

# THE GOSPEL MAGAZINE

*Editor*

MAURICE HANDFORD

9 Birtlespool Road, Cheadle Hulme, Cheshire SK8 5JZ

*Incorporating the Protestant Beacon and The British Protestant*

---

---

New Series  
No. 1583

JULY — AUGUST 1995

Old Series  
No. 2583

---

---

## *Editorial*

THE PSALMIST set himself one day to count up the benefits he had received from God. He hadn't proceeded very far when he found himself engaged in an impossible task. Psalm 103 opens with a burst of praise as David reviews the wonderful benefits the Lord had bestowed upon him. We could not do better than follow David's example and review the gracious way in which He has blessed us.

We need to cultivate a thankful memory — one which delights to dwell on the thought of God's goodness, mercies and great faithfulness. How prone we are to forget the marvellous things God has done for us! David checks up on himself and exhorts himself, "forget not all His benefits". We too have received great benefits — spiritual, temporal and physical.

David's review resulted in praise, "Bless the Lord, O my soul", and then in resolution, "forget not all His benefits". Here we have the music of a praising soul. The psalm begins and ends with the same words, "Bless the Lord, O my soul". He calls on all his faculties and powers to praise so gracious a God.

The psalmist rejoiced that God satisfied his mouth with good things and that he had been the recipient of the abundance of His provision. In another psalm David expressed his confidence that, "they who seek the Lord shall not want any good thing" (Psalm 34:10). The apostle Paul wrote, "My God shall supply all your need" — what a tremendous encouragement these words have been to all God's people down the years.

Do we count our blessings? Some people tend to count the blessings which others have received and forget their own. We all have abundant cause to be thankful.

# The Hidden Word

A Sermon by the Editor

*“Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee”  
(Psalm 119:11)*

THIS, OF COURSE, is the longest of all Psalms — 176 verses in all, and I always associate it in my mind with William Grimshaw, vicar of Haworth in Yorkshire, during the days of the Evangelical Revival. It is said that when he came to the end of the Prayer Book service he would often give out the 119th Psalm and leave the congregation to sing while he went around the village after the layabouts and drove them into church under the sound of the Gospel. He was a great man and if you ever get hold of his biography read it, it will do you good, because he was a wonderful man — maybe unusual in some of his methods, but God certainly blessed him and used him mightily. This Psalm is also connected with one or two other people in my mind. For instance, I read that in 1819 in a time of stir and turmoil of political crisis, William Wilberforce wrote in his diary these words: “Walked in Hyde Park Corner repeating the 119th Psalm in great comfort” — and oh that we had politicians after the order of Wilberforce, men who knew their God and who knew the Scriptures. Yet one other person comes to mind, that of David Livingstone, and it was said that as a boy of nine he won a Sunday School prize for reciting by heart the 119th Psalm. That was some feat for a boy of nine — that is more than I can profess to have done — the whole of this very wonderful Psalm.

So we come to this Psalm and look particularly at verse 11: “Thy word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against thee.”

Now the theme that predominates in this Psalm is the writer’s reference to the Word of God. He sets his subject in many lights and in different ways. He speaks of the Word as testimonies, as precepts, as statutes, as commandments and judgments. He excels in breadth of thought, in depth of meaning and in height of fervour. Read the Psalm with that in mind. It is a Psalm in praise of the Word of God and you will come to realise that here is the fruit of deep experiences, of careful observation and earnest meditation, and the Psalmist had a great desire here to please God and to live a life that was glorifying to Him. Our text tells us how it is possible to do this, how that the Word of God is the best antidote to sin. So I have three very simple headings to put before you.

**Our text speaks first of all of the best of Books**, and the text begins, “Thy word”. Now there are many wonderful books in the world, but the Word of God is supreme, it is unique. We are grateful for the great men of the past and for the great writings that can be found in our libraries. I remember years ago as a curate in Dublin often going in to the library of the University into the long gallery

in Trinity College and seeing those wonderful volumes there included, amongst them the Book of Kells. Well, all other books pale into insignificance alongside the Scriptures, because this Book that we hold in our hands called the Bible is worth more than all the others put together. This Book is wonderful and makes all the others of just minor importance.

What makes it so different and why is it the best of books? Because of its **Source**, because of its **Origin** — it comes from God Himself, in a very real sense God is the Author. He employed many writers in compiling it, about forty altogether, and they wrote in a period of some 1,600 years, but God Himself superintended it, and He was the Author. Listen to what Paul says on this question of the Bible and its inspiration. He says: "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works." Listen to the testimony of Peter: "Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." Yes, it is the best of Books because of its Source. It is God-given. It is the best of Books because of its stability. Although it was written centuries ago it is relevant to us today. It is absolutely up-to-date, it is a contemporary Book, and that surely is a remarkable thing in itself, because man's writings often need revision, but in God's Book there is no need for that, because of its stability. Look at verse 89 in this wonderful Psalm where it says, "For ever, O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven". Listen again to the testimony of Peter. He says: "The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: but the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you." Yes, but listen to a higher testimony, that of our Lord Jesus Christ Himself: "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my word shall not pass away."

Because God is the Author it is authoritative, it is **reliable** and it is **accurate**. But there is yet another reason why it is the best of Books, because first, of its Source and because of its stability, but thirdly because of its sufficiency. The Bible contains **all that we need to know for faith and practice**. It tells us what we must believe, and it tells us how we must live. There is no situation that confronts us but we shall find in this Book the help, the guidance and the wisdom that we need, and it is all to be found in the best of Books. When the Queen was crowned, part of the historical ceremonial was the handing to her of the Bible with these words: "Receive this Book, the most valuable thing this world affords. Here are the lively oracles of God." "The best of Books." Is it so in your estimation?

Notice something else. **The text speaks, not only of the best of Books, but the best of places**. What did he do with the Word of God? "Thy word have I hid in my heart" — and the heart is the best place for the Word. He did not put it away in a cupboard or a drawer or a trunk, but he hid it, he stored it away in his heart. He placed the Word of God at the very centre of his life, at the very core of his being. It entered his heart.

Now David, of course, had a very small Bible compared with ours. He had the first five books, what we know as the Pentateuch, he had some of the historical and some of the poetical books, but even the Old Testament was not complete at this point and the New Testament was not yet thought of, but notice how he treasured what he had and what he did with it. He hid it in his heart. It was a treasure to be preserved. It was a choice seed to be dropped in a fruitful field to bring forth an abundant harvest and he hid it in his heart. And I do like the comment of Dr. Alexander MacLaren. He says, "He is a shallow Christian who has no secret depth to his religion", and there is no depth to our religion unless the Word dwells deep in the heart, and if you want to know how to become a strong Christian how shall we answer? I put it this way. First of all we must take a Bible in our hand. The Bible in the drawer will do us no good until we take it in our hand and we read it. Get a Bible in good print, take it in your hand and read it, that is the first step. Secondly, we must get it into our head, and the old Collect helps us here where it says, "Grant that we may read, mark, learn and inwardly digest", and here the Psalmist in this long Psalm a little further on (verse 18) says: "Open thou mine eyes, that I may see wondrous things out of thy law." Take it in your hand. Take it into your head. There is something more. "Hide it in your heart." You see, head knowledge, of itself, is good, but it is not enough. It must enter deeper. It must come into the deepest recesses of our heart. Let it drop down right into the very centre of our being. So you see again the Psalmist in verse 15 says: "I will meditate in thy precepts, and have respect unto thy ways." You see how deep it is going now. It is not only in his hand or in his head, it is in his heart, the very centre of his being. This is what we need to do to meditate in the Word. The Bible has many illustrations put before us. What about Job? He said, "I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food". Or what about Jeremiah? He says, "Thy words were found and I did eat them and they were unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart". And when Joshua succeeded Moses as the leader of the children of Israel God said this to him: "This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth but thou shalt meditate therein day and night that thou mayest make thy way prosperous and then thou shalt have good success."

But there is something else to set before you. It is the best of Books and it must be in the best place, but **here is the best of reasons**. The text goes on, "that I might not sin against thee". The Word hid in the heart will have a sanctifying effect upon the life. The hidden Word will show itself in our life. If it does not, then we have read the Word of God to little profit. If it is within it will be shown outside of us by the lives we live, the way we conduct ourselves, and so on. But, confining ourselves for a moment to the text itself, "that I might not sin against thee". If we read the Bible it causes us to recognise sin. Our tendency is to excuse sin, but the Bible makes us see sin for what it is, the thing that God hates, that which made the Cross of Christ necessary, and when we read the Bible we discover that God requires truth in the inward parts. This, you remember, was

**the experience of David, and how tragically he fell into sin, but when he came to repentance how he really got down on his knees and said, "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy great goodness, according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions" and he goes on to say, "thou requireth truth in the inward parts", and as we read it we shall pray, "Quicken my conscience till it feels the loathsomeness of sin".** The Bible read and the Bible received into the heart does this quickening work and it makes us hate sin. By nature we love it, but once we begin to delve deeply into the Word we shall find ourselves loving what God loves and hating what He hates. Look at verse 9, in this very section of the Psalm. David asks, "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word". But as we pass on in the Scriptures we are finding it points to the One who has dealt with the very question of sin. You remember John Baptist, the great witness and testimony. There came a day when John was beginning to see his ministry recede because there had come to the forefront the Lord Jesus Christ and John pointed men away from himself to Christ and said, "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world".

Christ is the great Subject of the Bible, both in the Old Testament and the New. He is the One whom God appointed to be the Saviour and the Redeemer of men. "Behold the Lamb of God." We go on to read in the Scriptures: "If any man says he has not sinned he deceiveth himself and the truth is not in him. But if he confesses his sin God is faithful and just to forgive sin and to cleanse from all unrighteousness." Again John says, "If any man sin we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous and He is the propitiation for our sins".

Yes, here is the Word of God so immensely practical, but if you want to be a strong Christian there are no two ways about it, you must be conversant with the Scriptures and hide the Word in your heart. Read it daily and make it a matter of conscience if you want to grow in the Christian life.

Now, of course, there are many causes contributing to the decline of Bible reading; the pressure of modern life is one thing which tends to crowd out the Word. But if we allow it to do so, well, our Christian life will become enfeebled. There is nothing can take the place of the old Book. There is no substitute for reading the text of Scripture itself. You may read all the religious periodicals and magazines and literature and Bible-reading notes, but unless you read the text itself, you read to comparatively little profit. There is no substitute for the Word of God.

What a wonderful Book, then, the Bible is! It has come to us down the centuries. Men have done their very best at times to exterminate it, to burn it, to eradicate it, but it lives on as strong as ever. It comes to us because God has watched over it, as well as written it, and it is the instrument that the Holy Spirit uses in the development of our Christian lives.

May we treasure this Volume more and more. May we not only treasure it, but may we use it, and make practical use of it. Use the Book that we may become men and women that God wants us to be.

There is a chorus the children used to sing in the Sunday School, very simple, but we could do well to heed it —

“Hide God’s Word in your heart,  
Hide God’s Word in your heart,  
His Word of love sent from above,  
Hide God’s Word in your heart.”

Here, then, is the best of Books — Thy Word; the best of places — the heart; and the best of reasons — “That I might not sin against thee”.

M.H.

## For Younger Readers

CARINE MACKENZIE

### PERSONAL RECOMMENDATION

WE HAVE JUST COME BACK from a holiday on one of the Canary Islands. We booked it from a travel brochure and did not really know what to expect. But just before we left a friend came round to our house with a couple of maps and some photos. She had been to the same place a few months before.

She gave us tips about where to go and what to see, and the best place to eat. On our first evening we wondered where we would go for our meal. “*Marina said that the El Patio Restaurant was very good. We could try it.*” So on her personal recommendation we went to the restaurant and enjoyed a lovely meal.

We might have discovered the restaurant in a tourist guide or we might have come across it in the passing. But having it personally recommended made us go there with much more confidence. Marina was happy to tell us something that had worked for her and we benefited from it.

Are we personally recommending the Gospel and the wonderful provision of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ to others? Can we tell other people that Jesus Christ is a great Friend — you would find Him a great Friend too?

The Psalmist urges his friends to taste and see that God is good. He recommends it as something worth trying. Not until we had actually tried the restaurant for ourselves could we truly appreciate how good it was. Not until we actually trust in Jesus Christ for ourselves, do we know what a wonderful Saviour He is.

“*There are some wonderful beaches along the south coast. You should try them,*” she told us. “*But the road is really dreadful — far worse than a farm track — very rough.*”

One day we decided to look for these lovely beaches. We followed the directions on the map and turned off the main road on to a cinder track — what a