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**North Road Chapel (Evangelical)  
BIDEFORD**

# FORTY MOMENTOUS DAYS

*“For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the scriptures: And that He was seen of Cephas...”* (1 Corinthians 15:3-5)

*“The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon.”* (Luke 24:34)

These verses give the detail of the third appearance of the resurrected Christ, believed to have been to Simon Peter. It is not known precisely when this happened, as the time and place is not mentioned; but the striking fact is that of all the disciples, Simon Peter was the one to whom the Lord first showed Himself. This was **not** to confer primacy to Peter, as some sections of Christendom erroneously teach; such a thing is nowhere suggested in Scripture. The real reason for the singling out of Peter for this visitation is obvious: here was a man with a heart that was bleeding and broken by abysmal failure. Just as the heart of the Lord went out in forgiveness to the penitent thief on the cross, so now did He yearn to forgive and restore this backsliding follower; hence this early appearance to Cephas.

It is important to see a gradation, and orderly arrangement in these appearances of Christ. None were accidental, or chance encounters; all were pre-determined, and through them, a definite plan is revealed. Each occasion conveys a specific lesson: the first appearance was to a loving follower – Mary Magdalene; the second to loyal servants – the faithful women. The third is to a remorseful, broken-hearted backslider. In these incidents, three essential graces of the Christian life are portrayed. Firstly, **love**, that which 1 Corinthians 13:13 places higher even than faith and hope. Secondly, **obedience** which ranks above sacrifice (1 Samuel 15:22). Thirdly, **repentance** – that grace of tears, return, confession and

trust – all of which are illustrated in the character of Simon Peter. The steps of a backslider, through decline and sorrow to eventual restoration, may be traced in the account of this disciple.

The initial signs of deterioration in the life of any child of God are perceived only by Deity, for they occur in the heart. There is a waning of affection and love toward Christ. Then certain visible symptoms are manifested which are readily detected. In the case of Peter, the Holy Spirit has caused them to be recorded. The first to be seen is an **unsubdued will**. The essence of true godliness is the submission of man's will to God's will. That Peter's will was not in perfect subordination to the will of God is clearly shown. For example, when the Lord spoke to the disciples of His approaching death in Jerusalem, Peter had the audacity to take Him aside, and rebuke Him! A mortal man contradicting the incarnate Son of God! Such words merited the following stern response: "*He turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me Satan: thou art an offence unto Me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.*" (Matthew 16:23).

A similar instance is observed in the Upper Room, as the Lord began to wash the disciples' feet: "*Then cometh He to Simon Peter: and Peter saith unto Him, Lord dost Thou wash my feet? ...Thou shalt never wash my feet.*" (John 13:6, 8) Here is Peter in open conflict with His Lord, defiantly saying 'no, never!' Yet when compelled to yield, He says "*Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head.*" (v.9) This was going **beyond** the will of God – equally wrong and dangerous. Suffice it to say that Simon Peter had his own very fixed ideas, and they evinced a lack of absolute submission to the will and the words of Christ.

Secondly, there is apparent in this man the trait of **undue self-confidence**. This second weakness is largely born out of the first. Submission of one's own will to God's will, ever begets humility

and a distrust in self. It mortifies the flesh, and causes the creature to lean upon their Creator. It is that of which Paul speaks, when he says *“for when I am weak, then am I strong”* (2 Corinthians 12:10). This was an attitude sadly absent in Simon Peter. He was possessed of a vaunting confidence: *“though all men forsake Thee, yet will not I”* was his rash boast. When the Christian becomes over-confident in self, they move on to a very dangerous ground. The protection of Almighty God is vouchsafed to those who are of an humble and contrite spirit: *“I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit”* (Isaiah 57:15). The words of the hymnwriter are true, who wrote: ‘The arm of flesh will fail you, Ye dare not trust your own’.

Thirdly: **neglect of prayer**. Was this true of Peter? Sadly, it was; neither was he alone, for James and John were likewise remiss. As the blessed Lord approached the cross He took with Him Peter, James and John into the Garden of Gethsemane. There He requested that they tarried and prayed whilst He withdrew Himself for several agonizing hours. Our Lord’s direction to His disciples was clear: *“Watch ye and pray lest ye enter into temptation”* (Mark 14:38). That should have been meaningful to them, particularly Peter who had previously received solemn warning, *“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. And he said unto Him, Lord, I am ready to go with Thee, both into prison, and to death. And He said, I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me”* (Luke 22:31).

Despite this dreadful caution regarding a Satanic interest in him, Peter’s response, laden with self-confidence, was: ‘I am alright! I shall stand! I am prepared for prison or even death!’ So in the Garden, the Lord again stressed the importance of watchfulness and

prayer, in guarding against temptation and the snare of the Devil. Yet quite apart from watching and praying, Peter fell asleep, entirely oblivious to his urgent need. Here is a sure indication of backsliding in the life of a Christian. When a believer loses his interest in the closet and the prayer meeting, he is en route to spiritual calamity.

The fourth stage in Peter's regression was one of **increasing distance**, and following afar off. One commentator says: 'He was too much of a believer to forsake entirely, and too much of a backslider to follow entirely.' Such a condition is typical of this class of Christian. They do not openly renounce Christ, but neither will they openly renounce the world. In this position, the backsliding Christian is caught and ensnared. It was so with Simon Peter. Instead of shunning temptation, he put himself in the way of it. Contrary to the Lord's command to 'watch and pray, and thus enter not into temptation' he instead dallied with danger, went right into the Palace courts, and stood at the fireplace. There he joined the company of Christ's enemies, listening to the revilings and mockeries which they heaped upon his Master, yet uttering never a word in His defence. Later he sank to the depths of denying with an oath the One whom he had followed for over three years.

Here then are the retrograde steps of a backslider, epitomised by Peter. It is the sad out-working of the truth of Psalm 1 – he walks in the counsel of the ungodly, then he stands in the way of sinners, and at length sits in the seat of the scorner. T. V. Moore (a notable American preacher of the 19<sup>th</sup> century) wrote: 'The beginnings of backsliding are like the first movings of an avalanche. There is the silent dripping and wearing away of long weeks. Then when the last point of resistance gives way there is the loosing of a few stones, the rolling of a little earth, then a quivering of the whole mass, which trembles for a moment, then moves, then rushes and thunders in wild and desolating ruin into the abyss below.' The

description could scarcely be more fitting. Little wonder that Paul wrote as he did to the Christians at Corinth: “*Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall*” (1 Corinthians 10:12).

Consider now the **sorrows** of backsliding. There is perhaps no person on earth more miserable than the backslider; for though they seek to brazen it out, in their heart there remains a secret grief. The language of Job is true of them, when he said: “*O that I were as in the months past, as in the days when God preserved me: when His candle shined upon my head*” (Job 29:2-3). No doubt Peter’s sorrows began whilst still in the act of denial, but being caught in the snare of temptation, the Devil tightened the grip until the entrapped disciple augmented his sin with cursing and swearing. Then when the Lord turned and looked upon him across the High Priest’s Palace, Peter’s inward agony reached its most poignant degree, and he went out and wept bitterly (cf Matthew 26:75). Now was he awakened from cowardly delusion to feel the baseness of his conduct, and he rushed out to find a place of solitude in which to weep and mourn over his wrong.

Let none ever forget that, “*the way of transgressors is hard*” (Proverbs 13:15). Young people, and older Christians too, must register the fact. The sowing of wild oats will always result in a bitter harvest. What thoughts were in poor Peter’s mind as he went out into the darkness to weep? Perhaps he recalled past days – the wonderful teaching heard on the mountainside; the hours spent in company with the Lord when He called His own to ‘come apart and rest awhile’; the memorable preaching tours to Nazareth, Capernaum, Galilee and Jerusalem. Or maybe he reflected upon Gethsemane, horrified by the magnitude and folly of his disobedience, and the disgraceful consequences of his apathy. Doubtless, all the love and pleasure that attended those old memories now flooded in upon his soul, but served only to intensify

his distress. He had denounced his loving Lord and faithful Master. Oh, the remorse, and unutterable sadness which backsliding brings!

Let us all take warning, for thus it is with **all** those who forsake the paths of righteousness. The backslider may be unconscious for a time, as long as the Devil numbs the spiritual senses, but there will inevitably be a return of feeling, and a painful realisation of sin. There are many who can identify with the sentiments of the poet who wrote:

“Where is the blessedness I knew  
When first I sought the Lord?  
Where is that soul-refreshing view  
Of Jesus and His Word?

What precious hours I once enjoyed,  
How sweet their memory still!  
But they have left an aching void  
The world can never fill.”

Yet this solemn message has a wonderful sequel, filled with hope and assurance, and well illustrated by the case of Simon Peter. For the backslider was **restored**. In this process, successive steps are again observed. The first was **the look of Christ**. Peter was well aware of that glance toward him, and was devastated by it. The Lord was fully cognizant and conversant with his every action, word and thought. Let every backslider be assured of this – the Lord looketh upon them. Let that knowledge have its due impact, and produce the effects that it did in Peter: the tears of penitence. There must be repentance.

The second step in Peter’s restoration was **the message of angels**, who told those women concerning the Lord, “*He is risen; He is not here; behold the place where they laid Him. But go your way, tell*

*His disciples and Peter that He goeth before you into Galilee”* (Mark 16:6-7). Especially tell Peter that the Lord is going to meet him; Peter the deserter, the denier, the backslider. That same message is still as true today as when it was first spoken. The Saviour desires to meet the returning backslider; to the broken repentant one He comes in wondrous love and mercy. *“Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon”* (Isaiah 55:7).

The final and crowning stage was **the appearance of Christ** unto Peter. The other disciples were clearly amazed by it, as they reported, *“He hath appeared unto Simon”*. Before even they had been visited by the Lord, He was first seen by Cephas. How this magnifies the grace of the Saviour. His **primary concern** is for the broken reed, the smoking flax, the weak and fallen among His people. This is the great aspect of truth conveyed by His third appearance. Not only did the risen Christ show Himself alive by many infallible proofs, He also set forth the things pertaining to the Kingdom of God. This surely is one of the most precious: His grace and forgiveness to His failing, faltering children.

W. H. Molland (*transcribed by R. J. Steward*)

On Lord’s Day 30<sup>th</sup> July 2006, our dear sister Mrs Vera Robertson was called home, and entered into the eternal Sabbath of rest. She had suffered from a lengthy period of illness, but had maintained close contact and fellowship with the Church whilst housebound. Mrs Robertson began attending at North Road in the late 1980s after being widowed. She came to saving faith, and was baptised in 1990, then 63 years old, becoming a faithful and devoted member. The funeral service was held on 7<sup>th</sup> August, when her chosen passage, Psalm 23, was preached upon. Her life testified to those words: *“Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.”*



# Sowing on Stony Ground

Over recent months, this area of the country has witnessed a resurgence of so-called ‘mass evangelism’. Many sections of the professing church have been thus engaged. The aim is to attract the masses, and to convert as many as possible to a form of ‘Christianity’. As usual with such enterprises, the attraction is achieved by a combination of secular venues, racy speakers, worldly music and audio-visual spectacle. There is a conscious evasion of anything that might appear confrontational, dogmatic or ‘religious’. God Himself and His Divine attributes are given scant coverage, whilst His Holy Word is treated in an unbecoming way.

The programme of events is invariably sustained by advertising campaigns, supporting websites, ecclesiastical gimmickry, and the ecumenical efforts of many local congregations. The success of the meetings is measured in the four-figure crowds that attend, plus the number of impressionable persons who make what is termed a ‘commitment’, and sign up for further aspects of the Christian lifestyle.

There are very few saints who will dare to raise objections to such practices. They fear that criticism could discourage those who might be genuinely saved on these occasions. They are also afraid of the censure of other believers, who are quick to apply the label of ‘hyper-calvinist’ or ‘un-evangelical’ to those who protest. If unsaved persons are being converted, then surely the methods used are immaterial? If the ‘end’ is salvation, then the ‘means’ (however unbiblical or erroneous) must be justified. Plausible arguments like these have effectively silenced the voice of truth. God-dishonouring mass evangelism persists, leaving in its wake countless false and deluded professors, whose latter state is worse than the first.

Professions of this kind are of benefit to no one. The individuals concerned have an unfounded sense of security that effectively prevents the reception of further truth. When the inevitable happens, and their initial impressions evaporate, they are left bitter and confused, and more hardened than ever against the Gospel. The Churches to which these nominal believers gravitate are also bound for disappointment and discouragement.

This is not a modern phenomenon. The Lord Himself, when ministering upon earth, gave very clear details of those who hear the Word with apparent gladness; but their early fervour gives way to failure, and proves to be no more than passing enthusiasm. Nowhere is this better illustrated than in the parable of the sower, the seed, and the soils. This familiar portion is emphasised by its repetition in each of the synoptic Gospels. Whilst being well known and much preached upon, the passage conveys truth that is both solemn and searching.

The short-lived profession is likened to shallow soil beneath which lie buried stones. The fate of seed which lands there is described: *“Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth: And when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away”* (Matthew 13:5-6). The interpretation of this allegory is graciously given, a few verses later: *“But he that receiveth the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended.”* (vv. 20-21)

The symptoms and characteristics of transient professors deserve careful consideration, because in these days when such people abound, it is important that true believers should make positive

identification and discrimination. The first feature is **the speed with which the Word is accepted**. Matthew uses the words ‘*forthwith*’, and ‘*anon*’; Mark adds ‘*immediately*’ (Mark 4:5, 16). This is not a commendable receptivity, but rather an undue haste or rashness. It is a swiftness that reflects a lack of thought or understanding. It is true that the noble Bereans “*received the word with all readiness of mind*”, but they proceeded to “*search the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so*” (Acts 17:11). This was a deliberate and time-consuming activity. They were not prepared to immediately accept the preached word, before making a thorough study of its implications and applications.

The smallest of projects requires planning and careful thought: “*For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it?*” (Luke 14:28). How much more does the Christian discipleship demand prior diligence! The church landscape is littered with half-built and unfinished professions, which make a mockery of the faith. They were begun by those who received the word too quickly, and never devoted any time to the spiritual arithmetic.

The second feature is the **spirit in which the Word is accepted**. The Gospel writers all use the same word, translated variously as ‘*joy*’ and ‘*gladness*’. This is an emotion which may well be inspired by the entrance of Divine truth, and rightly so. But if it is the **only** response elicited in the heart, there is clearly a lack of understanding. There are very few people who teach, or even recognise, man’s state of total depravity; the need to flee from the wrath to come; and that apart from Christ there is no hope of deliverance. Without such knowledge, the whole purpose and reason for salvation is missed. It is possible for a man of the world to read New Testament truth, and rejoice in the outworking of redemption as he might applaud a daring rescue performed by the emergency services. This is very different from the joy of that

individual who is delivered from certain death and placed at safety. Superficially, their reactions may seem similar; but one has been saved, whilst the other has not. Massed evangelistic events set out to create an emotionally charged atmosphere of happiness, in which all will feel glad to accept the gospel offer. This falls far short of the Biblical instruction, which says: “*receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls*” (James 1:21). Joy in isolation is a sign that must be interpreted with caution.

**Intensity of works** is the third characteristic. The parable describes an instant ‘springing up’ of the seed, in all probability faster than that sown in good ground. The plant, being unable to drive down any roots, instead diverts all its energies to the setting forth of stem and leaf – the shallowness of the soil gives rise to the speedy development “*immediately it sprang up, because it had no depth of earth*” (Mark 4:5). Those who have no conception of real faith imagine that it consists in external works and exercises; so to these they give priority. To a casual observer who looketh on the outward appearance, they seem to be zealous and dedicated Christians. The sad fact of the matter is that they work for the work’s sake, and their endeavours are without foundation or substance. God, who looketh upon the heart, sees that “*they have no root in themselves*”; they have a name that they live, and yet are dead (cf Revelation 3:1).

By contrast, the exhortation of Scripture is to be “*rooted and grounded in love*” (Ephesians 3:17), “*Rooted and built up in Him, and stablished in the faith*” (Colossians 2:7). It is this invisible, spiritual exercise that demands the Christian’s foremost energies, and **then** the things that accompany salvation: works and labours of love (cf Hebrews 6:9-10). Unfortunately, many churches are so impressed by the prospect of eager, ‘professed Christians’, that they immediately entrust them with responsibility and office, without making sufficient inquiry, ultimately to the hurt of all involved.

The fourth, and most evident sign of a false profession is its **failure to continue**. The rootless plant will invariably wither away, and in like manner, groundless professors fall away. The cessation, when it comes, is often as sudden and dramatic as the ‘conversion’. It may not happen for some period of time; so long as the conditions remain favourable, and excited emotions are sustained by pleasant experiences. However, when the hot sun of adversity rises bringing tribulation and temptation, the plant is endangered. It has no root beneath, and so cannot derive any moisture in the hour of need. The false professor has no grounding in Scripture, and no foundation to his faith; so when opposition arises he has no means of sustenance – no promises on which to rely, no assurance on which to depend, no knowledge of God to inspire him, and no love to sustain him. The outcome is evident.

Often the difficulties arise, not from external factors, but rather “*because of the word*”. Having been taught little if anything at the outset, the individual concerned reads more of the Bible, and learns there of God’s holy standard for His people; the true nature of sin; the cost of discipleship. “*By and by, he is offended*”: these things were never explained or expounded before! Having been constrained to believe under false pretences, they feel completely justified in continuing no longer.

The features thus described are painfully familiar, and one does not have to look far among the Churches to see real examples of such persons. This begs the question: **‘why are there so many false professors in this generation?’** The Scriptures make clear that God is sovereign in matters of faith and conversion: “*Salvation is of the Lord*” (Jonah 2:9). He himself says: “*In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand: for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good*” (Ecclesiastes 11:6). But to point ‘blame’ at the Almighty for the current abundance of spurious conversions would

be folly bordering on blasphemy: “*Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God?*” (Romans 9:20). Neither is there an impotence on the part of God’s Word to effect salvation. The seed sown in the parable was ‘good’ in every case. Likewise, the Word of God continues to be “*quick and powerful*” (Hebrews 4:12) and efficacious in conversion.

There remains the further element of human responsibility. From what has already been said, it is clear that modern evangelistic techniques, by their very nature, tend to produce false professions. Shallow ‘conversions’ are the natural result of shallow ‘preaching’. Worldly methods of communication are much in vogue today. Fashionable evangelists come with their multimedia presentations, humour, clever rhetoric and elocution. Their speech and preaching is “*with enticing words of man’s wisdom*”, and consequently, the ‘faith’ they engender in their hearers, is a faith which stands solely “*in the wisdom of men*” and knows **nothing** of “*the power of God*” (cf 1 Corinthians 2:4-5).

There are professional preachers in these days who make a career from **sowing on stony ground**. Such ground is easy to find, requires no preparation, and gives rapid results. Rather than trying to sow the seed ‘in depth’, they are content to work on the superficial layer of topsoil. They do not address the hardness of men’s hearts, or deal with the underlying obstacles to faith – they instead play to the emotions and feelings of the audience. This kind of preaching will inevitably produce counterfeit converts. “*Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap*” (Galatians 6:7). What God said of Israel applies equally well: “*they have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind: it hath no stalk: the bud shall yield no meal*” (Hosea 8:7).

Every right-thinking minister or preacher of the word will be concerned to avoid these errors. Knowing the dangers which a false profession presents, both to the individual and to Churches, precautions must be taken in the broadcasting of Truth. It is impossible to know how a particular hearer will receive the Word – but two general principles can be profitably applied:

**Recognise the value of ‘the seed’.** The stony-ground sower has a very low opinion of the Word of God. He is careless in its proclamation, and imagines it can only be effective if supplemented with human devices. He selects those passages believed to be suitable for eliciting ‘decisions’, but conspicuously fails to declare “*the whole counsel of God*”. The Bible is presented in an irreverent manner as a ‘handbook for good living’, but never as the abiding Law of God, forever settled in heaven, and magnified above all His Name (cf Psalm 119:89, 138:2). Consider the contrast presented in Psalm 126:6 “*He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.*” Here is one who knows the immeasurable worth of Holy Writ, and is humbled to tears by the responsibility of bearing it. That attitude profoundly affects the manner in which he sows, and is in turn impressed upon his hearers. The subsequent harvest is joyous and enduring.

**Cultivate the ground.** Whilst unable to perceive the state of his hearers’ hearts, it is sufficient for a preacher to recognise that the majority are hard and unyielding. Sin has marred the ground with innumerable stones, which impede the penetration of any seed: stones of ignorance, animosity, pride, cherished sins, guilty fear, or false religion. All these things, and many more like them, lie in the human heart as great stumbling-blocks; deeply implanted obstacles to faith. Those who preach should do so with this in mind, and with the Biblical means at their disposal seek to “*gather out the stones thereof*” (Isaiah 5:2). This is the obvious order in which to work.

*“Doth the plowman plow all day to sow? doth he open and break the clods of his ground? When he hath made plain the face thereof, doth he not...cast in the principle wheat...in their place? For his God doth instruct him to discretion, and doth teach him...This also cometh forth from the Lord of Hosts, which is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working” (Isaiah 28:24-26, 29).*

A good sower must first do the groundwork, and address in ministry the serious issues of sin and unbelief. This can be a hard and thankless labour of long duration; but it is honouring to God, and in accordance with His Word. Whilst He alone brings conviction and regeneration to the heart, still He gives commandment: *“For thus saith the Lord...Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns”* (Jeremiah 4:3). His Word is the tool Divinely fitted for the task, for when accompanied by His power it is *“like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces”* (Jeremiah 23:29).

Sowing on stony ground continues to be a popular pastime. The results are dramatic and instantaneous, and a spirit of ecumenical cooperation is achieved. It creates the illusion of a modern revival. This has the effect of drawing in support from a wide circle of Churches – many of the true people of God are inclined to lend their weight to the effort. When they make such a mistake, they soon find themselves labouring amongst a spiritually ‘mixed multitude’ (cf Numbers 11:4), made up of religious persons from all the denominations, of every type and category. Included in that number will be those who, despite holding office in so-called ‘churches’, are in fact unregenerate, and have not the slightest notion of true salvation. For a genuine Christian to appear alongside such a company constitutes being *“unequally yoked together with unbelievers”* (2 Corinthians 6:14). The work may appear noble and the objectives lofty; but to sow the seed after this fashion is to *“plough with an ox and ass together”*, which practice was expressly forbidden by God (Deuteronomy 22:10).



When real believers join themselves to this crowd, they do not have a sanctifying effect, nor in any way enhance their own testimony. Rather, by their presence and apparent unity they give credence to error and silent approval to the false doctrines of aberrant churchmen. The command of Scripture is clear: from those who are “*destitute of the truth*”, and imagine that numerical “*gain*” is a sign of “*godliness*”, the saints are to “*withdraw*” (cf 1 Timothy 6:5).

Ultimately, the stony-ground harvest will speak for itself: shallow, dubious professions, and short-lived ‘Christians’ who sadly delude themselves and tragically endanger the Church. The great need of the present day is not for multi-church endeavours, or capable, crowd-pleasing evangelists, but for faithful ministers and teachers of God’s Word, who are prepared to sow the precious seed in His appointed way; to water it with prayer, and to trust Him for the increase (cf 1 Corinthians 3:6).

R. J. Steward

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“The short and pathetic history of some who are called ‘revival converts’: They are charmed, but not changed; much excited, but not truly converted. Their root is in the crowd, the fine music, the lively stir, the hearty companionships of the gospel meeting. The Moravians every Sabbath offer up this prayer: ‘From light-minded swarming, deliver us, good God.’”

Anon

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“The hard heart must be ploughed and harrowed before it can be receptive to the gospel seed. Doctrinal instruction must be given on the character of God, the requirements of His law, the nature and heinousness of sin, if a foundation is to be laid for true evangelism. It is useless to preach Christ unto souls until they see and feel their desperate need of Him.”

A. W. Pink

## *SPURIOUS CONVERSIONS*

Their plea is ‘that some are genuine converts’. The plea assumes that the small minority of genuine fruits would not have been gathered in without these means. It is notoriously untrue. In almost every case there will be found a preparatory work in the heart, the result of intelligent scriptural teaching and consistent Christian example, watered for some time by the Holy Spirit in the retirement of their homes. And the only result of the revival appliances as to them has been to hurry them a little, perhaps, in their disclosures of their new feelings, and at the same time to mar and pollute the wholesome soundness of their spiritual character. Had scriptural means of grace been used with them, and no others, they would have come into the church in due time, none the less surely, and with a piety more symmetrical and profound.

Nor is the assumption true, that the rest who are not savingly converted are no worse off than before. Is it nothing that the power of divine grace and the sanctity of a religious profession are dishonoured before the world, till the very name of revival becomes trivial? Is it nothing that the misguided converts who apostatise have the guilt of broken vows and professions, and perhaps of sacraments profaned, added to all their previous lists?

But this is not all; the spiritual effects of one of these delusive and abortive excitements are blighting. At best, the sensibilities of the subject are exhausted and worn out to no purpose, until his heart becomes almost incapable of impression, and his “*conscience is seared with a hot iron*”. Those who have passed through two or three of these fires are usually found the most impious and heaven-daring of profane swearers, revilers and mockers, where they are not restrained by principles of social decency and respectability.

If they belong to the latter class, they are usually found in a state of scepticism or hostility as to the very truth of Christianity. They feel that a cruel trick has been played upon their inexperience by the ministers and friends of Christianity in thus thrusting them, in the hour of their confusion, into false positions whose duties they do not and cannot perform, and into sacred profession which they have been compelled to shamefully repudiate. Their self-respect is therefore galled to the quick, and pride is indignant at the humiliating exposure. No wonder that they look on religion and its advocates henceforward with suspicion and anger.

Often their feelings do not stop here. They are conscious that they were thoroughly in earnest in their religious anxieties and resolves at the time, and that they felt strange and profound exercises. Yet bitter and mortifying experience has taught them that **their** new birth and experimental religion at least was a delusion. How natural to conclude that those of all others are delusions also? They say: ‘the only difference between myself and these earnest Christians is, that they have not yet detected the cheat as I have. They are now not a whit more convinced of their sincerity and of the reality of their exercises than I once was of mine. Yet I know there was no change in my soul; I do not believe that there is in theirs’.

But what shall we say of that large number, who having entered the church with a counterfeit conversion, continue there as formal and dead professors, blinded to their real condition? Their case is, alas, worse if possible than the former. Is Christ offered in the Gospel as a Saviour for lost sinners? They consider themselves as among the found. Is the danger of the unconverted painted in the most alarming colours? It is nothing to them, for they consider themselves among the converted. When Satan gets the “*wood, hay and stubble*” quietly built into God’s spiritual temple, he is best pleased; for he knows that they will probably remain there undisturbed till the day that trieth every man’s work by fire; and then they will be inevitably consigned to everlasting burnings.

R. L. Dabney (1820 – 1898)

## *“Continue in the Faith” – Acts 14:22*

Perseverance is the badge of true saints. The Christian life is not a **beginning** only in the ways of God, but also a **continuance** in the same, as long as life lasts. It is with a Christian as it was with the great Napoleon: he said, “Conquest has made me what I am, and conquest must maintain me.” So, under God, dear brother [or sister] in the Lord, conquest has made you what you are, and conquest must sustain you. Your motto must be, ‘Excelsior’. He only is a true conqueror, and shall be crowned at the last, who continueth ‘til war’s trumpet is blown no more. Perseverance is, therefore, the target of all our spiritual enemies. The **world** does not object to your being a Christian for a time, if she can but tempt you to cease your pilgrimage, and settle down to buy and sell with her in Vanity Fair. The **flesh** will seek to ensnare you, and to prevent your pressing on to glory. “It is weary work being a pilgrim; come, give it up. Am I always to be mortified? Am I never to be indulged? Give me at least a furlough from this constant warfare.” **Satan** will make many a fierce attack on your perseverance; it will be the mark for all his arrows. He will strive to hinder you **in service**: he will insinuate that you are doing no good; and that you want rest. He will endeavour to make you weary of **suffering**, he will whisper, “*Curse God and die*”. Or he will attack your **steadfastness**: “What is the good of being so zealous? Be quiet like the rest; sleep as do others, and let your lamp go out as the other virgins do.” Or he will assail you **doctrinal sentiments**: “Why do you hold to these [definite tenets]? Sensible men are getting more liberal; they are removing old landmarks: fall in with the times.”

Wear your shield, Christian, therefore, close upon your armour, and cry mightily unto God, that by His Spirit you may endure to the end.

C. H. Spurgeon

# Editorial

The foregoing articles in this edition have considered two sorts of ‘Christian’: the backslider, and the false professor. During their times of departure from the Truth, these persons exhibit similar symptoms, and may be difficult to discern. Their respective spiritual conditions however, are different. The backslider departs from the way he knows to be right, and begins to emulate the worldling. The false professor returns to a course he never believed to be wrong, and ceases to impersonate the Christian. The former is a saved soul in an abnormal state of decline. The latter is an unsaved person in their natural state of degeneracy.

Both cases produce the same effect in the minds of those Christians who witness the falling away. As well as the obvious distress and discouragement that is caused, there is also doubt: questions as to the genuineness of those who thus leave the paths of righteousness. When a professed believer for whatever reason forsakes the truth, he becomes at once an object of ambiguity and debate. His testimony is impaired; he has ceased to display that most evident sign of true faith, namely: **continuance**.

The Scriptures make clear that the saints will ever be recognised by certain external proofs: “*by their fruits ye shall know them*” (Matthew 7:20); and there is nothing more conclusive of regeneration than **perennial** fruit, which continues to be consistently borne throughout the Christian’s life. As Christ said, “*Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear **much** fruit; so shall ye be My disciples*” (John 15:8). Those who “*abide*” in a state of fruitfulness evidence discipleship. A patriarch of earlier generations observed that: “*The righteous also shall hold on his way*” (Job 17:9) – those who have been justified by grace will testify to it by maintaining their profession and staying the course. **Perseverance** is ever the the hallmark of the true child of God.

The ‘Perseverance of the saints’ is one of the great works of God’s grace, which He sovereignly accomplishes in the lives of His elect people. This is borne out by Holy Writ, which states that Christ “*became the author of **eternal** salvation unto all them that obey Him*” (Hebrews 5:9); and that the saints “*are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation*” (1 Peter 1:5). This preserving power is entirely of Divine origin, as the Saviour Himself declared: “*those that Thou gavest Me I have kept, and none of them is lost*” (John 17:12). There is no force or circumstance by which the believer can be plucked from the hands of the Almighty (cf John 10:28-29). This spiritual security should be a cause of immeasurable joy and gratitude in the heart of every Christian.

However, the Scriptures also show the place of **human responsibility** in matters of perseverance. Many verses combine to give exhortation: “*keep yourselves in the love of God*” (Jude 21), “*let us not be weary in well doing*” (Galatians 6:9), “*continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of*” (2 Timothy 3:14). No believer can dare to presume upon the grace of God, and use it as license for idleness or inconstancy. Perseverance is a vital and personal matter in which all must fully engage themselves.

The modern Church is blighted by those who depart from the faith, and thereby mar their testimony and deny the Lord that bought them (cf 2 Peter 2:1); but let this distressing trend have at least one positive outcome: let right-thinking Christians be set on their mettle, and increased in determination to persevere, and caused to hold with firmer grasp those things which they have (cf Revelation 3:11). ‘Conversion’ and ‘continuance’ go together: “*he that endureth to the end shall be saved*” (Matthew 10:22). “*God...will render to every man according to his deeds: To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life*” (Romans 2:5-7).