

CHRISTIAN WATCH

A PROTESTANT BIBLICAL WITNESS

"And what I say unto you

I say unto all, Watch"

Mark 13:37

NEWSLETTER

February 2014

February, 2014

To all Christian Watch Members

Dear Friends,

As I pen this letter, I do so because our Chairman, David Crowter, is again laid aside in hospital – this time for knee surgery. Pray that the operation will be a complete success and that, following a period of convalescence, David will soon be back on his feet once more.

At our February Committee Meeting, I felt led of the Lord to commence our deliberations together by reading the passage in Paul's letter to the Church at Ephesus, exhorting us to be soldiers for the Lord Jesus Christ and to put on the whole armour of God. How important it is that we are fully equipped for the battle. Let me encourage you by quoting the words in question – to be found in Ephesians chapter 6 verses 10 – 20:-

“Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints; and for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the Gospel, for which I am an ambassador in bonds; that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.”

We are engaged today in spiritual warfare. Satan's power and spiritual darkness are all around us but we are encouraged to watchfulness, perseverance, prayer, spiritual utterance and boldness as God's messengers. Let us be faithful in taking our stand in these apostate days and remembering that we are here *‘for such a time as this’* (Esther chapter 4 verse 14).

Over recent months, the weather throughout our nation has made headline news. One of our members – Peter Simpson of Penn Free Methodist Church, near High Wycombe – was interviewed on BBC Radio during the month on whether or not we were under the judgment of God and he expressed the view that it was a warning from God to the nation to humble itself and start praying. There was a need for heartfelt repentance and a turning back to God. In this connection, we have included an article from Dr. Alan C. Clifford (Norwich Reformed Church) entitled **Wild Weather: Is God Speaking?** Is there a connection between ‘wild weather’ and ‘Divine activity?’

A preaching message delivered some 16 years ago in London – **Keep Your Eyes Upon Jesus** – by Rev. Ken Kemble of the United States of America reminds us that God is Sovereign – that we must keep our eyes on the Lord Jesus Christ and, although wickedness abounds – and the righteous are trodden down – we are encouraged to focus on the fact that God is still in control.

The Great Battle For The Future by Rev. Geoff Thomas (one of our members in Aberystwyth) outlines for us four important considerations based on Romans chapter 1 verses 28 – 32 and shows how men and women have not changed since the days of the Apostle Paul. It challenges us to think about

- What is sin?
- A society's morals reflect its foundational beliefs
- People are held responsible by God for their actions
- How God responds to such behaviour and what must I do?

Finally, we include a further Word from the Lord entitled **One Thing Desired** by the late James Bourne. Do you feel the spiritual ardent longing of the Psalmist David for the sweet presence of the Lord in your life? Can you say with the Psalmist – “My soul thirsteth for Thee, my flesh longeth for Thee in a dry and thirsty land....”

Lack of space does not permit the inclusion in this Newsletter of several news items of particular interest and importance – items such as the following:-

- Sharia law now in force in the UK – London to lead in Islamic finance as David Cameron's wish to allow the Islamic Bank of Britain to offer Islamic bonds operating under a new Islamic Index takes effect.
- Rainbow flag hoisted in Whitehall – Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg “absolutely delighted”.
- Scottish Parliament votes through legislation to re-define marriage to include same-sex relationships.
- Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby congratulates the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Westminster Vincent Nichols on being made a Cardinal.

Pray without ceasing – 1 Thessalonians chapter 5 verse 17.

Pray for the planning that is now under way for our Christian Watch stall in the Christian Resources Exhibition in May in Sandown. Thousands of people visit this Exhibition annually - may the Word of God go forth with much power and clarity from our Christian Watch representatives and good literature be widely distributed.

Yours in the Saviour's Name,

Ian Henderson

Ian Henderson,
Vice –Chairman

PLEASE NOTE OUR NEW EMAIL ADDRESSES ON THE BACK COVER

Management Committee

Mr. M. Brockes (Hon. Treasurer/Co. Secretary); Mr. D. Crowter (Chairman);
Mr. I. Henderson; Mr. M. Hobbs; Mr. D. Lawson; Mrs. J. Cummins (Secretary)

WILD WEATHER: IS GOD SPEAKING?

Dr. Alan C. Clifford
Norwich Reformed Church

The weather has dominated the news for over a month, with serious flooding in the South-east, the West of England and elsewhere. Our hearts go out to those who have lost loved ones as well as possessions. Unusual climate changes, in the wettest month ever, seem to be the cause of higher-than-average rainfall and high westerly winds, resulting in widespread flooding - the worst since records began in 1727. Naturally, this has increased discussion about global warming among experts and ordinary people alike. From the perspective of those of us who believe in God, questions are raised about His providential involvement in these and other calamities. Whether or not these and similar events in recent years in the UK, Europe and other parts of the world are 'end times' phenomena (as some have suggested), we rightly ask: "Is God speaking in all this?"

Haughty atheists will say, "If there is a God, and He's a God of love, He would never allow calamities and crises like these floods!" The assumption is that we just don't deserve these things and God should not permit them. Rather than feel intimidated and defensive, there's only one way of replying to this kind of comment: "Since God is a God of mercy and justice, it's a miracle that we aren't all flooded when you consider the wickedness of the human race. Indeed, it's a miracle that He tolerates atheists like you."

Of course, a further question would be: "If God's judgement is involved, are the people in flooded areas more sinful than the rest of us?" Those directly affected will ask, "Why us? Are we more sinful than others?" Replying to those who thought in these terms after eighteen people were killed by the collapsing tower in Siloam, our Lord Jesus Christ said, "Nay: but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." (see *Luke 13: 4-5*). In short, these token judgements (*Greek* - krisis = judgement) are intended to shake us out of our spiritual complacency. While these solemn themes go through our minds at such times, God's mercies are not to be ignored. Indeed, it is remarkable how people rally round and cheerfully help one another in crises. Such troubles bring out a real 'community spirit' in a way that normal life often fails to do.

When the Old Testament psalmist King David says, 'The Lord also thundered in the Heavens, and the Highest gave His voice' (*Psalms 18: 13*), he declares his belief that God, the Almighty Maker, is ultimately behind all weather events. Dramatic weather patterns especially remind us that God is there. He is displaying His power! They thus remind us that there's a power greater than ourselves, even in 2014 AD. While we are thankful for their aid in predicting bad weather, computers don't control the world. God does! Of course, apart from periodic cycles, freak weather is now explained in terms of climate change. However, there is no absolute unanimity among the experts. Yorkshire had serious flooding in the 1920s. Indeed, there were unseasonable storms and floods long before cars, trains, ships and planes started pumping carbon dioxide into the atmosphere.

So David is quick to remind us that God's sovereignty in providence as well as salvation includes His sovereignty over the weather. Let us hear John Calvin's eloquent exposition of David's words:

[The Bible speaks of God activity] in the sky and the earth, as if [David] had said, "It has been as visible as the changes which give different appearances to the sky and the earth." If natural things always flowed in an even and uniform course, the power of God would not be so perceptible. But when He changes the face of the sky by sudden rain, or by loud thunder, or by dreadful tempests, those who before were, as it were, asleep and insensible, must necessarily be awakened and be tremblingly conscious of the existence of a presiding God. Such sudden and unforeseen changes manifest more clearly the presence of the great Author of nature.

Of course, many would dismiss Calvin's words as primitive, pre-scientific language (he died in 1564). However, the educated men of the sixteenth century - of whom Calvin was one of the most eminent - were not as unscientific as we might think! As his comment makes clear, Calvin clearly knew something about meteorology. However, as if to remind us of the Divine dimension in physical events, non-reductionist Calvin adds:

But David, in describing the phenomena of the atmosphere, rises, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, above the phenomena themselves, and represents God to us as the Supreme Governor of the whole...

Thus there is a Judeo-Christian view of the weather: fine weather is an expression of God's undeserved mercy. It is neither ours by right nor a mere scientific fact. But many people, even in this twenty-first century, are quick to complain of 'acts of God', yet are slow to thank Him for warm summers and fine days - equally 'acts of God'!

So, is there a connection between 'wild weather' and Divine activity? Smug Bishops are anxious to deny it, and Libby Purves and her ilk are quick to pour scorn on the suggestion. However, their mockery looks pretty feeble in the face of recent and current storms.

If a UKIP Councillor was not allowed to say it, and 'PC' clergy are too terrified to say it, I now affirm it. I cannot deny a touch of the Divine in our environmental 'winter of discontent'. The astonishing storms and consequent flooding are the kind of events one would expect from Almighty God, angry at a society which flouts His religious and ethical directives for humanity, including the acceptance of dark and barbaric Islam in our once-Christian culture. On top of the UK's hedonistic, violent, selfish and socially corrupt ways, unless the Government changes course over so-called SSM, and unless church leaders stop pleading for a toleration of homosexuality instead of urging society to repentance, who knows what judgements are around the corner?

While I am a Pastor in the Reformed (Calvinist) tradition, I heartily applaud Demetri Marchessini's 'Open Letter to Libby Purves' in the *Daily Telegraph* (28 January, 2014). It is time to repent and cry to God for mercy. May He grant it to us, according to His merciful promises revealed in Jesus Christ, the Son of God and only Saviour of the world. Amen.

The following prayers, from the **Book of Common Prayer** (1662), serve well as an urgent petition at this time of national distress. May we be on our knees before worse calamities befall us.

O MOST powerful and glorious Lord God, at Whose command the winds blow, and lift up the waves of the sea, and Who stillest the rage thereof; we, Thy creatures, but miserable sinners, do in this our great distress cry unto Thee for help: save, Lord, or else we perish. We confess, when we have been safe and seen all things quiet about us, we have forgot Thee our God and refused to hearken to the still voice of Thy Word and to obey Thy commandments: But now we see, how terrible Thou art in all Thy works of wonder; the great God to be feared above all: and therefore we adore Thy Divine Majesty, acknowledging Thy power, and imploring Thy goodness. Help, Lord, and save us for Thy mercy's sake in Jesus Christ Thy Son, our Lord.

Amen.

O Almighty Lord God, who for the sin of man didst once drown all the world, except eight persons, and afterward of Thy great mercy didst promise never to destroy it so again; we humbly beseech Thee, that although we for our iniquities have worthily deserved a plague of rain and waters, yet upon our true repentance Thou wilt send us such weather, as that we may receive the fruits of the earth in due season; and learn both by Thy punishment to amend our lives, and for Thy clemency to give Thee praise and glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

KEEP YOUR EYES UPON JESUS!

by the Rev. Ken Kemble of the United States

(Excerpt from a sermon delivered at Orange Street Congregational Church, London, 11 July, 1998)

“Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset [us], and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the Author and Finisher of [our] faith; Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right Hand of the throne of God. For consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.” (Hebrews 12:1-3)

Prayer

“And straightway Jesus constrained His disciples to get into a ship, and to go before Him unto the other side, while He sent the multitudes away. And when He had sent the multitudes away, He went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, He was there alone. But the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves: for the wind was contrary. And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea. And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear. But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid. And Peter answered Him and said, Lord, if it be Thou, bid me come unto Thee on the water. And He said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus. But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me. And immediately Jesus stretched forth [His] hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt? And when they were come into the ship, the wind ceased. Then they that were in the ship came and worshipped Him, saying, Of a truth thou art the Son of God.” Matthew 14:22-33

In this passage in Matthew, we see something that I think is very significant. Jesus had been preaching and, as usual, had attracted a large crowd. Five thousand men, besides women and children, had gathered to hear Him, and He not only taught them, but He also fed them all (possibly as many as ten thousand people) through a miracle of provision. After He had fed them, He sent them away, and instructed His disciples to get into a boat and go out onto the Sea of Galilee while He Himself went to be alone to pray.

While Christ was in prayer, the wind became boisterous, and the waters of the sea became severely troubled. But in the fourth watch of the night (somewhere between 3 a.m. and 6 a.m.), He went out to the boat, walking on the water! When the disciples (who were, I'm sure, already very concerned about the weather) saw Him, they were frightened, and thought they were looking at an *apparition!* Knowing this, Jesus said *“Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid!”*

Peter, always the first to speak up, good or bad, said *“Lord, if it be Thou, bid me come unto Thee on the water!”* So Jesus instructed Peter to come on out to Him.

Peter, following Christ's instruction, proceeded to go out to Jesus; and he too was walking on the water!

But when Peter realised what was going on, and saw that the wind and the waves were tempestuous, he was afraid, and began to *sink down into the water*. Peter *immediately* cried out to the Master, and Jesus stretched out His hand to catch him. And as Jesus caught him, He said *“O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?”*

Jesus then took him, and they got into the boat; and when they did, *the storm immediately ceased*, and in this same account in the Gospel of John (6:21), it records that they were immediately to the other side of the sea. And *they all worshipped Jesus, saying “Of a truth Thou art the Son of God!”*

There is something very significant that I want you to see in this account; something that I hope will help you ... it is the same with us today.

You see, our Lord *has* gone up. And we are left here below to face the storm. Yet, we do not have to face the storms of life alone; He is *ever with us*. Hebrews 7:25 says that He “*ever liveth to make intercession.....*”

As long as we hear His Voice, and obey His Word, we will be on *top* of the troubled water, or, *on top of the storm --- the situation that troubles us --- we will be on top of LIFE*. But when we take our eyes off Him, and begin to go our own way, and focus on other things, we will begin to sink down into that which we are focused on.

When Peter followed the Master's instruction, He was on *top* of the water, as troubled as it was. But when Peter took His eyes off Jesus, and began to look at the troubled water all around him, he began to sink down into that water.

What He was FOCUSED on began to CONSUME him!

And it's the same with you and me. You see, just as Peter sank into the troubled waters, *we too will sink if we focus on the trouble that is all around us!*

Now, I know, there are many things out there to trouble the waters. There will be storms in life. But do *not focus on the storm!* Because what you are focused on will *consume you!*

That is why we *must* keep our eyes on Jesus! Because as we are focused on Him, we will not be consumed by the storm, but will be consumed with our Lord and Master Jesus Christ and His precious Holy Spirit as He becomes more and more the centre of our lives! *And when we are focused on and consumed with the central figure of all the ages, we will NEVER be shaken!*

We are indeed in a very troublesome time in the history of our people. Wickedness abounds, and the righteous are pressed down. The turbulent wind and the tempestuous waves are all around us on every side, and the trouble and hopelessness of our situation would seem to be almost insurmountable. Life is full of storms. What are you going to focus on?

We must be as determined as Job was when he said “*Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him!*”

No matter what happens, we must remember that God is *absolutely SOVEREIGN*, and that the rulers of all nations and Kingdoms of this world are but pawns in His Hand, to accomplish that which He desires.

That's hard to remember when evil seems to prevail, *but GOD IS STILL IN CONTROL!* *And don't you ever forget it.* We may be under the Refiner's fire at present, *but it MUST be so; for He is purging out the dross. And He WILL purge the Kingdom of all that offends!*

Don't focus on the troubled water, and be consumed by it! Live your life according to God's Word; keep your eyes on Jesus and put your trust in Him, and you'll be on top of the troubled waters! ***Because right out there in the middle of all that trouble is the ROCK OF AGES; and He is a FIRM FOUNDATION!***

Rock of Ages, cleft for me;
Let me hide myself in thee;
Let the water and the blood,
From thy riven side which flowed,
Be of sin the double cure,
Cleanse me from its guilt and power.

(A.M. Toplady)

THE GREAT BATTLE FOR THE FUTURE

By Rev. Geoff Thomas
Alfred Place Baptist Church, Aberystwyth

I was visiting a member in hospital and, after I had spoken to her, I went around the people in the other three beds. In one lay an old woman who was depressed and she said to me several times "I want to die . . . I want to die." "Well, if you are going to die then you must get ready to meet God - and the way you meet God is to deal with Him while you are still in this world. You must say to Him, 'God be merciful to me a sinner.'" "Oh, I'm not a sinner," she said indignantly. Now what did she mean by that? She wasn't claiming that she was absolutely perfect. She meant that reports of her misconduct had not appeared in the newspapers. She had not been a criminal; she hadn't indulged in sexual sin. Her response was typical of many people in Europe today.

1. WHAT IS SIN?

The answer to that question is what makes the last five verses of Romans chapter one so fascinating, because Paul is explaining to us what sin is. Now people read these verses and they just remember one thing, the emphasis on homosexual actions and sexual deviation. They may also be struck quite rightly by the gravity with which Paul views unethical living, but they may also feel smug and self-righteous that no one could point the finger at them for doing things like that. But I want you to see the Apostle's judgments on other things, to notice what they are, those other examples of moral disobedience; but they are put in the same category as all the other deviations from the will of God. They are found cheek by jowl with what we think of as less significant sins – they are alongside terrible crimes like murder. We find here the phrase "*all unrighteousness*" (v.29), suggesting just how multifarious sin is. Murder is here, of course, but so is the sin of *envy* (v.29) – seeing another woman's slim figure, or that she has the latest tablet, or a boyfriend and there is anger because she has those things and you don't – it's green eyes. Then there is *gossiping (whisperers)* (v.29) – telling others of the secret falls of people you both know; "Did you realise this about him? Are you aware of what he did?" People speak to the detriment of other men's reputations. Then there are even what the Apostle refers to as "*heartless*" actions, people being formally correct and straight in what they say but totally lacking in tenderness and sympathy. That is simply another kind of sin.

When people think of the condition of the Roman world of the time of Nero, fortified by epics on television and block buster movies about the Coliseum and the games and the gladiators, they all portray the most salacious and scatological aspects of life in the ancient world. We acknowledge that those things were there of course, but as I say, Paul is not exclusively concerned with such behaviour. For example, he mentions '*maliciousness*,' and we can see in Syria today a nation torn in two by old hatreds that recently have exploded into infamous cruelties, so that hundreds of thousands of lives have been destroyed. But you don't need to go to the eastern Mediterranean to discover that particular sin. Strife is seen in our town when the terms of a Will are read and a family is split and all contact between the different branches broken for a lifetime. The second most common problem people take to the Citizen's Advice Bureau after debt is neighbours, strife over noise and hedges and parking. Paul also speaks of '*deceit*,' the claims or hints men drop of educational attainments they've never obtained, that they went to Cambridge, but it was two years in a teachers' training college. Men claim a certain status – like singleness – that they don't have – they are married men who are deceiving in order to compromise a woman. Or think of the vast world of sport and how it is corrupted by deceit. Think of Lance Armstrong, the seven-time winner of the Tour de France. He lived a deceiving lie, all day, every day, throughout his sporting career. What did he say? "I didn't live a lot of lies, but I lived one big one." There are hundreds of thousands of sportsmen who deceive just like that cycling cheat. Or think of the late Jimmy Savile, the great fixer, knighted for his work; that wretched, evil, ugly deceiver. We all know about deceit because we are guilty of it in some way or other. Or there is '*pride and boastfulness*' (v.30) which is everywhere today; especially in the professing church. We have all observed that the people

who have much to be proud about are the last people to refer to their achievements. We are amazed to learn of the academic record of people whom we thought were of average intelligence. They never spoke of their books or their awards.

Then notice that Paul describes this other category of wickedness, "*disobedient to parents*" (v.30). That is another mark of a depraved mind. Hear the mother, "You have opened this packet of biscuits." "No, I haven't," her son says defiantly, when it was bound to be him. "Please tidy up your room! Get your homework done first. Don't stay out late!" – they are such sensible comments, aren't they? In the news recently we've heard of a girl who disappeared in York when she was out with her friends for the evening. It seems so sad, and then you discover that all those girls had been drinking heavily and they were coming out of a club at 2.15 in the morning and they were walking near a river when she disappeared – the CCTV cameras trace the stumblings of this raucous group - and then suddenly she is not part of the gang - and foul play is not being suspected by the police. They think that she fell in the river. "Don't stay out late!" But who can say to her friends, "I must get home because I promised my mother I wouldn't be out late?" Only nerdy girls do things because their parents asked them to.

You can link it with the next category Paul mentions, "*without understanding*" (v.31) – what a waste! What folly! Then he joins together a trio of other kinds of wickednesses which are also all too familiar to us – "*covenant breakers, implacable, unmerciful*" (v.31). We know those vices only too well and most of us have first-hand painful experience of such attitudes from our acquaintance with our own hearts. A man announces to his wife that he's leaving her because he's met someone else. It is a bolt from the blue to her. She has never suspected that anything was wrong. What a wretch! How perfectly these words apply to such rotters - "*covenant breakers, implacable, unmerciful.*" This man had made vows and solemn promises but he threw them aside when infatuation for another woman filled his mind. Think of Salome asking for the head of John the Baptist – "*covenant breakers, implacable, unmerciful.*" Think of David arranging for Bathsheba's brave young husband Uriah be deserted in a skirmish and allowed to be killed - "*covenant breakers, implacable, unmerciful.*" Those sins at first glance don't seem worth linking to those other evil attitudes like "depravity" and "God-hating". They seem trivial in comparison, but we are very familiar with them and we can see the weeping casualties of such kinds of wickedness.

Or again think of this striking phrase of Paul's, "*implacable*" (v.31). Movies and television are invented and immediately there is the birth of pornography. The world-wide web brings the possibility of knowledge at our finger tips into our own homes, but immediately there are ugly sexual sins also brought into our living rooms, or people find new ways of deceiving you by telling you they have millions of pounds to give to you if only you provide them with your bank account details. Drugs are invented so that pain and depression can be treated, but they are sold on the street to young and old and a new generation of addicts arise. Fallen man is so cunning that he can invent new ways of doing evil.

These verses are a dark mosaic of a decadent groaning world in which we live, and I ask you what is your picture of a decadent world? What kind of society do you think is one that has been given over by God? What kind of community brings down the wrath of God upon it? Isn't it a society where sexual permissiveness abounds? Yes. Isn't it somewhere where men are faithless, heartless and ruthless, where children defy their parents, where there is every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity? Is it a city which is full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice? Is it a country village in the Cotswolds, such a pretty place but in the village inn there are "*backbiters, haters of God, spiteful, proud, boasters*" (v.30). Is it a civilisation where men invent ways of doing evil? Paul tells us that a country characterised by those things is a community which is marked by the wrath of God. Paul tells us that that is a society given over by God. In other words, God says to man, "If that is what you hunger for, then you can have it," and he abandons them to it. He gives them what they crave for; not only violence and sexual perversion, but all those additional things too which destroy the sweet stuff of human relationships. And that is the glory and solemnity of this passage, that it highlights for us, from God's perspective, those things that men can dismiss because they are simply what everyone does; they are mere human frailties.

2. A SOCIETY'S MORALS REFLECT ITS FOUNDATIONAL BELIEFS

And I would say that the acceptable behaviour of a society will reflect the foundational beliefs of that society. The Roman Empire of that day was polytheistic and idolatrous and immoral. The ethics of national life steadily reflected these precise features; what audiences laughed at in the theatres, what philosophers commented on in their writings, how the rich and famous behaved in their relationships with young boys, and women, and slaves. It was reflected in what was written on the walls of Pompeii when Vesuvius rained its ash down on the place and buried it.

So where do we stand today? Precisely in that situation of theological and ethical collapse. We have lived for the past hundred years on the moral capital of the Christian past. We are going further and further into uncharted territory. God is now marginalised from the media, and from education, and from child-bearing, and from the law. Our God has been banished. The one by whom we spoke in the courts of law; the one who witnessed our marriages; the one to whom our doctors vowed they'd do no harm to the baby or the helpless or the elderly; the great author of the penal functions of the law of God; the source of knowledge, every fact being a God-created fact – this living God – He has gone, and so how can morals survive? How can marriage survive the death of God? How can justice survive the demise of the law-giver? How can education survive in the death of the God of epistemology?

Now you may think that I am a prophet of doom, but I must say this one thing. There has been found in the history of the world one fact, that democracy has been able to flourish only when it is based upon a Christian foundation. And I find in the whole history of western civilisation that rule of the people by the people and for the people can't work effectively without the presence of high, moral and spiritual standards on the part of the masters; and, in a democracy, the people are the masters and when people lose their theology and lose their God and lose their categorical imperatives, there is an inevitable regression into anarchy. But even the anarchy itself will not be permanent because it will be found necessary to impose upon the disorder an order that tyranny alone can control.

That is why, in the abandonment and loss of theology and the subsequent abandonment of the disappearance of absolute standards, we are facing a challenge to the permanence of democratic institutions themselves. We are finding ourselves, to say the least, on the threshold of total, social and moral breakdown. All the weekly statements coming from such organisations as the 'Christian Institute' and 'Christian Concern' are evidence for this. I am not saying for one moment that breakdown is inevitable. God in grace may arrest the decline and revive and restore, but one thing we have to remind ourselves continually, that western civilisation has no Divine right before God. Almighty God has no need of us. The Christian cause does not need the western world. And should it please God to give us over as a consequence of our own sin and our suppressing the truth in our unrighteousness – then we will be dispensed with just as the seven churches in Asia Minor were abandoned.

3. PEOPLE ARE HELD RESPONSIBLE BY GOD FOR THEIR ACTIONS

Then you see something else, as Paul describes these people. He says that God "*gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient*" (v.28). Their behaviour flowed from their state of mind, not from their genetic code and DNA, not from their upbringing, but from how the values received by their minds, judged and acted upon in what they did. Paul does not go on in the closing verses of this first chapter to describe a collection of sicknesses. Rather, the Apostle is saying that they were "*filled with all unrighteousness*" (v.29). What they do is reprehensible; they are morally responsible for their choices. It is not because of some biological, organic defect that they speak and act as they do but because they have given their minds to receiving these things and dwelling on them. So there is a new bondage, but it is not a bondage resulting from biological deficiency or from social pressures. It is a slavery resulting from a soul's bondage to a habit and state of mind.

We ourselves, as believers, must be so discerning as we stand before all the claims of people in authority who say in schools and colleges and in the media and in the National Health Service that Christians may not pass judgment on such behaviour, that there are simply some people who choose to behave one way while others in a contrary way. "Such behaviour should not be regarded as a sin; it is an illness." Such statements are made in clear defiance of the teaching of this kind of passage. The Word of God is not saying, "Let me tell you about immoral men whose immoral actions have some medical basis and explanation." No. People of sexual perversions and alcoholics and greedy men and women and the violent are not people with biological problems. They are certainly people with tremendous problems, but they are moral problems; they are people with spiritual problems. Their enslavement is an enslavement of the will, and the moment we call it a kind of disease we do two things.

i] First, we undermine their sense of human responsibility because a person with measles is not morally blameworthy for being covered in measles' spots. He could not help having this illness. He got it while a friend of his did not get it. The determinist grip of a disease grabbed him. It got him while he was sitting by someone on a certain bus, or teaching in a class, and hence through the environment and through a virus the illness got him. It was all out of his choice and his control. The son of a gun was helpless before it. It simply trod on him and he was flattened on a bed for a week getting over it. I am simply pointing out to you the difference between getting an illness and behaving in the ways Paul describes in these last verses of Romans chapter one. We believe, "What a piece of work is man!" We believe that and stand in awe of the intelligence and bravery and creativity and mother's love of people we have known and heard about. Then we will not say and we do not believe that a person is absolutely helpless before his temper - and his desires - and his greed - and the lusts of his mind - and his flesh. Those forces are different. They are eminently resistible. I do not and cannot accept that people are trapped impotently before forces within them that utterly dominate their lives and all they can do is go with the flow. I say that that attitude is quite degrading.

Paul tells us that all men are quite aware of this. They pass judgment on others for what they do. Paul says, "*Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them*" (v.32). You hear them crying out at the trial of a murderer, "I hope he rots in Hell forever", but they continue in other sins which are maybe even more reprehensible and they laugh at the behaviour of others who cheat and lie and steal and fornicate as they do and get away with it. "Lucky dog!" they say with a smile and they continue in the sins that so easily beset them.

ii] Second, this attitude to sins that they are mere illnesses is the philosophy of despair, necessarily, because it is claiming that our crimes and our drives are simply our natures! Think of it, not only do we steal, but our natures are such we can't prevent ourselves from stealing and that is how we are made; this is our condition, and medically it is irreversible. I am saying that that is the door to despair - and to totally unnecessary despair - because these people can be truly elevated by the grace of God and transformed. I can understand the despair of the pure evolutionist because he says that man has always been behaving like this. Of course we reject that, believing that man was created upright and chose to fall into his current rebellion against God. Also the evolutionist denies that there is any supernatural power that operates from outside and comes into our lives and changes us personally; and again the evolutionist also believes that men and women are destined to always be like this. That is his despairing faith, that, as we see it now, so it was from the very beginning; and forever it has to be just like this, world without end. Evolutionistic determinism rules! But that is not my faith and that is why I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is the power of the God who is greater than us and greater than our most powerful desires. Our Gospel is not a Gospel that can reverse a medical condition, but it is a Gospel that can reverse a moral and spiritual condition. It can redeem man from his slavery to his lusts and to his despair.

One more thing, when we look at this catalogue of a "depraved mind" and "every kind of wickedness", it is not only an expose of human sin, it is a catalogue of human misery. You look at that list and you think for a moment of the pain that lies behind it, the broken hearts, the shattered hopes, the battered wives and the lost childhood; all the sorrow and the anguish -

think of that! What is it that all our text is describing when it is set in the framework of Almighty God, the One who is Light, in whom there is no darkness at all, the God of total integrity? I say that it is all a part of the wrath of God revealed from Heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. These men knew the truth about God from creation and from conscience, and many from the preaching of Jesus Christ, and they proceeded to distort the truth. Then, as the years past, they found themselves at last in despair and misery. They were living in moral and social anarchy with all sorts of psychological and social problems for themselves, living in hopeless misery, surviving by drugs and on alcohol.

4. HOW GOD RESPONDS TO SUCH BEHAVIOUR AND WHAT MUST I DO?

We have to ask what is the response of God to this behaviour? What is His attitude to people He has loved, to whom He has given every good and perfect thing, whom He has sincerely urged to leave that broad road that is leading them to destruction. "Why will you die?" He often asks them. It is not His will that they perish and He weeps over them as they reject His Son Jesus Christ and all His offers of mercy. He looks at them living in an abyss of misery and despair. He hears them mocking his Son hour after hour as He is hanging on a cross with nails through His limbs. What is His response to this? Paul sums it up in this chapter in one mighty monosyllable. It is the word 'wrath.' *"For the wrath of God is revealed from Heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness"*(v.18). This wrath is being revealed in the processes of history. This wrath is revealed in the words of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, when He spoke of those who perished in disasters of His day and then He said, "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." He often explained His warnings in terms of outer darkness, and the wailing of those there, and of fires that are not quenched or of a worm that does not die. He was concerned to bring our minds and affections to this reality.

What then is the plight of man today? It is not seen in his economic condition or his cultural barrenness or his psychological problems (though these are all there in our nation). But more important than all of that is that everyone who receives great mercies from God throughout his life, but who then proceeds to disdain the Giver and who does things in man's own way - he is under the wrath of God and he faces a close encounter with Him after death. One day I shall stand before the great white throne and the Lord will ask me, "Did you ever hear of Me?" and it is impossible to deceive God. I have to tell the truth. So I have to tell Him, "My conscience spoke to me of Thy righteous demands and the Heavens above declared how glorious Thou art. I saw with my eyes Thine eternal power and glory in Thy creation. I heard of Thy Son Jesus Christ and that He spoke to men sweetly saying, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." "And what did you do?" I shall reply, "I did nothing at all. I ignored it all and did things my way." "You mean that you are without excuse?" Silence. Every mouth is stopped. The whole of unredeemed mankind lies guilty before God.

When I speak I shall say again, "Yes, I heard of the marvel of redeeming grace, God making His blessed Son sin for us - the One who knew no sin - that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." "You mean that you suppressed those truths of love and forgiveness?" "Yes." So what am I in my guilt? I am a human being made in the image of God, created with a never-dying soul by God and for God to glorify and enjoy Him, but I threw it all away. Then I must be judged fairly by God; all the factors of my guilt taken into consideration in a judgment of scrupulous justice; none to be condemned unfairly. Yet all mankind is to be judged; what they have sowed that they will also reap. The Lord Jesus said that on the crucial day many would hear the words, "Depart from Me", while others would hear, "Today shalt thou be with me in Paradise." There is the great bifurcation of human destiny lying before us. Jesus said, there will be the sheep and the goats, Heaven and Hell, glory and damnation - so said the Lord Christ.

And I shall never plead, "I didn't know." I shall never argue that I was caught in the grip of forces totally outside my control, that I was a helpless piece of flotsam tossed on the seas of eternity. No, I was a man in the image of God and I know today what I shall know even more

clearly in that great day, “that it was against God, and God only, that I have sinned and done evil.” Then you ask me what hope can there be for you today? What light and comfort can I offer you? Much in every way. Very much. The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. If you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ you will be saved. If you are enabled to entrust yourself to this merciful God He will abundantly pardon. ‘For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.’ You may have the propitiation of the wrath of God towards your wickedness; an appeasement is here through the cross of Christ. Jesus Himself has dealt with the judgment of God towards sinners by bearing that judgment in His Own body on Golgotha. How can you deal with it? What can you do to escape from condemnation? The tremendous reality is in God’s work, what He has done for us. God has set Him forth to be the propitiation for our sins and for sins of sinners the whole world over until the very last day. We were damned in our guilt. We stood guilty in our condemnation and then we heard the voice of reconciling grace in the words of the Son of God. He made an offer of mercy to me because of what the Lord Jesus had done, that enabled God to remain just and yet to justify the ungodly. He obeyed in my place. He died in my place. He became the Lamb of God for me. He was lifted up for me. He took all the Father laid on Him for me. He bore all that my sins deserved. He exhausted all the condemnation that my wickedness merits. He entered the grave and rose the third day for me. He intercedes for me. He sends His servants throughout the world to preach salvation. Forgiveness is preached today; it is promised to all who repent today. There is now no condemnation to those who cry from the heart, “God be merciful to me a sinner. Forgive me in Jesus’ name; Father I have sinned against Heaven, and before Thee, and am no more worthy to be called Thy Son”, but Thy Son bore Hell for sinners that mercy might come to someone like me, even me. Let Thy mercy fall on me today.

Do you understand why these words are in the Bible, this terrible description of man with his depraved mind, doing what ought not to be done, filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity? That you might appreciate that only the coming of Jesus Christ into the world and His being born under the law and His dying under its condemnation of all that is listed here in Romans chapter 1, that that alone could save the best of men and the worst. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is for sin of the dimensions of this tremendous chapter of human cruelty and pain. I may be guilty of every sin in this catalogue of iniquity and many, many more and yet I can hear today that the blood of Jesus Christ, God’s Son, cleanses me from all my sin; every atom and molecule of sin and all the sins of omission. Sinners plunged beneath that flood lose all their guilty stains. In Him we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins. I long for us all to believe this truth today. Isn’t this the most serious of all our problems and isn’t the best news anyone can hear today that there is the reconciliation of a Holy God and this is offered through what Christ all by Himself has done? Then pray to receive it, O sinner, pray to receive it. This message is true, and neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other Name under Heaven given among men whereby we must be saved. **Amen.**

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| <p>1. Here, Lord, my soul convicted stands,
Of breaking all thy ten commands;
And on me justly might'st thou pour
Thy wrath in one eternal shower.</p> | <p>3. I see my fig-leaf righteousness
Can ne'er thy broken law redress;
Yet in thy gospel plan I see,
There's hope of pardon e'en for me.</p> |
| <p>2. But, thanks to God, its loud alarms
Have warned me of approaching harms;
And now, O Lord, my wants I see;
Lost and undone, I come to thee.</p> | <p>4. Here I behold thy wonders, Lord,
How Christ has to thy law restored
Those honours, on the atoning day,
Which guilty sinners took away.</p> |
| <p>5. Amazing wisdom, power, and love,
Displayed to rebels from above!
Do thou, O Lord, my faith increase,
To love and trust thy plan of grace.</p> | |

(J. Maxwell)

ONE THING DESIRED

By the Late James Bourne

“How amiable are Thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts! ... For a day in Thy courts is better than a thousand.” Psalm 84:1, 10

This does not mean outward worship only, but to spend a day in communion with God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, seeking His face, watching His hand, praising Him, and asking wisdom of Him in all our temporal and spiritual affairs. Now David says, “My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God.” This is to express the spiritual, ardent longing the Psalmist felt for the sweet presence of the Lord at a time when he had lost it. Now do you feel this? Remember the “Kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence” and is to be got in no other way; and the Holy Spirit works this earnestness in the hearts of God’s people.

“Yea, the sparrow hath found an house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even Thine altars, O Lord of hosts, my King, and my God.” This is my desire, to bring my family and all my concerns before God, that He may guide and conduct all for me. “Blessed are they that dwell” in this house; they cannot help praising Thee. They see Thy wonderful wisdom in so over-ruling even temporal matters that they cannot but feel the utmost admiration and astonishment. How this enables them to fulfil all relations of master or servant, parent or child! Let our affairs be ever so numerous or complicated – as David had to rule a Kingdom – and let us live in whatever tumult we may, yet this sweet communion is to be enjoyed and carried on in the midst of it; as I have found in the midst of the greatest bustle. Only let us take heed to the secret warnings and cautions and checks of the Holy Spirit, and not slight them, but pay a tender regard to them, and stand in awe of them; and if He frown, fall down under it, and never rest till this peace is restored.

Here it is said, “Blessed is the man whose strength is in Thee; in whose heart are the ways of them.” Such will dread above all things the slightest motion and offered help of that legal spirit which will ruin all, and will have their strength in Jesus Christ, not in themselves. Such go from strength to strength; that is, they become weaker and weaker in themselves, but are taught by the Holy Spirit and by experience to find the Lord Jesus Christ a ready help in every trouble. So that a confidence at length is worked in the soul that all things, however dark they may be, will by His wonderful working be made to work for good, and that in all troubles they shall be more than conquerors through Him that loved them.

Now these make the valley of Baca a well. They are encouraged not to wish for a life of no trouble, but rather to seek His presence and blessing in all troubles. For Jesus Christ is a well, and out of Him we draw water by prayer; and it is impossible to fall under conviction of sin, confess, and beg mercy of Him without getting a taste of these waters. They are eternal life, a “well of water springing up into everlasting life.” And David says, “I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God”; that is, be kept in a waiting posture, be the last and the least and the meanest in the Church “than to dwell in the tents of wickedness” or have all the fullness of this world. Now we cannot make this choice of ourselves, it is contrary to our nature; but God the Holy Spirit works it in the hearts of His people. For naturally we say, “How dull is praying all day, watching all day!” But the Holy Spirit will cause us to feel that this life exceeds all the delights of this world. “For the Lord God is a Sun and Shield,” not darkness and uncertainty. It is not stumbling at we know not what, but we shall have light on our path; and He is a Shield to cover us from evil.

In Psalm 27 David says, “One thing have I desired of the Lord.” What is this one thing? To have communion with Him in all things temporal and spiritual, to ask advice and protection of Him, to be in His fear all the day long and to seek His blessing in all things. “That I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life” – not enjoying this communion today and losing it tomorrow. No, but to have it every day; for this steady uniformity is the work of the Spirit. But these “tents of wickedness” we are obliged to enter (only take heed you are where God calls you). We must have communication with the world, and we cannot touch pitch without

being defiled. Then when guilt is contracted we show we have communion with the Lord by sorrow, misery, and confession; and He does return again, and wash away these defilements. But “be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners” (1 Cor. 15.33).

“To behold the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in His temple.” We behold His beauty in various ways. I see great beauty in the way He led me into this house in answer to prayer. I have seen His beauty when a thief would have robbed me, in leading me to pray to Him and His causing the thief to pay me. I have gone to Him with earnest prayers and tears when I had work brought before me in the course of His providence beyond my ability; and He has given me the requisite talents.

“For in the time of trouble He shall hide me in His pavilion: in the secret of His tabernacle shall He hide me.” We may be surrounded with all manner of confusion, and in the midst of this He can give us assured peace. “He shall set me up upon a Rock.” This Rock is the Lord Jesus Christ. Not in a presumptuous confidence, but in a real trust wrought in the heart by the Holy Spirit that He is my Friend. There is the utmost safety in every trouble, if we rest on this Rock.

And to show again the ardency with which we must seek these things if we ever hope to attain them, David says, “My soul thirsteth for Thee, my flesh longeth for Thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is; to see Thy power and Thy glory, so as I have seen Thee in the sanctuary” (Psalm 63.1,2). This is, to hold communion with God in all things all the day long; not to do one thing without Him that we may have time after to seek His face, but to seek His face and His help in all our occupations, to see His power and glory. Again He says, “My soul followeth hard after Thee.” There must be this violent pressing after Him; and David says, “Blessed is the man whom Thou chooseth, and causeth to approach unto Thee, that he may dwell in Thy courts” (Psalm 65.4). This work of God is generally done by affliction leading us to seek His face. And he says, “We shall be satisfied with the goodness of Thy house, even of Thy holy temple.”

Now, take notice, all the good things of this world produce no real satisfaction. Hence that saying, “Man never is, but always to be blest.” But the least gleam of God’s mercy, the least token of His favour, has the fullest satisfaction in it. We want nothing as long as it lasts; we are fully satisfied. Therefore this is the sum – *Seek to make God your Friend, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; that He may rule and over-rule all things. And if He shows displeasure in the slightest degree in anything, be sure you stand in awe of that, and do not slight it.* There is no end of the blessings that will follow you in attending to these admonitions; but if these are disregarded and not attended to through the hurry of other things, we shall fall into darkness and not know where we are going. All the misery I have ever met with, in the course of my life, is from not paying attention to these things. Yet such is His great mercy that He does not suffer all His displeasure to arise, but brings us back with much sorrow and many fears. When these heavy convictions come upon us because we have slighted His counsel, He will be with us, leading us to cry for mercy and will bestow it on all who seek to make Him their Friend.

Now, blessed are all they who dwell in these courts, who have this holy familiarity with God, who have Him for their Friend, and who go to Him as their home and dwelling. Blessed are all such.

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