

REDEEMING THE TIME

"Redeeming the time, because the days are evil" (Ephesians 5:16).

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"BE YE *Kind* ONE TO ANOTHER"

BY BRAD K. GSELL

OVER THE PAST YEAR AND A HALF, our nation has been greatly divided between those with very different visions for America. In general, one side believes this is the greatest nation on earth, largely because Biblical principles played such a large role in the founding of our Constitutional republic. Those with this view, nonetheless, see many cases where improvements are needed with freedom and justice perfected. The other general view is that this is essentially a bad nation which is in need of "fundamental transformation" away from our founding principles.

With such a large chasm between these views, there is little wonder when emotions run high and opposing principles offend.

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The fall 2016 meeting of Faith Presbytery, Bible Presbyterian Church, was held in Cannon Beach, Oregon. The Pacific Ocean and Haystack Rock are in the background.

— THE DIVISION OF 1937 BETWEEN THE ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH AND THE BIBLE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH —

by Brad K. Gsell

This series of articles will continue in our next issue.

BE YE KIND ONE TO ANOTHER

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This is not to suggest that this is an equal playing field. We believe that those who want to move our nation away from its founding principles have very dangerous views which are leading to the loss of religious, social and economic freedoms. It is our position that this view replaces God with an all-powerful government as the source of our reliance.

It is a vision where sinful men who have gained power think they know best, and thus undertake grand schemes, which those without power are expected to follow under the force of the State. False security is offered, taking away personal initiative. Humanity is presented as a mere chance of evolution, with no greater purpose than to obey the government and its agenda.

It is particularly heartbreaking when we see young people, trained in godless universities, falling prey to these deceptive ideas and plans. Many have been robbed of being taught Biblical principles, often having courses which breed division and

One day, when looking at some particularly strident Facebook posts, the familiar words of Ephesians 4:32 impressed themselves upon my heart. They are simple, clear and direct. "Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you."

resentment being served to them as destructive substitutes.

How Do We Respond?

During the presidential campaign, many came forth strongly in defense of their preferred views. The disagreements were heightened by the abysmal moral failings of ALL of the national candidates.

Many things posted or "shared" on Facebook and other social media did not just deal with ideas, but rather were raw and personal. Ridicule of clothing and unflattering facial expressions (accompanied by pictures pulled from the millions of available photos), even talk of assassinations and injuries, were seen far too often from those on both sides.

"All Truth Is God's Truth"

The Bible does have principles which deal with such situations. First of all is the need to stand unswervingly for the truth — even when it might be injurious to our candidate or philosophy. This includes not using facts selectively to paint a picture that is not accurate.

God is a God of Truth. Deuteronomy 32:4 tells us that God "is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth

and without iniquity, just and right is he."

The word "truth" is used hundreds of times in the Scriptures. Indeed, Psalm 119:160 tells us that "Thy word is true from the beginning..." Christ Himself declares to His Father: "Thy word is truth" (John 17:17). All that the Scriptures teach is God's truth, and we must of necessity apply it to our hearts and the circumstances of our daily lives.

The venerable Augustine stated: "... but let every good and true Christian understand that wherever truth may be found, it belongs to his Master." Conversely, anything that is untrue is not of God.

The title of this section, "All Truth Is God's Truth," sums up this statement by Augustine. However, we must be extremely careful not to abuse it. A false or unbalanced application of the principles of God's Word in situations such as the one presently before us is to misuse the Scriptures, which is a sin. Further, we must be careful that in our zeal we do not claim God's sanction for every view we put forth. Many Scriptural teachings are general and several ways of doing things may comport perfectly well with a specific teaching.

However the support for liberty of conscience, individual responsibility and initiative, limited government which recognizes the need for constraint due to man's sin, the recognition of Biblical marriage, a condemnation of purposeful lying by the media, and so forth, are all principles concerning which the Scriptures speak.

Peter and John, in the Book of Acts, did not flinch from preaching the truth. In Acts 4:29, Luke records their prayer: "And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word." They faced stiff opposition, but they nonetheless preached the Word "with all boldness"!

REDEEMING THE TIME

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Kind "BE YE ONE TO ANOTHER"

One day, when looking at some particularly strident Facebook posts, the words of Ephesians 4:32 impressed themselves upon my heart. They are simple, clear and direct. "Be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you."

The preceding verse declares: "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice."

Earlier in the chapter (verse 14), Paul tells his readers that they are to be grounded in the faith and not to compromise. But, in the very next verse he instructs them to "[speak] the truth in love."

The Apostles did not acquiesce to their enemies in Acts 4. Yet, they prayed for them, and God answered in a mighty way! They obeyed God, rather than man, yet they were not consumed with bitterness, wrath, anger, clamour and evil speaking — the things which Paul condemned in his epistle to the Ephesians

While we must declare the truth "and sell it not" (Proverbs 23:23), we are likewise commanded to "Be ye kind one to another." Love your coworker, neighbor, friend or relative who does not hold to Biblical views, never forgetting ALL that God has forgiven you. Remember the exceeding great mercy of our Lord! PRAY FOR THEM!

Remember the words of Luke 6:27-36: "But I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you, Bless them that curse you, and pray for them

which despitefully use you.... For if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them. And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same.... But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil."

Sure, but gracious presentations of the truth, coupled with genuine love, can be used by God to work in the hearts and minds of those around us. We must be faithful witnesses of the precious gospel of Christ, but it is the Spirit of God who brings men unto Himself. He it is who strips away the deceptions of Satan as to the desperate need of their souls and illumines them as to all aspects of Biblical truth. •



Mr. Brad Gsell is an elder and minister of music of the Bible Presbyterian Church of Charlotte, NC, and President of The Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions.

Present With the Lord

MR. WALTER PLATT, a longtime elder, trustee and Sunday school teacher of the Collingswood, NJ, Bible Presbyterian Church, went to be with the Lord on June 17, 2016. Mr. Platt was a faithful member of both The Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions, and The Independent Board for Presbyterian Home Missions.



Following service in the Navy during World War II, Mr. Platt worked as a mechanical engineer at AT&T Philadelphia.

He exerted a faithful and steady hand of leadership for many decades in the work of the Lord. His service and testimony for Christ were the focus of his life. He will be greatly missed.

"Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them" (Revelation 14:13). •



As goes the church, so goes the nation!



REVELATION 1:4-17 Portraits FROM Patmos

BY ROBERT W. ANDERSON

Stepping through the front door into the sacred confines of the book of Revelation, we are immediately struck, subdued and silenced by three matchless portraits from Patmos — not painted portraits strictly speaking, but verbal portraits, spiritual portraits executed by a master. The portraits are of a composite nature; features of personalities are brought together with such clarity that we can almost see the subjects with the natural eye.

Two “portraits” found in Revelation 1:4-6 and 13-17 are of Christ. The third is a smaller self-portrait of the Apostle John (1:9-11). When such a solid writer as J. Gresham Machen says, “the details of the vision ... are of symbolic significance” and “they were intended not to produce an artistic picture, but to teach spiritual truth ...,”¹ why speak of them as portraits? In reply, we note what Machen writes about the letters to the seven churches: “each is sufficient to produce a wonderfully vivid [emphasis ours] impression of

the church that is addressed.”² Thus we call these depictions of Christ “portraits” because of the “wonderfully vivid impression” they give.

One art historian wrote about portraits at the beginning of the twentieth century that “it was assumed that the *raison d’être* of a portrait was to communicate the ap-

John endured some of the worst a man can be subjected to because he did the best thing a person could ever do — he stood for the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ.

pearance and personality of the sitter.”² John’s portraits, “painted” under the superintendence of the Holy Spirit, do beautifully, wonderfully and faithfully “characterize” and “communicate” the personality and status of Christ, as well as the Apostle himself. Those portraits, hung in the vestibule of the book, are not to be glanced at and forgotten.

As we traverse the verses of Revelation, which represent the course that the epic battle between Christ and His and our enemies is destined to take, there is, thankfully, not a scene in all its 22 chapters where the Christ of the portraits cannot be looked to for our strength, trust and cheer. He is the one who says, “I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.” The portraits at the beginning nerve us for what shall meet us in the rest of the book. Moreover we see the portrait of John, whose example strengthens the weak hands and confirms the feeble knees, as we contemplate what we might yet face in standing “for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.”

There are many other “portraits” in the book, among which are the vignettes of the seven churches. But, before we see those seven churches as Christ saw them, we see Christ Himself as He desires to be seen by the churches.

These “portraits” date from the end of the first century, when Domi-

tian was the Roman emperor (51-96 A.D.), at whose hand Christians were facing fiery trials. John paints the portraits to steady, sustain and strengthen the church in a time of tremendous crisis. They are given to the whole church, but especially to the churches of Asia Minor, which faced two great threats: persecution from the world and compromise with it. Leon Morris writes, “It was sent to a little, persecuted, and frustrated church.”⁴ “Persecution had fallen on some Christians, and more was on the way.”⁵ In addition, the churches of Asia were confronted with the inroads of compromise in doctrine and behavior. We have but to read the letters Christ directed to the churches to discern that degeneration had already set in among some of them.

In order to heighten appreciation of those peerless portraits in chapter 1, consider more about both persecution and degeneracy. John Rutherford writes, “Persecution was no accident.... The reasons for the persecution of the Christian church by the Roman empire were (1) political; (2) on account of the claim which the Christian faith makes, and which it cannot help making, to the exclusive allegiance of the heart and of the life.... Patriotism demanded that every citizen should unite in the worship of the emperor, but the Christians refused to take part in this worship on any terms, and so they continually lived under the shadow of a great hatred, which always slumbered, and might break out at any time. The claim which the Christian’s faith made to the absolute and exclusive loyalty of all who obeyed Christ was such that it admitted of no compromise with heathenism.... The essential absoluteness of the Christian faith was its strength, but this was also the cause of its being hated.”⁶ Rutherford also

cites Workman, who wrote, “For 200 years, to become a Christian meant the great renunciation, the joining a despised and persecuted race, the swimming against the tide of popular prejudice, the coming under the ban of the Empire, the possibility at any moment of imprisonment and death under its most fearful forms.”⁷

In the same volume, under the article on “The Roman Empire,” among the several reasons for persecution, S. Angus points to “Intolerance and exclusiveness of Christian religion and society.”⁸ He says, “All other religions of the empire admitted compromise and eclecticism, were willing to dwell rather on the points of contact with their neighbors than on the contrast. But Christianity admitted no compromise, was intolerant to all other systems.... Christianity demanded complete separation. The Jesus cult could tolerate no rival; it claimed to be absolute, and worshippers of Jesus must be separate from the world.”⁹

Angus lists another reason for persecution: “Rom[an] clemency and

says, “All prejudices against Christianity were summed up in ... ‘hatred for the human race’ ... which was reciprocated by ‘hatred of the human race for them....’ No nicknames were too vile to attach to them.... Rom[an] writers cannot find epithets strong enough. Tacitus reckons the Christian faith among the ‘atrocious and abominable things ... which flooded Rome....’ Suetonius [regarded Christianity] ‘as novel and malefic....’ Well might Justus say the Christians were ‘hated and reviled by the whole human race.’”¹¹

J. Gresham Machen wrote, “Yielding to persecution, however, was by no means the only danger that threatened the Church; worldliness was also an insistent peril. The churches of Asia were situated for the most part in magnificent cities, full of the splendour of the ancient world. Wealth and power were everywhere exalted above moral purity. Religion, in particular, was largely concerned with magnificent display. In pagan Asia Minor during the first century, piety and goodness were often entirely separate; religion was

often merely one expression of overweening pride. The Church was being affected by her environment. The first enthusiasm was long past. Christians were becoming satisfied with life in this world; they were in danger of losing their citizenship in heaven.... Must the disciple of Christ really refuse to worship the emperor? Might he not accommodate himself to the conditions of the world as it was? What harm could he suffer by outward conformity to the customs of the age? Laxity in morals, moreover, seems to have been excused by false theorizing. As previously among the readers of 2 Peter and Jude, so in Asia Minor at the close of the first century, sin was be-

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respect for law were baffled before Christian obstinacy. The martyr’s courage appeared as sheer fanaticism.”¹⁰ Angus goes on to cite one Roman author who referred to Christianity as “sheer obstinacy” and another author who branded it as “stubbornness.” Further, Angus

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ing buttressed by error. A sect called the Nicolaitans, boasting of a knowledge that transcended the simplicity of holy living, and of a freedom that permitted compromise with impurity and heathenism, was tolerated in a number of the churches.... Toward the works of the Nicolaitans only hatred was in place (Revelation 2:6). **That is a solemn lesson for modern indifferentism. Tolerance is good; but there are times when it is a deadly sin.**"¹²

With the church suffering fiery trials fueled by the world's hatred on one hand, and on the other being beset by insistent temptations to compromise with error and evil, where, O where was this little, weak, exposed, uncertain and trembling church to find adequate strength to stand true?

In our minds, the picture painted by the authors in the paragraphs above matches that of 1 Kings 20:27: "... and the children of Israel pitched before them like two little flocks of kids; but the Syrians filled the country." Here in Revelation, how shall we think of the church? Seven little flocks of kids going up against a world that "fills the land." In such an environment, how could they possibly endure? They were faced with the fearful question of Elisha's servant, "Master, what shall we do?" The answer is found in the "portraits" from Patmos, in looking to Jesus Christ in His glory. Blessed assurance would be imparted as Christians looked to their Captain in the well-fought fight.

THE First PORTRAIT

Some 40 years had passed since Paul first preached Christ in the re-

gion of the seven named cities of Asia Minor (modern day Turkey). After Paul, John himself preached in Ephesus. But in spite of a deep, persistent, growing dislike for Christians and their Christ, John has found no reason to rework his portrait of Christ in order to make him more seeker friendly. John was in effect saying what Paul told the Corinthians: "brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received and wherein ye stand" (1 Corinthians 15:1). One could be at rest with the portrait: it was of Jesus Christ "the same yesterday, today and forever."

The first feature which shines brightly in this portrait is **Christ's deity**, as is witnessed to by the greetings and doxologies of Revelation 1:4-6: "Grace be unto you, and peace" from Jesus Christ, and then "to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever." In these words of greeting, Christ is associated with "him which is, and which was, and which is to come" (clearly a reference to God the Father) and "from the seven spirits which are before his throne" (Warfield writes: "that is the Holy Spirit set forth in His divine completeness"¹³), which means that He has equality with both the Father and the Spirit. They are "one God, existing in three persons, the same in substance, equal in power and glory." "Christ," Paul writes, "who is over all, God blessed forever" (Romans 9:5).

And why should Christ's deity be important to churches that were looking at a trial by fire? Because they had turned from trust in idols that were nothing and could do nothing, either good or evil, and had put their faith in the living God and His Son. As people who were deserving of God's wrath and curse and undeserving of his blessing, they had turned in faith to Christ for grace and peace, for God's love and favor, and all the blessings which flowed from that favor. That faith in Christ as God's Son had not been misplaced nor would it

be disappointed. No matter what trouble bore down upon them, the Lord Jesus being their divine, almighty and all gracious Savior, they needed not fear what man could do unto them. Vain was the help of man, but victorious was the help of the God-man, Christ Jesus. He was able to keep them from falling.

A second feature painted into the first portrait is **Christ's credentials**, "the first begotten from the dead" (verse 5). The resurrection of Christ as the first begotten from the dead is everywhere in Scripture treated as validating the assertions that Christ is deity, along with all the claims that go with it. In Romans 1:4, Paul says concerning Christ that he was "declared to be" — to be what? "the Son of God with power by" — by what? "by the resurrection from the dead."

Paul argues in 1 Corinthians that "... if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen, And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain, Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God.... But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept" (1 Corinthians 15:13-15a, 20). This great, historic, supernatural event, the resurrection, set in concrete the absolute veracity of the saving message of the gospel.

Looking on the credential of the resurrection, the people in the churches of Asia were strengthened at the very time when the winds of persecution were growing in fury.

"Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, Make you perfect in every good work to do his will ..." (Hebrews 13:20, 21a). To the "now" of those words of Hebrews may be joined the "now" of Jude 24, 25: "Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you

faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, To the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and for ever. Amen.” Should Christians of Asia be put to death, they had this to bolster them: the resurrection of the Almighty Son of God would be sure to secure their own.

A third feature of this splendid portrait is **Christ’s offices: prophet, king and priest.** The office of **prophet** is mentioned first in the words, “who is the faithful witness” (verse 5a). To be a witness is to attest to a fact, a truth. At His trial before Pilate, Christ told the governor, “To this end was I born and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone that is of the truth heareth my voice” (John 18:37). Could Jesus be believed? That He was a witness to the truth was being substantiated at the very moment He spoke to Pilate. Long before the crucifixion took place, Christ had told His disciples, “the Son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests and unto the scribes, and they shall condemn him to death, And shall deliver him to the Gentiles to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify him; and the third day he shall rise again” (Matthew 20:18,19).

The truth to which Christ attested brought freedom: “Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free.” It cleansed and sanctified: “sanctify them through thy truth, thy word is truth.” It imparted joy: the Thessalonians “received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost.”

But now after having the truth of Christ attested to them, the Asian churches were having to contend with falsehood, lies, deception. The world of Revelation was awash with it. There is “the great dragon ... that old serpent, called the Devil and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world” (Revelation 12:9). In the imagery which suffuses the book, John says, “I saw three unclean spirits like

frogs come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet.” *The New Geneva Study Bible*, in its introductory comments to the book of Revelation, says, “Together — Satan, the beast, and the false prophet — form an unholy trio ... counterfeiting the Holy Trinity.”¹⁴ In 22:15 we see those who love and make a lie. The churches in the Asia of John’s day were dealing

As we traverse the verses of Revelation, which represent the course that the epic battle between Christ and His and our enemies is destined to take, there is, thankfully, not a scene in all its 22 chapters where the Christ of the portraits cannot be looked to for our strength, trust and cheer.

with a world whose stock in trade was falsehood. The word, the witness, the testimony, the affirmations of great people and lesser bristled with lies by which the lives of Christians were complicated and threatened.

We can scarcely imagine what it meant for these people to have Christ painted as the faithful witness. That His faithful witness had brought about His death and that He was the first begotten from the dead meant much to them. If for their faithful witness to Christ these Asian Christians should be put to death, they, like Christ and by his almighty power, would be raised from the dead. As B.B. Warfield says, “His resurrection drags ours in its train.”¹⁵

The next office in which Christ is being painted is that of **king**, “the prince of the kings of the earth” (verse 5). The title takes us back to the scene of Christ’s trial before Pilate, who asked Jesus, “Art thou the king

of the Jews?” (John 18:33). In reply, Jesus averred, “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36). Again Pilate asked him, “Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, “Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world ...” (John 18:37). Against this background, Paul wrote Timothy, “I give thee charge in the sight of God, who quickeneth all things, and before Christ Jesus, who before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession; That thou keep this commandment without spot, unrebukeable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ ... who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords” (1 Timothy 6:13-15).

Confessing Christ as King brought those church members into collision with the Roman powers. We read, “Domitian took one definite step against Christianity in establishing an easy test by which to detect those who were Christians.... This test was the demand to worship the Genius of the emperor.”¹⁶ Judge what such an edict meant to our brothers and sisters nineteen hundred years ago. To bow the knee was to live; to refuse meant ignominious death, confiscation of property, imprisonment, meeting with wild animals in the arena, and consequences to one’s dependents. If there was a moment of wavering, the heart was settled with the assured knowledge that Christ was King without equal. The day those church members embraced Christ in faith, they had owned Christ as their God and King. He had subdued them to Himself as surely as he had subdued Paul on the road to Damascus, when Paul asked, “Who art thou?” and “what wouldst thou have me to do?” Knowing Christ would conquer all His and their enemies, they would follow their King wherever he led them and would love not their lives to the death.

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John has not exhausted all the titles of Christ; he uses the brush to set forth Christ as **priest**, the one “who loved us, and washed us from our sins in his blood” (verse 5b) Christ was both priest and sacrifice. He offered Himself to God to satisfy divine justice and reconcile believing sinners to God. In that first understanding and acceptance of the doctrine that Christ had given himself as a propitiation for sin, they would joyfully concur with David when he said, “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity” (Psalm 32:1,2a). Knowing how easily sin besets us and how clever are Satan’s devices, we can read between the lines of Christ’s letters to the churches and discern what took place.

The passage of time, the never-remitting antagonism against them from the surrounding world, the waning of zeal, the subtle inroads of the old, pagan ideas of sin and religion — all worked their mischief. Sin did not seem quite so exceedingly sinful. The lessening of their love for Christ lessened their appreciation for His love for them and for being washed from their sins in His blood. But now, when John from exile on the isle of Patmos wrote to them of the old truths, their appreciation for Christ as their priest and for His sacrifice was reignited. The view of Christ as priest was wonderfully fitted to rekindle their love.

To this composite portrait, with its features of Christ’s deity, his credentials, his offices as prophet, king and priest, John adds this last one of **Christ’s work**, which is found in these words: “and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to whom be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen” (verse 6). He who is King of kings

has made us kings; He who is our great high priest has made us priests unto God. How do we respond to this great work of Christ? What does it make us think, feel, to be kings, to be priests? Have we any clear concept of what He has made us? We know what Adam’s sin made us: a rabble of rebels and lawbreakers. But He made us kings.

Of the many things that entails, one from Proverbs 16:32b comes to mind: “he that ruleth his spirit [is better] than he that taketh a city.” Kings rule. As kings, Christians rule their own spirits, however imperfectly. By grace God works that ruling activity within them. To turn from yielding our members as instruments unto sin to yielding ourselves as instruments of righteousness is a great kingly work. To be made priests is, among other things, to “offer the sacrifices of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to his name” (Hebrews 13:15). Matthew Henry explains, “As kings, they overcome the world, mortify sin, govern their own spirits, conquer Satan, have power and prevalency with God in prayer, and shall judge the world. He hath made them priests, given them access to God, enabled them to enter into the holiest and to offer spiritual and acceptable sacrifices, and has given them an unction suitable to this character, and for these high honours and favors they are bound to ascribe to him dominion and glory for ever.”¹⁷

This is the first portrait: The King in his beauty, the one who is fairer than all the children of men.

THE Second PORTRAIT

The second portrait from Patmos is John’s self portrait. He is nothing like Simon Magus of Acts 8, who was “giving out that himself was some great one” (Acts 8:9). John’s

self-portrait simply pictures him as a servant, with a fleeting account of his work. It ought to make the churches with “somewhat” against them conscious of their shortcomings, make the struggling churches conscious of their source of power, and the persecuted churches conscious of their refuge and strength.

John begins with his identity. We have five books in the New Testament which may safely be attributed to John, son of Zebedee, apostle of Christ. In the gospel historically credited to his account, John never mentions his name; he is “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (See John 13:23). In the epistles of 2 and 3 John, he identifies himself as “The Elder.” But in this book of Revelation, he identifies himself in 1:1 as “his servant John.” In verse 9, he is simply “John.” He might have identified himself as “John, the aged.” The Spirit in all these cases guided him in his identification.

He further paints himself by his relationships: “I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ” (verse 9). The brotherly affection with which such relationships are universally mentioned in the New Testament show that they were prized above all computation. His relationship to his readers was that of a spiritual brother. The students of Princeton Theological Seminary 150 years ago heard these words on the subject of brotherly love from the lips of Charles Hodge: “They [Christian brothers] are all united to him [Christ], and therefore are united to each other. They constitute his kingdom, his fold, his household, his body. He is their common Saviour, their common portion, the object of supreme love to each, and therefore the bond of union between them.”¹⁸

They were a band of brothers and they were companions. They were participants, partakers, partners in something extraordinary. They were

companions in tribulation. Christians' names were cast out as evil; men had no good thing to say of them, but reviled and cursed them. They suffered the spoiling or confiscation of their goods. Some had already met up with prison at a time when prison reform and prisoner rights were not a priority. Others, such as Antipas, from the church in Pergamos, had already suffered martyrdom (2:13).

They were companions in tribulation and at the same time in the kingdom, two concepts which might seem offsetting. If there are unjust sufferings, where is the kingdom and its king who can stop such things? If there is a kingdom with its ruling head, how come suffering can be tolerated? But tribulation and the kingdom stand here side by side.

The kingdom of God or of Christ is a huge subject in Scripture. The great defender of the faith J. Gresham Machen wrote, "the kingdom of God is simply that place or condition where God rules.... It is used to denote where God's will is done, not of necessity, but by willing submission. Wherever human hearts and will are in true accord with the will of God, there the kingdom has come."¹⁹ The connection in Scripture is that tribulation served to strengthen and spread the kingdom. Paul told the churches, "we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). Tertullian of the second century A.D. is famous for his observation that "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church."

"... Who also am your brother, and companion in ... the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ" (verse 9). If suffering promoted the kingdom and prepared souls for eternal glory, then patience, endurance or perseverance were in order. Tribulation, the kingdom and patience united John on the isle of Patmos with his readers on the Asian mainland. And these things united them "in Christ." John, speaking to his readers in these terms, when he was going through suffer-

Now, in a time when there is mounting hostility toward Christians from the world, and at the very same time a deepening compromise of the church with the world, a long and earnest look ought to be given to these portraits.

ings of his own, had a great soul-confirming influence upon his brothers and companions, as well as on himself. In the midst of his own tribulation, he had not deserted or disowned them; he had not proved unfaithful to the cause. John's spirit and courage buoyed up his brothers.

Another feature in this self portrait of John is the setting. With hurried strokes of the brush, John lets us look at his present condition. He tells us where he was: "the isle that is called Patmos" (verse 9). Patmos was an island of rock, ten miles long, six wide and about 40 miles off the coast of Turkey. It was where Rome banished its exiles as punishment and to limit the influence they might exert in a wider world. In 95 A.D., when he was banished there, he must have been nearing or had surpassed his 90th year of life. John was in prison, but he could say "and thou visitest me." He was confined to the island fortress, but the Word of God could not be bound — it would make its way across the separating waters to the mainland and from there across the world and throughout the generations.

John further informs us why he was banished to Patmos: "for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ" (verse 9). John's "crime" was preaching and contending for the Word of God, that reveals what man is to believe concerning God and the duty which God requires of man. He was a prisoner of Rome because he was a preacher of Christ. He gave witness to Christ as the Son

of God and to salvation from sin by grace and through faith. John endured some of the worst a man can be subjected to because he did the best thing a person could ever do — he stood for the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ.

John tells us not just his physical but also his spiritual condition. "I was in the spirit ..." (verse 10). The Holy Spirit's "ordinary work" in Christians is to open the understanding to see and appreciate the beauty and excellence of the things made known in the Bible. But he also does "extraordinary work" by immediately revealing to men what they could never know nor discover on their own. The Spirit of God superintended the writers of Scripture so that what they wrote was the very Word of God, free from error of any kind. What was revealed to John by Christ on Patmos was the extraordinary, supernatural work of the Spirit of God; it was "thus saith the Lord."

As John adds hurried brush strokes, he tells us that he was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day. On a day that looked back to the resurrection of Jesus Christ and looked forward to the consummation of all things at His return and the ushering in of the everlasting state, Christ revealed Himself and the things which must shortly come to pass. We are told that some of the Roman emperors had days set aside for emperor worship. They felt it was dishonoring to them and divisive to society to observe any day that drew away from their own worship. Did Christ yield so as not to offend the emperor's sensibilities? No, as a rebuff to the emperor and his worship and as a blessed encouragement to those of faith in Christ, Christ came to John on the very day which the government disallowed. Christ counters a pagan, unjust government and culture at every point in which they dishonored Him. He did not bow the knee to them. The time

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PORTRAITS FROM PATMOS

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would come when “every knee should bow, of things in heaven and things in earth, and things under the earth, And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:10,11).

Finally, we see the daunting assignment given to John in verse 11, “What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea.” It is no easy task to write and confront a church with its sins. It was not easy to write Philadelphia with its smallness and weakness and encourage them onward. It was not easy to tell the churches that they were in the path of a hurricane or tornado of persecution. Being an apostle, an elder, a servant of Christ, a minister to the churches, was taxing, draining work.

So those short brushstrokes — the identity, the setting, the assignment — are what constitute John’s portrait of himself. God makes the “wrath of men to praise him;” it is demonstrated in the good which came out of the sufferings of John, the disciple whom He loved.

THE Third PORTRAIT

John writes, “I turned to see the voice that spake with me.” Now we shall see how Christ reveals Himself to John. Milton Terry, in his work *Biblical Hermeneutics*, speaks of the “sublime description of the Son of man” in the portrait before us.²⁰ John says he saw in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks one like the Son of man “clothed with a gar-

ment down to the feet and girt about the paps with a golden girdle.” If the picture of kings in their royal robes (such as Jehoshaphat and Ahab in 2 Chronicles 18:9, or Herod Agrippa in Acts 12:21) were impressive, how exceedingly more was it to see the Christ of this vision symbolically appeared in “honor and majesty.”

“His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow.” This description makes us think of the proverb, “the hoary [gray] head is a crown of glory when it is found in the way of righteousness” (Proverbs 16:31). His head thus described is a way of making us feel the dignity which belonged to him.

“And his eyes were as a flame of fire.” The eyes are so often indicators of intelligence, character and life. In his *Life of John Calvin*, Theodore Beza, the colleague of Calvin in Geneva, remarks that “his eyes ... to the very last were clear and sparkling,” while the rest of him was greatly weakened and emaciated.²¹ Calvin’s eyes bespoke great intelligence; those of the Christ in John’s vision showed infinite intelligence. The eyes of Christ thus described remind us of the Scriptures which inform: “the eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good” (Proverbs 15:3), and “his eyes behold, his eyelids try, the children of men” (Psalm 11:4) and “the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him” (2 Chronicles 16:9).

Next John avers that His feet were “like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace.” This indicates His steadiness, immovability, unchangeableness. With those terrible feet “he it is that shall tread down his enemies” (Psalm 60:12.).

“And his voice was as the sound of many waters.” This depiction brings to mind Psalm 29, with its representations of the voice of the Lord: “The voice of the Lord is upon

the waters: the God of glory thundereth: the Lord is upon many waters. The voice of the Lord is powerful; the voice of the Lord is full of majesty” (verses 3 and 4). It is that Lord with that mighty voice who “will give strength unto his people; the Lord will bless his people with peace” (verse 11).

Interestingly, John’s language reflects that of the Old Testament books of Daniel and Ezekiel especially. Daniel wrote, “Then I lifted up mine eyes ... and behold a certain man clothed in linen, whose loins were girded with fine gold ... his body also was like the beryl, and his face as the appearance of lightning, and his eyes as lamps of fire and his arms and his feet like in colour to polished brass, and the voice of his words like the voice of a multitude” (Daniel 10:5,6; cf. Ezekiel 1:28).

John continued his description: “And he had in his right hand seven stars,” which suggests His power to protect. The Psalmist foresaw this when it said of the Messiah Christ, “strong is thy hand, and high is thy right hand” (Psalm 89:13). Our Lord Jesus spoke to this feature, saying of His sheep, “I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand” (John 10:28).

“And out of his mouth went a two-edged sword.” The sword is like the short Roman sword which was tongue-like in appearance. The word of Christ is seen as authoritative, irresistible, “quick and powerful ... piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12).

“And his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength.” Leon Morris writes, “the appearance of the Lord ... is dazzling and would be terrible to His foes.”²² Robert Mounce writes, “There is a brilliance about Christ which surrounded his entire person”²³ Clothing, forehead

and hair, eyes, feet, hands, mouth, face came together to invest Christ with infinite majesty.

Here, this second portrait of Christ reaches its ineffable climax. The scene hangs in breathless silence! We know what John did after the first portrait; with uplifted voice he exclaimed, “to him be glory and dominion forever. Amen.”

What does John, the witness of the second portrait, do at this climactic moment? With the paint still wet on the canvas he “fell at his feet as dead.” What could be a more affecting tribute to the infinite excellence of Christ whose glory he had just beheld? Where better to look at the expectation of certain triumph over all His and our enemies than at His feet? In due time the entire universe will fall at His feet in voluntary or involuntary acknowledgement of and submission to His absolute sovereignty and triumph.

Rome, with its emperors, pales before the sight of Christ, and well it might — they shall become as dead men. The great Head and King of the church is of unrivaled, unequalled majesty, glory, power and sovereignty, which would comfort His people under severest trial and awaken them when they were ready to cave before the allure of compromise.

While the first portrait of Christ fixes our eyes on Him who shed His blood to save the church from sin, this last portrait shows Him as the Ruler and Judge, with flaming eyes and burnished feet, saving the church from sinners who, in persecuting fury, would shed the blood of His people.

Now, in a time when there is mounting hostility toward Christians from the world, and at the very same time a deepening compromise of the church with the world, a long and earnest look ought to be given to these portraits. Rome left to its people statues and busts of its emperors and great men, likenesses which had eyes to see, but they saw not, feet to walk but they did not walk. So it was



Ladies attending the fall 2016 meeting of Faith Presbytery, Bible Presbyterian Church, in Cannon Beach, Oregon, on September 30, 2016.

with every one who trusted in them. But we are left with portraits which, as it were, pulse with life, and by the operations of the Spirit of God in our hearts, these portraits will benefit us in this critical hour. •

¹J. Gresham Machen, *The New Testament: An Introduction to its Literature and History* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1976), p. 275.

²*Ibid.*, p. 276.

³William Ruben, “Reflections on Picasso and Portraiture,” *Picasso and Portraiture* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1996), p. 13.

⁴Leon Morris, “Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary,” *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, Vol. 20 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), p. 22.

⁵“Introduction to the Revelation,” *New Geneva Study Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995), p. 2000.

⁶John Rutherford, “Persecution,” *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Vol. IV (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1939), p. 2326.

⁷*Ibid.*

⁸S. Angus, “Roman Empire,” *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Vol. IV (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1939), pp. 1939, 2604-2605.

⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁰*Ibid.*

¹¹*Ibid.*

¹²Machen, pp. 277-278.

¹³Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Lord of Glory* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1974), p. 296.

¹⁴*New Geneva Study Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995), p. 2006.

¹⁵Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Person and Work of Christ* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1950), p. 545.

¹⁶James Orr, ed., *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Vol. IV (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1939), p. 2608.

¹⁷Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, Vol. VI (Old Tappan, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Company, n.d.), p. 1120.

¹⁸Charles Hodge, *Princeton Sermons* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1979), p. 267.

¹⁹Machen, p. 304.

²⁰Milton Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1974), p. 473.

²¹*John Calvin's Tracts and Letters*, Vol. I (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, reprint 1983), p. xcv.

²²Leon Morris, “The Revelation of St. John,” *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1980), p. 54.

²³Rober H. Mounce, “The Book of Revelation,” *New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1977), p. 80.



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The “Invincible” Armada

BY MARK W. EVANS

Chief Admiral expired. The greatly inferior Duke Medina Sidonia was selected to fill the vacancy. His chief qualification was his wealth. The Duke of Parma, a proven general, would transport the invading forces from the Netherlands. Church historian, J.A. Wylie, wrote: “The invading navy was the largest which had ever been seen on ocean since it was first ploughed by keel. The Spanish half alone was deemed more than sufficient to conquer England, and how easy would conquest become when that Armada should be joined, as it was to be, by the mighty force under Parma, the flower of the Spanish army!”³

The first fleet departed Spain on May 21, 1588, and arrived in the English Channel on July 9. On the way, it endured two storms and suffered loss of ships and crews. Queen Elizabeth divided her fleet among three capable commanders: Lord Howard of Effingham (High Admiral); Sir Francis Drake; and Sir John Hawkins. The English vessels were dwarfed by the massive Spanish galleons, but possessed superior maneuverability and speed. Once the massive first fleet appeared in the Channel, English ships rushed to battle. They delivered broadsides, while the enemy’s cannons fired harmless shots above their tormenters. The Spaniards lost ships, treasure and gun powder. The gun powder restored the scanty supply possessed by the English.

When the Spanish fleet reached the Isle of Wight, the queen’s ships struck a harder blow. Wylie wrote: “The sides of the orthodox galleons were pierced and riddled with the English shot, their masts cut or splintered, and their cordage torn: and when evening fell, the enemy, who had all through the conflict seen the Spanish shot pass harmlessly over him and bury itself in the sea, stood away, his hulls bearing no sign of battle, hardly a cord torn, and his crews as intact as his ships.”⁴

Hollis Read wrote in the mid-1800s: “The church has out-rode every storm. She has passed unscathed by the lightnings of human violence. Like the oak that strikes its roots deeper, and clings to its rocky soil the more tenaciously, as the storm beats and the tempest rages, the church has been strengthened amidst the rigors of persecution, and nourished by the blood of her martyrs.”¹ True history demonstrates that the King of kings will always be victorious. He calls His people to “earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 4). By this God-ordained means, He builds His Church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.

During the reign of England’s “Bloody Mary” (1553-1558) at least 288 Protestants were burned at the stake and many others perished through imprisonments, tortures and cruel persecutions.² The murderous queen left a legacy of blood and hatred. Queen Elizabeth followed her and ascended the throne with enemies to face on every side. She favored Protestantism and devised a way for its Biblical teachings to reach the hearts of her subjects. Many of the clergymen were incompetent and corrupt. She ordered them not to

preach, but to read the homilies of Thomas Cranmer, Nicholas Ridley, and Hugh Latimer, who were faithful Protestant ministers burned at the stake by “Bloody Mary.” They “being dead yet speaketh” (Hebrews 11:4). The Gospel light began to dispel Roman darkness.

Pope Pius V broke the peace by issuing a bull of excommunication against the queen and pronouncing her subjects free from allegiance. Numerous plots to assassinate the queen failed. The next pope, Sixtus V, encouraged Philip II, the King of Spain, to invade England and crush Protestantism. The bigoted king spent three years constructing the largest armada ever built to that time. When the moment of invasion approached, Pope Sixtus V repeated the papal anathema against Queen Elizabeth and gave England to Philip. To encourage the slaughter, he promised Philip a contribution of one million crowns. With the pope’s blessing, the Invincible Armada began its journey to immortal shame.

King Philip divided the Armada into two fleets. One fleet sailed from Spain, the other would sail from the Netherlands. The two fleets would join in the English Channel and obliterate England. Before the Spaniards could depart, their renowned

The invader, with its superior size and numbers, forced its way into position for a rendezvous with the Duke of Parma. Unknown to Duke Medina Sidonia, the Duke of Parma was in serious trouble. Dutch ships blocked the harbors, paralyzing the second Spanish fleet. The renowned general had failed to secure his exits. Sidonia waited in vain.

Queen Elizabeth knew the urgency of defeating Sidonia's fleet before the Duke of Parma's arrival. She devised a brilliant strategy. Eight English ships were painted with pitch, filled with combustible materials, charged with explosives and set adrift towards the waiting Spaniards. These ships appeared as dark objects floating in the night and then suddenly burst into flames. Spanish arrogance vanished, decks came alive with desperate sailors. Lines were cut and ships sought a confused escape from the approaching horror.

At first light, the English followed the confused fleet and soon engaged battle with their foes. Wylie wrote: "All the great ships on both sides, and all the great admirals of England, were in that action; the English ships lay-to, close to the galleons, and poured broadside after broadside into them. It was a rain of shot from morning to night. The galleons falling back before the fierce onset, and huddling together, the English fire was poured into the mass of hulls and masts, and did fearful execution, converting the ships into shambles, rivulets of blood pouring from their scuttles into the sea. Of the Spanish guns many were dismounted, those that remained available fired but slowly, while the heavy rolling of the vessels threw the shot into the air."⁵

Wylie concluded: "The power of the Armada had been broken; most of its vessels were in a sinking condition; from 4,000 to 5,000 of its soldiers, shot down, had received burial in the ocean; and at least as many more lay wounded and dying on board their

shattered galleons. Of the English not more than 100 had fallen."⁶

The winds shifted and the shattered fleet began to drift helplessly to its destruction. Drake, although out of ammunition, followed behind as long as his provisions allowed. Wylie said: "No sooner did Drake turn back from the fleeing foe than the tempest took up the pursuit, for that moment a furious gale burst out, and the last the English saw of the Armada were the vanishing forms of their retreating galleons, as they entered the clouds of storm and became hid in the blackness of the northern night. In these awful solitudes, which seemed abandoned to tempests, the Spaniards, without pilots and without a chart, were envi-

True history demonstrates that the King of kings will always be victorious.

roned by bristling rocks and by unknown shallows, by currents and whirlpools. They were 'driven from light into darkness'; they were 'chased out of the world.'"⁷

Thousands were drowned, others were executed when they staggered on the hostile shores. Wylie said, "Of the 30,000 who had sailed in the Armada, scarcely 10,000 saw again their native land; and these returned, in almost every instance, to pine and die." Pope Sixtus V rendered Philip II an awful insult. He haughtily refused to pay his promised "million of crowns" and declared to Philip that "[h]e could not be expected ... to give a million of money for an Armada which had accomplished nothing, and was now at the bottom of the sea."⁸ Spain never recovered. Its power and prestige permanently vanished.

Our Savior has "all power in heaven and in earth." In every generation He enables His elect, blood-bought people to bear witness to His

truth and glory. Although we grieve at today's degeneration and apostasy of the professing Church, we have good reason to look to our King of kings, knowing that the victory is certain. Charles Haddon Spurgeon stated: "Each martyr that has died has passed the blood-red flag to the next, and in his turn has passed it on to another. Every confessor who has been nailed to the stake to burn, has lit his candle, and handed it to another, and said, 'Take care of that!' And now here is the old 'sword of the Lord and of Gideon.' Remember what hands have handled the hilt; remember what arms have wielded it; remember how often it has 'pierced to the dividing asunder of the joints and marrow.' Will you disgrace it? Will you disgrace it? There is the great banner: it has waved in many a breeze; long ere the flag of this our land was made, this flag of Christ was borne aloft, Will you stain it? Will you stain it? Will you not hand it to your children, still unsullied, and say, 'Go on, go on; we leave you the heritage of war; go on, go on, and conquer. What your fathers did, do you again; still keep up the war, till time shall end.'"⁹ •

¹Hollis Read, *The Hand of God in History* (Hartford: H.E. Robins and Company, 1849), p. 102.

²J.A. Wylie, *The History of Protestantism*, Vol. II (London: Cassell and Company, originally published in 1878), p. 431.

³*Ibid.*, p. 450.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 454.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 456.

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 456

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 458

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 460.

⁹C.H. Spurgeon, *The New Park Street Pulpit*, Vol. III (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1990), p. 48.



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*America needs prayer, America needs evangelism
and America needs the Bible if it is to survive.*



OUR GREAT NEED FOR *Reformation*

BY JERRY GARDNER

GALATIANS 2:15-16: “We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.”

Protestant Reformation

Each year, we celebrate the last Sunday of October as the day that Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the door of the Castle Church at Wittenberg, Germany. The date on record is October 31, 1517.

Some two months later, January 1518, Luther's friends had translated the “Theses” from Latin to German and had them printed and distributed. Within two weeks of that printing, the “Theses” had spread across Germany, and within two months they had spread across Europe. This controversy was one of the first in history to be aided by the printing press.

Western Civilization was ripe for reformation, so God used Luther's writings to that end. Regarding his 95 Theses, Luther refused to recant. At the Diet of Worms, he declared: “Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason ... I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted, and my con-

science is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. May God help me, Amen.” Subsequently, he was excommunicated from the Romish Church by Pope Leo X on January 3, 1521. Though reformation had begun already, it began in earnest with Luther's works.

It was just after his excommunication that Luther was sequestered, hidden away at the Wartburg Castle by the Elector, Prince Frederick III. Luther termed this “my Patmos.” Like the apostle John, Luther spent his time writing while at his “Patmos.” He translated the Greek New Testament into German. That translation developed a standard version of the German language. [See the fall 2010 and fall 2012 issues of *Redeeming the Time* for more details on the Protestant Reformation.]

[Reformation did not begin with Luther. We now turn to examples of reformation in the Scriptures.]

Apostolic Reformation

PAUL

Acts 9:3-6: “And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou,

Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?”

Perhaps Paul was regenerated right then and there. Certainly he was born again by the end of chapter nine. This was Paul's reformation, and his reform was from Jewish tradition to Bible justification by faith. Look at Philippians 3 where we have recorded Paul's testimony of regeneration and reformation.

Philippians 3:3-9: “For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh. Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.”

That sounds to me a little bit like Luther. Paul came to the conclusion that justification is by faith. Paul rejected Judaism for Christianity. Now that's Reformation.

From his birth, Paul had been brought up in the principles of Jewish law. Justification by works allowed Paul to live in the cold, dead, traditions of man. Paul was transformed from the letter of the law, to free grace in Christ. Before his salvation, Paul was so sure that what he

did was right that he persecuted anyone who preached another gospel. In fact, that was his mission that day on the road to Damascus when God took heavenly action. Paul saw Christ that day.

God got Paul's attention! You might say that there was a tectonic shift, an earthquake-like shift, in Paul's thinking. It was regeneration; it was reformation. The explanation is that Paul came face to face with the God of the universe. Because he saw Christ, Paul responded rightly.

When a sinner comes face to face with Jesus Christ, there will be change, perhaps even reformation, and that's what we seek. We seek to give people a figurative and true picture of Jesus Christ. When one truly sees Christ, he will respond. The elect one, enabled by the Spirit of God, will run from Judaism or from heretical Protestantism or from whatever — straight to Christ. If the Spirit of God is working, salvation comes. We can't bring salvation, but Christ can. Paul saw Christ that day, and he bowed before sovereignty, rejecting Jewish tradition. Regeneration came. Reformation happened.

PETER

By the time of Paul's writing of the Book of Galatians, I believe Peter was already saved.

Matthew 16:15-18: "[Jesus] saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

Some disagree, but I believe that by the time of this incident in Matthew, Peter was already saved. Later on, just before the crucifixion, Peter

denied Christ, but he had come back to Christ by the time of the resurrection. It was after Christ's ascension that Peter began his God-given task of strengthening the brethren. Christ had given Peter that task back in Luke 22.

Luke 22:31-32: "And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren."

Nevertheless, after Christ's ascension and during this period of strengthening the brethren, Peter began acting the hypocrite. Paul found him out and confronted him at Antioch. In my mind's eye, like Nathan to David, I see Paul's long, bony finger stretching out to Peter. "Thou art the man, Peter"; then, I hear these words coming from Paul's lips.

Galatians 2:14-16: "When I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, if thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews? We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified."

The passage in Philippians about justification by faith that we read earlier was written 10 years or so after this incident at Antioch. However, I believe that the principle of justification by faith was already in Paul's heart and mind. Note what Paul wrote in Galatians 2:14: "But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel...."

Paul was concerned with the truth of the gospel. He was concerned

that justification by faith might be known on the earth. Thus, Paul stood before Peter, before them all, and confronted Peter over his hypocrisy.

Paul would not let Peter get away with sin. Now, Peter was not as bad as I, but he was much like you and me. Peter was a sinner, a brushed off, cleaned up sinner, who was justified by his God-given faith. This passage doesn't say so, but I believe Paul's confronting of Peter, under direction of the Spirit, changed Peter for the better. Reformation came and Peter was able to strengthen the brethren even more.

Further, 2000 years later, Peter continues to strengthen the Church. I say that because we have two wonderful books in the Bible. We call them 1 and 2 Peter. They strengthen the church today. I love those two books, along with the other 64. Peter's reformation was from practicing hypocrisy to practical truth.

The Need for an American Reformation

It hasn't happened yet, but reformation in America needs to happen. O, there was a Great Awakening in the eighteenth century, the prayer revivals in the nineteenth century, and the Welsh revival more recently, but we need an American Reformation. We need reformation from the growing influence of Rome and from the cold, dead, heretical, liberal mainline denominations. The church needs to get back to the Bible. But it's obvious that we can't bring reformation.

Man can't do that. But God uses men as instruments to bring about revival and reformation. In the Old Testament, God tells us: "If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their

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OUR GREAT NEED FOR REFORMATION

Continued from page 15

sin, and will heal their land” (2 Chronicles 7:14).

There is no doubt, our land needs healing. I believe America is staring into a great abyss. We are on the cusp, the eve of destruction, on the verge of one historical period to the next, a turning point. If we continue down this path, I see a dark age staring right back at us as we stare at it. But it's not just America that is imperiled. Western Civilization is on its last legs. I hope not; I pray not. God must intervene if we are to be delivered from the wasteland, the howling wilderness looking back at us. If there is to be reformation, God must bring it.

I'm not alone in sensing this imminent catastrophe. Jacques Barzun, born in France, graduated from Columbia University and taught there for a lifetime. He wrote a book: *From Dawn to Decadence: 500 years of Western Cultural Life*. I've read about 350 pages of that 800-page tome, but I've read those 350 pages over and over again. I would like to say that Barzun was a Christian, but I can't; nevertheless, he had something other than air between his ears. William Safire said that this book is “(A) stunning five-century study of civilization's cultural retreat.”

One of my favorite quotes from the book is this: “when futility and the absurd are accepted as the norm, you know the culture is decadent.” Objectively speaking, it cannot be denied that our culture *is* decadent, as useless absurdity holds sway today.

Note the title of this book. Those 500 years began at the High Renaissance, about 1500 AD. It ends at the present day. The major reason for this decline is our rejection of the Bible. It was the Protestant Reformation that affected the establishment of this nation. All but one of those

once great Ivy League schools were started by Christians for Christians. Over the years, the light of truth in America has dimmed. Today, there is precious little critical thinking, especially among the people of the land. Today, many people don't think. Rather, they emote.

Blaise Pascal, the seventeenth century French philosopher, mathematician, inventor, and Christian theologian addressed man's inability to think. He said this: “The heart has its reasons that the reason does not know.” Pascal's words sum up my meaning, and it describes a large portion of the American population.

For their own corrupt reasons, the leaders of this land stand at the abyss, and people blindly follow. As the blind lead the blind, both fall into the ditch. For example, a few years ago there was the promise of “hope and change.” Well, we got the change all right, but then we got hopelessness. We are surrounded with futility and absurdity. Our culture is decadent.

There is no true hope in Nashville, in Knoxville, in Charlotte, or in Washington, DC. What was at the center of the Apostolic Reformation and also at the center of the Protestant Reformation? It was the Holy Spirit, the Lord Jesus Christ, and God the Father, but it was also the inspired Word of God. It was the Bible. It was relevant in the days of Moses, and it is just as relevant today.

I heard an independent Baptist preacher say that there is nothing wrong in America that can't be fixed by a bunch of raw-boned preachers standing up saying “thus saith the Lord.” Like Luther, those preachers will need a backbone of steel, energized by the Almighty. That's what this country needs. Many people won't like it. If somebody stands for Christ, the Devil will not like it either, and he will go after that preacher. Nevertheless, that stand for Christ is what this country needs. It is sad that many of today's Christians have

ceded the field of battle to the progressive regressives.

What can we do? One thing we can do is we can cling to the Lord Jesus Christ as never before. We can cry out to Him as never before.

Reformation will not come through the ballot box alone. It won't come through easy believism. Think of your children and your children's children. What country will we give them? Think of the Lord Jesus Christ and what He has done for you and me. When you hear some godless statement or proposal, in prayer, contradict that statement with reason. Send a letter to the editor or to your congressman.

More importantly, be involved in church, attending all services. Attend prayer times at church or in someone's home. Covenant with someone to cry out to God. Ask God to have His people across this land cry out to Him. Ask God to have His people stand with one voice for the Word of God. This will not happen over night. If this nation survives, it will take time, and it will take blood, sweat and tears in prayer to God.

Those Muslims who are being brought to America need Christ. Wouldn't it be grand if God would destroy Islam through justification by faith in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ? Now that's reformation.

We have our work cut out for us. We must get busy. I'm not talking about organizing and getting involved in politics. You can do that if you want, but what I encourage today is unity in the faith in churches all across America. America needs prayer, America needs evangelism and America needs the Bible if it is to survive •



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