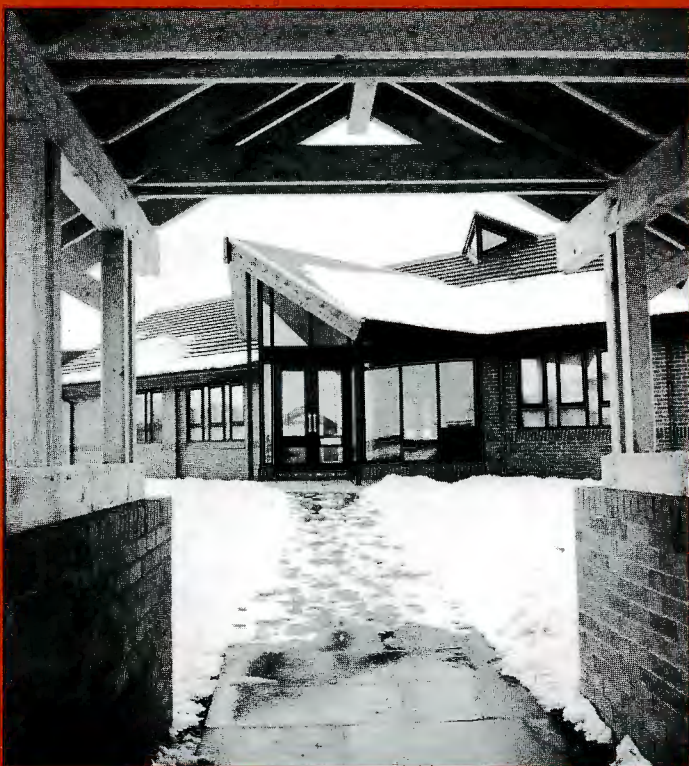

REFORMATION TODAY



SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 1992

129



Dr Roy Summers, featured above, is now pastor of the Jennyfield Evangelical Church, Harrogate, N Yorkshire. The formal induction service is to take place on September 12 when Gareth Crossley, pastor West Park Church, Wolverhampton, and Peter Parkinson are the preachers. Roy and his wife Yvonne have one child, Luke, aged one. Roy was assistant pastor to Gareth Crossley for three years prior to his coming to Jennyfield. Leeds Reformed Baptist Church enjoy a close association with Jennyfield. We rejoice in the progress that has been made at Jennyfield and the privilege with others of involvement along the way, praying and believing that the unusual potential of the work at Jennyfield will continue to be realised.

The editor is due to embark on a busy itinerary of ministry in the USA from August 20 to September 20.



Dr John Armstrong with Simon Gay of Lowestoft at the Carey Family Conference. (See report on page 3.)

Front cover: *Jennyfield Evangelical Church, Harrogate.*

Editorial

Cutting the nerve of missionary concern

What theological direction is evangelicalism taking? That is an important question because theology always dictates our practice. For instance, what we believe about God, the judgement to come and eternal punishment, chiefly motivates missionary zeal and evangelistic enterprise.

Evangelicals are facing a serious challenge, one which threatens the gospel and which cuts the nerve of missionary vision. The doctrine of eternal punishment is being questioned and rejected. If that truth is changed or eliminated it undermines missionary zeal. That can be likened to digging up the goal-posts, redrawing the lines on the field and changing the rules. There are various ways in which the doctrine of eternal punishment is being overturned. There is *Pluralism*, which is the notion that God is saving souls through other religions; *Inclusivism*, which is the idea the Christ is the Only Saviour but is saving through means other than the gospel, through angels, other messages and other religions, and *Annihilationism* (there are at least eight different brands!) which is the notion that there is no eternal hell because God will annihilate the wicked. Pluralism and inclusivism have the tendency to turn into *Universalism*, which is the idea that God will save all in the end.

The positions outlined above all arise through a desire to avoid the reality of eternal punishment.

W Gary Phillips in an article 'Evangelicals and Pluralism' (*Evangelical Quarterly*, July 1992), grapples with the issue of those who have not heard the gospel. Can they be redeemed? He quotes J D Hunter as follows: 'For over nineteen hundred years missionary activity has hinged on this belief alone: that those who did not believe in the salvific capabilities of Jesus Christ had not hope of receiving eternal life. It follows that the unevangelised – those who lived without the knowledge of the claims of Christianity – would be damned to an eternity in hell. This exclusivism and finality of the Christian soteriology is the single most offensive aspect of Christian theology, the single most important source of contention between Christians and non-Christians, – yet without this particularity, there is no orthodoxy (historically understood).'

Phillips goes on to remind us that ‘in the past an overwhelming consensus has affirmed this position. However, a recent survey of evangelical college and seminary students showed that 32 percent and 31 percent (respectively) no longer hold these teachings.’

Of course we can challenge Phillips about motivation for mission since there are a variety of biblically grounded motives to evangelise, but we accept what he is driving at. We are compelled to face up to the strong revisionist tendencies that are at work and which can have devastating effects on missionary zeal. Historically evangelicalism has with great consistency and marked continuity maintained that without Christ the unevangelised are eternally lost.

Influential voices are calling for an abandonment of the classic evangelical view in favour of a more generous view of non-Christian religions and what Clark Pinnock calls ‘an optimistic view of salvation’. Pinnock in his recent book *A Wideness in God’s Mercy* (Eerdmans 1992) calls for the placing of religious pluralism on the agenda just as social concern was placed on the evangelical agenda during the 1970s. [During the 1970s, through the Lausanne covenant, social concern was put on the evangelical agenda. I will not attempt to evaluate that. Dr John Woodhouse, lecturer in Old Testament at Moore Theological College, Sydney, analysed that subject in detail in the book *‘Explorations 3: Christians in society’* (Impact Books, 21 King Street, Newtown, NSW 2042, Australia)]. Pinnock describes the reasons calling for a consideration of pluralism. Ethical liberalism is portrayed as reasonable. How can eternal hell be fair for those who have never heard the gospel? How can that ever be equated with justice?

Following the same course of thinking Peter Cotterell, ex-missionary to Ethiopia and Principal of the London Bible College in his book *Mission and Meaninglessness – the good news in a world of suffering and disorder*, argues for a solution which will ‘not outrage common sense and our common ideas of justice’ (page 83). Note the influence of ethical liberalism! Ethical liberalism is the articulation of the reasoning of natural fallen, sinful man. Ethical liberalism consists of worldly anti-God arguments and reasonings presented by liberal theologians who dress up their case in Christian clothing.

The principal omission in ethical liberalism is the nature and attributes of the Living Triune God of Scripture. Liberals reject the authority of Scripture and in so doing establish their own god, a God of love who

according to their reasoning would not contemplate sending sinners to hell, still less an eternal hell. Liberal theologians reject absolutely the biblical doctrine of divine wrath. The best answer to the pressures that have been described is the exposition of Scripture on the nature and attributes of God. Hence the article 'The Reality of God's Wrath'.

Not Every Preacher a Model Preacher

Pastor Bill Payne of Canada, the writer of the above article, is the minister of a Reformed Baptist church in Burlington, Ontario. He is editor of *Reformation Canada* and teaches Homiletics in the Toronto Baptist Seminary. His article emphasises the importance for the preacher of developing his own style according to his own personality.

We do not know of any case of a leading preacher encouraging students to imitate his example. Such an idea is ludicrous. However what is painful is the observation that students fall into this trap. In addition it is noted that some latch onto the idea that only one kind of preaching qualifies and that all other kinds are defective and hardly worth even listening to. The popular kind is that of structured exegetical preaching with very clear emphasised headings which help the hearers follow the theme. Surely that is the most helpful and effective way: a clear structure in which the text is opened up, the salient points lucidly expounded and practical application made.

But it is a travesty to think that is the only method. There are many effective styles. The varied content and many different styles in Scripture; narratives, proverbs, psalms, history, doctrine, biography, apocalypse, symbolic pictures, by their very nature demand flexibility. Our Lord evangelised using parables. He taught thematically as in the Sermon on the Mount, elaboratively as in the Olivet discourse, and systematically and historically (Biblical Theology) as on the road to Emmaus. Paul reasoned in linear (straight line) fashion and John in a circular way. Strangely no biblical writer employed the strict exegetical method with headings adverted to above which we find edifying. The equipment and personality of the preacher will dictate largely the style that is followed. It would not be difficult to draw attention to and contrast the different styles of expositors both in the Bible and subsequent history who have, in their own very distinctive ways, been effective and powerful. Surely we need always to be open to learn and improve as we observe others and learn from them, at the same time avoiding the pitfalls described by Bill Payne.

The Centrality of the Atonement

Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement

George Smeaton, 502 pages hardback

The Apostles' Doctrine of the Atonement

George Smeaton, 548pages hardback.

Banner of Truth Trust, 1991, £9.95 each

Substitution is the very heart of the gospel. If Christ did not actually and literally die in my place I cannot be saved. The atonement of Jesus is the foundation of my assurance. Preachers need to expound the propitiation of Christ clearly and constantly. Here are two volumes admirably designed to assist in that great work.

In the first volume the sayings of our Lord are considered in their contexts. Every aspect of Christ's atonement is then expounded in a thorough way. Just a few themes will give the reader an idea of the scope of the work: The atonement decides Christ's right to the world; The atonement denudes Satan of his sway; Christ's death takes the sting out of death; Christ's dominion is the reward of his atonement; The atonement reunites men and angels; The atonement glorifies God; Eternal happiness or irremediable woe hinges on our acceptance or our rejection of the atonement.

In the second volume Smeaton shows that the apostles expounded the sacrifices of the Old Testament as symbolical and typical of the great sacrifice of the Messiah himself. Christ fulfils the prophecies and promises of salvation. Smeaton then travels through the New Testament epistles expounding the atonement wherever that subject is expressed. The book of Revelation is included in this survey.

These volumes form excellent reference books to be kept alongside your New Testament commentaries. My one criticism is that the style, typical of that time, is wordy. Perhaps in those days they lacked an editor with the authority of S M Houghton who for so many years before his death served the Banner of Truth with outstanding ability. On particular redemption, Smeaton is both crystal clear and comprehensive in the texts to which he appeals (*Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement* page 365ff).

While reviewing these books I was reminded of the masterly work on the Holy Spirit by the same author. George Smeaton's *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit* (370 pages published by the Banner) is in my view, apart from John Owen, the most useful obtainable on that subject followed closely by a smaller concise work by Edwin Palmer of 196 pages published by P & R in the USA. Strangely Smeaton is less wordy in his book on the Holy Spirit.

The Reality of God's Wrath

What exactly are we to understand by the wrath of God? Is this an attribute of God and if so on what basis does it proceed? In answer to these questions no statement is more definitive than that of the apostle Paul in his introduction to the main theme in his letter to the Romans:

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness (Rom 1:18).

Compressed in this declaration are the salient points of our inquiry. This wrath is God's wrath. It is being revealed *from heaven*. Note the present tense. It *is being* revealed. The judgements of God in history are a testimony of this wrath. Furthermore this wrath is directed against men, but specifically against godless and wicked men, and even more specifically against men who suppress the truth by their wickedness.

Further on in the context the apostle explains that it is possible to escape from the wrath of God by faith in Christ who alone has propitiated that wrath (Rom 3:21-26). With that conclusion in view I open Romans 1:18 as follows.

1. The provocation of God's wrath

'against all the godlessness and wickedness of men.'

2. The nature of God's wrath

'The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven.' Wrath emanates from the being or person of God, his ongoing, unchanging reaction to evil.

3. The wrath of God expressed

'God's wrath is being revealed (continually).' *Apokaluptetai*, is being revealed, is a frequentative present. The manifestations of divine displeasure recur throughout history and a study of these assists our comprehension of the reality of God's wrath.

4. The propitiation of God's wrath

'Whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in his blood through faith' (Rom 3:25 NASB). The atoning blood of Christ alone propitiates God's wrath and the righteousness of Christ imputed to us secures protection permanently from that wrath.

1. The provocation of God's wrath

'against all the godlessness and wickedness of men.'

Ungodliness is really 'anti-Godness' and refers to enmity and perversity that is religious in character, a perversity which opens the way to unrighteousness (lawlessness). Godliness acts powerfully as an incentive to righteousness of heart and life. Its absence leaves a vacuum all too easily filled by unrighteousness. Where there is no fear of God, sensual appetites soon drive men to indulge freely in every form of wickedness. The form in which godlessness is most readily manifested is idolatry. In the pagan world this is expressed in the actual service of idols and in bondage to demons associated with those idols. In Western society idolatry takes the form of worldliness, of serving the world in place of God and in 'the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does' (1 John 2:16).

Inasmuch as godlessness strikes at the very being and character of God it provokes his wrath. Paul declares that God's wrath is continually being revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men *'who suppress the truth by their wickedness'*. This implies that the truth is known by men. They are convicted by it but they hold it down by restraining it or pushing it back. This is true of those who practise wickedness but it is true in a very special sense of the Jews to whom Paul refers in chapters two and three. The Jews were proud about their knowledge of the truth (Rom 2:20) but they despised that truth in such a way as to arouse our Lord to words of fierce indignation: 'Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to' (Matt 23:13).

All sin has its source in apostasy from God. Sin then develops and increases as God's restraints upon sinners lessen. Finally all sin has its ultimate consummation in the fire of God's wrath. All the acts of wrath and indignation in this world are but a prelude to the final state of wrath which will be revealed on 'the day of God's wrath' (Rom 2:5).

It is not as though wrath rests on sin in the abstract. Most references in Scripture explicitly apply to God's wrath resting upon sinners. 'You hate all who do wrong' (Ps 5:5). There are about 26 instances in Scripture stating God's hatred of sins such as divorce, stealing, idolatry, etc. Of these at least 12 refer to God's hatred of actual sinners in person. We must also observe that every expression of wrath in the history of this world has an eschatological (moving toward the final Judgement) reality. Everything is moving forward to that great day of which the Scriptures constantly speak (Matt 25:31ff; Rom 2:5, 5:9; Eph 5:6; Heb 9:27; Rev 20:11ff). In that day everything will be revealed and the lake of fire will become a permanent monument to the justice of God.

A tremendous expression of hatred toward God resulting in consequent wrath is expressed in Revelation 20:8,9. All the armies and powers of Antichrist array themselves against the camp of God's people. The united powers of godlessness advance to assault the bride of Christ. As we view the battle we see that while glorious holiness characterises deity, hatred and ugliness mark the enemy. God's wrath is against godlessness — that which wars against him.

2. The nature of God's wrath

'The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven.'

Human punishment, unlike the divine, is variable and inexact. In dealing with crime and punishment we think mostly in terms of reforming the guilty and protecting the innocent. The idea of retribution is not popular. At the final tribunal, divine wrath will be expressed in retribution only. Hell will not be a penitentiary, that is, a place to reform. Incurable hardness will characterise the wicked. Punishment in that day will be just retribution.

Magistrates are authorised by God to punish (Rom 13:1-4), but ultimately retribution is asserted in Scripture to be the function of Deity alone. "It is mine to avenge, I will repay," says the Lord' (Rom 12:19, Heb 10:30). The role of conscience is important. While there is no repentance in hell (Rev 16:11) the wrath of God in endless punishment will be supported by the human conscience which will bear witness to and approve the condemning sentence (Rom 2:15,16).

The reality of God's wrath raises the subject of impassibility: we find in our credal statements that 'God has not bodily parts or passions'. That forms an important truth designed to circumvent any idea that God is changeable or subject to the moods and turmoil that we mortals experience. Yet it would be disastrous by this to conclude that God is a machine without feeling. He is eternally holy and blessed and is perfect in his Triune love (see article in RT 110). We see his feelings expressed in Christ but it is not possible for us to know how God experientially feels. That he feels in his own immutable and infinite way is a fact if the statement God is love means anything. In our own experience we tangibly feel the love of God as it is poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit as he is given to us (Rom 5:5). The primary biblical language is Hebrew. The word *aph* denotes anger, trembling, snorting (210 times) and *chemah* means heat, rage, fury, (115 times). Viewed each time in context these words convey the message clearly that God feels passionately about evil. The subject as such obviously needs separate exposition in which the utmost care is needed to safeguard our view of God's immutability and at the same time our sense of relating to God in our understanding of him as a God ever blessed in himself who is love and wrath.

On the subject of wrath and love Shedd comments, 'These two emotions are real and essential in God; the one awakened by righteousness and the other by sin. The existence of the one necessitates that of the other; so that if there be no love of righteousness, there is no anger at sin, and, conversely, if there be no anger at sin, there is no righteousness. The necessary coexistence of these opposite feelings towards moral contraries like righteousness and sin is continually taught in Scripture, 'Let those who love the Lord hate evil' (Ps 97:10)'.¹

The perfect compatibility of wrath and love is seen in the substitutionary ordeal of Christ. He alone could fulfil the requirements of justice. The burnt offering of Leviticus 1:1-9 was completely consumed by fire. It made 'an aroma pleasing to the Lord'. The 'pleasing' is a reference to the total satisfaction of righteousness, and does not for one moment mean that God had pleasure in Christ's sufferings. He loathed that (remember Abraham's ordeal with the call to sacrifice Isaac) with perfect loathing but had pleasure in the vindication of justice and the accomplishment of righteousness represented in his Son's victory. 'The pain of the Lamb in body and soul, was so intense that only the combined powers of a divine person could bear it.'² 'How did his soul boil under the fire of wrath, and his blood leak through every pore of the vessel by the extremity of the flame.'³

Since in these essential interests of justice the wrath of God came upon the Lamb we can only conclude that that wrath is a terrible reality.

3. The wrath of God expressed

'God's wrath is being revealed continually.'

As I write this the mass media are at work to expose to the world's view the atrocities taking place in what used to be Yugoslavia. World opinion has been quickly aroused to demand that action be taken to stop genocide. Scripture speaks plainly of events of this kind and of calamities such as wars, famines, floods, hurricanes and volcanoes. It plainly warns of the facts of God's judgements in history.

The fall of Adam and Eve. The first expression of God's wrath is that which came in inexorable fulfilment of his words, 'for when you eat of it you will surely die' (Gen 2:15). A curse was pronounced on the first sinners, woman in the main orbit of her life and man in his. The ground was also cursed. All the progeny of Adam and Eve in one stroke by their space-time fall became 'sinful at birth' (Ps 51:5). Every person born into this world is guilty of Adam's first sin, is destitute of that righteousness in which Adam was created and is corrupt by nature (Rom 5:12-21). That means every person born into this world emerges as a sinner who accrues guilt and subsequently wrath by the ever multiplying sins he commits.

Delay in the application of punishment pronounced in Genesis 2:15 is seen in a number of ways. Adam did not immediately expire physically. Cain's punishment for the murder of Abel was deferred even though it is evident that he was a reprobate. 'The Cainite civilisation described in Genesis 4:16-24 was richly endowed with the benefits of common grace and excelled in technical and cultural progress. At the same time it was a prototype of godlessness and humanism.'⁴

The deluge of Noah's day. The degeneration of mankind in consequence of the fall has its own commentary in the observation of Jahweh who complained that the inclination of the thought of man's heart was only evil all the time! Sin always brings the reaction of wrath. The LORD declared, 'I will wipe mankind, whom I have created, from the face of the earth' (Gen 6:6). The evils of indifference and gross sin characterised Noah's generation. The pursuit of lawful activity, eating, drinking, building, marrying, if followed without God-centred motives incites God's wrath. Increasing crime was also a harbinger of the flood. The earth was corrupt in God's sight and was full of violence, so God said to Noah, 'I am going to put an end to all people' (Gen 6:11-13). In alluding to the sin of world-centredness in Noah's day, our Lord declared plainly that a similar state of worldliness will precede his second coming (Luke 17:26).

Sodom and Gomorrah. According to Calvin the case of Sodom was brought before the attention of Abraham to teach him that the Sodomites justly deserved to be destroyed. 'In saying that the "cry was great" he indicates the grievousness of their crimes, because, although the wicked may promise themselves impunity, by concealing their evils, yet their sin will necessarily sound aloud in the ears of God.'⁵

The appalling evil of what has come to be called 'Sodomy' was fully revealed on the night before Lot was removed from the city when 'all the men from every part of the city of Sodom, both young and old' demanded to 'have sex' with the two angelic visitors (Gen 19:5). Romans 1 shows this particular sin to be an evidence of reprobation, a sign that God has given men over to destruction. Paul says it is impossible for a practising homosexual to inherit the kingdom, but some in Corinth did repent of this sin and find salvation (1 Cor 6:9-11).

The case of Sodom teaches us that sins that destroy the institution of the family and make life intolerable for little children invoke God's wrath. The alarming exposure of child sex abuse today surely provokes God's wrath. The sin of the Amorites became unbearable when it reached its full measure at the time when that nation was put to the sword by Israel. The invasion was an act not of war merely, but of justice (Gen 15:16, 1 Kings 21:26 – 2 Kings 21:11).

The manner in which the cities of the plain were destroyed is not without significance. Their crimes called for an act of indignation which was expressed by fire from heaven, not a fire of annihilation, but a fire of never-ending torment, a fact endorsed by Jude 7: 'Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire.'

Wrath falling on individuals. The wrath of God is continual in expression and universal in application. God is a righteous judge, who expresses his wrath every day. This wrath can be traced in the lives of people like Ahab and Jezebel in the Old Testament; and in the New Testament, Ananias and Sapphira and then in King Herod who was struck down when he received adulation which should be ascribed to the Lord alone; and in modern times in the demise of evil dictators such as Hitler and the Ceauscescu.

Nations and empires. Nations as well as worldwide empires are all weighed in God's balances. Whole sections of the prophetic utterances are devoted to this theme (Isaiah 13-15, Jeremiah 46-50, Ezekiel 25-32 and Amos 1-2). The burden of Nahum was to show that the time of God's wrath had come for Nineveh because she 'enslaved nations by her prostitution and peoples by her witchcraft' (3:4). For these reasons, 'his wrath is poured out like fire' (1:6). Daniel 2 describes God's judgement on four successive proud empires all of which have been totally demolished.

The seven bowls of wrath (Revelation 16). The golden bowls of Revelation 16 are bowls of wrath. Some of the horrors of the judgements described in symbolic fashion in the Apocalypse are with us to a marked degree. Drought, famine and pollution are awful realities. We are constantly plied with questions as to why God permits the dreadful disasters of civil wars (Sudan for 25 years, Mozambique for 16 years, the recent Iran/Iraq conflict, etc); famines (as in Ethiopia, Sudan and Somalia,); holocausts (Nazi Germany, Russia, and more recently in Campuchea). Isaiah 24:5 tells us, 'The earth is defiled by its people; they have disobeyed the laws, violated the statutes and broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore a curse consumes the earth; its people must bear their guilt.'

The wrath of God revealed against his covenant people. Privilege brings responsibility. God's covenant as outlined in Deuteronomy lays great stress on the importance of faithfulness. Fidelity would be rewarded with abundant prosperity. They would 'lend to many nations but borrow from none' (Deut 28:11-13). On the other hand disobedience, especially if shown in their service to worthless idols would provoke the jealousy of the Lord and kindle the fire of his wrath (Deut 32:21-24).

Perhaps the allegory of unfaithful Jerusalem recorded in Ezekiel 16 provides the most striking lesson of wrath. This was provoked by Israel's promiscuity and prostitution. Having been picked up from the rubble heap as an infant, cast out in its blood and with its cord still uncut, Jerusalem had been made beautiful by her Saviour and lover. But she had slept with her lustful neighbours on all sides. Hence he says, 'I will bring upon you the blood vengeance of my wrath and jealous anger' (Ezek 16:38).

The New Testament parallel is to be found in Hebrews chapters 6 and 10. God's justice is commensurate with human responsibility. Those who profess faith, join the church, receive light, teaching and the benefits of the gospel and then spurn these privileges will be punished accordingly:

How much more severely do you think that a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know him who said, "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," and again, "I will repay," and again, "The Lord will judge his people." It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Heb 10:29-31).

4. The propitiation of God's wrath

'Whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in his blood through faith' (Rom 3:25 NASB).

Nothing is as profound or so wonderfully effectual as the once for all substitutionary sacrifice of Christ to propitiate the wrath of God. So terrible was that wrath that even Christ, who knew all things, when he came to drink the cup said, 'My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death' (Mark 14:34).

In his exposition of Isaiah 53:10, 'Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer,' Manton says: 'Hence learn; *i. The heinousness of sin.* It cost Christ a life of sorrows and a painful, shameful, accursed death and an amazing sense of the wrath of God to reconcile sinners; *ii. The terribleness of God's wrath.* It put Jesus Christ upon dying; *iii. The greatness of our obligations to Christ in condescending to bear God's wrath;* *iv. That we must be willing to suffer anything for Christ.* Since he endured the anger and wrath of God for us, shall we not endure the anger and wrath of men for his sake?'⁶

To propitiate (from the Latin *propitiare*) means to appease, render favourable or conciliate. The personal element enters in. An offended person is conciliated. God is propitiated in the sense that his wrath is removed.

The Sixth International Baptist Conference

October 19-22, 1992

*Sponsored by Toronto Baptist Seminary, 130 Gerrard Street East
Toronto, Ontario M5A 3T4, Canada*

Theme: The Unique Christ

Speakers: Trevor Archer, Earl Blackburn, John Campbell (Australia), Amar Djaballah, Noel Espinosa (Philippines), Don Garlington, David Fountain, Paul Helm, Thierry Huser (France), Erroll Hulse, Conrad Mbewe (Zambia), Tom Nettles, Peter Parkinson, Larry Perkins, John Reisinger, Thom Smith.

(continued from page 11)

The gift of Christ to be our propitiation is the fullest expression and proof of the love of God. 'This is love: not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins' (1 John 4:10, NASB). Here is effectual love, a love determined to save, a love that would go so far as to transfer wrath from those who earned it, to him who so loved us that he was prepared to bear it. On the basis of the same propitiation all benevolent and common grace is exercised, wrath restrained and judgement delayed. 'All the favours which even the reprobate receive in this world,' says John Murray, 'are related in one way or another to the atonement and may be said to flow from it.'⁷

Conclusion

The reality of God's wrath as an attribute, an intrinsic, essential part of his being, should act as a bulwark to resist false teaching and wishful thinking that there is no hell. The actuality of God's wrath as seen in historical acts of judgement should further strengthen us against the influences of ethical liberalism described in the editorial. The truth that God's wrath lies upon men should urge us to share the gospel with them. It is significant that a recession of missionary zeal can be traced to the shift in emphasis away from preaching on this theme which characterised our evangelical forefathers. The propitiation of Christ's cross is in itself a testimony of the reality of divine wrath. That wrath, and the propitiation which silences it, should propel us forward in the full use of all our available resources to evangelise the world.

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The Preacher's Role Model

Bill Payne

In the course of history God has raised up within the Church outstanding preachers who have excited the admiration and indeed the amazement of God's people. They have been men of outstanding gifts and abilities; and other preachers almost inevitably see them as men to be emulated. In this the centenary of his passing we think immediately of the great Charles H Spurgeon (1834 – 1892) as an example. He was a man of indisputable pulpit genius who held a huge congregation in the grip of his mighty preaching for close to forty years and was of such outstanding ability that few would have argued with Archibald Brown's description of him as 'the prince of preachers'. During his lifetime 900 men passed through his college. Without question there would have been many in Spurgeon's day who sought to model themselves on him. It is interesting to note that Spurgeon acknowledged that George Whitefield (1714 – 1770) had been something of a model for himself, though obviously he had not been around to see Whitefield in action. 'My own model, if I may have such a thing in due subordination to my Lord is George Whitefield; but with unequal footsteps must I follow in his glorious track' (*The Early Years*, p 348).

Timothy appears to have seen in the apostle Paul something of a model to be emulated, and apparently with the apostle's approval. In 2 Timothy 3:10 Paul says, 'But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance . . . ' (NKJV). The expression 'you have carefully followed' is the translation of one word in the original text (*parēkolouthēsas*). One of the meanings of the verb from which this word is derived is, 'a standard or rule to conform oneself to.' Now, in this text Paul was clearly not being viewed only as a preacher, and yet that aspect of the man cannot be left out.

It is then not a wrong or sinful thing to have a model and we may well be grateful to God that he graces his Church with men of outstanding calibre. However, there are some cautions which need to be observed in this area.

1. The importance of being yourself

A cardinal rule in the pulpit is to be oneself, that is, be natural. It is one thing to

There is no well known preacher to our knowledge who would find pleasure in students imitating his style. See editorial. Yet the tendency in students seems always to recur. Scripture references in this article are from the KJV except where otherwise stated.

have a model from whom we draw inspiration and help; it is another thing to become a slavish imitation. To imitate every gesture, every vocal inflexion, every particular expression and pronunciation is to be in danger of losing one's own distinctiveness and also risk becoming ludicrous in the eyes of those who notice! God made you as you! If he has called us to preach he will use us and not our imitation of someone else. The most famous incident in the life of David serves to underline this point. When David declared himself willing to take on the giant Goliath, who was defying the armies of the living God, Saul clothed David with his armour, including his bronze helmet and his coat of mail. But it didn't take David long to realise that that just would not do. God had used him to kill the lion and the bear, and God would use him – not his imitation of Saul – to kill the ungodly Goliath. He had to be himself. He had to use the weapons which were characteristically his at that point in his career, his staff and his sling shot, and especially his love of God, commitment to his cause and his strong faith in him. It was to David just as he was that God gave the victory.

This is not to say that we are not to improve ourselves when it comes to our preaching. The man who doesn't seek improvement, and continual ongoing improvement, of his gifts is foolish; not to profit and learn from others may be a reflection of arrogance and pride. Not a few young preachers bring into the pulpit personal habits, oddities and eccentricities which need to be eliminated because they detract from the message being delivered. They draw attention to the preacher rather than to the gospel and that is something to be avoided at all costs. Spurgeon once wrote a book on *Eccentric Preachers*, in which he comes to the defence of a number of worthy men of God who had been criticised for their unusual ways. But the same great man also devoted two entire chapters of his famous *Lectures To My Students* to warning, often in hilarious fashion, about 'Posture, Action, Gesture, etc'. We must learn from others to correct abuses, improve our gifts, but strive earnestly to do so without losing our individuality. Having referred to Spurgeon, let us give him the last word on this particular point.

Be yourself, dear brother, for, if you are not yourself you cannot be anybody else; and so you see, you must be nobody. The very worst notes in music are those which are untrue; each bird has its own music. In my aviary are many birds and they sing very sweetly; but there are among them three grass parrots, which do not sing, but imitate the other birds, and very effectually spoil the concert. Their imitation seems to drown the natural music of the rest. Do not be a mere copyist, a borrower and spoiler of other men's notes. Say what God has said to you, and say it in your own way; and when it is so said plead personally for the Lord's blessing upon it (*An All Round Ministry*, p 73ff).

2. Slavish emulation of a model is dangerous.

There is the danger of the preacher imagining that he must be as much like his model as possible before he can be effective. In this sense he himself strives to be a model preacher. This is dangerous for two reasons.

Reason 1: One opens oneself up to unnecessary discouragement. It is my conviction that discouragement is one of the devil's prime tools for attacking the preachers. The work of the ministry is very demanding. Discouragements are apt to come from many different directions. The congregation might be small and struggling, and, despite the conscientious and self-denying efforts of the pastor, never seems to grow. The people outside seem utterly impervious, hard and indifferent, and, no matter how intense the effort to reach them with the gospel, they appear unresponsive. A pastor may be called upon to survive on a very small salary, which makes it difficult for him to support his family adequately. Sometimes disunity within the church leads to families leaving, and, when hopes are raised by someone showing interest in the gospel, these hopes are dashed when the interest wanes and comes to nothing. The minister must learn to live with discouragement! It is the cause of many leaving the ministry altogether.

Now this is nothing new. A classic example of the use of this tool is given to us in the book of Nehemiah. Nehemiah had come from the Persian court to the city of Jerusalem to rally his countrymen to rebuild 'the city of God' which was still mostly in ruins. His cry was, 'Let us rise up and build' (2:18). No sooner had they set their hands to the work than Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem sought to discourage them: 'Laughing us to scorn and despising us' (2:19). The attack using the weapon of discouragement continued as recorded in chapter 4:2,3.

And he spoke before his brethren, and the army of Samaria, and said, 'What are these feeble Jews doing? Will they offer sacrifices? Will they complete it in a day? Will they revive the stones from the heaps of rubbish – stones that are burned?' Now Tobiah the Ammonite was beside him, and he said, 'Whatever they build, if even a fox goes up on it, he will break down their stone wall.'

Only God-given determination and Spirit-wrought faith which was nurtured in earnest prayer enabled the Jews to overcome such discouragement. And so it is with us today.

Since this is the case, it is folly to add further unnecessary discouragement by a preacher imagining that he must be someone else before he can be effective; for no matter how hard one tries one can never be that other person. God never intended that we should be. We may speak with a nasal twang, introduce our

sentences with ‘well now’, and pronounce ‘particular’ in a very particular manner, but we shall never be D Martyn Lloyd-Jones. And if we have convinced ourselves that we must be another Lloyd-Jones (or anyone else for that matter) to be effective for God we shall be sorely discouraged, and unnecessarily discouraged, for God doesn’t need us to become someone else before he can use us to his glory.

Reason 2: There is a danger of overlooking the fact that God is pleased to use ‘earthen vessels’ (2 Cor 4:7). God does indeed use men with great gifts, men with extraordinary powers, men with a rich vocabulary and a striking turn of phrase, men with great pulpit presence. But thank God, he can and does use men of much lesser ability, and he does so in order to demonstrate that the power is not of us, but of God. It is a frequent temptation, and we are constantly falling into it, to think that our success is due to our gifts, our methods, our personality, our particular way of doing things. Pride arises in our hearts and we take the glory to ourselves. Yet God has declared that he will not give his glory to another; nor should he! He alone is worthy, and it is his blessing which brings success; ‘Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it’ (Ps 127:1).

Such is *his* wisdom and ability that he can take the most imperfect instrument and use it gloriously. He can take a man with gifts very much less than outstanding and make that man a fruitful labourer in his vineyard. To imagine that we have to become a model preacher before we can become effective for God is a profound and tragic mistake. We are reminded of the oft-quoted line of Robert Murray M’Cheyne (1813 – 1843), ‘It is not so much great gifts that God blesses as likeness to Jesus.’

3. God uses a variety of instruments

To attempt to be someone else in the pulpit overlooks the fact that God needs different instruments for different situations and different ministries. No doubt Martin Luther (1483 – 1546) and John Calvin (1509 – 1564) might be seen as model preachers, each in his own way, but could we imagine any two preachers so different? Luther was passionate, demonstrative and intense, while Calvin was careful, deliberate and controlled; yet each of them was wonderfully fitted for his task! Is there not a great contrast of personality in these two leaders? God gave a Luther to demolish the ramparts of Romanism, to clear away the rubble, to give a blast of the trumpet that would rouse men to action. He also provided a Calvin to build on the new-laid foundation, to systematise the theology of the Reformation movement, to lead the Church by clear progressive exposition into a deeper understanding of the Scriptures. It would be folly to contend that one was ‘better’ than the other; their circumstances were different and so were their ministries; both were needed. This will ever be the case. Spurgeon brings this out forcefully:

When Dr John Owen said that he would give all his learning to be able to preach like the tinker, John Bunyan, he spake not wisely, unless he meant no more than to extol honest John; for Owen's discourses, profound, solid, weighty, suited a class of persons who could not have received Bunyan's delightfully illustrated preaching of the plain gospel. No, Dr Owen, you had better remain Dr Owen, for we could by no means afford to lose that mine of theological wealth which you have bequeathed us. You would have looked very awkward if you had tried to talk like the marvellous dreamer, and he would have played the fool if he had imitated you. It is pitiful to hear comparisons made between the different servants of the same Lord. They were made by their Master, the one as well as the other, and set in different spheres to answer his own designs, and the same wisdom is displayed in each (*Eccentric Preachers*, p 33ff).

Some men are called to minister in great urban centres, others in rural areas. Some preach to highly educated congregations, others to those whose circumstances have precluded much education. Some preach to people who would be totally 'turned off' by intensity and volume, others to those who could hardly profit without it.

Even a comparison of the preachers of the Bible itself will endorse this point. Moses is not an Isaiah, neither is Hosea a Malachi. Peter is not a Paul, nor is John a James. God chooses different men with different personalities and different gifts to minister in their own unique way within the circumstances which providentially confront them and to the people to whom God calls them.

4. The source of our power must be remembered

It is possible to become so enamoured with a particular 'model preacher' and with the idea (even if we slip into it unconsciously) that being just like him will bring us power, that we forget the real source of the preacher's power. That power lies first of all in his personal relationship with God. Not imitation but intimacy with God is the great thing needful: having the heart taken up with God and knowing something of what D M McIntyre (1859 – 1938) called the 'hidden life of prayer'.

The cultivation of the inner life, the life of communion with God is crucial and yet it is liable to be overlooked, especially in this day and age. Busy-ness is the mark of the modern pastor. There are sermons and Bible studies to prepare, counselling sessions to conduct, meetings to attend, visitation to be done, letters to be written, conferences to be involved in, books to be read and a host of other things demanding attention. The great temptation is to neglect times of secret prayer, times of waiting upon God. So vital did our forefathers see this to be that

they recommended not only daily periods of prayer, meditation and communion, but they were also keen advocates of what was often referred to as 'seasons of retirement'. These were occasions when they would spend an entire day in some undisturbed location seeking God. If we are to imitate great men of God we should imitate them in this. We shall find that every outstanding servant of God who has been wonderfully blessed and used of God has recognised the importance of communion with God and has jealously sought to nurture his life in the 'secret place'.

Here lies the source of real power: knowing what it is to draw near to God, not just on a Saturday evening when the duties of the Lord's Day approach, but ongoingly through the days, weeks, months and years of one's life. This is the real challenge; this is the source of the preacher's power. Style, manner of speaking, homiletical skill all have their place and their importance; but power flows from communion with God.

Of course, if we are speaking of the source of power we must not fail to speak of the Holy Spirit of God, for it is the Spirit working in and through the preacher who achieves true, lasting and spiritual results. The prophet Micah declared that he was full of power by the Spirit of the Lord (3:8); and only as the Spirit enabled him could he perform his difficult task. And is this not the consistent testimony of the New Testament preachers? What glorious results came from the preaching of Paul in Thessalonica! Here were a pagan people who 'turned from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven' (1 Thess 1:9,10). How did this transformation come about? The explanation is surely given in 1 Thess 1:5: 'Our gospel did not come to you in word only but in power and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance.' It was not merely preaching that turned the first-century world upside down; it was preaching in the power of the Holy Spirit! Oh that we might recover the reality of that again in our day. We emphasise preaching, and I believe we are right in doing so, but how much do we know of the preaching of the gospel 'with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven' (1 Pet 1:12)? Paul could afford to be dismissive of 'words of human wisdom' and not be overly concerned with his sense of fear and trembling so long as he could preach in the demonstration and power of the Spirit (1 Cor 2:1-5). That ancient word is still relevant today, 'Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord' (Zech 4:6).

As we think of the source of power, we must not forget the sovereign will of God. We must never forget that it is God who uses his servants as he sees fit and as he wills. This fact must not be made an excuse for indifference, laziness or carelessness, but on the other hand we must never forget it. David reminds us that 'our God is in heaven, he has done whatever he pleased' (Ps 115:3). Paul expresses it thus: 'He works all things after the counsel of his own will' (Eph 1:11). God owes us no explanation as to how, when and where he uses his

International Fellowship of Reformed Baptists

A meeting will be held in Toronto, Canada
on October 23, 1992

Members of the Executive and General Committees will be present and any IFRB members are welcome to attend. Particulars are obtainable from: Pastor Bill Payne, 628 Kilbirnie Place, Ontario L7L 2M4, Canada. Telephone (416) 634 4879.

servants. Nor does he offer one. Sometimes he will crown the efforts of one preacher with success and prosperity, while another, perhaps equally dedicated and gifted, labours on with little to show for his efforts. Indeed, the former man may experience a period of great fruitfulness, perhaps lasting several years, but then go on for many more years with little success. Sometimes we may point to factors which seem to provide an explanation of such things, but often there is no other explanation than, 'Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in your sight.' We do have to confess that often God's ways are beyond us. He does indeed move in mysterious ways his wonders to perform. Model preacher or no model preacher, the Sovereign Lord will use us as he sees fit.

5. The danger of idolatry

In conclusion, one can rightly say that one of the great dangers connected with the idea of finding a model preacher is that we may convey the impression that only one preacher, or one kind of preacher, is worth listening to. Only 'the master' or those patterned upon him deserve a hearing. This attitude will surely breed factionalism: 'I am of Paul, I am of Apollos' (1 Cor 3:4). Our people must be given to understand that God, who has demonstrated such extraordinary variety in creation, delights in variety among his servants. They may differ greatly in temperament, personality, style, technique and gifts, but if they are truly men of God, walking with him and seeking to preach 'in the Spirit', God can, and undoubtedly will, use them and make them a blessing to his people. It is a great disservice to God's servants and will discourage many of them if they are refused a hearing and are summarily dismissed because they don't conform to a certain pattern (See editorial comment). Likewise God's people will lose many a blessing if they are prejudiced against all who don't 'measure up'.

The Lord gave the word; great was the company of those who proclaimed it (Ps 68:11).

Not all that company will be model preachers; but may they all be endued with power from on high and mightily used of God to the salvation of the lost, the blessing of God's people, and the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Vital Place of the Prayer Meeting

It is said that the weekly prayer meeting is the spiritual barometer for any local church. You can tell with a fair degree of accuracy what the church is like by the demeanour or substance of the weekly prayer meeting. Is there genuine evangelistic concern? If so it will be expressed in the prayers. Is there a heartfelt longing for the conversion of unconverted family members? If so that is sure to surface. Is there a world vision and a fervent desire for revival and the glory of our Redeemer among the nations of the world? Such a burden cannot be suppressed. Is there a heart agony about famine and war and the need for the gospel of peace among the suffering multitudes of mankind? The church prayer meeting will answer that question. Intercession in the prayer meeting will soon reveal a loving church that cares for those who are oppressed and weighed down with trials and burdens. Those bearing trials too painful or personal to be described in public will nevertheless find comfort in the prayer meeting for there the Holy Spirit is especially at work.

A daily church prayer meeting

One of the results of the revival in Korea is the multiplication of daily early morning prayer meetings. I questioned a Korean pastor recently and he assured me that daily early morning prayer meetings (5.00 am in summer and 6.00 am in winter) are part of the lifestyle of evangelical Christians of all denominations. Are these Koreans more angels than men?! Yet Bob Sheehan told me that as a boy he was impressed by the devotion of his father, a working man who laboured from 7.00 am to 7.00 pm daily, yet attended without fail a prayer meeting at 6.00 am on his way to work!

In 1866 Spurgeon instituted daily prayer meetings at the Tabernacle, 7.00 every morning and again 7.30 each evening.¹ The main Tabernacle prayer meeting took place on Monday evenings attended by over 3,000. To provide for participation there was an obvious need of supplementary times of prayer for smaller groups within the church.

The book *Only A Prayer Meeting*² by C H Spurgeon consists mostly of brief addresses given at the Monday evening prayer meeting, but does not describe the mechanics of how the church prayer meeting functioned with so many present. Visitors to Romania have observed that in their large church prayer meetings it is the custom to designate a section of the assembled company as solely responsible for the prayers. In this way those in one part of a gallery or one section of the seating on the lower deck are responsible to pray out with enough volume to reach the corners of the auditorium. Prayers are fervent and in rapid succession.

The theology of prayer

‘Prayer is an offering up of our desires to God *for the things agreeable to his will,*

in the name of Christ, *by the help of his Spirit*, with confession of our sins and thankful acknowledgment of his mercies.³³ How can we be in accord with the will of the Holy Spirit unless he creates those desires in us? When the Holy Spirit works powerfully then there is not enough time for everyone who wishes to participate. When he is absent then spiritual deadness prevails. How can we express the burdens and concerns of the Holy Spirit except by prayer? The Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we should pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans which words cannot express (Rom 8:26).

Spiritual repentance is the creation of the Spirit. 'They shall look upon the One whom they have pierced and mourn and grieve bitterly for him' (Zech 12:10). There was no repentance in King David concerning his adultery and murder until he was convicted by the Holy Spirit. Psalm 51 was the outcome. Desire for the glory of Christ and a burden to pray for his Kingdom to prosper is also the creation of the Holy Spirit. At the same time such concern is our responsibility. It is sinful to be fatalistic and say to ourselves, 'Well, we will be more attentive and lively in prayer when the Spirit comes to us!' No! That will not do! We are exhorted to stir ourselves up to prayer but at the same time we must rely on the Spirit.

But, we reason, will our prayers achieve anything of moment? Hasn't the Lord made up his mind what he is going to do? This brings us back to the tension of divine sovereignty and human responsibility. We must uphold both to the full. We are answerable to the Lord by way of dependence upon him through his Word and by prayer. That is our way of life and the extent to which we follow that will reflect in our entire way of life and be the measure of our peace, joy and happiness.

Prayer as dependence upon the Father and the means of guidance is seen in the prayer life of our Lord. He is divine yet his divinity did not lessen his need to pray. He was in prayer at the time of his baptism (Lk 3:21). He rose very early while it was still dark to go to a solitary place to pray (Mk 1:35). He spent a whole night in prayer before choosing his apostles (Lk 6:12). He was in prayer when he was transfigured (Lk 9:29). Prayer was the means of his agonising his way to victory in Gethsemane (Lk 2:44).

The phrase 'prepared to do any good work' (2 Tim 2:21) literally 'having been prepared to every good work'³⁴, suggests that all that we do requires preparation in prayer. All that we do requires spiritual motivation and wisdom. Our works therefore need to be prepared in prayer. Obviously we must be governed by common sense. We can't close our eyes for prayer every time we come to traffic lights. Prayerfulness is an attitude and there are all kinds of prayer (Eph 6:18; Phil 4:6).

Is there adequate church prayer meeting time?

Consider the subjects that cry out for intercession: family concerns and anxieties; church issues; the ongoing evangelistic scenario; sister churches and

ministers in particular; regional and national concerns; the world of missions; missionaries including members of our own church labouring abroad; the global situation with several nations experiencing the agony of civil war, drought, famine, or extreme poverty; the desperate need for stable governments and rulers of integrity (1 Tim 2:1-4).

If we are not to succumb to a feeling of being overwhelmed we will need a structure of subjects. Specific prayer should be encouraged and individuals should be mentioned by name. Note the individuals named by Paul in Romans 16; and to the Colossians whom he had never met he wrote, 'For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have never stopped praying for you' (Col 1:6).

Is one prayer meeting a week sufficient? If we are to pray in a way which is worthy of so great a Majesty should a local church not offer more opportunity for praying together? Those with family responsibility find it difficult enough to attend every second week. Some churches have a short prayer meeting before the Sunday evening service, an excellent preparation for worship, but hardly adequate if that is the only time for some church members.

What about the weak?

In most churches there are members who never attend the communion service and who rarely if ever attend the weekly prayer meeting. What can be done? Spiritual life and growth is akin to horticulture. Plants can be nurtured and cultured but there is no way that they can be forced to grow. The Lord is gentle with the weak,

*A bruised reed he will not break,
and a smouldering wick he will not
snuff out (Isa 42:3,4).*

There are some in the body who possess the gift of exhortation (Rom 12:8). That gift wisely employed can be most effective for stirring believers to faithful attendance at the prayer meeting.

Is the weekly prayer meeting marked in your diary?

It is customary to mark engagements in our diary. If meeting the King with our fellow believers is important it will surely be reserved in our diary. Invitations to dinner or to recreational events will have to be fitted in elsewhere. Jesus says that we have not because we fail to ask (James 4:2). Is the audience with our Monarch esteemed by you as a priority? Does your diary reflect that fact?

The importance of versatile leadership at the church prayer meeting

In a previous article with the title *A Lively and Edifying Prayer Meeting*⁵ I urged that a leadership of common sense is needed up front for an edifying prayer meeting. The leader must come thoroughly prepared himself, ready to encourage with appropriate scriptures and information and exhortation. He

should encourage participation. Also he may need to remind participants not to be too long, but not so short as to be trite. Also it may be needful to go privately to individual participants who fall into a bad habit of which there are several. For instance the eccentricity of preaching instead of praying or the oddity of telling the Lord all the biblical texts which have been memorised when he obviously knows them already. Information before prayer, compressed, crisp, clear, is vital. Those who come tired and who feel spiritually apathetic or perhaps downright rebellious need pithy biblical reminders of what praying is all about. The leader up front must be in touch with the feelings of those present.

Helpful examples can be cited of means employed to stimulate prayer. A well prepared brief information focus is hard to beat. For instance a five minute feature using an atlas and extracts from OPERATION WORLD is the practice at the midweek prayer meeting at Kings Chapel, West Chester, USA. It is most effective as a 'prayer quickener'. The Baptist Church in Hillcrest, Natal, South Africa, do the same thing in the Lord's Day morning service and include the outline as part of the printed bulletin — excellent for getting out of parochiality and promoting a vision for world missions.

Leaders should encourage freedom so that there is no embarrassment for those who can only stay for a while. The notice used for the prayer meeting which proved the genesis of the 1858 revival in New York read as follows:

DAILY PRAYER MEETING

from 12 to 1 o'clock

STOP

5, 10, 20 mins

or the whole hour as your time permits

The place of the church prayer meeting illustrated from the book of Acts

The place and importance of the church prayer meeting can be seen from the opening chapters of the book of Acts. Pentecost was born out of the church prayer meeting. We are not told how often the disciples adjourned for refreshments but we know they continued earnestly in prayer until the Holy Spirit came in power. How many today really believe in praying for revival? Soon after Pentecost when there were serious setbacks, fierce persecution threatened the cause, and the apostles were forbidden to preach any more. What could be done? There was only one answer. The church prayer meeting. They got together and told the Lord all about it. He responded by giving the building a gentle shake, a token of his support! Later persecution raged again. James was beheaded. Peter was arrested and imprisoned. What did the disciples do? They had only one recourse. The church prayer meeting. As on former occasions it was daily and continued for eight days right up to the eve of the hour when Peter was to be executed. In answer to their intercession the Lord

sent an angel who took Peter out of his chains and through the locked doors as effortlessly as a great liner sails out to sea.

Where did Peter go when he found himself free? Why, he went to the church prayer meeting! How did he know where that was? Do you think that the leading apostle would not know where to find the prayer meeting? And when he arrived it took time to get in because they could hardly believe it was Peter, alive and well! Why did they find it hard to believe? Because like us they only half believed in the effectual nature of prayer.

Further on in the book of Acts we learn that the first church in Europe had its genesis in a prayer meeting for women (Acts 16:13).

Revival and improvements at the church prayer meeting

We stand in urgent need of revival personally, in our churches, nationally, and internationally. When revival comes he who is the Spirit will almost certainly begin to stir us in our private prayers and in our church prayer meetings. There is room for occasional united church prayer meetings. The biblical base for a concert of prayer involving several churches is described in the book *Give Him no Rest*.⁶ Spiritual impetus can come from other evangelical churches.

Revivals always seem to have their genesis in prayer meetings. I conclude by recommending a book just published by the Banner of Truth, *The Power of Prayer*.⁷ Written by an eye witness, Samuel Prime, it describes how a great national revival began with a small prayer meeting. The local church weekly prayer meeting is the best place to call upon the Lord to revive his work. He is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine (Eph 3:20).

Notes

- 1 *The Life and Work of Charles Haddon Spurgeon*, Holden Pike, Banner of Truth, 1992 (The original six volumes are bound in two in this new set. The reference is found in the original vol 3 page 183).
- 2 *Only a Prayer Meeting*, C H Spurgeon, 367 pages, Pilgrim Publishers, Box 66, Pasadena, TX 77501, USA.
- 3 This definition is composed from the Larger and Shorter Catechisms and cited in B M Palmer's book *Theology of Prayer*.
- 4 *hētoimasmenon* is a perfect passive.
- 5 *RT 95*, now available only in the bound volume 91-110.
- 6 *Give Him no Rest*, Erroll Hulse, pages 90ff and 124ff. EP. 144pp £4.95.
- 7 *The Power of Prayer, The New York Revival of 1858*, Samuel Prime, 263pp bound, £7.95

Pastor Ken Dix of Dunstable has been gathering historical material for a treatise on the place, importance and practice of the weekly church prayer meeting. He reports that for this our 20th Century he is woefully short of data. Do you have references to this vital part of church life in your church records? If you find helpful material please communicate direct with brother Dix: 38 Frenches Avenue, DUNSTABLE, Beds, England.

Advancing in Adversity

‘Advancing in Adversity’ is the printed collection of the six papers presented at the annual Westminster Conference in London in December, 1991.

In the paper *The Puritan Brotherhood* John J Murray of Edinburgh, summing up practical lessons learned from the Puritan era in England from 1558 to 1662 and beyond says, ‘The Puritans were more successful in the work of planting the gospel in adversity than they were in prosperity,’ and he quotes Whitefield; ‘Ministers never write or preach so well as when under the cross.’

Who were the Puritans? How did they originate? What was their influence? What were their convictions? How and why did they decline? These questions are answered in a most interesting, arresting and challenging way. John J Murray traces out the development of the Puritan movement as a spiritual brotherhood that grew. This paper on its own is worth the price of the book. The same could be claimed for the others which, typical of this conference, reflect the merits of extensive research.

1992 is the tercentenary of the passing to glory of Richard Baxter and three papers were devoted to him. The first is a biography of superb quality by Iain Murray. Baxter was a colossus as an evangelist, pastor and writer. He led the literature field with three outright winners, *The Call to the Unconverted*, (recently republished in modern language by EP), *The Reformed Pastor* and *The Saints’ Everlasting Rest* (both Banner of Truth paperbacks). That is as impressive in spiritual terms as were the three Kenyans in athletic terms in winning the steeplechase at Barcelona, way ahead of the rest of the field, 1st 2nd and 3rd! Yet astonishingly Baxter was heterodox on the central doctrine of justification by faith. He believed that personal faith is the ground of justification, and not Christ’s righteousness imputed. You will not spot that in the books referred to. Iain Murray in one of several outstanding applications says, ‘Baxter’s life surely teaches us the need of discrimination as well as charity in our dealings with other Christians. It would be as wrong to ignore Baxter

because of his mistakes as it would be to suppose that such an eminent Christian must be free of error.' Baxter's errors caused far-reaching damage and this is traced out clearly by Iain Murray, who warns us not to idolise men (p 19ff).

In 1673 *A Christian Directory* by Baxter was published: a massive work of a million words republished in 1991 by Soli Deo Gloria, USA. Baxter's *Directory* covers every aspect of life: communion with God, the use of time, the discipline of the mind, emotions and tongue, recreation, marriage, family worship, the Lord's Day, and much more beside. Bob Sheehan reviews Baxter's work and brings out issues of special interest to us today. Leith Samuel follows the same method in his paper on Baxter's *The Saints' Everlasting Rest* providing not only a summary of the book but extracting the most enriching spiritual portions.

The contributions described so far illustrate once more the spiritual goldmine represented by the Puritan era. The papers which complete this volume are by Robert Oliver and Eryl Davies. Public interest in Eastern Europe has been aroused through the astounding liberation of the last two or three years. Dr Oliver's paper has the title *The Reformation in Eastern Europe: Progress and Decline*. It concentrates in particular on Poland, Hungary and Bohemia. Dr Davies' *An Angry God – The place of hell in preaching*, is a valuable, thoroughly contemporary and informative exposition on the subject of eternal hell. The title used at the time and for the printed papers is misleading. It would be accurate to call this paper *A contemporary consideration of the doctrine of eternal punishment*. The paper does not deal with subjects such as why Jesus was frequently explicit about hell but why Luke does not report that as a feature in apostolic preaching, or to what extent and how frequently we need to warn of hell in our preaching.

By way of conclusion I choose one of the eight questions asked by John J Murray in his application of the Puritan Brotherhood. Where is the recovery of Reformed truth leading us? Have we the vision of a Reformed church that would serve as the instrument to reform the nation? I add what he affirmed boldly in the delivery of the paper but chose to omit in the printed version: 'Will such a vision ever be conceivable while our evangelical churches are split into a multiplicity of independent, isolated, non-united parts?'

Copies of *ADVANCING IN ADVERSITY* are obtainable from John Miller, at 55 Warwick Road, Thornton Heath, Surrey, CR7 7NH. Price including postage, UK £3.50, USA \$10.00

Duties of Church Members

This article follows 'Check-up for Church Members' (see RT125). Both have been extracted from the **Works of John Flavel** (Vol 6 pp 586-589) and rewritten in modern language. They first appeared in the July and August 1991 issues of **The Protestant Review**, Australia. The New KJV has been used for Scripture quotes.

The following duties toward fellow Church Members are too often neglected due to the all consuming self-centredness of modern Western Christianity. We copy the world in making religious superstars instead of copying Christ, who *did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many* (Mark 10:45). The duty of faithfulness in public worship was mentioned in the former article (RT 125).

1. Fellowship

The members' first duty is to gather together frequently for Christian fellowship, Malachi 3:16. *Then those who feared the LORD spoke to one another . . .*

Seize the opportunity to attend prayer meetings and Bible studies. Discuss the points raised in the Lord's Day sermon with family and Christian friends. Participate in informal social gatherings. All these activities are a great help to edify one another. After all, this is what Christian fellowship is designed for, Ephesians 4:16.

2. Evangelism and missions

The Christian's second duty is to evangelise both personally and by supporting the sound preaching of the Word of God. Remember that the witness of our words and our lives helps in the conversion of the carnal and careless world. Paul encouraged the whole church at Philippi, including the elders and deacons (1:1) to . . . *help these women who laboured with me in the gospel . . .* (Phil 4:3) *Through the Lord Jesus Christ, and through the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in your prayers to God for me* (Rom 15:30).

3. Helping one another

Christians have a duty to bear, and bear with, the infirmities of their weaker brothers. This often means keeping our opinions to ourselves when we can do so without sin, so that we don't cause needless offence. *We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbour for his good, leading to edification* (Rom 15:1,2)

4. Maintaining unity of the Church

Members of true churches of Jesus Christ have a tender regard for the church's unity. This applies in matters of doctrine, love and practice. We are to avoid (within the bounds of Scripture) all causes and occasions of division and separation. *Note those who cause divisions and offences, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them* (Rom 16:17). Scripture continually exhorts us to be *like-minded* (Phil 2:1,2; 4:2; 1 Cor 1:10).

5. Walk humbly

The poorest and least educated Christian deserves the love and respect of his brothers. Indeed every Christian is to esteem others better than himself or herself. External things make no difference with Christ according to Romans 12:10 – *In honour giving preference to one another*. Galatians 3:28 reminds us that we are *all one in Christ Jesus*.

This does not mean that Christians should not respect brothers who hold responsible positions in society. Ephesians 5:21 speaks of *submitting to one another in the fear of God* (See also Rom 13:7; 1 Pet 2:14).

6. Submit to reproof

Christians must humbly receive reproofs from each other for their sins, especially when the matter is just. When we must reprove a brother, it must be done biblically in love.

*Let the righteous strike me;
It shall be a kindness.
And let him reprove me;
It shall be as excellent oil*
(Psalm 141:5).

7. Exercise gifts

Every Christian has his or her spiritual gifts and graces, 1 Cor 12:7ff. Each has a duty to exercise them, sharing their experiences of God's dealing with their souls, without interfering with the work specifically appointed to elders and deacons. *As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another* (1 Peter 4:10).

Take care to avoid sinful favouritism, including some and excluding others. *Observe these things without prejudice, doing nothing without partiality* (1 Tim 5:21). We ought also to give the greatest priority to those who have the greatest need and would benefit most.

8. Giving

Christians ought to give cheerfully to relieve the needs of their brothers. The Lord loves such, 2 Corinthians 9:7. *Do not forget to do good and to share* (Heb 13:16). In order to do this properly, they must apply themselves to their secular work. Ephesians 4:28 counsels, *working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need*.

Members are especially responsible to make adequate provision for their ministers, as the Lord enables them. This is not a matter of courtesy, but their duty. *Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel* (1 Cor 9:14).

9. Care for the distressed

We should not only relieve the distressed members of Christ, but actively seek them out and visit them. We must make it our business to know their spiritual and temporal needs. How else can we fulfil our biblical obligations to them? *Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble* (James 1:27).

10. Love thinks no evil

A much neglected duty is to put charitable constructions on doubtful words and actions. If there are two or more possible constructions, always adopt the fairest and most charitable. Love . . . thinks no evil . . . bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things (1 Cor 13:5-7). Such a love will defend and maintain church peace and unity.

Above all, let none of you plan evil in his heart against his brother (Zech 7:10).

Reformation and Revival

After sixteen years as pastor of Trinity Baptist Church, Wheaton, Chicago, John Armstrong has embarked on a writing and itinerant ministry. His writing ministry will mainly concern the production of a quarterly journal with the title *Reformation and Revival*, designed especially to penetrate non-reformed areas of the USA denominational world. John who ministered at the annual Carey Family Conference this year (see report) is particularly gifted in persuading pastors to rethink their theology. For a number of years he has organised the Whitefield Fraternal in Chicago. In a climate indifferent to Reformed theology, he has persevered through lean times into the present period in which the attendance varies between 30 and 50 ministers.

A number of pastors in mega churches in the USA have been influenced through John's personal friendship and ability as a theologian. Trinity Baptist Church is part of the Baptist Convention. In that denomination alone, with its 500 churches, there is scope for the new journal. There are many learned technical theological journals in America, (the economy there can support what is impossible in most other countries), but there is need for a more popular reformational and revival style of presentation.

Several reformational magazines have come into being recently: *The Founders' Journal (USA)*, *Reformation Canada*, *Grace and Truth (Zambia)*, *Reformation Africa South*. There is great scope in encouraging the churches not only to reform but to pray earnestly for spiritual awakening. John Armstrong plans to continue his bi-annual ministry in

Andra Pradesh, India, where there is a receptivity to the gospel typical of many third world nations, a receptivity which is desperately and miserably absent in the West. Dr Armstrong is worthy of our prayers and support in his labours. The address for *Reformation and Revival* is: PO Box 88216, Carol Stream, IL 60188, USA; and c/o Crag House Farm (D.Deacon), Smithy Lane, Leeds LS16 7NH, UK. Subscription rates: \$16 for one year, \$30 for two years. \$4 extra for overseas postage.

The Grace/Carey Conference 1993



Baruch Maoz

For one year as an exercise of unity the annual Grace Assembly and the Carey Conference are to combine at Swanwick, Derbyshire, 19th to 21st May, 1993. This will be exceptional inasmuch as church officers and their wives are welcome. The principal guest speakers are Baruch Maoz of Israel and Walter Chantry of Carlisle, USA. The full programme as well as other speakers will be announced later.

Enquiries to: John Rubens, 22 Leith Road, Darlington, Co Durham DL3 8BG.

The 1689 Confession of Faith, Carey Publications

A Faith to Confess, being the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith rewritten in modern English, is shortly to have its seventh reprint with a revised introduction. The editions have been large and evidence the popularity of the 'Confession' in an easy to read style which has also been used to encourage translation into other languages. Clark Pinnock, mentioned in the introduction to the sixth edition, has changed his view of Scripture and is now a leading advocate for pluralism (see editorial comment). This has necessitated a clear statement by the publishers espousing the absolute authority and timeless relevancy of Scripture since there are several contemporary views which appear to hold to the Bible but in fact deviate from its authority.

Zambia

Peter Milsom of Deeside is due to minister during August at the Reformed Baptist Conference to be held this year in the Copper Belt.

Reports of Reformed Baptist growth in Eastern Zambia are encouraging. From a small beginning four years ago, Chipata Calvary Baptist now has a membership of 16 with another 10 being prepared for membership. Attendance is sometimes up to 50 adults which causes problems squeezing into a schoolroom built to accommodate 40 children! A site has been procured and the church members are prayerfully seeking to raise funds to build a church and manse. The latter will be timely as rents in Zambia are constantly rising to unaffordable levels and the pastor (Percy Chisenga) and his family have suffered real testing in being virtually homeless for a period and then having to live in an incomplete rented house while it was under construction.

Pastor Chisenga was sent to consolidate the work in Chipata in 1989 as well as pioneer new works in other peri-urban towns in the Eastern Province. He has also been able to give spiritual support to a small fellowship at St Francis Hospital, Katete.

Contact: Dr John Anderson, Ash Thomas, Tiverton, Devon Ex16 4NP, UK.

Newcastle, Australia

Are Reformed Baptist churches growing? Generally speaking a gradual growth is reported from most countries. A typical report comes from Newcastle where Don McMurray and Jack Natrass are elders. The editor was present when the church was planted on 12 August, 19 years ago, meeting in the home of Don. The next years were a struggle until seven years ago when the Holy Spirit gave a surge forward to the work, an unusual sense being imparted at that time that the assembly truly belonged to Christ himself and not to men. An old, inadequate building was acquired. Now the morning congregation averages 80 and the plan is to sell that property and erect a new church building. This is not easy as land is expensive and a substantial plot will be needed to allow for parking requirements.

Singapore

The Evangelical Library of London has set up a branch named TELOS (The Evangelical Library of Singapore) in this sunny island. It opened recently with a stock of about 500 books and periodicals and about 200 cassette tapes.

Situated in the financial district of Singapore, TELOS is well located to reach out to many. TELOS welcomes Reformed books, magazines, cassettes, or other contributions. Contact: Peter Ong (see back inside cover for his address).

Carey Family Conference

After eight years in the North the Carey Family Conference returned South being held at Farney Close School, Bolney, Sussex from July 27th to August 1st.

This 1992 conference was led by Andrew and Iris Symonds of Cuckfield Baptist Church, with Anna Symonds, Catrin Thomas and Paul Kellett organising the children's sessions on the life of John Newton. Tim Symonds led the young people's sessions and the sporting activities. Peter White was musical director. Fifty percent of those attending came for the first time

including two families from Italy (they read about the conference in RT).

John Armstrong was the principal speaker taking as his subject every evening *The Cross (its Centrality, Necessity, Mystery, Power, and Christian Life under the Cross)*. This material was excellent in substance and presented in a heartwarming and practical fashion that will be remembered. The morning sessions were all relevant and edifying: Practical lessons from the life of Spurgeon; An exposition of 2 Peter by pastor David Ellis of Cuckfield; Andrew King, pastor of New England Road

India

Stephen Turner of Auckland, New Zealand has recently returned from South India where he has enjoyed times of ministry with students mostly from Madras and surrounding churches. It is his purpose to maintain long term spiritual bonds with the men there who are in urgent need of modern English readable Reformed literature materials.



President Chissano embracing Afonso Dhlakama of Renamo at peace accord meeting in Rome, August 7 1992

Muslim Countries

In RT124 we reported the work of the Middle East Reformed Fellowship. At their Study Centre in Lanarca (PO Box 52) Cyprus, groups of church workers from Arab countries receive two weeks of intensive Bible training before returning to their home churches. Presently three weekly broadcasts are transmitted from radio Monte Carlo reaching much of the Arab world resulting in encouraging contacts. MERF report churches persevering under tremendous physical and spiritual oppression in these countries — 'there is much hunger for God's word'.

We are in possession of well documented facts concerning outstanding

church growth in some Muslim country, characterised by fearless professions of faith in young people particularly.

Mozambique

A peace accord was signed in Rome between the leaders of the Mozambican government and Renamo, the national resistance movement, to end their 16 year conflict by October 1st 1992. Observers welcomed the agreement as a considerable triumph for the country's church leaders. Certainly if the peace succeeds it will be an answer to fervent prayer. The severe drought of Southern Africa has given added urgency to the peace negotiations.

Evangelical Church, Haywards Heath, demonstrated the gospel in the Gospel of Mark; and Keith Underhill from Kenya spoke on missionary work and culture.

The second session each morning was of a more informal nature allowing time for questions and discussion. A very helpful practical workshop on how to lead a neighbourhood Bible study followed Andrew King's session. On the last day, with regard to the question of missionary endeavour, our attention was drawn during the discussion to the fact that the amount of missionary work undertaken by those of Reformed Baptist conviction should by no means be measured by the two agencies best known among us (*Grace Baptist Mission – UK* and *Reformed Baptist Mission Services – USA*), since many for practical reasons go through other established



Keith Underhill and Stephen Murray of Cuckfield

ference was the sense of spiritual joy and enjoyment through a felt sense of unity in our Triune God. Thoughtful provision was made for young children, parents expressing appreciation of the teaching their children received (and enjoyed). The young people had the benefit of a well equipped gymnasium. There was a cricket match in which Keith Underhill was declared to be the man of the match. A special opportunity was given to John Armstrong as our guest to bat. He was out three times in four balls bowled, by which episode it is hoped that he will not again suggest that a cricket bat is too large compared with a baseball bat!



Tim Symonds, left, and Jonathan Underhill in the gym

missionary agencies. John Armstrong testified that from the church he has pastored for sixteen years in Wheaton, Chicago, two missionary families have been supported in countries abroad. Instances can be cited of those who have pioneered in other countries from their home churches without the advantage of an agency to organise their support.

The outstanding feature of the con-

A strong petition has been made for a further conference in the South next year before contemplating a return to the North. The venue was filled to capacity which dictates the necessity for a larger venue (and we have one in mind) next year. Andrew and Iris have kindly indicated their willingness again to provide the organisational basis which contributed to a truly wonderful week. Especially in mind is the need to have an attractive site for caravans and campers.

The sessions described above are available at £2.50 per cassette from Carey Cassettes, Crag House Farm, Cookridge, LEEDS LS16 7NH.

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CONTENTS

- 1 Editorial**
- 4 The Centrality of the Atonement**
A review
- 5 The Reality of God's Wrath** Editor
- 13 The Preacher's Role Model** Bill Payne
- 20 The Vital Place of the Prayer Meeting** Editor
- 25 Advancing in Adversity**
A review
- 27 Duties of church members**
- 29 News**
- 31 Carey Family Conference**