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## **THE GATE OF THE YEAR**

King George VI spoke these words at the end of his 1939 nine-minute Broadcast to the British Empire. Britain was at war at the time, but the King's words proved impressive and memorable.

I feel that we may all find a message of encouragement in the lines which, in my closing words, I would like to say to you:

I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year: "Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown." And he replied: "Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the Hand of God. That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way." May that Almighty Hand guide and uphold us all.

The King was quoting from a poem, entitled "God Knows", originally written by Minnie Louise Haskins in 1908 and privately published in 1912 as part of a collection entitled "The Desert." The poem had been brought to the King's attention by Queen Elizabeth, the late Queen Mother, and 63 years later it was recited at her funeral. In the original, Miss Haskins continued with the following lines:

So I went forth, and finding the Hand of God, trod gladly into the night. And He led me towards the hills and the breaking of day in the lone East.

## **THE ONE THAT WENT ASTRAY**

One night, about three o'clock, I was awakened by someone pounding at my door. There stood a man who was an entire stranger to me. He said, "I have come to ask you to go with me to pray with a dying girl." When I suggested that I would come as soon as it was daylight, he said he feared that would be too late.

As I was dressing, he said, "I want to be straight with you and tell you where you are going. It is no nice place, but a house of shame. This girl seems to have known you and asked me to fetch you to pray with her."

I set his mind at rest on that point, by telling him that it didn't matter where she was if she wanted me to pray with her.

He took me down into that low district and into the house where I found a poor girl in her teens. It was very evident that soon she was to meet her Maker. A little lamp was on the table by her bedside, and I turned the shade so that the light fell on her face to see if I could recognize her. She sensed at once what I was doing, for she said, "I do not think you know me, but I know you, and I knew you would come to pray with me, for I am soon going to die. The girls here do not believe I am going to die, but I know I am."

While I was wondering just how to point this poor soul to a living Saviour, she solved the problem for me by asking if there was not a story in the Bible about a sheep that had wandered out of the fold and had gone very far astray, and about the Shepherd who had brought the sheep back.

"Oh, yes", I said, "That is the story of the ninety and nine, and the one that went astray."

"Yes" she murmured, "the one that went astray."

As I knelt to pray by that dying girl, another girl in the room knelt too, sobbing by her friend's bed. What a company was there! I have preached to vast congregations, but never was a meeting more hallowed by the presence of the Lord Jesus.

When I looked up, I shall never forget the expression on the dying girl's face. "Oh," she cried, "He is holding me to His heart!" I had never heard that expression before, but she repeated it again and again. "He is holding me to His heart." At last, I ventured on my homeward way. When I later returned, I knew the end had come, because the undertaker was entering the house as I drew near to the door.

One of the girls came out to meet me, and her first words were, "We all wished you had been here when Mary passed away. She was so happy, and she kept saying, "The Shepherd has found me and is holding me to His heart." She

actually tried to clasp her arm around the One unseen, and then with a soft “Good-bye” she was gone.

Several years later, as I finished preaching the Gospel in a certain city, a young woman came to me and smilingly asked, “Don’t you recognize me?” When I replied that I could not say for sure, she said, “I am the girl who told you of Mary’s passing that morning, and of how happy she was in her new-found joy. But there is something else I wanted to tell you. Once or twice I have started to write the story, but I did not have the courage to finish.”

“Well”, I said, “what is it?”

She replied, “Just this: that morning when the Good Shepherd brought in Mary, the straying sheep, on His one shoulder, I came in on the other!”

*The People’s Magazine*

## **FELLOWSHIP NEWS**

Another Evangelistic Supper was held at Grove House on the evening of Thursday 25 October. We were pleased to welcome an encouraging number of visitors on this occasion, to enjoy fellowship as well as a good meal. Keith brought a clear gospel message in-between courses to which all listened attentively. We look to God to add his blessing on this evangelistic effort.

Our prayerful interest in the spread of the gospel goes beyond our immediate doorstep. At our midweek meeting on 17 October we were glad to have a visit from Aural Vidal who is serving with Christian Witness to Israel in Paris. It was encouraging to hear of the many contacts Mr Vidal has among God’s chosen people in this large metropolis, giving him opportunities to speak of the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

The Middle East Reformed Fellowship is also regularly in our prayers, working, as it does, in Arab and Muslim lands. We welcomed Rev. Timothy Burden to

our midweek meeting on 14 November who gave us much to challenge us to continue in prayer for this spiritually needy area of the world.

On Saturday, 1 December, the Ordination and Installation Service of Mr. Peter Bruce to the pastorate of Chardsmead Baptist Church, Bridport, took place. Many other churches, including Emmanuel, were represented that afternoon to witness this solemn occasion. It was a day of heartfelt thanksgiving to God for answered prayer on behalf of his people there at Chardsmead who have been through a long interregnum. Pastor Watts, who has been Moderator of the Church in Bridport for several years, led the service and preached from 2 Corinthians 6:11-13: A Faithful Minister – “O ye Corinthians, our mouth is opened to you, our heart is enlarged”; and A Faithful Church – “Now for a recompence in the same...be ye also enlarged.” May Peter and his wife, Joan, together with the whole church, know the blessing of God upon them at this time and in a very special way

We were very pleased to welcome Rev Graham Chewter, representing the Trinitarian Bible Society, at our midweek meeting on Wednesday 12 December. Once again it was encouraging to hear of the completion of new translations of God's Word, in particular for Romania and Mongolia. Mr Chewter also shared correspondence from prison chaplains and others who have been able to give out portions of the Word of God to needy people who would otherwise have no access to it. We continue to pray for TBS and for all who work tirelessly to distribute the Scriptures throughout the world in many languages.

*"Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the LORD his God." Psalm 146:5*

## **DEVIZES YOUTH CONFERENCE**

The Devizes Youth Conference is a Christian Conference for Young Adults from school Year 10 to 20/30s and it is held twice a year at Mayport Street Baptist Chapel, Devizes (previously held in Chippenham). It is jointly organized by Tabernacle Cardiff and Emmanuel Church, Salisbury.

The Conference is an excellent opportunity for young people from like-minded churches to meet up and have fellowship together, and to be taught from God's Word.

The Autumn Conference this year was held on Saturday 17 November and about 70 young people attended. There were two addresses given over the course of the day, as well as a session where the testimonies of the two guest speakers were given. A long lunch-break provided ample opportunity for the young people to share together over good food, to encourage one another in the Lord, and to make new friends.

The first address was given by the Rev Aaron Lewis, Crosslanes Chapel, Ibsley. The title for this address was 'My Life is Christ' and we considered Philippians 1:21 "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain".

There is a race to be run - the Christian race, and it is so important that we are running in this race. It is a race that begins with Christ, that continues because of Christ, and that ends with Christ for ever.

Those present were provoked to consider whether they were running this race, whether they were looking to Jesus, keeping their eye on Him, and whether they were submitting to Him in all things. Could it be said of them that they were living their life in complete surrender at the feet of Jesus?

The following points were considered:

1. Christ the Source of our Life
2. Christ the Object of our Life

The second address was given by the Rev Thomas Yates, Maryport Baptist Chapel, Devizes. This address was entitled 'My Death Is Christ' and our attention was drawn to 2 Corinthians 5: 8 & 9 "We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord. Wherefore we labour, that whether present or absent, we may be accepted of Him."

There is a death that each one of us must die, a day when we must appear before the Judgement Seat of Christ. It is therefore vitally important that we are right with God, facing this appointment with hope, security and confidence, so that we are perfectly safe at that time and for evermore. Our thoughts were, therefore challenged by the following points:

1. The certainty of death
2. The preparation for death
3. The triumph over death

The full addresses can be found on Cardiff Tabernacle's website: [tabernaclecardiff.org](http://tabernaclecardiff.org)

The next conference is to be held, God willing, on Saturday, 2nd March, 2019, and the speakers will be Bill Goodman (Bath) and Roland Burrows (Old Hill).

It would be good to see even more young people at this conference. All who come can be assured of a great day of Bible teaching, and a profitable and enjoyable time of fellowship with other young Christians.

*Steve & Liz Storey*

## **ANNIVERSARY SERVICES, 2019**

God willing, the Church's 66<sup>th</sup> and Pastor Watts's 48th Anniversaries will be held the weekend of 23 & 24 February 2019. The guest preacher will be Rev. Jonathan Stobbs, Minister of Clarence Street Baptist Church, Penzance.

There will be a preaching meeting on the Saturday at 3.30pm, followed by Sabbath services at 11am & 6.30pm. There will also be an After Church Meeting on the Sabbath at approximately 8.30pm.

We extend to all a sincere and very warm invitation to these special services and meetings.

# CREATION, OLD AND NEW

**Malcolm H. Watts**

In a single chapter of thirty-one verses, Scripture provides us with an account of the creation of the world. This is the only infallible source of information and it shows that God did not work through a process of gradual development (evolution) but through a series of instantaneous acts. 'He spake and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast' (Psalm 33:9 cf. Hebrews 11:3). Believing Scripture to be the Word of God, we unhesitatingly accept its simple yet sublime account, and we maintain that God created the heavens and the earth in six natural days.

Genesis 1, however, is more than a record of creation: it is a wonderful foreshadowing of God's work of grace in the hearts of his people. The apostle Paul describes the inward spiritual change in a believer as 'a new creation' (2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 6:15 – the Greek word used in both instances can be so translated, but, in any case, a new creature supposes a new creation). In another place, he says Christians are God's 'workmanship (a word used of creation in Romans 1:20), created in Christ Jesus', and he calls upon his readers to manifest 'the new man (i.e. the new self or character), which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness' (Ephesians 2:10; 4:24). These verses show that God's works of creation and re-creation are comparable. It is profitable to trace some of the parallels.

To begin with, notice how in both creations God acts in divine sovereignty, according to his eternal purpose, and with a view to his own honour and glory – (Nehemiah 9:6; Psalm 148:6; Proverbs 16:4 cf. Acts 2:47; 2 Timothy 1:9; 1 Peter 2:9). Notice, too, how similar conditions are said to prevail before the performance of these works. In the beginning, when God began to work, 'the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep' (Genesis 1:2). It is much the same with the sinner prior to God's work of salvation. His life is confused and empty, penetrated by the awful darkness of ignorance, depravity, and wretchedness. Paul writes: 'Ye were sometimes darkness' (Ephesians 5:8 cf. 2:12; 4:18). However, just as in the old creation, God used his Spirit and Word – 'the Spirit of God moved... and God said...'



(Genesis 1:2,3), so in the new creation, the Holy Spirit accompanies the Word to effect the great change. To quote Paul once again, 'our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance' (1 Thess. 1:5 cf. 1 Corinthians 2:4; 1 Peter 1:12).

If we consider the special work of each of the 'days', we should be able to trace the progressive steps of God in salvation.

### **1. THE FIRST DAY: the formation of light.**

'God said, Let there be light' (Genesis 1:3). This was how creation's work began. Similarly, in conversion, the first thing God works is spiritual illumination. The Spirit of God, using the Law and the Gospel, convinces men of their sin and misery (John 16:8 cf. Ps 50:21) and of Christ's ability and willingness to save them (John 16:14 cf. Ephesians 1:17). 'For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ' (2 Corinthians 4:6 cf. Psalm 36:9; 119:30).

### **2. THE SECOND DAY: the provision of a firmament.**

'God said, Let there be a firmament (or, an expanse) in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters (the waters of the earth's surface) from the waters (the waters of the vapour canopy surrounding the earth)' (Genesis 1:16). The 'firmament' here is obviously the earth's atmosphere, later called 'heaven' (v.8). Its counterpart in the spiritual realm is the effect of regeneration: the new nature. Without regenerating grace, human nature is fallen, corrupt and carnal, and it is appropriately called 'flesh'; but the Holy Spirit is able to produce in us a nature similar to his own which, in consequence, is called 'spirit'. Our Lord said to Nicodemus: 'That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit' (John 3:6 cf. Galatians 5:17). God, in regeneration, creates something new and heavenly in us. We become 'partakers of the divine nature' (2 Peter 1:4).

### **3. THE THIRD DAY: the emergence of the land from the sea, and the creation of plant life.**

'God said, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear... And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind,

whose seed is in itself, upon the earth' (Gen. 1:9,11). There were two divine acts on this day: the raising of the earth, and the making of it fruitful. Once again, this perfectly illustrates the work of God in the soul of man. He 'raises' us to 'newness of life' (John 5:21; Romans 6:4) so that we are able to bring forth 'fruit', even 'fruit unto holiness' (John 15:8; Romans 6:22). Galatians 5, verse 22, describes this as 'the fruit of the Spirit' because it is the result of the Spirit's indwelling operation. It is also the evidence of a real work of grace. Our Lord said: 'By their fruits ye shall know them' (Matt. 7:20).

#### **4. THE FOURTH DAY: the making of the light-bearers.**

'God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven... to give light upon the earth' (Genesis 1:14, 15). There was already light (see verse 4), but now the light was concentrated in special heavenly bodies: the sun, and stars, generating light; and the moon, reflecting it. These luminaries were to play vital roles in regulating the distribution of light upon the earth. The analogy continues in the sphere of Christian experience. God, having given to his people the light of knowledge, calls them to be communicators of that knowledge to all the world. Our Lord Jesus Christ said: 'Ye are the light of the world... Let your light so shine before men' (Matthew 5:14,15). The apostle, almost certainly alluding to those words, exhorts early believers to 'shine as lights in the world', and significantly, I think, the word he uses for "lights" is one which strictly means "light-bearers" (Phil. 2:15). We, too, are called to bring light into this dark world, and, as Paul explains, we do this by 'holding forth the word of life' (2:16).

#### **5. THE FIFTH DAY: the introduction of living creatures to the sea and air.**

'God said, Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life, and fowl that may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven' (Genesis 1:20). Thus, by a multitude of life forms, the emptiness of the earth was removed. Two words of considerable importance here are 'abundantly' and 'life', since later they reappear in one of our Lord's great statements. 'I am come', he said, 'that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly' (John 10:10). This day's superabundant life. Observe with me also that as soon as this life appeared on earth, provision was made for its increase. 'And God blessed them, saying, Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the waters in

the seas, and let fowl multiply in the earth' (Genesis 1:22). This is the first reference to 'blessing' in the Bible; and it shows that God is always willing to bless further. If that is true in nature, it is certainly true in grace. Our God is able and willing to bless us with more and more 'life in the Spirit', until we attain to spiritual fullness' (Ephesians 5:18 cf. 1:23; 3:19; 4:10).

## **6. THE SIXTH DAY: the creation of land animals and, as the crown of all, man.**

'God said, Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind... And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness' (Genesis 1:24,26). First, the lower animals, then, and finally, man. In matters spiritual, God works to the same end: the formation of the perfect man. Reading the New Testament, we discover that although people came to faith, Paul was not satisfied until, through further ministry, they showed something of the beauty of Christ. He writes to the Galatians: 'My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you' (Galatians 4:19). Once he has been concerned for their conversion: now he agonizes over them again, but this time for their transformation into the Saviour's likeness. He knew this was God's objective too, since God has said that he wanted this people 'conformed to the image of his Son' (Romans 8:29). This work is only begun in regeneration. It is continued, however, in sanctification (2 Cor. 3:18). And it is perfected in glorification, when, seeing the Lord face to face, 'we shall be like him' (1 John 3:2). Then, and not until then, shall we bear, in soul and body, 'the image of the heavenly' (1 Cor. 15:49 cf. Psalm 17:15).

## **7. THE SEVENTH DAY: the completion of creation commemorated in a sacred rest.**

'On the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made' (Gen. 2:2). Since God is never weary, this was not the rest of exhaustion. It simply means that he ceased to create and that he took satisfaction and delight in his achievement. So will it be when God's work of grace is finished (Philippians 1:6 cf. Ecclesiastes 3:11). And then, there will be for God, and for us, an everlasting Sabbath. 'There remaineth therefore a rest (literally, a keeping of the Sabbath) to the people of God' (Heb. 4:9 cf. Revelation 14:13). This is

surely one of the loveliest descriptions of heaven. It tells us that we shall worship and serve God throughout one eternal day.

*'Increase, O Lord, our faith and hope,  
And fit us to ascend  
Where the assembly ne'er breaks up,  
The sabbath ne'er shall end.*

*Where we shall breathe in heavenly air,  
With heavenly lustre shine;  
Before the throne of God appear,  
And feast on love divine.*

*Where we, in high seraphic strains,  
Shall all our powers employ;  
Delighted range the heavenly plains,  
And take our fill of joy.'*

## **GLEANINGS FROM THE ART OF DIVINE CONTENTMENT**

**by Thomas Watson**

**“I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.”  
Philippians 4:11**

This text is like a precious jewel: little in quantity, but great in worth and value.

A contented spirit is like a watch. Though you carry it up and down with you, yet the spring thereof is not shaken, nor the wheels out of order. The watch keeps perfect motion. So, it was with Paul. Though God had carried him into various conditions, he was not lifted up with one, nor cast down with the other. The spring of his heart was not broken; the wheels of his affections were not disordered but kept their constant motion towards heaven. The same God who has bidden us believe, has bidden us to be contented. God's promise is "I will

never leave thee, nor forsake thee" (Hebrews 13:5). Behold, God has made a promise to the believer and has, as it were, entered into a bond for his security: "I will never leave you".

The comfort of life does not consist in having much. It is Christ's maxim: "a man's life does not consist in the abundance of things which he doth possess" (Luke 12:15), but in being contented. Contentment lies within a man, in the heart, and the way to be comfortable is not by having our barns filled, but our mind quiet. Contentment is as necessary to keep life comfortable, as oil is necessary to keep the lamp burning.

You have a Friend in heaven who will never fail you. "There is a friend", said Solomon, "that sticketh closer than a brother" (Proverbs 18:24). Such a Friend is God.

He is a loving Friend. Oh, the infinite love of God in giving the Son of His love to be made flesh. God, in giving Christ to us, gave His very heart to us. He is a caring Friend. "He careth for you" (1 Peter 5:7).

He is a prudent Friend. "God is wise in heart" (Job 9:4). He knows what will do us good, and what wind will be best to carry us to heaven.

He is a faithful Friend. God's friendship is nothing else but compassion. When we were enemies, he sent an ambassador of peace. When our hearts were turned away from God, His heart was turned towards us.

He is a constant Friend. "His compassions fail not" (Lamentations 3:22). Friends often drop off, as leaves in Autumn, during adversity. God is a Friend for ever. "Having loved his own, He loved them to the end" (John 13:1).

Consider the excellency of contentment. It is a flower that does not grow in every garden. It teaches a man how to abound in the midst of want. Contentment has in it a happy mixture of all the graces. It is a most precious compound which is made up of faith, patience, meekness and humility, which are the ingredients put into it.

A contented Christian acquiesces in his present condition and does not murmur. Atheism is the fruit that grows out of the blossom of discontent. Contentment sweetens every condition. As Christ turned the water into wine, so contentment turns the water of Marah into spiritual wine. Contentment as a honeycomb, drops sweetness in every condition. But discontent is a leaven that sours every comfort. Discontent is unworthy of the relation in which we stand to God.

A Christian is invested with the title and privilege of sonship (Ephesians 1:5). He is an heir of the promise. Why are you discontented? Oh, how unworthy is this! Discontent is heart-breaking; it takes away the comfort of life. "By sorrow of the heart the spirit is broken" (Proverbs 15:13). For as discontent distresses the mind, so it pines the body. A contented spirit goes cheerfully under its affliction. Discontent of mind is the sore that makes the fetters of affliction more grievous.

A contented spirit is a silent spirit. He does not have a word to say against God.

A contented spirit is a cheerful spirit. It is something more than patience, for patience only denotes submission. Contentment denotes cheerfulness. He "takes pleasure in infirmities and distresses" (2 Corinthians 12:10).

A contented spirit is a thankful spirit. "In everything give thanks" (1 Thessalonians 5:15). A gracious spirit spies mercy in every condition.

Paul had learned in every state to carry himself with equanimity of mind. A contented Christian does not seek to choose his cross but leaves God to choose it for him.

In a word, a contented Christian, being sweetly captivated under the authority of the Word, desires to be wholly at God's disposal, and is willing to live in that sphere and climate where God has set him.

Faith sucks the honey of contentment out of the hive of the promise.

Christ is the vine; the promises are the clusters of grapes that grow upon this vine; and faith presses the sweet wine of contentment out of those spiritual clusters of the promises.

The humble man is the contented man. A proud man is never content; he is one who has a high opinion of himself.

Contentment is the manna that is laid up in the ark of a good conscience. Good conscience turns the waters of Marah into wine.

Would you have a quiet heart? Get a smiling conscience. Get much of heaven into your heart. Spiritual things satisfy. The more of heaven that is in us, the less earth will content. When a person has once tasted the love of God, his thirst is much quenched towards earthly things. Discontent is a serpent that stings only an earthly heart. A heavenly soul that, with the eagle, flies aloft, finds abundantly enough in God to give contentment, and is not stung with the care and disquiets of the world.

*Submitted*

## **THE GREAT DIVIDE**

Every person meets his “great divide” which determines his destiny. The greatest divide of all comes when someone chooses to accept or reject Christ. This “divide” determines eternal destiny.

High in the Canadian Rockies is a rushing stream called Divide Creek. At a point in its course the creek divides around a large boulder. Waters which flow to the left of the boulder rush on into Kicking Horse River and finally into the Pacific Ocean. Waters which travel to the right rush into the Bow River which courses through the mountains into Saskatchewan River, on into Lake Winnipeg, the Nelson River, Hudson Bay, and eventually into the Atlantic Ocean.

Once the waters divide at the boulder, the ultimate destinies of the separated streams are settled. Downstream from the rock there is no turning back.

*“There was a division among the people because of Him.” (John 7:43)*

*“Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on the earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division. For from henceforth there shall be five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three.” (Luke 12:51,52)*

*“Therefore said some of the Pharisees, This man is not of God, because he keepeth not the sabbath day. Others said, How can a man that is a sinner do such miracles? And there was a division among them.” (John 9:16)*

*“Some mocked: and said, we will hear thee again of this matter. So Paul departed from among them. Howbeit certain men clave to him, and believed.” (Acts 17:32-34)*

*“He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already.” (John 3:18)*

## **AUGUSTUS TOPLADY (1740-1778): HIS LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT**

“I most humbly commit my soul to the hands of Almighty God, Whom I know, and have long experienced to be my ever-gracious and infinitely merciful Father. Nor have I the least doubt of my election, justification and eternal happiness, through the riches of His everlasting and unchangeable kindness to me in Christ, His co-equal Son, my only, my assured, and my all-sufficient Saviour, washed in Whose propitiatory blood, and clothed in Whose imputed righteousness, I trust to stand perfect and sinless and complete, and do verily believe that I most certainly shall so stand in the hour of death, and in the kingdom of heaven, and at the last judgement, and in the ultimate state of endless glory. Neither can I write this my last will without rendering the deepest, the most solemn, and the most ardent thanks to the Adorable Trinity



in Unity for their eternal, unmerited, irreversible, and inexhaustible love to me a sinner.

I bless God the Father for having written, from everlasting, my unworthy name in the Book of Life, even for appointing me to obtain salvation through Jesus Christ my Lord.

I adore God the Son for His having vouchsafed to redeem me by His most precious death, and for having obeyed the whole law for my justification.

I admire and revere the gracious benignity of God the Holy Ghost, Who converted me to the saving knowledge of Christ..., and Whose enlightening, supporting, comforting, and sanctifying agency is, and, I doubt not, will be, my strength and my song in the house of my earthly pilgrimage.”

## **PSALMS, HYMNS, AND SPIRITUAL SONGS:**

### **an extract from “God’s Hymnbook for the Christian Church”**

**Malcolm H. Watts**

The words ‘psalms’, ‘hymns’ and ‘spiritual songs’ (Eph 5:19; Col 3:16) refer to the rich variety of compositions within the biblical Book of Psalms. They are synonymous terms and used interchangeably.

This finds confirmation in the Septuagint (LXX), the Greek translation of the Old Testament (circa. 250 BC). Due to the conquests of Alexander the Great, King of Macedon, Greek culture spread throughout the world and Greek became the common language between people of different nationalities. Hence there arose the need of having the Scriptures accessible in Greek; and the answer to this need was the version known as the Septuagint. This translation was adopted by Greek-speaking Jews and it became the Old Testament of the Early Church. It was certainly the text most often quoted by the apostles. Paul, we know, was very familiar with it (e.g. Rom 3:13,14; 1 Cor

10:7; 2 Cor 4:13; Gal 4:27; Heb 1:6; 10:5). Significantly, the three terms Paul uses in Ephesians 5:19 (and Colossians 3:16) - psalmoi, humnoi, and odai – occur in the Psalm titles of the Septuagint.

- psalmoi (singular: psalmos) is used 67 times (e.g. Pss 3, 5, 6, 7, 8);
- humnoi (singular: humnos) is used 6 times (Pss 8, 54, 60, 61, 67, 76 - and we note the words 'on Neginoth' (singular) and 'on Neginah' (plural) are translated 'en hymnois', 'in hymns', in Pss 6, 54, 61 [plural], 67, and 76, as indeed are the words 'upon Shushaneduth' in Ps 60);
- odai (singular: ode) is used 36 times (e.g. Pss 30, 45, 46, 48, 65, 66).

Furthermore, these terms appear in the Psalms themselves. Psalmoi, for example, occurs in Psalm 7:17 – 'I...will sing *praise* unto the name of the Lord most high'; humnoi, in Psalm 40:3 – 'he hath put a new song in my mouth, even *praise* unto our God; and odai in Psalm 144:9 – 'I will sing a new *song* unto thee, O God'.

In the title of Psalm 76, the three terms appear together. The Septuagint title reads as follows: 'For the end, among the *Hymns*, a *Psalm* for Asaph; a *Song* for the Assyrian'. Now since this is the version of the Old Testament that Paul generally used, it is difficult to imagine that, in Ephesians (and Colossians) he had anything else in mind but the inspired Psalms of the Psalter.

The Jews certainly understood these terms to relate to the Biblical Psalms. The Jewish historian Flavius Josephus (AD 37-100) in his second great work '*The Antiquities of the Jews*' (AD 94), wrote as follows: 'And now David being freed from wars and dangers, and enjoying for the future a profound peace, composed *songs* and *hymns* to God, of several sorts of metre...' (Book VII, ch. XII, sect 3). The early Christian Fathers also thought these terms applicable to the Psalms. Jerome (AD 342-420), for example, in his Homily on the Ephesian passage, remarks, 'What is the difference between psalms, hymns and songs, may be fully learned from the Psalter'.

It is important for us *not* to understand these terms according to *modern* usage. We must discover, first of all, how Scripture employs them; and then (for the purposes of supporting evidence) how the Jews and early Christians used them.

Furthermore, if we carefully examine the biblical texts (Eph 5:19; Col 3:16), we shall find that they do indeed refer to the canonical Psalms.

*First of all*, in exhorting the Christians to sing ‘psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs’, the apostle implies that they already had in their possession a stock of such praises. If this was not the Psalter, it is difficult to think what else it might be.

*Second*, they were not told to compose lyrics suitable for use in the worship of God. Neither here, or in other places, are believers directed to do such a thing. And, besides, there was granted no spiritual gift for this purpose.

*Third*, when Paul wrote to the Ephesians (AD 62), the church there was less than ten years old (which was also the age of the Colossian church). Since its membership was composed largely of recently converted Gentiles (2:11,13 cf. Rom 2:24-27), it is not in the least likely that they would have been competent to prepare for themselves worthy material (unless, of course, it was by inspiration of the Holy Spirit).

*Fourth*, the word ‘spiritual’ (pneumatikais) means produced by the Holy Spirit, ‘such as the Holy Spirit inspired and gave utterance to’. Since the psalms and songs are divine in origin, it hardly seems possible that the hymns are merely human composesures (particularly as that word appears, in its verbal form [humneo], four times in the New Testament, each time referring to the biblical Psalms (Matt 26:30; Mk 14:26; Acts 16:25; Heb 2:12 cf. Ps 22:22). Moreover, according to the rules of Greek syntax, the word ‘spiritual’ could refer to all three terms. ‘Pneumatikais’, as Dr T.K. Abbott observes, ‘seems essential as a further definition of the preceding word or words. Probably it is to be taken [as by Hofman and Soden] with all three’ (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles to the Ephesians and the Colossians*, p. 163).

*Fifth*, in the parallel Colossian passage, Paul enjoins his readers to use ‘the word of Christ’ in obeying his exhortation to praise the Lord – ‘Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms, and hymns and spiritual songs’ (Col 3:16). The inspired psalms could be so called, as they were dictated by ‘the Spirit of Christ’ through ‘the

prophets'; and David is specifically called 'a prophet' (Acts 2:29,30 cf. 1:16). Peter writes: 'Of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: searching what, or what manner of time the *Spirit of Christ* which was *in them* did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow' (1 Pet 1:10,11).

*Sixth*, there are more references to the Psalms in Ephesians than to any other Old Testament book (e.g. 1:20,22 cf. Ps 110:1; 1:22 cf. Ps 8:6-8; 2:20 cf. Ps 118:22; 4:26 cf. Ps 4:5; 4:8-10 cf. Ps 68:18). Since these quotations are all to be found in the 'Book of Hymns (or Praises)' which include 'psalms' and 'hymns', it seems most reasonable to conclude that in Ephesians 5:19 Paul was referring to *the inspired Psalms* of the Holy Scripture.

*Seventh*, the purpose of singing these praises is to edify one another. While in Ephesians the apostle writes 'speaking to yourselves', in Colossians he writes 'teaching and admonishing one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs'. Now we are nowhere authorised to teach our own ideas. We are rather to teach Holy Scripture (2 Tim 3:16,17). Hence, this is another reason for believing that Paul's terms refer to the written Word of God.

*Eighth*, after using the three terms, the apostle urges them to be 'making melody' in their hearts 'to the Lord'. Now the word rendered 'making melody' is the verb corresponding to the word 'psalm' (verse 19 - *psallontes*, from *psallo*, to sing psalms). So it might literally be translated 'psalming'. In the singing of the 'psalms, hymns and spiritual songs', therefore, the Ephesians would actually be 'psalming' before God.

*Ninth*, if the hymn-singers are right, and Paul is encouraging the use of uninspired material, it is surely fair to ask the question, Where are all these uninspired praises? Let us suppose for a moment that each apostolic church had a collection of them, how strange that not one of them has been preserved! Unless, of course, their collections may still be found in the Book of Psalms.

*Tenth*, the objection is sometimes raised that we make Paul to urge the singing of 'psalms, psalms and yet more psalms'. This objection takes no account of a

common linguistic device whereby three forms of expression are used to denote one single thing. For example, acts of disobedience are referred to as 'iniquity and transgression and sin' (Exod 34:7); the laws of God are called 'his commandments and his statutes and his judgments' (Deut 30:16); and miracles of the apostles are called 'signs, and wonders and mighty deeds' (2 Cor 12:12). Such forms of expression add very considerable weight to the argument that the apostle intends us to understand by his terms in Ephesians 5:19 (and Colossians 3:16) the Psalms of David.

This is the position taken by many orthodox and prominent Commentators. A Puritan Preface was included in an edition of the Scottish Metrical Psalter published in 1673. It was signed by *John Owen, William Jenkyn, Thomas Watson, Thomas Lye, Matthew Poole, Matthew Meade, Thomas Vincent, Edmund Calamy, James Janeway, Richard Mayo*, and sixteen others. These Puritans all subscribed to these words: 'To us David's Psalms seem plainly intended by those terms of *Psalms and Hymns and Spiritual Songs*, which the Apostle useth, Ephes. 5.19, Col. 3.16.'

On Ephesians 5:19, *Dr John Gill* comments thus: 'By *psalms* are meant the Psalms of David, and others that compose the book that goes with that name; and by *hymns* we are to understand, not such as are made by good men, without the inspiration of the Spirit of God; since they are placed between psalms and spiritual songs, made by men inspired by the Holy Ghost...but these are only another name for the Book of Psalms, the running title of which may as well be the Book of Hymns, as it is rendered by Ainsworth...: and by *spiritual songs* are meant the same Psalms of David, Asaph etc.'

*John Brown* of Haddington, whose *Commentary* has been widely used in his native Scotland and indeed throughout the world, wrote these words in 1775: 'The Holy Ghost hath, under the New (Testament), plainly directed us to the use thereof (i.e. of the psalms), Col. 3:16; Eph. 5:19. The *Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual Songs*, there recommended, and plainly the same with the Mizmorim, Tehillim, and Shirim, mentioned in the Hebrew titles of David's Psalms, 3, 4, 5 etc.; 145, 120, 134.'

We therefore conclude that the three terms, 'psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs', refer to the praises in the Inspired Psalmody, and that it follows that they cannot be used to justify uninspired compositions in the praises of the Christian Church.

## EPILOGUE

*“And he said, The things which are impossible with men are possible with God.” Luke 18 v 27*

We live in an age when “science” attempts to explain everything, but it seems that “science” takes no account of the God who created everything out of nothing. Consequently, there are facts of creation and life that we find impossible to explain; if we ignore the Creator. It is not possible to identify, analyse, or quantify the soul of a man and its spiritual needs, and therefore the tendency is just to discount the existence, needs and impact of our souls.

Ultimately the greatest need of man is to be right with God and gain eternal life. But that cannot be earned by good works or paid for with material wealth as neither is sufficient to pay for the debt our sins have incurred. It is absolutely impossible for anyone to gain salvation without having faith in Jesus Christ.

Our Lord made the statement above to his disciples as recorded in Luke 18 regarding those who could be saved. It appears that the disciples thought, in common with many, then and now, that wealth was a sign of God’s blessing and therefore the rich would certainly enter the kingdom of God. Christ was teaching them that material blessings are not necessarily a sign of spiritual blessings, and that it is impossible for man, without faith to gain an entrance into heaven.

The right to enter heaven is a gift to the elect from God as a result of Christ’s atoning sacrificial death at Calvary. What was impossible for man, God made possible. In Mark 9 v 23 Christ tells the distraught father of a very sick child “If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth.” Belief in Christ’s atoning death for the forgiveness of our sins is the key to unlocking

God's love towards us and even this faith is a gift from God which cannot be earned. It is impossible for anyone to save his own soul, but God has made a way for all who believe upon Christ to be saved. Impossible for man, possible for God.

*Bill Norton*