustrate the secrets of the redeemed. Nettie writes on our being the sons and heirs of God.

The existence of the doctrines of grace in the Medieval Church is demonstrated with references to Archbishop Usher's writings. It may surprise readers to know that, in the examination of the dying, the clergy were to ask, 'Dost thou believe to come to glory, not by thine own merits, but by the virtue and merit of the passion of our Lord Jesus Christ?' and 'Dost thou believe that our Lord Jesus Christ did die for our salvation: and that none can be saved by his own merits, or by any other means, but by the merit of his passion?' Those who answered 'yes' were then directed in this manner.

Go to therefore, as long as thy soul remaineth in thee, place thy whole confidence in this death only; have confidence in no other thing; commit thyself wholly to this death; with this alone cover thyself wholly; intermingle thyself wholly in this death; fasten thyself wholly, wrap thy whole self in this death. And if the Lord God will judge thee, say: Lord, I oppose the death of our Lord Jesus Christ betwixt me and thy judgment; no otherwise do I contend with

thee. And if he say unto thee, that thou art a sinner, say: Lord, I put the death of the Lord Jesus Christ betwixt thee and my sins. If he say unto thee that thou hast deserved damnation, say: Lord, I set the death of our Lord Jesus Christ betwixt me and my bad merits, and I offer his merit instead of the merit which I ought to have, but yet have not. If he say, that he is angry with thee, say: Lord, I interpose the death of our Lord Jesus Christ betwixt me and thine anger.

Apparently the Inquisition had these questions and answers removed from the office in 1584 and in 1612, denying the people that gospel comfort that ought to have been set before them..

The thirteenth Question propounded in Holy Writ, from James 2:5, is treated to show what it means to enjoy the divine favour. Some helpful thoughts on weariness are followed by an appeal to stand fast from 2 Thessalonians 2:15. A piece is reproduced from the *English Churchman*, on Salvation in relation to the Holy Ghost. A sermon in Christ speaking peace unto his people and unto his saints leads to letters and the notices of two deaths. The Protestant Beacon asks When did Christ enter the Holiest? The answer is given in the form of an extract from the writings of George Smeaton, whose work on the Atonement and the Holy Spirit have remained standards for 140 years. By a comparison of the entering in of the high priest with the sufferings of Christ, the writer asserts that it was in his death that Christ entered the holiest, rather than in his ascension.

TO BE CONTINUED

SERIOUSNESS IN RELIGION

by THE REV. WILLIAM ROMAINE (1714–1795)

'Blessed are they, which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled' Matt 5:6

WHATEVER objections the vain or vicious make against religion, they must allow, if they have any regard to truth remaining, not only that nothing else promises happiness hereafter, but that nothing is so likely to give happiness even here, as that disposition of mind, to which religion proposes to bring us. For he who loves God sincerely, and obeys him willingly, and trusts in him cheerfully; who delights in doing justice and shewing goodness to his fellow creatures; and takes pleasure in regulating his conduct by the dictates of reason and Scripture; studying to be useful in his station, and keeping his heart shut against every hurtful indulgence, while he opens it in a proper degree to every innocent gratification, hath unquestionably the truest enjoyment of his being that is possible. He destroys not his health by intemperance, nor his fortune by extravagance, nor his character by criminal or mean behaviour. He generally obtains esteem and friendship from others; and he always feels the most comfortable testimony of his own conscience. Whatever he denies himself, or parts with, it is for a valuable, consideration, the discharge of his duty: whatever he suffers, he escapes the greatest of evils, remorse and shame; and he enjoys the greatest good, a conscious sense of the divine favour, conducting him graciously through the afflictions of this life to an endless felicity in the next, that shall be the more abundant for them: and where shall we find upon earth a securer, an easier, a more joyful situation? Right actions, it must be owned,

are often accompanied, in the beginning of a Christian course, with great inward struggles. But they diminish continually, in proportion as a right temper is formed: and when we arrive at a proper maturity in goodness, we shall be entirely free from difficulties, and absolutely at peace.

But then it is objected, that allowing such a state to be ever so happy, we have no prospect of attaining it in a sufficient measure to afford us any feeling of that happiness. And experience is imagined by too many to confirm this apprehension. Most of those who live either in vice or neglect of piety, make at one time or another warm resolutions, and, it may be, vigorous attempts, to throw off wrong habits and become religious. But they find it an unpleasing, laborious, painful work. And let them endeavour as earnestly as they will; nay, be ever so much persuaded, for a while, that they have gained considerable ground; they are very liable to relapse, more or less, into their former transgressions or omissions, contrary to all their hopes. Daunted at this, they draw immediately a hasty conclusion, that nature is not to be altered, and custom is second nature: that it would be well for them indeed, if they had that command of themselves, that some have: but how much soever they may envy them, they must of force be content with their own condition; for it signifies nothing to strive against what they shall never get the mastery of, or aspire to what they shall never arrive at. And so they sit down satisfied with this plea, lay aside the thought of growing

better, and then of course grow continually worse, Yet plainly if endeavouring would prevent that only, it would be worth while; for, next to being good, being as little bad as we can, is our evident interest, with respect to both worlds.

But we may justly hope for much more. And that we may not doubt of it, our Saviour hath assured us of it. In the very beginning of his sermon on the mount he lays it down; 'Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.' Whoever truly desires to become pious and virtuous, and pursues that great point in the right method, with due perseverance, shall never fail of attaining his end. And the whole Word of God teaches the same thing. Why then should we not believe it, and act on that belief? If we act without it indeed; our attempts will be as faint as our hopes. But this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith (1 John 5:4). Not a presumptuous faith in ourselves alone: that will certainly deceive us; and is the very cause that so many fall to their utter ruin, when they thought they stood firmest: but a trust and reliance on the promised grace of God, through him who died to obtain for us power as well as pardon; a fixed persuasion, that we can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth us: which he doth by a double assurance, of present help, as well as a future reward. This help he hath expressly engaged to every Christian, in every difficulty, on the reasonable terms, of humbly praying for it; and honestly making use of it. What should hinder us then from working out our own salvation, when God is ready to work in us both to will and to do; (Phil 2:12, 13) both good desires, and the accomplishment of them? Our bad inclinations may be too hard for us, but not for him. He will certainly qualify us for what he commands and

expects: else his precepts would be mockery, and his punishments cruelty.

But still it is alleged by many, that in fact, though they do both endeavour and pray, they cannot become good, even in their outward behaviour; much less in their hearts. And perfectly good we do not say they can become at present: but why not sufficiently to enjoy from it much peace and comfort? Let us examine the pretended impossibility of this a little more distinctly. It is confessed, our spiritual frame is weak, and was grievously disordered by the fall. But however, though in our flesh, to use the words of the Apostle, dwelleth no good thing, yet after the inward man we delight in the law of God (Romans 7:18, 22). Through his mercy we have still right and worthy principles, as well as wrong and bad ones. We have still dispositions in our breasts, to esteem and honour goodness, to be grateful for benefits, to observe the commands and submit to the disposal of a just, wise, and kind superior. Now these, directed to their properest object, Almighty God, are love, obedience and resignation to him, in which consists a spirit of religion. We have also by nature, not only tender affections in the nearer relations of life, but a general sense and approbation of honesty and truth, of goodwill, pity, and forgiveness towards all with whom we have to do: and these things comprehend our duty to our neighbour. Then, as to what we owe to ourselves: reasonable creatures must think reason ought to be followed, rather than passion and appetite; must condemn the excesses that destroy their understanding or health, and be shocked at violations of decency and modesty. So that, in truth, we have the seeds within us of every thing good, as well as evil. And all we need is, to cultivate the one, and pluck up the other, and we are what we should be. It is acknowledged, we

have not strength of our own to root out our vices: and our virtues will never bear fruit, without kindly influences from above. But since God is ready to give us all we really want, we may labour with full as much assurance of succeeding as if we had it of our own.

There are instances, but too many, of persons bringing themselves into habits contrary to reason and nature: why should it be impossible to acquire such as agree with both? We can abstain from faults, for which we have ever so great a love, when our interest requires it, when some favourite pursuit or fancy is served by it. This cannot therefore in general be extremely difficult: for very often the motive of such self-denial is trifling enough. And why do we then persuade ourselves, that love of God and our duty, and hope of eternal happiness; and fear of eternal misery, cannot have an equal influence upon us? The truth is, we need but try heartily, and we shall find it can; shall find that we are able by a firm resolution, founded on faith in Heaven, to abstain from any one sinful action whatever: and: therefore, by repeating the resolution, from any number of such actions.

Indeed merely restraining the outward acts of vice is not being virtuous: virtue consists in the inward disposition of the heart. But a course of such restraints uniformly carried out with that view, will as certainly, in time, change our dispositions in this respect, as we see it doth in all others. We grow contented, and pleased, by degrees, with every place, and every way of life, we are put into: and become fond at last of what we were once quite indifferent about; nay, of what we disliked very much. But besides the general force of custom, there is a peculiar complacency, connected by our Maker with the performance of our duty; which the longest habit of sin cannot so entirely extinguish, but that, whenever we return to the right

way, our heart will applaud us for every step we take; joyful prospects will open to us, and invite us on through every difficulty; till at length we shall get beyond them, and find the ways of wisdom pleasantness; and all her paths, peace (Prov 3:17).

Perhaps this may not be so soon as we could wish or expect. Yet, not uncommonly, God meets the very first advances, that he hath inclined men to make towards him, and changes their hearts almost totally at once. But be it ever so long, what have we else to do, but go on and wait his time? Attaining a religious state of mind is not a matter, at which one would aim only if it could be acquired in a short space, and with little trouble. It is the great, the one thing that we have to be concerned about in life: what must be done, or we are miserable; and if once done well, makes us happy for ever. Therefore, how slow or how difficult our progress may be, is little to the purpose: we should go on with more pleasure indeed, if we went on faster and smoother: hut our business is to go on as we can. And whoever hath strength enough to make a stand may quickly have enough to gain ground; and, by pursuing his advantage, will undoubtedly at length get a complete victory.

I am very sensible, how often this fails to be the case. But the reason is: either men do not set about reforming themselves with the sincerity, the spirit and the prudence, that they do about other points of importance; or they have not patience to persist in it.

Most people, far from wishing to mend their faults, are very unwilling to know that they have any. Now what can be the meaning of this? In all other employments, whoever is desirous to do well, examines carefully into the defects of his own work, receives with thankfulness the judgment of his friends, turns to use even the censures of his enemies;

and from whencesoever the knowledge of any imperfection comes, hath no quiet, till he hath corrected it to the best of his power. But is it thus we act in the government of our hearts, and the conduct of our lives? If not, whence comes the difference? Doubtless from hence, that we are not so sincere in one case, as the other. It is not righteousness, piety, and virtue, that we hunger and thirst after; but a fair show, even though it be a false one, to others and ourselves. We have small regard to what promotes not this: and what lessens it, we consider only as an injury and a loss; not at all as an opportunity given us of reforming and improving our hearts and

lives, notwithstanding that we profess the strongest desire of it.

But suppose a person ever so desirous to conquer some vices, yet if he indulge others; or suppose he endeavours to get rid of all immoralities, yet if he allow himself in profaneness or forgetfulness of God, his aim is inconsistent, and he must not hope to succeed. Every virtue is connected with every other virtue: all virtue is connected with religion: and they will not flourish apart. Specious appearances there may be: but not useful realities. We must hunger and thirst after universal righteousness, not one part only, if we expect to be filled from above.

TO BE CONCLUDED

Adam was made perfect for the whole end of ruling the creatures, and living to God, for which he was made; which, without the knowledge of the nature of the one, and the will of the other, he could not. All this being lost by sin, a multiplication of tongues also being brought in as a curse for an after-rebellion, the whole design of learning is but to disentangle the soul from this issue of sin: and the light by which it is discovered (which the Lord knows is very little, weak, obscure, imperfect, uncertain, and conjectural, for a great part only enabling men to quarrel with and oppose one another, to the reproach of reason; yet I say, that which is attained by it) is not in the least measure spiritualized, or brought into that order of living to God, and with God, wherein at first it lay. This is wholly beyond its reach: for the darkness and ignorance that it strives to remove, being come upon us as a curse, it is not in the least measure as a curse, able to remove it, or take it away; so that he that hath attained to the greatest height of literature, yet if he hath nothing else, if he have not Christ, is as much under the curse of blindness, ignorance, stupidity and dullness, as the poorest silliest soul in the world. And the more the mind is furnished herewithal, the more it closes with the curse, and strengthens itself to act its enmity against God. All that it receives doth but help it to set up high thoughts and imaginations against the Lord Christ.

John Owen

The doctrine of justification by the righteousness of Christ spreads itself through the whole system of divinity. As this is either solidly established or superficially touched, fully stated or slightly dismissed; accordingly the whole structure of religion either rises graceful and magnificent, superior to assault and beyond the power of decay; or else it appears disproportionate and defective, totters on its foundation, and threatens an opprobrious fall with us.

John Flavel

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BIDEFORD, DEVON: *North Road Chapel*. Consecutive Expository Ministry. AV, *Christian Hymns*. LORD'S DAY 10.45 am and 6.30 pm. *Minister:* Mr R.J. Steward. northroadchapel.org. nrcbideford@gmail.com.

CHELTENHAM. *Providence Baptist Chapel*. Lord's Day services, 10.30 am and 6.30 pm. Bible Study and Prayer Meeting, Wednesdays 7.30 pm. Use AV and *Christian Worship*. *Pastor:* Mr Pooyan Mehrshahi. Tel. 01242 245116.

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