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THE GOSPEL MAGAZINE



Three wise kings • A brief discourse • The pillar and ground of truth

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1766–2023

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

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

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

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

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KINGSHIP

'I will be thy king' (Hosea 13:10)

AS with almost every important aspect of life, if we would know what a right king looks like, we must turn to the Scripture of truth. When Israel was preparing to enter the promised land Moses recapitulated the whole of the nation's recent history and the laws given by the Lord. Among the many matters discussed, we find the rules for kings, Deuteronomy 17:14–20.

The rules given are as follows.

In the first place, the person chosen to be king must be the one whom the Lord chooses. Notice that the desire to have a king will come from the nation, v. 14; when it does, they must choose the Lord's candidate, v. 15a. This was wonderfully fulfilled in the choosing of Saul to be the first king. He was selected by drawing lots, 2 Samuel 10:20–22, but he had already been anointed by Samuel in private, v. 1. The public shout of acclamation, v. 24 was nothing more than the people acknowledging the Lord's choice of king.

We see much the same in Saul's successor.

David was anointed king in private, and then began to fulfil the role of a king. He began by killing Goliath and so saving the nation. He continued by administering justice to those who could not obtain it under Saul. Finally he was acknowledged to be king, first by the tribe of Judah, 2 Samuel 2:4, and then by the whole nation, 5:1ff.

Absalom attempted to usurp the throne but perished in the war that followed. Adonijah attempted to take the throne on David's death, but Solomon was acclaimed king. Not only was David's line the only legitimate kingly line, but even the very son who should reign was chosen by the Lord. Others who tried to take the throne failed.

The main purpose for God choose the king was to prepare the nation for the coming of the Messiah. They were not free to choose whomsoever they would to fulfil that role, but it belonged only to the one whom the Lord would raise up. Any who attempted to usurp the role would perish.

In the second place, the chosen king was to be a fellow Israelite. No foreigner could wear the crown. Only Israel was the covenant nation, having receive the law at Sinai. Only Israel had the word of God, the Aaronic high priest, Levitical priesthood, tabernacle, sacrifices and festivals. Only Israel had the promised land and the hope of that better rest. Only Israel provided the line from which the Messiah would come, being the seed of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. If all these things were restricted to the people in covenant relationship with the Lord, how could they have a king who was not part of this?

The wonder of this particular requirement was fulfilled in the Incarnation. The one who came as the Messiah is God, but he is also a fellow Israelite, a descendant of David, one made under the law.

In the third place, the chosen king was not to acquire herds of horses nor return to Egypt. A king who has many horses relies on the strength of his army. Horses need soldiers trained to ride and fight on them. A standing army is required, and at great cost. The king who commands such an army will wish to use it at some point.

The wealth of Egypt will be too strong a temptation for the king. He will desire to invade that nation, and the Lord expressly forbids this. He does so because he alone delivered Israel from Egypt and set his people in the promised land. He has given them the wealth of Egypt already, and they are to be content with their own borders. To seek either vengeance against Egypt, or to desire more of its wealth, or to wish to expand Israel's borders, is a desire born of dissatisfaction, even of unbelief.

We are taught to be fully content with our deliverance in our Lord Jesus Christ, and to desire only those good things that he gives us in his mercy, love and grace.

In the fourth place, the king is not to have many wives or accumulate wealth. David had several wives, and each gave him a son. Although arguments from silence are of limited use at best, it does appear that his wives and several sons died. He married as a widower. The same cannot be said for Solomon, whose had vast number of wives and concubines. We know that Solomon's heart was turned away from the Lord because he chose to take part in the idolatrous worship brought to Jerusalem by his wives.

The record in 1 Chronicles 23 shows that David had collected vast quantities of iron, stone, wood, gold and silver for the temple that his son Solomon would build. Yet we note also that he did not enrich himself with this wealth, but set it aside for the Lord. Other kings may have had their own wealth, but David reserved his for God and his glory.

This teaches us that our true king has but one bride, the church. This teaches us that our true king has an abundance of wealth, but that he uses it to enrich us with spiritual blessings to the glory of God.

In the fifth place, he is to be a student of God's word. So vv. 18–20, commanding him to write out the law, to read it regularly, and to live by its precepts. No king accomplished this more fully than David, although Josiah came close. The people of God, being ruled by the man of God's choosing, must be governed in accordance with the will of God as revealed through his prophets.

This teaches us that the kingdom of Christ is easily recognised because it conforms to the pattern set out in Scripture.

We are commanded in Scripture to pray for kings and all in authority. If our nation is far from this biblical picture, let us give ourselves to prayer and seek the Lord's undeserved mercies on us at this time of national celebration. 'God save the king.' ¶

THE CORONATION

by CARINE MACKENZIE

The coronation of a monarch is a very special occasion, full of pomp and ceremony, and traditions of great historic significance.

When King Charles the Third is crowned, God willing, in Westminster Abbey, the ceremony will be watched by millions of people worldwide via film and television.

The King will sit on the ancient throne made for King Edward the Confessor and used for all English and British monarchs since the 14th century. The highlight of the ceremony is when the St. Edward's Crown is placed on the monarch's head by the Archbishop of Canterbury.

The king is presented with regalia—the sceptre as a symbol of the monarch's power and the orb, a jewelled globe with a cross on top to represent God's power which is to remind the king that all power comes from God.

The people of Israel wanted to have a king to rule over them like all the countries round about. Samuel had judged Israel all his life but his sons had turned away from God's ways.

'You are old,' the elders of Israel said to Samuel, 'and your sons do not walk in your ways. Give us a king.'

Samuel was not pleased but prayed to God about it. God told him to go ahead and give them a king but to warn the people of the demands that a king would make on them.

'They are not only rejecting you,' God told Samuel, 'they are rejecting me.'

Saul was the first man chosen to be king of Israel. The Lord guided Samuel to choose Saul out of all the people. He was anointed with oil and confirmed as king before all the tribes of Israel. 'God save the king!' shouted all the people.

Eventually Saul was rejected by God because of his disobedience to God's commandments. Samuel was sent to find another man to rule over God's people Israel. God's choice was David, the shepherd boy. He was anointed by Samuel in a small ceremony in his home in Bethlehem. He became king when he was 30 years old and reigned for 40 years.

When the time came for Solomon, David's son to take over the throne, David called for Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet to anoint Solomon (1 Kings 1:34). So Solomon rode to Gihon on King David's mule. Zadok took a horn of oil and anointed Solomon. Trumpets were blown and the people shouted, 'God save king Solomon!' There was a great noise of joyous celebration.

The king is worthy of honour and respect because of his great office. All kings are but frail men and will disappoint us in many ways. We are advised to pray for the king 'and for all that are in authority that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty' (1 Timothy 2:2).

But the greatest King, who will never disappoint, is the Lord Jesus Christ. He is called the King of kings and Lord of lords (Revelation 17:4). He rules over the whole earth. He defends us from our great enemy, the devil. He restrains and conquers all our enemies, dealing with our sin and overcoming death itself. His Kingdom is made up of all his people whom he has made willing to obey him.

Jesus, the greatest king, came riding to Jerusalem on a lowly ass (Matt. 21:5). This was to fulfil the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9 about the King, the Messiah. 'Thy King cometh unto thee: he is just and having salvation; lowly and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass.'

He went to the cross, not to a throne. He was crowned with a painful crown of thorns. The shout from the crowds was 'Crucify him.' But that was not the end of the story. Death could not have dominion over Jesus. He rose from the tomb in victory. He suffered death for his people for a little while, but now is crowned with glory and honour at the right hand of his Father in heaven (Colossians 3:1). His throne is for ever and ever. The sceptre of his Kingdom is a right sceptre, we are told, in Psalm 45.

Jesus the King is worthy of all glory and honour. God has given him a name that is above every name. 'At the name of Jesus every knee should bow,' (Phil. 2:10). Everyone will pay homage to the King of kings either in mercy or in judgement.

If you ever have the privilege of being introduced to a member of the royal family at a function, those in charge will tell you 'Don't speak to the King until he speaks to you.' That is part of the protocol. But our great King Jesus is so different. We are encouraged to 'come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need' (Heb 4:16).

God is holy and we are sinners. But God welcomes us to himself through the merits of his Son, the Lord Jesus. A man who knew he was a sinner and asked, 'God be merciful to me a sinner,' was the one who went to his house justified.

May that be our prayer too.

Bible Search

Search the Bible for the missing words. The initials of the correct answers will spell out a word from the story.

1. For thou preventest him with the blessings of goodness: thou settest a _____ of pure gold on his head. (Psalm 21:3)
2. And Bathsheba bowed, and did _____ unto the king. And the king said, What wouldest thou? (1 Kings 1:16)
3. The Lord shall _____ for ever, even thy God, O Zion, unto all generations. Praise ye the Lord. (Psalm 146:10)
4. Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalted itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the _____ of Christ. (2 Corinthians 10:5)
5. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a _____ that is above every _____. (Philippians 2:9)

6. All thy garments smell of myrrh and _____ and cassia, out of the ivory palaces , whereby they have made thee glad. (Psalm 45:8)
7. And Pilate wrote a _____, and put it on the cross. And the writing was, JESUS OF NAZARETH , THE KING OF THE JEWS. (John 19:19)
8. Now to the King eternal, _____, invisible, the only wise God , be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen. (1 Timothy 1:17)
9. Then Samuel took a vial of _____ and poured it upon his head and kissed him and said Is it not because the Lord hath anointed thee to be captain over his inheritance. (1 Samuel 10:1)
10. And it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them: and power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues and _____. (Revelation 13:7)

THREE WISE KINGS

by J.E. NORTH (TOTTON)

WHEN the children of Israel asked of Samuel a king like the nations around them, he warned them that a king would do nothing but bring them troubles. His counsel was that they should follow the Lord and continue as a theocracy: 'Then all the elders of Israel gathered themselves together, and came to Samuel unto Ramah, And said unto him, Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways: now make us a king to judge us like all the nations' (1 Sam 8:4,5). The Lord told Samuel to accede to their request: 'Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them....Now therefore hearken unto their voice: howbeit yet

protest solemnly unto them, and shew them the manner of the king that shall reign over them....This shall be the manner of the king that shall reign over you...And ye shall cry out in that day because of your king which ye shall have chosen you; and the LORD will not hear you in that day' (1 Sam 8:7-18). However the elders of the children of Israel were determined there should be a king rather than be governed by the Judges (Samuel was the last of the Judges). Saul was to be the first king of the kingdom of Israel. Of the four kings who ruled over the united kingdom there were on two who were good and wise kings, namely David and Solomon. Saul and Rehoboam were neither wise nor good. After the kingdom was split into the kingdom of

Israel (the northern kingdom) and the kingdom of Judah (the southern kingdom), both kingdoms had a line of kings the majority of whom, we are told, 'did evil in the sight of the LORD'. Even the wise king Solomon, we read, 'did evil in the sight of the LORD, and went not fully after the LORD as did David his father' (1 Kings 11:6). But we do read of some kings who did that which was right in the sight of the Lord. We intend in this article to look at two of the kings of Judah and one 'pagan' king: Hezekiah, Josiah and the 'King of Nineveh'.

1. Hezekiah

Hezekiah reigned in the Southern Kingdom for about 29 years. His upbringing was not at all favourable, being the son of King Ahaz who has been designated the most wicked of all the kings of Judah. But here is the grace of God manifested. Although his father engaged in the most evil of idolatry, copying the nations around him, and true religion was absent from the nation, Hezekiah when he came to the throne engaged in the re-establishment of the worship of the temple and the abolishing of idolatry. It was during the reign of Hezekiah that Isaiah prophesied ('The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah' Isa 1:1). Although Isaiah had prophesied of judgement to the previous kings, even giving words of comfort and encouragement to them (Isa 7:14, 9:6 etc) he gave much encouragement to Hezekiah. The testimony of Scripture is that 'he did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that David his father did. He removed the high places, and brake the images, and cut down the groves, and brake in pieces the brasen serpent that Moses had made: for unto those days the

children of Israel did burn incense to it: and he called it Nehushtan. He trusted in the LORD God of Israel; so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor any that were before him. For he clave to the LORD, and departed not from following him, but kept his commandments, which the LORD commanded Moses' (2 Kings 18:3-6).

In what way, then, was Hezekiah a wise king? He was a man of prayer. We see this on two occasions. Firstly when he received the letter from Rabshakeh and, secondly, when he was 'sick unto death'.

Firstly, when he received the letter from Rabshakeh. Hezekiah had subdued the Philistines and had rebelled against the Assyrians and had refused to pay to the Assyrians further tribute than had been paid before (cf. 2 Kings 18:13ff). The Assyrian army led by Rabshakeh had come to siege Jerusalem, the other cities of Judah having fallen to that great army. Imagine the scene. The army surround the city, the citizens are on the wall whilst the Assyrian army issue vocally the terms of surrender and in doing so blasphemed Almighty God, the covenant God of Israel comparing him to the local tribal deities and who could not withstand the armies of the Assyrians. We know not how long the siege lasted but the terms were put in writing and Hezekiah went into the temple with that letter (2 Kings 19:14,15) It was here that he spread the letter before the Lord and he prayed. The prayer is recorded almost word for word by Isaiah (37:14-20). This prayer is a wonderful example of what prayer should be. Firstly, there is an acknowledgment of the nature of Almighty God: 'Thou art the God, even thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth.' Secondly, there is the plea to be heard: 'LORD, bow down thine ear; open, LORD, thine eyes; and hear the words of Sennacherib, which hath

sent him to reproach the living God.' Then Hezekiah argues before the Lord that the works of destruction that the armies have accomplished were because the gods of the nations around were no gods at all, but purely the imagination of the lands which were conquered, then, finally, he cries unto the Lord, the Covenant God of Israel, Jehovah, the LORD God Almighty: 'O LORD or God, I beseech thee, save us out of his hand'.

Secondly, his prayer when he was 'sick unto death' (2 Kings 20, Isaiah 38). Unlike the rest of humanity, Hezekiah received a warning that he was about to die. The Lord through Isaiah sent him a warning: 'In those days was Hezekiah sick unto death. And the prophet Isaiah the son of Amoz came to him, and said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Set thine house in order; for thou shalt die, and not live' (2 Kings 20:1). He was given notice to set his house in order. Very few of us receive such a warning or intimation. Today's doctors and physicians are able to make a diagnosis of symptoms and they can give a prognosis, but they cannot be certain. But here in this instance, there was an accurate statement made by Almighty God: 'Thou shalt die and not live.' It was a message delivered by Isaiah but from the mouth of God. Hezekiah was concerned. How would the nation fare after the ruination caused by the Assyrian invasion and which had been thwarted by the hand of the Almighty. Also he had no heir to whom the kingdom would be given after his death. What would happen in such a state? The nation would be plunged into an internal civil war. What was the answer to his and the nation's predicament? Prayer! 'Then he turned his face to the wall, and prayed unto the LORD, saying, I beseech thee, O LORD, remember now how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good

in thy sight' (2 Kings 20:2,3). What a mercy it is that Hezekiah's first concern was to cast his care upon the Lord. When kings and rulers do this they can be considered to be reliable rulers in the state and that state will be a happy state for, as the Psalmist says, 'Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD; and the people whom he hath chosen for his own inheritance' (Ps 33:12). Well, Hezekiah turned his face to the wall. By this action he was turning away from anything that might distract him in prayer. I have often wondered as a child why we should close our eyes when we pray. It is to help us to concentrate upon the business in hand and not to be distracted by those things we are able to see. This was the case with Hezekiah. The noise of the court; the people in the court, chatting away; the soldiers on guard; the officers of the court wanting audiences with the king—all these things were distractions from the business in hand, which was prayer.

The Lord's answer came almost immediately. Isaiah delivered the Lord's message and left court and before he had reached the perimeter of the court/palace Isaiah received the answer from the Lord that Hezekiah would be healed. What a mercy! Our God is a prayer answering God! The idols of this world are false gods who can neither hear nor answer prayer. 'But our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased.. Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands. They have mouths, but they speak not: eyes have they, but they see not' (Ps 115:3-5). Now, does this healing mean that God changed his mind? Of course not. 'Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world' (Acts 15:18). There are many things in the mind of the Almighty that we cannot understand, and cannot fathom. We stand in awe at the mind and work of God and his purposes.

But again notice what happened in the fifteen years given to Hezekiah. ‘Manasseh was twelve years old when he began to reign, and reigned fifty and five years in Jerusalem. And his mother’s name was Hephzibah’ (2 Kings 21:1). Hezekiah’s heir and future king was born during that extended time given to him. Manasseh is mentioned in the ancestry of the Lord Jesus Christ according to the flesh: ‘And Ezekias begat Manasses; and Manasses begat Amon; and Amon begat Josias’ (Matt 1:10).

Finally, we note that Hezekiah was a humble man. After his sickness he was visited by an embassy from the king of Babylon to whom he showed all his treasures—perhaps he did so out of the natural pride that he would have had for his nation and kingly wealth as one author whom this writer has consulted states. Isaiah came to him and rebuked him for his folly and with the prophecy that all that which the embassy had seen would be taken to Babylon—‘nothing shall be left’ (Isa 39:6). There was no panic by Hezekiah, there was no endeavour to try to move all the treasures to another place so that they could not be taken away by a future conqueror. No! Hezekiah accepted the word of the Lord: ‘Good is the word of the LORD which thou hast spoken. He said moreover, For there shall be peace and truth in my days’ (Isa 39:8).

2. Josiah

Josiah was the great-grandson of Hezekiah. Hezekiah’s son was Manasseh who was born, as we have noticed, in the fifteen year period which was added to Hezekiah’s life. We have noticed in a study of the life of Manasseh previously published in *The Gospel Magazine* that he lived a wicked life, but was called by God’s grace and returned to the ways of the Lord in later life. He sought to undo the

wickedness that he had both allowed and promulgated, but neither his son nor the nation would follow in his reformed footsteps. Manasseh’s son, Hezekiah’s grandson, was Amon. His reign was short and sinful. His epitaph written in 2 Kings 21 says of him, ‘he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD, as his father Manasseh did. And he walked in all the way that his father walked in, and served the idols that his father served, and worshipped them: And he forsook the LORD God of his fathers, and walked not in the way of the LORD’ (2 Kings 21:21). He was assassinated by one of his courtiers and was succeeded by his son Josiah, Hezekiah’s great grandson.

Josiah came to the throne when he was just eight years old. He reigned in Judah for thirty-one years. Obviously at such a young age he had regents to govern the nation on his behalf. We are not told who these were or what action Josiah was able to take. We do know, however, that even though he was but a child-king he had a heart that sought the Lord in all things. He was probably instructed in the things of God by his mother, Jedidah; but that is pure supposition on the writer’s part, for nothing is told us about her. She is mentioned only the once in the Scriptures (2 Kings 22:1). Her name means ‘beloved’—but by whom? Obviously by her unnamed parents, but is it too much to assume that her parents gave her that name because she was loved not only by her parents, but also by Almighty God?

We are told about his call by grace in 2 Chronicles: ‘in the eighth year of his reign, while he was yet young,’ that is, when he was sixteen years old that ‘he began to seek after the God of David his father’ (2 Chron 34:3). We are also told that he did that which was right in the sight of God and walked in the ways of David his father, ‘and declined

neither to the right hand, nor to the left hand' (2 Chron 34:2). In the twelfth year of his reign, when he was 20 years old—he would no longer have had any regents by that time as he would have been considered an adult from the age of 13 years—he no doubt had advisors, but not regents—he undertook a purge of the land of idolatry and idols. He worked his way through Judah and then the land of Israel (there was no-one to hinder his progress through Israel for the nation had been taken into an exile from which they never returned, some 100 years before. There was an external reformation, but was idolatry fully abolished? The literal images, stocks and stones were abolished, burnt and ground to powder and scattered over the graves of the dead alongside the burnt bones of the idolatrous priests. The Children of Israel would not have touched those ashes as they would have made themselves unclean (2 Chron 34:3–7). It is one thing to abolish idols made of wood and stone, but it is another thing to abolish idolatry in the heart. It was said by one of the Puritan divines that it took forty days for Israel to come out of Egypt, but it took forty years for Egypt to come out of the children of Israel.

In the eighteenth year of his reign, when he was twenty-six years old he gave instruction that the House of God, the Temple, should be repaired. It was on that occasion that the book of the law was found. Tradition has it that the book that was found was written in the hand of Moses. We are not told which book of the law was found but it was almost certainly the Book of Deuteronomy which Moses had expounded, under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost (2 Tim 3:16). It was described as the book of the covenant (2 Chron 34:30). The book was read before the king who rent his clothes in anguish and as a sign of repentance and concern that the

judgment of Almighty God would fall upon the nation. He sent to Hulda the prophetess for a word from the Lord: 'Go, enquire of the LORD for me, and for them that are left in Israel and in Judah, concerning the words of the book that is found: for great is the wrath of the LORD that is poured out upon us, because our fathers have not kept the word of the LORD, to do after all that is written in this book' (2 Chron 34:21). The word that came back from Hulda was that the judgment of God would fall upon the nation, but because Josiah had set his heart to seek the Lord and to walk in His ways, the judgment of God would not come in his time of reigning but that he would have a peaceful end: 'Because thine heart was tender, and thou didst humble thyself before God, when thou heardest his words against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, and humbledst thyself before me, and didst rend thy clothes, and weep before me; I have even heard thee also, saith the LORD. Behold, I will gather thee to thy fathers, and thou shalt be gathered to thy grave in peace, neither shall thine eyes see all the evil that I will bring upon this place, and upon the inhabitants of the same. So they brought the king word again' (2 Chron 34:27, 28).

With the law of the Lord now uppermost in the nation, the Passover was re-introduced: 'So all the service of the LORD was prepared the same day, to keep the passover, and to offer burnt offerings upon the altar of the LORD, according to the commandment of king Josiah.... And there was no passover like to that kept in Israel from the days of Samuel the prophet;... In the eighteenth year of the reign of Josiah was this passover kept' (2 Chron 35:16; 18, 19).

After a long reign of thirty-one years as a wise and godly king, Josiah engaged in folly in that he meddled with two other nations

who were at war with each other. Necho the Egyptian king told him not to meddle, but he took no notice of the warning given and was fatally wounded in the ensuing battle. He was carried to Jerusalem where he died from his wounds and was buried with his fathers. Great lamentation was made for him, including Jeremiah the prophet who wrote, 'The breath of our nostrils, the anointed of the LORD, was taken in their pits, of whom we said, Under his shadow we shall live among the heathen' (Lam 4:20). So ended the life of a great king. He was followed by Josiah's two sons: the older was deposed by Necho king of Egypt after three months and placed his brother upon the throne, but we are told that he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord. The Babylonians invaded and sacked Jerusalem and thus began the exile of seventy as the chastisement of the nation in accord with Jeremiah's prophecy. Josiah's reformation was swept away by the conduct of the Israel's elders. But was it? Probably the externals were swept away in the nation BUT the Lord has always a remnant to seek and serve him. We turn over to the Book of Daniel and we see that in the company of the exiles there was a remnant: 'Now among these were of the children of Judah, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah: Unto whom the prince of the eunuchs gave names: for he gave unto Daniel the name of Belteshazzar; and to Hananiah, of Shadrach; and to Mishael, of Meshach; and to Azariah, of Abednego' (Dan 1:6,7). The Lord always has and always will have a people to show forth His praise. The Lord Jesus said, 'I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it' (Matt 16:18).

3. The king of Nineveh

We turn now to a pagan king. The king of Nineveh to whom we refer is not known by

name, but only by his actions. We know the era in which he lived, being during the life and ministry of the prophet Jonah. We know when Jonah lived. In 2 Kings 14 we are told that Jonah lived and prophesied during the reign of Jeroboam II, king of Israel during the 8th century BC. 'He,' that is Jeroboam II, 'restored the coast of Israel from the entering of Hamath unto the sea of the plain, according to the word of the LORD God of Israel, which he spake by the hand of his servant Jonah, the son of Amittai, the prophet, which was of Gathhepher' (2 Ki 14:25). This verse tells us of the time, place and father of Jonah. This would have made Jonah contemporary with the other 8th century prophets Isaiah, Micah, Amos and Hosea. Isaiah and Micah prophesied in the southern kingdom of Judah, Amos and Hosea prophesied in the northern kingdom of Israel whereas Jonah prophesied in Nineveh.

He prophesied first in the Northern Kingdom, as quoted above, then his role was to preach to the citizens of Nineveh the need for repentance for the Lord's judgment would fall upon that city unless there was a change of direction in their conduct. Not wanting to follow the Lord's calling he ran away to Tarshish, but he could not flee from the presence of the Lord (Ps 139:7). This is recorded for us in Jonah 1-2. In chapter three we find Jonah taking his journey to Nineveh and preaching to the citizens of that extremely large city.

'For word came unto the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. And he caused it to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste any thing: let them not feed, nor drink water: But let man and beast

be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands. Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?' (Jonah 3:6–8).

There has been much discussion as to whether the Hebrew word translated here as 'king' means 'governor' or 'ruler'. It is irrelevant! The relevance of this book of Jonah is that the Lord commanded his servant to go and preach to a heathen nation who were without God and without hope in the world. It is a looking forward to the time when our Lord Jesus Christ told his disciples, 'And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature' (Mark 16:15). What a mercy it is that the gospel is to be freely preached to all men in all ages!

When the news of Jonah's mission and message reached the king he was enabled to take it to heart and issued the decree that there should be repentance and fasting of all the nation and city. We know not how much he understood of the gospel of grace. It may well be that, like Paul as in Acts 26, he was able to speak before the king and his court—we are not told! But we are told that he issued that decree. And the Lord both heard and saw their contrition: 'Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?' (Jonah 3:9). Dr Gill comments: 'he speaks here not as nor as absolutely doubting, but as between hope and fear: for, by the light of nature, it is not certain that God will pardon men upon repentance; it is only probable or possible he may; neither the light of nature nor the law of Moses connect repentance and remission of sins, it is the Gospel does this; and it is only by the Gospel revelation that any can be assured that God will forgive, even penitent sinners; however, this Heathen prince

encourages his subjects not to despair of, but to hope for, the mercy of God, though they could not be sure of it; and it may be observed, that he does not put their hope of not perishing, or of salvation, upon their fasting, praying, and reformation, but upon the will, mercy, and goodness of God.'

'And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not' (Jonah 3:10). Again, to quote Dr. Gill, 'Not their outward works, in putting on sackcloth and ashes, and fasting; but their inward works, their faith in him, and repentance towards him; and which were attended with fruits and works meet for repentance, in that they forsook their former course of life, and refrained from it; and these he saw not barely with his eye of omniscience, as he sees all persons and things, good and bad, but so as to like them, approve of them, and accept them, in which sense the word is used; and so the repentance of these men is spoken of with commendation by Christ, and as what would rise up in judgment, and condemn the men of that generation.' Gill is referring us to the words of the Lord Jesus Christ which authenticates both the book of Jonah, and its authority: 'The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here' (Matt 2:41). We can hope, therefore, that this king and his people were made wise unto salvation.

We have looked at three wise kings. Obviously, there were others who were wise rulers in their generations, but here we wish to notice first of all, that monarchs and other rulers of the nations should be godly leaders and also godly examples seeking the help of

God in all things they do. 'Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God' (Rom 13:1); 'Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king' (1 Pe 2:17). Secondly, the child of God is to pray for their king and rulers: 'I exhort therefore, that, first of all,

supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth' (1 Tim 2:1-4). ¶

A BRIEF DISCOURSE

or sermon showing how England hath left her first Love, and how she may recover it. Suited to the solemn occasion of fasting and humiliation, appointed by Her Majesty to be observed 28th March 1711

by JOHN EDWARDS (1637–1716)

'Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.' (Revelation 2:4–5)

THIS book of Revelation begins with the epistles written by St John the Evangelist, but by Christ's direction, to seven remarkable churches in Asia the Less. He takes no notice of the Church of Rome or Jerusalem, because this latter was then destroyed, together with the whole Jewish polity: and he foresaw by a prophetic spirit, that the former would wholly be corrupted; besides that he would not honour that Church so much as to write to it, which he knew would afterwards pay too great and lavish an honour to itself. But these seven Asiatic churches here mentioned were thought by him to be the fittest to have those mysteries which are contained in this Book conveyed unto them, and to transmit them to future ages.

The first of these epistles is that which I

am concerned in at present: It is directed to the angel of the church of Ephesus; that is, to the chief pastor and other ministers of that church which was erected in the metropolis of the Proconsular Asia. Some would persuade us that Timothy was this angel, or bishop of the church of Ephesus at that time: Grotius, in one part of his *Annotations*, thinks so, but in another he contradicts it. Those who are for the affirmative consider not how they discredit that excellent person, by asserting, that this was the man who was so faulty in his bishopric as he is here represented. And moreover, this opinion is inconsistent with the chronological account of ecclesiastical affairs in those days. Some would make St. John to be the bishop, or rather archbishop of Ephesus at this time: But then

let it be enquired, whether it is probable that St. John wrote an epistle to himself. It is enough then for us to assert, that this epistle was directed to one of the chief pastors at Ephesus, called an angel here, as some have thought, in conformity to the way of speaking among the Jews, who gave the title of angels to their chief priests, and eminent clergymen: But under this name are comprehended here all the ministers of the gospel in the Ephesian church; yea, and all their flock, as Dr. Hammond confesses. 'These messages,' saith he, 'are sent to the whole congregation of Christian professors; for though the angels were single persons, yet what is said to them is not said only to their persons, but to the universality of the people under them.' Which, by the bye, seems to me to impair what the same learned writer had said a little before, that these angels are bishops, yea, metropolitans, and so distinct from presbyters. But how can this be, when he ranks them with ordinary presbyters, and owns that these epistles, or messages, were sent in common to the angels, and to other ministers; yea, to the whole body of the respective people? This shows, that this author was not much upon his guard here.

It is sufficient to my present purpose to observe to you, that in this part of that Epistle wherein my text is, there are these three things considerable, 1. The charge, or accusation brought against this prime clergyman, and those under him, 'Thou hast left thy first love'. 2. The wholesome advice tendered to him and them, Remember from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works.' 3. The severe threatening to enforce the advice, I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of its place, except thou repent.'

The design which I have formed at present from this text, is this, to show the

parallel between the matter contained in these words, and what is observable among ourselves at this day. For though the several particulars of the text do primarily refer and belong to the pastors and people of the church of Ephesus, yet there is reason to apply them to those of our own church, and even to the nation in general. For we are those that have left our first love, and it behoves us to remember from whence we are fallen, and to repent, and do our first works, and so to prevent the removing of our candlestick out of its place. And this certainly is very suitable to this day of fasting and humiliation, the proper work of which is to call our sins to remembrance, to bewail them, and heartily to abandon them.

1. The charge

I begin with the charge or accusation, comprehended in this one article, that we have left our first love. Which you may take in these three particulars; we have left our first love of truth; our first love of holiness and strictness of life; our first love and charity toward our Brethren; or, which is the same thing, our love of peace and concord. This, I conceive, displays the full import of this part of the words; but I don't see any reason that Grotius had to restrain it wholly to the love and care towards the poor.

As to the first, the love of the truth, it is too notorious and manifest that we have left this in a great measure, and therein we run parallel with some in the Apostle's times, and particularly some of those of the Church of Ephesus; for from what St. Paul saith to them in Eph 4:14, we may gather, that there were those among them, who had been tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine. From his Epistles to the Galatians and Corinthians, it is evident, that many corruptions in doctrine had crept into

those churches. And from his other writings it appears, that in his time some consented not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness, 1 Tim 6:3. There were perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, v. 5. From ecclesiastical history we are informed, that the heresies of Simon Magus, and of Ebion and Cerinthus, vexed those first times, and that St. John was a great opposer of these latter. Whence 'tis unlikely (as was said before) that he was the angel of the church of Ephesus spoken of in the text.

And as the love of truth was laid aside by some men of corrupt minds in those early days, so it is now in these times, and in the nation wherein we live. We abound with clubs of atheists, who deny the first article of the creed of nature, the being of an Eternal Spirit, the Founder and Governor of the world. The immortality of human souls, and a future state of everlasting happiness or misery, are derided as fictions.

We swarm with Deists, who laugh at all revealed religion, especially that which was delivered to us by Christ and his apostles; the aim of these men is to drive Christianity out of the world.

The revivers of Arianism are hard at work, and the disciples of Socinus are grown numerous. Now we may apply that of the Apostle, 'Of our own selves do men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.' And is it not strange, that a man should begin to set up the Kingdom of Christ (which he tells us is very near at hand) by exploding his divinity, and publishing other blasphemies concerning the Son of God?

And as for the Articles of Religion, which our Reformers left us concerning eternal election, original sin, the impotency of man's

will, discriminating grace, and other propositions depending upon these, though these may justly be said to have been our first love, that is, they were at the Reformation, and afterwards received and professed by our Churchmen, and by all the faithful among us, yet now our defection from them is manifest to the world.

It can't but be observed, that we have set up a more refined divinity (as we fancy) and under pretext of being rational, we are scarcely Christian. We have cast off our first faith, 1 Tim 5:12, and, according to what the Apostle foretold should come to pass in the latter days, we have departed from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, 1 Tim 4.1. We have preached, and writ, and disputed away much of our Christian religion: And some have laughed away a great part of the Protestant doctrines.

It is a dreadful view, and strikes a man with horror, to see the strange variety and contrariety of opinions in religion among us: But give me leave to observe to you the rise oft hem, which I perceive is not taken notice of and considered, yea, is very much mistaken and misapprehended. But the true account is this. At the beginning, and much more about the middle of King Charles I's reign, the Jesuits flocked hither in great numbers, and the Popish priests bore a great sway (which the Lord Clarendon himself confesses) their great design was to divide and distract us, and they undertook to do this by infecting us with some of their own opinions, as that Christ is corporally present in the eucharist, that this sacrament is a true and proper sacrifice, and that all ministers of the gospel are proper priests, and that the communion table is an altar properly so called; with several Popish notions relating to worship. Besides these, they brought in liberty of prophesying (as it was styled) and

all licentiousness in opinions. Then, then it was that the foundation was laid of all the sects which afterwards appeared; which are too well known, and therefore I need not recite the particular clans and families to which they belong. Here was their true Epocha.

And it is further remarkable, that our declension in those times from the established truths, and our running into heterodox opinions, began with our rejecting the Calvinian doctrines. This caused us to throw off other Articles of Religion. This taught us to cry down our sound divinity as systematical: this made us turn our discourses and sermons either into a loose sort of haranguing, or into a show of demonstration, still changing and altering our methods, that we might anyways be rid of our old theology, which we thought we sufficiently branded and disgraced by giving it the name of Calvinism.

Here then let us take notice of God's just providence in suffering Atheists, Deists, Sceptics, Enthusiasts, Papists, Socinians, and other sects to get footing among us, as a due recompense for our abandoning the doctrines which our Protestant Reformers left with us, those Doctrines which are not only grounded on plain Scripture, and have incontestable marks and signatures of truth on them, but are made part of the Articles and Homilies of our Church, and were at and after the Reformation maintained by our archbishops and bishops, our Convocations, our universities, and the whole body of the clergy. Here the just judgement of the Almighty is to be observed and revered: He hath punished our neglect of these sacred truths of the gospel, by permitting those fore-mentioned errors to take place among us.

Indeed it might justly be expected that all revealed religion should be scoffed at, when

some among ourselves cast off some very considerable Articles of it. Can we look for the performance of Christ's promise to be with his Church, when we ourselves are not with it, but against it, and discard its choicest doctrines? When some of the lights are removed out of our candlestick by our own hands, we do vainly hope that the rest shall remain unmoved. It is a strange generation we live in, when a man must prevaricate with God and the truth, or else he can't be acceptable to some readers or hearers; yea, though he maintains the ancient principles of Christianity, and of the Reformation, and the express Articles of our excellent mother the Church of England. Thus we have left our first love of truth.

Secondly, Our first love of strict holiness, is decayed, and herein we follow the example of some in the Apostles times, who were corrupted in their manners, of which the Apostolical Epistles give us a melancholy account, for we are told there that in the Church of Corinth there were fornication and incest, 1 Cor 5:1, uncharitable and vexatious going to Law, 1 Cor 6:1, profaning the Lord's Supper, 1 Cor 11:20. St. James reproves the carnal Christians of his time for regarding the rich, and despising the poor brethren, James 2:1,2 for their wars and fightings, their covetousness, intemperance, pride, James 4:1,2, &c. And St. Jude describes the vile and dissolute manners of the seducers that were crept in unawares, and sums up all in this, that they walked after their own lusts, v. 16, 18. And 'tis not to be doubted, that even in the Church of Ephesus there was some degrees of this degeneracy, which is included in what is said of them, that they had abandoned their first Love, even that of strictness and holiness.

But our times are much more guilty in this kind, we have more notoriously

degenerated from the truly primitive and pure practice, such as is prescribed us in the writings of the Evangelists and Apostles, and was seen in the lives and conversations of those that were truly Christian. I know not where to begin or end, if I should attempt to set forth the defection of this age and nation from their first religious behaviour; therefore I must content myself with generals. At the first Reformation of our Church under that pious Prince Edward VI, and afterwards under the prosperous reign of the Virgin Queen, there was a great and visible restraint upon vice; and religion and a virtuous deportment were even in fashion, and an honest and upright way of living was generally embraced. And this continued till the declining of the next Prince's reign, and the beginning of the succeeding one, at which time a door was set wide open to all immorality. Then it was that sports and revellings, interludes and masquerades were introduced even on the Christian Sabbath, and the Lord's Day was turned into a carnival. Then all rioting and looseness of manners, and hatred of goodness were generally indulged and practised: then impiety and wickedness came boldly upon the stage, and acted their parts with applause. And ever since they have gained ground, and even grown into credit; and at this day there is as great a decay of piety and probity as ever. And this I desire you to observe, that at the very time when the orthodox doctrines of our Church, which I mentioned under the foregoing head, were laid aside by us, and those of the Arminians and Remonstrants were taken up, entertained, and professed by us, at that very time and juncture, I say, there began to be an apparent change in our lives and manners: And we may further observe, that as these errors have since increased and have been encouraged, so proportionably all

manner of vice and profaneness have prevailed in our practices. Thus you see, the date of our disordered lives, and you see the source and spring of them. Heretofore, whilst the Calvinian Articles flourished and found entertainment, there was none of that atheism and debauchery in the nation which we now everywhere see, men were strict and circumspect in their lives, and made conscience of doing their duty towards God and man, till the doctrines of the Remonstrants and Free-Willers were spread among them: But as soon as these prevailed, and the other doctrines were opposed and preached against, a torrent of atheism, impiety and profaneness broke in upon us. Before this time there were those that were stigmatised with the name of Puritans, who were made the common scoff of the people, because they were thought to be too strict and precise in their lives: But we have none of these now, or their number is very small. We are rather Ranters than Puritans. Instead of being Precicians, we are libertines. We are so far from being righteous over much, that we are (as the Wise Man words it) overmuch wicked, and we surpass former ages in the disorder and dissoluteness of our lives. And those who don't profess atheism, yet discover too much of it in their living, as without God in the world. All seriousness in religion is laughed at: And as it was in the times of paganism, which Gregory Nazianzen speaks of, so 'tis now, To be wicked is honourable, and even worshipped and revered. Yea, even where there remains a form of godliness, the power of it is expiring. All zeal and fervour for religion are extinguished, and in their room succeed indolence, carelessness and indifferency. Thus we have left our first love, our love of strictness and holiness of life.

Thirdly, as to brotherly love, and love of peace and unity, we are very defective, and

therein follow the example of those quarrelsome Christians in the Apostles' times, who were scandalous for their divisions and contentions, 1 Cor 1:10,11. One was of Paul, another of Apollos, another of Cephas, yea, another of Christ, v. 12. As if Christ were the ringleader of a party. We in our times outgo the divided Corinthians, and more visibly and professedly side against one another, and value doctrines for the sake of the persons that deliver them. We are so unhappy as to fall into an age in which names and authorities are much in fashion in religion, as if not religion itself, but a sect and party were the thing designed. This cools our affection, yea, sets us at enmity against one another, and on poor and mean pretences we break the laws of Christian charity, and blacken one another with opprobrious titles and appellations of distinction. And 'tis no small aggravation of our fault, that we keep up our passionate heats and contests at home, even whilst a potent and implacable enemy is making war upon us abroad. Yea, we seem to affect to imitate him, and to begin our quarrels afresh.

2. The advice

I am sorry there is occasion to mention these things, but I'm glad I am now to pass to the second general part of the text, the seasonable and wholesome advice. And here are particularly set down the three necessary things, that are required of those persons that have been offenders, 1. Remembrance or Recollection. 2. Repentance. 3. A Change of Life. First, we are bid to remember from whence we are fallen, which is a very proper admonition, because an act of oblivion as it were seems to be past by most men with respect to these things: They forget how notoriously they are fallen from the truth, from holiness, from peace: They take no notice of it,

which is of itself a great and flagrant crime. In the next place we are obliged to repent, that is, to lay these miscarriages to heart, to reflect upon them with grief and remorse, with sorrow and regret, and with a perfect hatred and abhorrence of them. Chiefly we must take care to show the sincerity and reality of this by doing our first works, that is, by retrieving our first love (as was before called) and acting according to it. And here the directions which I shall offer and commend to you, shall be adjusted to the three Heads which I before insisted upon.

As I then showed, how in so many instances we had left our first love, so now I will in the same manner endeavour to put you into the way of recovering it.

1. *As to the principles and doctrines of our religion*, and the love to them; the way to recover these is to govern ourselves no longer by prepossession and prejudice, by false representations, and the inventions of busy-brains, but to make the sacred oracles of the Scripture the rule and measure of our faith, and to guide ourselves wholly by the form of sound words, which is there prescribed us. This one thing alone will restore to us the Apostolical faith and doctrine, and establish us in the belief of it. Many men among us seem to err after the same manner that Origen of old did, who 'tis thought laboured to render some part of Christianity conformable to the doctrines of the pagan philosophers, to make Christianity the more acceptable to them.

The like is done at this day in the points controverted between us and the Socinians and Arminians; these men strive to corrupt the simplicity of the evangelical truths, there by to make them suitable to the taste and relish of philosophical palates, and of men that argue only from the principles of natural reason. Others allege the Fathers, and

think their suffrage is of great weight: so did Arius when he broached his heretical opinions concerning the divinity of Christ, the bragged that all the Fathers of the Eastern Church were of his mind, and that the other doctrine was new and upstart. But he that is a sincere lover of truth looks upon the Fathers and Councils as empty names, when he finds that they agree not with the inspired writings, it is the neglect of guiding ourselves by this rule, and, on the contrary, the managing our persuasions and sentiments by what is dictated to us merely by natural reason and human authority, that hath been the great cause of the erroneous positions in religion that have reigned among us,

2. *This very thing hath been the Author of the great and notorious depravity of our manners.* And therefore let us look into the Holy Book again, and continually converse with it, and there acquaint ourselves with the true measures of our duty, with respect to sobriety, righteousness and godliness. This will bring us into the right way again, and enable us to do our first works. This backed with the gracious influence of the Holy Spirit will effectually accomplish it, and nothing else can possibly do it. Thus our lives will be exemplary and shining, and the practice of holiness will become honourable and praiseworthy. And truly it is high time to attend to this advice, seeing the degeneracy of men's manners is grown so universal and epidemical which I take to be the meaning of the Psalmist's words, Ps 119:126. It is time to work or perform to the Lord, for so 'tis according to the Hebrew and the Septuagint and the Chaldee favours this rendering of the words, for there 'tis paraphrased thus, It is time to work the will of God: and the reason is added by the Psalmist, For they have made void thy Law. And so the plain sense of the holy man is this; Now, if ever, is the season wherein I ought to

bring honour to thee, O Lord, by a godly and exemplary life, now when thy sacred laws are despised and neglected by the generality of the world. Their contempt and rejecting of them makes me the more observant of them, and enhances my value and esteem of them. Therefore, saith the Psalmist in the very next verses, I love thy commandments above gold, yea, above fine gold: I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right, and I hate every false way. The same doth this present degenerate age require of us; seeing there is a general defection from the ways of God, and so few walk in them, we are the more engaged to be holy and righteous, and to uphold religion in the world. Iniquity abounding, we ought to abound and excel in virtue and godliness. The badness of others should make us the better. And truly, with respect to our own safety we are concerned to listen to this advice; for if wickedness increases proportionably to what it hath done, the world will be a chaos, a worser one than it was at first, and there will be no staying for good men in it.

3. *As to brotherly love,* there must be great care taken that we cultivate and nourish this, for this will be serviceable to promote the other two grand purposes before mentioned; for we have had experience enough to inform us, that our divisions, and uncharitable contentions, have contributed towards the increasing of our errors, and our immorality. They have made us think and live amiss. Wherefore I must be very urgent with you, that mutual amity be cherished by us, that there be no strife and contention among us but this, how to emulate and exceed one another in true sanctity, and in love and goodwill. To this purpose we should take care to extirpate every root of bitterness, and not to nourish any principles that will divide us. It is well known that it was the

Arminian Faction which raised all the tumults and uproars in the Low Countries, at the beginning of the last century; and those Provinces were all in flames, till the Synod of Dort (of which some of our English Divines were a part) happily extinguished them. And how quiet and cool were we of this kingdom, what repose and tranquillity did we enjoy, till a great prelate, who hated Calvin with a perfect hatred, resolved to root out his doctrines? And in order to the effecting it, frowned upon all those who had a favour for them, and advanced those to preferments and dignities in the church, who expressed their kindness for Arminianism, and something else. Again, in order to peace and tranquillity in our Church, it is necessary that we show not any fierceness or bigotry for things that are purely indifferent in religious worship, for seeing they are owed and confessed to be so, it is irrational to be greatly concerned for them, and 'tis more irrational to use any rigour and severity, any force and violence for the promoting of them. To speak my sentiments freely, It is now above a hundred and fifty years since Non Conformity commenced in this nation, and I believe it will never be quashed as long as we are under the influence of such rulers, as prefer the peace and edification of the Church, before the imposition of disputable and controverted rites: Yea, I'm inclined to think, if God shall not suffer the French or Roman powers from abroad to prevail against us, (which is the subject of all good men's prayers) that our Governors will at last wholly dispense with those indifferent observances, for they will be convinced by that time, that the best and only way to establish a firm and durable peace and harmony in the Church, is to impose nothing in religion but what is prescribed us by our blessed Saviour and his Apostles.

And this rule is serviceable, yea, necessary in all the parts of our religion, and will be useful to all Christian churches. We are not to enquire what such and such particular societies of Christians in the world at this day profess. We are not to ask what Luther or Calvin, what these or those Fathers, Doctors and preachers have asserted, but what Christ, and the Evangelists, and Apostles, the founders of our religion, have delivered, and have commanded us to observe. The common neglect of which, was that which the great St. Augustine laid to heart in his days, It exceedingly grieves me, saith he, that many things, which are most wholesomely commanded in the Scripture are not regarded, and all things are full of presumptions, and inventions, and devices of men. But is not the way clear before us, and can there be any occasion for disputes, when we are assured, that nothing is required of us to settle us in matters of religion, but only to mind the plain directions of the New Testament? One would think this should satisfy any sober and intelligent man, especially when he confiders, that by this means the matter and fuel of all our late disputes and controversies (namely, difference about the modes of public worship) will be removed: Whereupon those incendiaries, the Jesuits and Roman priests, who lurk among us, and promote our distractions and divisions of that kind, will soon cross the water, and be gone, for there will be no employment for them so a happy period will be put to our church-wars and religious crusades. Should not all good and wise men be glad to see this day, which will be attended with universal love, and uninterrupted Peace, should they not pray and plead for so great a blessing?

But withal I am to tell them, that they must submit the accomplishing of it to the All-Wise God, and to our Superiors in

Church and State, to whom solely it belongs to effect it. In the mean time let it be our great concern to mind the weightier matters, judgement, mercy and faith, and the love of God, and to be forward and zealous in asserting the fundamental doctrines and necessary duties of our Religion and divine worship. Let Conformists and Dissenters unite and agree in their mutual love and affection, in their hearty devotion and worship of the Divine Majesty, (though with some different circumstances) in a steady profession of the Reformed Protestant Religion, in exact loyalty and obedience to our most Gracious Sovereign, in prizing the great blessing of the revolution, in joint endeavours to support the Government both in Church and State, and in making the glory of God, and the welfare of our Country, our great aim and design. And if we thus agree, there will be no handle for divisions and contentions.

3. The severe threatening

The third and last part of the text, is the severe menace, or commination, 'else I will come unto thee quickly, namely in wrath and displeasure, and will remove thy candlestick out of its place;' that is, I will remove the church of Ephesus, (for by the candlestick is meant the church, where the light of the gospel is set up, as 'tis interpreted in Rev 1:20) and deprive her of all her sacred privileges and even unchurch her. Or the expression may be taken more generally and largely, and signify this, That God would bring great judgments and calamities upon the Christians of the Ephesian Church, and leave them in darkness and distress. Now, let us apply this to ourselves (as we have done the other parts of the text). We of this nation may justly expect that judgments will come upon us quickly, and that our candlestick will be removed out of its place: For this we

can't but know, that sin in its own nature is destructive to a nation, because it is the parent of confusion and disorder; it raises the very foundations of government, it pulls down the props and buttresses of a kingdom, it demolishes the goodly structures of polity and discipline, it spoils the frame of human bodies, and so is the original of diseases and sicknesses; it creates discord and division, and consequently is an inlet to war and slaughter; in some it overturns the course of nature, and brings a long train of curses and Judgments with it, and fills every place with mischief and plagues. Physicians talk of critical days, from whence judgment is made whether the patient will live or die. Divines also have their crisis, whereby they can judge of the recovery or destruction of sinners: accordingly this I will foretell, that unless our late deliverances be improved to the Purposes of Religion, and an universal reformation of our lives, we may despair of health and recovery.

I know there are those among us, that will be apt to flatter themselves, and to cry, Peace, Peace, but let them not deceive themselves and others with vain words, but remember that the old world was drowned, and Sodom and Gomorrah burnt to ashes for the very sins which reign among us at this day. Irreligion, profaneness and debauchery, which have brought down vengeance on nations heretofore, will undoubtedly be as destructive and fatal unto us, unless we amend our lives, and turn unto God. And truly I fear that this visitation is not far off, because the former judgements have had no good effect upon us, because the former mercies have not kindly wrought upon us, because we continue still in our delinquencies, and are filling up the measure of them. If one sinner destroyeth much good, that is, doth a great deal of harm, (as the Wise Man

long since observed, and as we find it verified in the examples of one Achan, who troubled all Israel, and of a single Jonah, who raised a tempest that endangered all the passengers) what evils and judgments then will a multitude of Sinners bring upon us? What will be the dismal effect of a catholic degeneracy and corruption? This is our case; and thence I infer, that the day of visitation is nigh at hand, and that the Revenger will come unto us quickly, and that the Kingdom of God shall be taken from us, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof, Matt. 21.43.

Or suppose this direful judgment suspended for a time by the Divine clemency and forbearance; yea, suppose that we were freed from the calamity of war, and that the late haughty menaces and fresh efforts of the French Monarch, are but the last and dying blaze of this affrighting comet, which by its malign Influence hath procured such mischiefs to the world, yet we have ground to look for the return of that foresaid calamity, or some other judgements from another quarter; we may expect to see the black clouds which hung over our heads, gather again, and fall down upon us, and crush us, if we persevere in our vicious and ungodly practices. When we imagine God's treasury of wrath quite spent and exhausted; when we think he hath blunted all his weapons, and discharged all his arrows; yet, if we still continue to rebel against him, and to disobey his righteous laws, we may sadly experience that our imaginations were groundless, and that the quiver of the Almighty is replenished again with fatal shafts; we shall find the former calamities multiplied and increased, or we shall be convinced that there are new and unheard of ways of severity to curb audacious sinners.

But you will say to me, There is a visible face of religion in this nation, the true

air and mien of it is plainly to be seen, for we duly appear in the public assemblies, and there make solemn profession of the Christian faith: We observe constant hours for our public devotion, and there is a continual offering up the sacrifice of prayer, and we are absolved twice a day from all our sins, which surely will screen us from the wrath and destruction which you threaten us with.

To this I answer, It is this very thing that makes us obnoxious to the Divine wrath and vengeance, namely, that we put up a great many prayers every day in our solemn meetings, and make an outward show of devotion; but these are not joined with repentance and reformation of life. Our behaviour contradicts our prayers, and so our very prayers are turned into sin, and instead of receiving an absolution and a blessing, we provoke the Divine Majesty to curse us. Wherefore let us seriously think of this, and if we are really desirous to obtain God's favour towards our church and nation, let us (as the Apostle advises) pray, lifting up holy hands, 1 Tim. 2.8, backing our addresses with a religious life. God cares not for verbal, outward and bodily service, when 'tis not accompanied with the heart, and an agreeable conversation. The mere external show of sanctity is so far from being acceptable to him, that 'tis reckoned by him as profaning his Name, and a mocking of him. Wherefore let us not flatter ourselves, and because of some outward show of religion among us, infer the safety of our condition, and conclude ourselves secure; but rather let us weigh the remarkable words of the Jewish historian, who after he had given the tragical history of Jerusalem's overthrow, freely adds this, 'That as neither the venerable Antiquity of that great City, nor its vast riches and wealth, nor its celebrated fame which was spread over the whole world, so not the great glory of its

religion and worship could hinder the ruin and downfall of it.’

And if this was Jerusalem’s case, if God’s own inheritance was rejected, no church or nation under Heaven must expect to be spared. If any place upon earth could have pleaded its privilege, Jerusalem could have done it; but yet we see she was not able to do it, for she had aggravated her guilt by making a show of religion, but being destitute of the power of it. O that we would seriously consider this, and represent it to ourselves as our own case, and thence be effectually moved to abandon our vicious practices. O that we would consider how dangerous and deplorable our condition will be, if after so many marks of favour bestowed upon us, we persist in our iniquities, if profane oaths and execrations be still heard in our streets, if ebriety¹ and intemperance be as common as they were before, if pride and wantonness have the same ascendant over us, if cheating and defrauding prevail as formerly, if irreligion and atheism be as much favoured and befriended as in times past, if unchristian animosities be kept up, if the truths and doctrines which are according to godliness be trampled upon as before, If it be thus with us, we need not foreign enemies to come into the field against us abroad, or to invade

¹ Unsoberness, the absence of sobriety.

us at home: We are able of ourselves to work our ruin: our own voluntary choosing the ways of vice, and persisting in them, will destroy as without any other assistance.

Not that I speak this as if I came with a MENE TEKEL, and undertook to pronounce your Peremptory and Irreversible doom: no, you may prevent it, if you please. There is one, and but one way to escape, and that is in the last words of the text, except thou repent. Which is the very thing that had been mentioned before, but now it is repeated, to let us see how important and necessary a duty it is. Let us then heartily repent of our revolting from the love of truth, from the love of religion and holiness, and from the love of unity and peace. Let us sincerely repent of our errors in doctrine, of our irregularity in manners, and of our unchristian divisions, and swerving from the laws of brotherly love and charity. In a word, let us be sure to testify and demonstrate our repentance by our reformation, and by applying ourselves in good earnest to the leading a religious and holy life. This let us be careful to do, as we expect to be heard this day in our public prayers and supplications, as we look for a good issue of our fasting and humbling ourselves, as we desire to prosper in our military affairs both at land and sea, and as we hope for a general blessing on our Church and Nation. ¶

As Adam had a world made for him, so shall Jesus Christ, this second Adam,—Adam being a type of him that was to come,—have a world made for him. This world was not good enough for him; he hath a better appointed than that which old Adam had, a new heaven and a new earth, according to the promise, Isa 61:22, where the saints shall reign. ‘Thou hast made us kings and priests, and we shall reign on earth.’ And this world he hath not subjected unto angels’ no, there are none of those principalities and powers in it, or shall be in it, when it cometh to its perfection.

Thomas Goodwin

THE PILLAR AND GROUND OF TRUTH

Preached before HRH Prince Charles

by JOHN PRESTON (1587–1628)

'But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.' (1 Timothy 3:15)

Here are two main principles, upon which the whole frame of Popery is founded; first, *That the Church of Rome is the only Catholic Church*; secondly, *That the Church cannot err*. By which latter principle they have brought on themselves a desperate necessity, never to amend or reform whatsoever is once decided by the Church. These are the principles they first instil into their novices; these are the trains, wherewith they seek to win men to themselves: for when they cannot prove their points in special and particular, they take them all in gross, and by this one principle (*Our Church, which cannot err, hath so decided it*) they prove a bundle of them altogether. So when they can shew no ground in Scripture for their clouded, ungrounded, superadded opinions, they fasten them and hang them all upon this pinnacle of the Church, which because it is infallible, admits of no examination. And whereas truth seeks out no corners, desires to see the light, and come to trial; Popery delights to hide itself in these obscure and uncertain generalities. As for example: ask them what ground they have for invocation of saints, worshipping of images, indulgences, superadded sacraments, and a multitude of superstitious ceremonies; their answer is, The Church hath so decided, and her decrees are all infallible, and not to be examined by particular men, which are inferior. So that pull but this pillar

down, as Samson did, and the whole frame of Popery, with all that stay themselves upon it, comes presently tumbling down.

Yet because they think it too improbable a course to build all on the naked assertion of the Church, which is only to interpret and not to make the text, therefore they bring in traditions, which they call unwritten verities, and make them of equal value and credit with the Text: but if you ask them what these unwritten verities are, and how they may be known from counterfeit; they say only the Church can tell that, to whose custody they were committed, and who only is able to judge infallibly, which are the genuine traditions, and which not. And if Scripture at any time be brought against any of these points, they say it belongs to the Church of Rome to declare what books of Scripture are canonical, what translation is authentic, what interpretation must be the sense of Scripture, and in effect they will be only judged by themselves, and whatsoever we say, they choke us with these principles, Theirs is the only Church, and, the Church can never err.

Now of all places of Scripture, whereby they would vindicate to themselves this privilege, this verse that I have read is one of the chiefest; but how justly, we are now to consider.

Says the Apostle to Timothy, 'I have written unto thee, that thou mayest know how to behave thyself in the house of God:' as if

he should say, It is of much moment that the house of God be ordered and kept aright, be swept continually and purged, because it is the *Pillar and Ground of Truth*, that is, the ground and place where truth (which is the households food) is nourished, and doth grow; into which if falsehood creep, their food will soon be poisoned, and so not nourish but corrupt, not fit them to salvation but destruction: so that the Apostle in this verse hath this double scope.

First, to describe the Church by this distinguishing property, that it is *the Pillar and Ground of Truth*, that is, Truth is the sign, whereby this house of God is known from other houses.

Secondly, he says, *in the house of God etc.*, not in the Church of Ephesus, lest any should conclude (as now the Papists would) that the truth were so nailed and fastened to any one particular house or pillar, that it could never be taken down from thence, and hanged up in another place; which is flat contrary to the scope of the Apostle in this place, who in the beginning of the next chapter shows evidently, that in the later times some should depart from the faith, and give heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils, 'forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats.'

The Papists would make us believe, that because the truth was once at Rome, it is there still. Indeed the house and place where once it was, they may still shew perhaps; but the inhabitant is now departed, and the truth, which was the sign, is taken down, and hanged up elsewhere, in stead whereof these very errors hang, which the Apostle doth foretell to be the signs of truth's departure, 'forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats.' If they object, they forbid not all to marry. I answer, no heretic or people since the beginning of the world, did ever do

it, nor is it credible that any ever will; for then the world would soon be at an end: but they forbid some to marry at any time, as the clergy; all at sometimes; and that not as a precept of convenience, but necessity and holiness.

The Papists indeed say, that the church is so the pillar and ground of truth, that there is no truth but what comes from the church, and that whatsoever comes from the church is true infallibly, and not subject to error: but this cannot be the Apostle's meaning here. First, there may be truths in other writers that are not of the church: though the garden be the most convenient and ordinary place and ground of herbs; yet some violets may be gathered in the woods, and on the highway side.

By truth therefore here is meant divine and sacred truth, a plant of God's own garden, not growing in the wilderness and waste.

Besides, as some truths may be found without the Church, so some errors may be found within the Church: though the Garden be the proper ground and place of herbs, yet weeds may also grow there, as tares may in the field, which notwithstanding is the proper place of wheat.

Again, when he saith, 'The Church is the pillar and ground of truth', his meaning is, that in the Church of God, the truth ought always to be persuade and kept, that is, those that profess themselves to be the Church, ought to maintain the truth; that is their duty, which they are bound at all times to perform: but it's no good consequence to infer, A thing is surely done, because some ought to do it; for men do not always perform their duties, nor discharge the trust that is committed to them.

Lastly, it is to be marked, that the Apostle saith in general terms, 'The church is the pillar and ground of truth', not this or that particular people, of Ephesus, or Corinth, or Rome, or any other city or country; for the

church may make a progress, from one people to another, as now it hath from those famous cities of Asia unto other parts. Indeed while the church continues in a place, so long the fundamental truths continue, but when she changeth habitation, the truth goes with her; for these cannot dwell asunder: while the church continued at Rome, so long the truth continued, but no longer.

If they object, that a pillar is the prop of that building wherein it is, and therefore cannot be removed to another place, unless the building be destroyed and perish: since then the Church of Rome was once the pillar and ground of truth, it is so still.

I answer, the Apostle in this place speaks of a pillar, as understanding by it some essential and inseparable piece of the building, for such a post or pillar, on which tables and proclamations, and such things are wont to hang; and from such pillars, such things may soon be separated. Such a pillar was this people of Ephesus, which stood long after the truth was taken down and Mohammedanism hanged up in stead thereof. And that its thus meant, appears by the other word, joined with it, which signifies a seat or receptacle, at all times separable from what is in it. And indeed (as before I said) the church is the ground of truth, as the garden is the ground of herbs, which we know, may be plucked up and planted in another place. As therefore that which hangs on the pillar may be plucked down, or other things hanged with it, as herbs may be translated from one garden to another, or weeds grow with them; so that people which are now the Church of God, may cease to be so, or continuing the church, may be obnoxious unto errors.

And that this is the meaning of the place, and not that which the Papists hence deduce, namely, That the Church cannot err; may appear by these reasons.

First, not to be capable of error, is the inseparable attribute of God himself; for God and truth are terms convertible, which cannot be said of any creature; because to creatures, truth is a rule, from which they may decline; as the carpenter's hand may from the line that guides it. Truth is not of the essence of a creature, as it's of Gods, and therefore separable and distinct; as the carpenter's line, is a thing distinguished from his hand, and therefore may be separated, his hand may sometimes deviate and go awry. The decree and will of God is the rule it self, and from it self it cannot deviate or err; but the creature hath a line of rectitude, drawn to it by the Scripture, from which, though now *de facto* it doth not swerve, yet *de possibili* it may. Isa 8:20. 'To the Law and to the Testimony; if they speak not according to this word, it is because they have no light in them.' As if one should say to a pilot, Know that in your eye, and in your hand, there is no inseparable and inbred rule, to guide you in your course, but here is a compass for to direct you; if you look beside this, or neglect this, you will fall upon the rocks and sands: so the Lord saith to his Church, Know that in you there is no inherent self-sufficient light, but here is my word, to be a lantern to you; if you keep not your eye on this, you may err quickly, and make shipwreck of your faith.

Secondly, where there is ignorance there may be error; for ignorance is the cause of error, as darkness is of stumbling; for a man cannot have a perfect judgement of things, except he have a perfect knowledge of them: now the most learned bishops that ever were, in general Councils (which is the representative Church, in all mens judgements least subject unto error) have been ignorant of many things; for even in humane things, whereof we are more capable, the wisest men have been ready to profess, that the greatest

part of that they knew, was the least of that they knew not; much more in things divine, in which our eyes are like the eyes of bats and owls, unto the brightest sunshine, too weak and too angust¹ to comprehend them: therefore their knowledge being defective, their judgement likewise must needs be so. 1 Cor 13:11, 'We know in part, saith the Apostle, therefore we prophesy in part.' Aristotle could say, He that looks not round about a thing, and sees not all the parts and corners of it, can give no certain judgement of it: now who can say in divine mysteries he is able to see all things? and if he be not, he may both be deceived, and deceive.

Lastly, where God intends to give the end he always gives the means to effect and bring that end to pass; but he gives not to the Church the means of infallibility, as perfect knowledge of the truth, sincere love of it, right ordered zeal for it; he takes not always from them those sinful lusts, which breed errings from the faith, and often thrust and impel men into error.

How oft have general Councils, been distracted into factions, leavened with malice, puffed up with pride, etc? and shall we say when their hearts and minds are thus corrupted, that their tongues are notwithstanding infallibly overruled, to pour forth nothing else but oracles? To say that at that instant there false a spirit upon them to guide them with immediate revelation, is to approve the fanatical fancies of the Anabaptists; which they take on them to abhor; which notwithstanding if any do affirm, as some have been bold to do, they must consider, that the prophets which were guided by such spirits, and had the truth inspired by visions, and immediate revelations, did never argue, discuss, or reason of the things they spake and wrote; but only did declare and manifest

what was revealed; but in general Councils the truth is bolted out by reasonings to and fro, the conclusions many times disputed of, and strongly argued on both sides: now where the premisses are only probable, the conclusion cannot be infallible; for they are the cause of the conclusion, and there cannot be more in the effect than was formerly in the cause. This is sufficient to evince that though general Councils, do not at all times *de facto* err (for we all acknowledge the great benefit of the four first general Councils) yet to say that *de possibili* they cannot, is utterly untrue.

Christ hath promised, John 16:13, to send his Spirit which should lead them into all truth; and, Matt 28:20, to be with them to the end of the world.

These places must needs be understood primarily of the Apostles themselves, who only were infallibly led into every truth, and but secondarily of their successors, that is, so far as they insist in their steps and doctrine; for if that were the sense that Bellarmine, Stapleton, and other popish writers give, namely, that the promise is indifferently made to their successors, as well as to themselves, then particular bishops and ministers should be infallible judges of truth and falsehood, and so all controversies in the Church would presently have an end, so as never to spring again. If they say, its not to be understood of them taken single and apart, but as met together, and assembled in a Synod. I answer, there is not the least intimation of this distinction in those places: but the place for such a promise is Matt 18:20. 'Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.' But this place is to be understood of the least meetings of true Christians in the name of Christ, as well as of the largest Councils, and so the smallest company or convention should be capable of this promise of infallibility, as

¹ = narrow

well as the most general and ample Council.

But they farther object, If there should not be a visible, external unerring judge, to which at all times those might resort for resolution, that are not themselves able to wade through the depth of divinity-controversies, there would be no end of wrangling and disputing, nor any certain means to find the truth in matters questioned.

Though there be no infallible, visible, human judge; yet there is an invisible, in fallible judge, and that is the Holy Ghost, speaking in the scriptures, which are therefore called the word of God. And this judge in many respects, is better and fitter than any other. First, this may be easily had, is always ready, and at hand, to which men of all sorts may soon repair; the other ambulatory, to many inaccessible, and to all difficult to be obtained. Secondly, the sentence of this judge is certain and inflexible, not subject to error; but the others mutable like a leaden rule, that may be bended to and fro: for in men, affections have their place; which is the reason that among men there are laws, because the law is not capable of affections; but the lawyer is. Thirdly, this judge is better known, and may sooner be agreed upon by all; for be it granted that the true church is a judge infallible, yet it may be sooner known which is the true Scripture, than which is the true Church, there being more pretenders to the one, than to the other.

While the Church is militant upon the earth, God hath not said, there should be any such end of controversies, as these men dream of; but rather he hath said the contrary, 1 Cor 11:19. 'There must be heresies' in the Church, that those may perish who receive not the love of the truth to be saved, and 'that those which are approved might be known.'

If there were any such means, by God appointed in his Church to determine

controversies infallibly, yet a general Council (though in his place to be respected) is not likely to be it; for is it like God would appoint a means for ending controversies in his church, that for at least three hundred years, (that is, till the time of Constantine the great) could not be had? and though he and others his successors (while the Empire was undivided) might easily assemble Councils, yet when the Empire fell into many subdivisions, and the parts thereof were governed by several kings, of different religions, as now they be, it is impossible the church should have the benefit of them.

What is the use then and benefit of general Councils, if they could be obtained?

They are the best means to find out truth; for many candles give more light, and many eyes see more than one; and in the multitude of Counsellors there is health: and as they are the best means to find it, so from them it hath no small authority; yet notwithstanding they may err in necessary and fundamental points, as the Council of Ariminum, and Seleucia, where there were as many more Bishops, as at the first Nicene Council; and therefore held in two Cities, because no one was able to contain them; yet erred in a fundamental point, decreeing for Arius heresy against the deity of Christ. The second Council at Ephesus did the like, and so ten Councils, at Tyrus, Jerusalem, Philadelphia, Ariminum, Seleucia, Constantinople, Alexandria etc., so the second Council at Nice[ea] set up images, and commanded them to be worshipped, which in the second Council of Constantinople immediately before were utterly condemned.

More instances might easily be given, but these suffice to warrant this conclusion, That a general Council may err in fundamental points. For though the universal Church of Christ, taken for his mystical body on earth,

and complete number of his elect, cannot err in matters fundamental (for then they might fall away, and the gates of hell prevail against them) yet the external visible body of the Church may err, because the truth of God may be locked up within the hearts of such a company, as in competition of suffrages cannot make a greater part in a general Council; so that the sentence decreed therein may be a fundamental error.

From these grounds thus laid, may fitly rise a threefold application.

First, seeing it is the received and approved doctrine of the Papists, That the Church of Rome cannot err in points of faith and doctrine; we see how little hope there is that we and they should ever be reconciled, or that one truth should arise from a composition of their and our opinions: for if they yield in any thing to us, it would presently follow, that in that wherein they now yield, before they erred, and so this fundamental point of their churches not erring, would from thence be overthrown. We may alter our tenets if we will, but they are strongly engaged to keep theirs without any change or variation; we may go to them, they cannot come to us; witness the German Interim, so carefully and often tempered, wherein there were but few of their ingredients left out; yet was it more than Charles V could do to get it entertainment on either side: and therefore those Cassandras that think by wit and policy to reconcile us, attempt a thing impossible. For of what materials shall any middle course be framed, when neither side can spare the smallest piece of timber in their building? they cannot, because thereby they should be argued of erring for merely; we cannot, for true religion is of a brittle nature, break it you may, bend it you cannot, no not in the least degree. It cannot be accommodated to interests, and

respects of policy and serving turns; it cannot be mixed with error, no more than oil with water, iron and steel with clay. *Daniel* 2:43. 'They shall mingle themselves with the seed of men, but they shall not cleave one to another: even as iron is not mixed with clay;' or as the elements when once they are mingled in a compound body do lose their proper forms; even so Religions, when made ingredients, and compounding parts of any other, do lose their forms, and cease to be religions in Gods account. *2 Ki* 17:33. It is said, the mingled people of Samaria feared the Lord and served their own gods, after the manner of the nations whom they carried away from thence; that is, they jumbled all together, the fear of God, & worship of their Idols, thinking thereby to fit both parties, Jews and Heathens, with a religion wherein both might be gratified. But what saith God? doth he approve this mixture? *v.* 34. Unto this day they do after the former manners, they fear not the Lord, neither do they after their statutes, or after the law or commandment which the Lord commanded. God will not own his own commanded worship when mingled and compounded with another.

So *Gal* 5:1, 2. 'Be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage' (that is) take heed of entertaining those rites and customs of the ceremonial law, from which now by Christ ye are set free. Well, but what if circumcision the ancient character be still retained, and joined unto Christ? is it not better to be sure of both? See what he answers in the second verse; 'Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if you be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing.' And again, *v.* 4. 'Christ is become of none effect to you;' As if he should say, Take whether you will, either Christ or circumcision; for both ye cannot have: So *Isa* 1:21, 22. 'How is the faithful City become an harlot?' But how proveth he that? 'Thy silver

is become dross, thy wine mixed with water.' He denies not but they had silver and wine amongst them; but as silver mixed with baser metal becometh dross, and is no longer accounted silver: so wine when it is mixed with water leaves off to be accounted wine. Jer 23:28. 'He that hath my word let him speak my word faithfully; for what is the chaff to the wheat?' Whatsoever of our own we offer to annex to the word of God, in God's account is as if we added chaff to wheat, by which addition the wheat can be no gainer. They that go about to mix true and false religions, are like those that take too big a grasp, and so let what they meant to have sustained fall and break, as we see in Jeroboam who mingled truth and falsehood, not changing the worship, as he thought, but the place and manner of the worship only, lest the kingdom should return unto the house of David, that was the interest, whereunto he thought to make religion stoop, 1 Ki 12:26. etc. But what came of it? He made a nullity of religion, and of his and his posterities title to the kingdom. Saul had a strait command to destroy all the Amalekites, but because in execution of it he needs would interpose his own discretion, in sparing Agag, and some of the cattle, God takes the kingdom from him for it. Moses will not yield to the King of Egypt to leave one hoof behind him, of any thing that did belong unto the Israelites. Mordecai, because God forbid them to make peace with Amalek for ever, will rather hazard his own and others safety, than so much as bow the knee to Haman an Amalekite. Daniel when God commanded to pray towards the temple, will not omit that circumstance of his prayer, though he cannot practise it without hazard of his life. This is the disposition of all whose hearts are perfect with their God; they dare not pare away the least lap from the garment of religion, nor add the least fly to this box of

precious ointment; for in this curious clock-work of religion, every pin and wheel that is amiss distempers all: And as we are wont to lay aside cracked vessels, and distempered watches as unuseful, so doth God distempered and mixed religions. As to the Jews, a garment made of linzy woolsy² might not be worn: so to us a Samaritan religion, made up of true and false, is not to be endured; but as the stomach loathes lukewarm water, so God lukewarm religions. As therefore Elijah exhorts the people to follow either God or Baal, and not to halt between them both; so it's good for us to take heed of mingling truth and falsehood, whereof God is more impatient than of either of the two extremities apart. For one to be a downright Papist may be a sin of ignorance; but to blend and mingle with it, to pick and choose some tinctures of it to serve our worldly turns, cannot but be a sin of knowledge: for if one were fully in his heart persuaded that Popery were the truth, he would embrace that, and cleave to that alone; again, if our religion were thought to be the right, that only will be entertained; but when we mingle thus, and will not run without a bias, but for advantage halt willingly between both, we cannot be accepted. This we speak but for prevention, not knowing what temptations aftertimes may bring; it is good preventing physic to know the truth.

Secondly, seeing we have proved that the judgement of the Church is not infallible in points of faith and doctrine; hence we may learn, to take up nothing merely upon trust, not to think things are so only because the Church hath said it; this foundation is too sandy for us to build our faith upon, that should be built upon the rock which is the word of God: upon which ground, in a manner, the whole fabric of Popery will soon be overthrown, seeing all, or most of them,

² ie. of mixed fibres

are only took up upon the Churches credit; for in all the book of God ye shall not find a word for invocation of Saints, worshipping of images, universality, and supremacy of the Bishop of Rome, purgatory, Popish indulgences, prayer in an unknown tongue, prayer for the dead, consecration of oil, tapers, and holy water, and all that rabble of superstitious ceremonies; but are the hay and stubble that men have heaped together, now one, and then another, according to their several fancies, till the mystery of iniquity was come unto its fullness: for all these controversies are founded, either upon the decrees of the Pope, or unwritten traditions, or the authority of the Church, or Scripture wrested from the native sense to that which they are pleased to put upon it; so that this principle of their Church not erring, is that indeed on which the very weight of Popery doth depend; let this be taken away, and all comes quickly down.

Thirdly, as the Apostle here exhorts Timothy, and in him all ministers to take heed how he behaves himself in the church of God; so may we do all magistrates, both supreme and subordinate to be circumspect and wary how they behave themselves, in this Church of God: for though the ministers be the bees that make the honey, yet the magistrates are the hives wherein it is made and kept; the ministers are the vines that bring forth grapes, yet magistrates are the elms that underprop and hold up these vines; the minister defends the Church with tongue and pen, the magistrate with hand and power, wherewith for that end God hath furnished him; ministers are the preachers of both tables, magistrates the keepers; the executive power of word and sacraments belongs alone to ministers, but directive and coactive, for the orderly and well performance, belongs to magistrates. And the text it self affords us motives.

It is the house of God, and its reason the tenant should keep the house in reparation; and they are magistrates as well as ministers; for if the ruins and breaches of the house be once neglected, both heresies and superstitions will soon creep in, and carry captive with their errors those of the family.

It is the Church of God, of which good magistrate are nurses, Isa 49:23, as therefore the nurse is bound to look to the child, and see it cherished with wholesome food, and kept from dangers, as they will answer to the parents, whose child it is; so magistrates are bound to defend and keep the Church, to see it nourished with milk, and not with poison, that is, with truth, and not with error, as they will answer to that God, who with his own blood hath purchased it unto himself, Acts 20:28. It is the flock of God, and its no disparagement for kings to be his shepherds, as David was; if wolves therefore do enter through their negligence, and snatch up now a sheep, and then a lamb, the Lord will one day require it at their hands, as Laban did at Jacob's.

It is the pillar and ground of truth, that is, the field or garden wherein truth grows, and Magistrates the gardeners or husbandmen; and therefore bound to see the good plants watered, the weeds and stones thrown out that hinder growth, the hedge kept strong and good about it; lest as the serpent got into Eden, and beguiled Eve, so the serpents of our times creep through into this garden, and corrupt the minds of any from that simplicity which is in Christ. The like motives are every where in Scripture scattered; Rev 2:20. 'I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth her self a prophetess, to teach and seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things offered to idols.' Therefore neither errors, nor their authors in the Church of God are to be suffered. John

15:13. 'Every plant which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted out.' And who should root them out, but magistrates, to whom God's vineyard is committed?

Let's come to the Old Testament, where the lives of Magistrates are represented, as the face is in a glass, that shows both spots and beauty. 2 Chron 17, Jehoshaphat commanded the priests and Levites to instruct the people in the Law, from the 7th verse to the 10th; but that's not all, but in the 6th verse it is said, 'His heart was lift up in the ways of the Lord; so that he took away the high places, and the groves out of Judah.' Let us cast our eyes upon the other kings of Israel and Judah, and consider what God himself hath marked and observed in them, seeing his observation cannot but be of moment, like asterisks in the margins of a book. Of Solomon God hath observed, 1 Ki 11:4, that when he was old his wives turned away his heart after other gods, and his heart was not perfect with the Lord his God, that is, sat loose from God, and then the Lord left off to do him good: Of Rehoboam, 2 Chron 11:17 that for three years he walked in the way of David, but when he had established the Kingdom, and had strengthened himself, he forsook the Law of the Lord, and all Israel with him, 2 Chron 12:1-2, therefore in the fifth year of Rehoboam, Shishak King of Egypt came up against Jerusalem, because they had transgresses against the Lord: Of Asa, 1 Ki 15:11, etc. that he did what was right in the sight of the Lord, took away the Sodomites out of the Land, removed all the idols that his fathers had made, removed Maacah his mother from being queen, because she had made an idol in a grove, and burns her idol by the brook Kidron, but the high places were not taken down; therefore v. 16, there was war between Asa and Baasha King of Israel all their days: yet those high places were but the

groves where the tabernacle and altar were which Moses made, where before the temple was built it was lawful for them to offer sacrifice; yet this was that for which the Lord is so offended, because when the Temple once was built, it was no longer lawful to offer sacrifice in any other place. Now when Almighty God shall be so curious, have such a quick and jealous eye upon so small an oversight as this; how sensible will he be, when matters much worse are tolerated and permitted? Jude 3, 'the faith once given to the Saints.' It was but once given; therefore if lost, or any way corrupted, it will not be given again: for it was given *once* for all, and is not to be revealed a second time; and therefore he exhorts them to *contend earnestly* for the same.

For ourselves, we have cause to magnify God's mercy in our present condition, under the government of his gracious Majesty, and to remember this day, which is the birth day of his Majesty, seeing under his shadow we enjoy the public profession and practice of religion, and may live not only a quiet, but an honest life; a blessing that we cannot prize too much, and should therefore much enlarge our hearts with thankfulness to God, and love to our princes, to bestow on them not only outward obedience, but also inward, to assist them, and be subject to them, not by constraint, but willingly, to pray for them not formally, but heartily, as for the instruments and conduits of so great blessings. Notwithstanding we the ministers of God have been bold to deliver from the mighty God of heaven and earth, to conscience his vicegerent this impartial and inflexible rule, not fashioned and bended by the hand of man, but moulded by the holy Ghost, that thereby we may discover wherein we have fallen short, and be careful to amend it: wherein we have done well, and be encouraged to do it more and more, that

is, to make freer passage for the truth, and dam up the current of errors, whether Popish or Arminian, or of what kind else soever; for it's the Lords business, and blessed is the man that doth it diligently: for as any walked more perfectly with God, so they had more perfect peace, and where unevenness was found in their obedience, there was it also found in God's blessing on them. Though wickedness and crooked ways may get the advantage for a start, yet by it shall no man be established, Prov 12:3. And again, though uprightness be sometimes overwhelmed, yet like a cork at last it will arise from under water; the prosperity of wicked men, like a watery sunshine

may for a while continue, but the late evening will bring a storm that never shall blow over: he may flourish for a time, like a green bay tree, but at last shall surely wither. Those that are perfect with their God, may have a winters season, but shall at last be sure to flourish. For if God be governor of the world, disposer of the things therein, according to his will, if good and evil are done by him alone, then certainly it must be well with those that fear him, and ill with those that sin against him; for it will be always found a true and certain rule, That uprightness and holiness is the cause of all our happiness, and obliquity, and sin the cause of all our misery. ¶

POETRY

The Queen is dead!: Long live the King!

Written for a service held at Ebenezer Chapel, Smallfield, Surrey, on Coronation Day, 26th June, 1902, by the pastor, Mr E. H. Preston.

O Thou, to whom all power belongs,
Accept to-day our grateful songs,
O lift our hearts to Thee.
For all Thy wondrous acts of love,
For all Thy mercy from above
Eternal praises be.

Eternal King, and Lord of lords,
Enthroned and crowned in heaven's high dome,
To Thee all honours be.
All earthly crowns are delegate,
All kingly pomp, all earth's estate,
Must bow the knee to Thee.

Assist us Jesus, by Thy grace,
Rightly upon Thy head to place
The crown we owe to Thee.
Thou art our rightful heavenly King,
Accept the tribute which we bring
In loyalty to Thee.

Of late Thy sovereign hand removed
The earthly crown from her we loved,
(In this we bow to Thee).
Still in thy hand 'are gifts for men,'
Wilt thou in kindness give them—when
We come for them to Thee?

O bless our King, enthroned in state
Midst earthly pomp, and honour great,
(A faint reflex of Thine).
Be pleased to seal our placing hands,
By that disposing, fixing, sure,
Confirming hand of Thine.

As flowing rills, with downward trend,
Obey Thy laws, and e'er descend
Into the mighty sea;
So in Thy hand, O King of kings,
May his heart be for whom we plead,
In humble strains to Thee.

MINISTRY

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.

FRISTON, SUFFOLK: *Baptist Church*, Mill Road IP17 1PH (4 miles from Aldeburgh, 3 miles from Snape Maltings). Lord's Day services: 10.45 am and 2 pm. Bible Study Tuesdays 7.30 pm. AV and *Gospel Hymns*. Reformed Evangelical worship. *Pastor*: Michael Harley. fristonbaptistsuffolk.org.uk. Tel 01728 602657.

LANDFORD WOOD, WILTSHIRE: *Landford Wood Mission Hall*, Stock Lane, Landford Wood, SP5 2ES (off A36). Weekly Service on each Lord's Day at 3 pm, (God

willing) from February to December. Conservative Evangelical Worship using the AV at all services. Elder: J.E. North, phone 07500265419

SUFFOLK: *Wattisham Chapel*. Evangelical and Reformed services each LORD'S DAY 10.45 am and 6.30 pm. Metrical Psalms and hymns. AV only used. Pastor Elisha John Masih. Tel. 07737031749. wattishambaptist.org

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Prayers for the King's Majesty (From the Book of Common Prayer)

O GOD, who providest for thy people by thy power, and rulest over them in love: Vouchsafe so to bless thy Servant our King, that under him this nation may be wisely governed, and thy Church may serve thee in all godly quietness; and grant that he being devoted to thee with his whole heart, and persevering in good works unto the end, may, by thy guidance, come to thine everlasting kingdom; through Jesus Christ thy Son our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

O LORD our God, who upholdest and governest all things by the word of thy power: Receive our humble prayers for our Sovereign Lord CHARLES, set over us by thy grace and providence to be our King; and, together with him, bless, we beseech thee, Camilla the Queen Consort, William Prince of Wales, the Princess of Wales, and all the Royal Family; that they, ever trusting in thy goodness, protected by thy power, and crowned with thy gracious and endless favour, may long continue before thee in peace and safety, joy and honour, and after death may obtain everlasting life and glory, by the merits and mediation of Christ Jesus our Saviour, who with thee and the Holy Ghost liveth and reigneth ever one God, world without end. Amen.

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