

**Record of Sermons delivered during the month of**  
**November 2022**

(added progressively for each Sunday)

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(see following pages)

Delivered Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> November, 2022

2 Corinthians 2:14-3:6

## True Messengers & Counterfeits

Per S Olyott

*2 Corinthians 2:17*

***17For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ.***

It can be easy to lose the gist of 2 Corinthians as we look piece by piece at the details, but the threads can be 'picked up' as we continue with Chapter 2 Verse 14.

By now, we all should be quite clear in our understanding of the nature of the city of Corinth. It was a large port – incredibly immoral. A cesspool of ungodliness and immorality. Even the local unconverted recognised that Corinth was a bad place. Despite all its theatres; medical schools; and its culture, none the less it was wretched in its immorality.

So Paul has gone there and he has preached and there has been a church formed. Just through the straight forward preaching of Scripture. Because that is the power of the Gospel. All sorts of people even from the most awful of backgrounds have become Christians. This is the church at Corinth, that he is writing to. It's Paul who has led them to Christ – through the preaching of the Gospel.

The sad thing is that sometimes there are tensions between Christians. That's the case here! Between Paul and these people – who owe so much to him. There are a number of reasons for the tension: one is that they feel let down, because having come back to the church to sort out some problems and at that point promising to return directly, not having been able to fulfil this promise (he's explained all about that); while the other cause of tension was the people who had come to the church since Paul left it. These were the self proclaimed 'super' apostles.

They in fact, were saying the most spiteful things about Paul. There were three of them in particular. They were saying, "Now look at us. We are full of confidence. We know what we're doing and why we are doing it. Having expertise and being powerful preachers. Look at that Paul. He really is just a pathetic figure. He's incompetent and so weak. We are powerful, whereas he has no appeal – charisma. Besides we've got these 'letters' from people elsewhere who have said that we are qualified Ministers. Paul? We've only got his word for it.

So now Paul will drop the subjects he's been talking about and he will address these criticisms. Now it is actually a lengthy digression, – right through almost to Chapter seven – but none the less very important.

It's importance is particularly relevant to young people, who have become Christians in our local surroundings. It would be most pleasant for we older ones that they continue to be with us. But circumstances commonly occur where – for employment opportunities for example – they need to move away. To other places in our country or even the world. They will want to look for a 'gospel' church to attend. Trying one and then another and even others to find a spiritual 'home'. Even then they may be duped, misled and fooled. Because they don't know a true messenger from a counterfeit. (The subject of this sermon!)

A study of 2 Corinthians, and particularly this passage this morning and in a few week's time, will go a long way towards finding out what the great difference is. Unfortunately, experience shows, that most people who look like 'gospel' ministers aren't! Which is why Paul says, what he says in verse 17: <sup>17</sup> *For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word, ... like so many!* Most Bible preachers are not Gospel preachers. We'll see why shortly.

This is why it's an important passage. Your spiritual life depends on the sort of ministry you receive and you could find yourself in a situation where you are not receiving a message from a true minister of the Gospel. Paul will tackle this in three ways: first of all he will give us some 'pictures'; then talk about letters; and then use an alternative to both these techniques because there are some things that can't be explained easily by words.

His 'pictures' Chapter 2, Verses 14-17: <sup>14</sup> *But thanks be to God, (he says – as he often does) who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, ...* (now in AD 71 the Roman Emperor Vespasian came back to Rome – at the conclusion of his winning the Great Jewish Revolt – which began in Jerusalem in AD 66. What a momentous day that was for the citizens of Rome! Such a day that you can actually go to Rome, today, and see the monuments that were erected on that occasion. Still standing after 2000 years. Vespasian arrived back in Rome with his son Titus – nothing to do with the Titus in the Bible. They had defeated the Jewish Rebellion in Palestine. They had 'put down' the Jews. They had destroyed Jerusalem. They had scattered the Jews throughout the world – where most of them still remain today. It was a tremendous victory after such a long siege.

There had been terrible bloodshed in Palestine. But most of it had been Jewish blood not Roman and he came back to Rome with hordes of 'prisoners of war'. What a triumph it was! All Rome 'came out' and many of the surrounding provinces. It was a great, great celebration. The crowds thronged the streets. Vespasian and his son rode proudly along the streets on horse back leading these poor prisoners in chains. Many who would be put to death to please the crowd. That's what Romans meant when they talked about a *triumphal procession*.)

<sup>14</sup> *But thanks be to God, (says Paul) who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, ...* So Paul's 'picture' is of triumph! Yet people are saying of Paul. "This is very odd – what you are saying. Aren't you the man who when you went to Corinth – you left behind tensions there? Aren't you the man who had to flee from Ephesus be-

cause things became too hot for you?” (As has already been mentioned in Chapters 1 & 2.) “Aren’t you the man who went to Troas and was so unsettled emotionally that you couldn’t settle there and get on with your preaching? Aren’t you the man who went to Macedonia in a state of complete anxiety, waiting for the Biblical Titus to come back to give you some news? And yet you are talking about always going around in a triumph of the magnitude of that of Vespasian?” Yet this is exactly Paul’s ‘picture’! But ... the triumph isn’t his!

<sup>14</sup> *But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, ...* Paul’s picture is: that God in Christ is leading the triumph. So where is Paul in this procession? Is he one of the Generals? Where is he in the procession? He’s not THE General – that’s God. And there is the Son of God – like Vespasian and his son, Titus. But where is Paul? You ‘see’ all the generals go by and all the lesser officers. All the great cohorts who have won all the battles of the past four years. Now you come to the ‘prisoners in chains’. There he is! That’s Paul’s ‘picture’.

A very important ‘picture’, because these ‘super apostles’, who have come into the Corinthian church: place themselves with the generals. They were triumphalist. Everything was great. That was their verbal banner. It was ‘great’. They had ‘great’ meetings. ‘Great’ preaching, ‘great’ characters and ‘great’ results. ‘Great’ influence. Everything was ‘great’. But here is Paul and he is among the captives. Captured by God in Christ! Taken wherever God in Christ would like to take him – as a captive. That’s Paul’s ‘picture’. Not an ounce of triumphalism in it! That’s why he was in Corinth, Ephesus, Troas and Macedonia. As the captive of God. Not strutting around in great triumphalism and success or majesty, but simply being taken where God took him.

In a ministry, nonetheless, (Verse 14) which made its presence felt.

<sup>14</sup> *But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere.*

In the Roman triumphal procession, there were people who scattered flowers, petals and fragrant herbs. So there were not only bands to listen to and a wonderful parade to see, but also an aroma to smell. Sometimes even incense was burnt. All the senses were appealed to. “Although I’m just one of these pitiable captives,” says Paul, “My ministry is not without effect. Because wherever God leads me – the one who is captured by His Gospel. He spreads the aroma of this knowledge of Him.

They had experienced that in Corinth, of course. People had come to know God through the preaching of a pitiful man. They had seen that in Ephesus. The Word of God had come to the whole of that province of Asia, through the preaching of a pitiful man. The great door of opportunity had been opened in Troas and then in Macedonia. He himself was poor and to be despised and nothing in particular. But his ministry had tremendous effect! He had actually brought men and women into the knowledge of ... God. Fellow Christians – God is the centre of our message. God is all our joy. Our message starts with God; comes from God; and leads to God. The point of our mes-

sage is to bring men and women not to themselves, but to God. That's exactly what Paul's message was doing.

It was dividing his hearers. Look at verses 15 & 16. <sup>15</sup> *For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, <sup>16</sup> to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things?* This pitiful Paul. Despised, incompetent, ill, man. Preaches: As he preaches he preaches about Christ. Some people react to Christ as being dead and buried. They spit, turn their face away, and walk off. They are spiritually dead. To them Christ is dead. They remain fixed in their state of spiritual death. Continuing to be propelled along that pathway.

Paul preaches Christ! As he preaches others come to see that Christ is alive. That this man is serving a risen Saviour – who is active in the world today! They come to believe, on God's own authority, that Christ is alive in the power of an endless life. He is able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him.<sup>1</sup> They call out to the living Christ. They look forward now to His Second Coming and the Resurrection Day. Eternal life! The very same message rejected by many is the aroma of life. "I as a mere man," says Paul, "divide the world. My words. Pitiful as I am, propel people along their path – their chosen path of hell." (Because you can chose hell – which is what you do if you remain unconverted.) "Or it lifts people up to glory by the risen Christ. But nobody is indifferent because of this message!" Who is equal to this task, so that by speaking words the world is divided. As divided as it will be on the Judgment Day. Who is equal to such a task as this? "Yes," says Paul, "But I am very different from the many!" Verse 17, "They peddle the Word of God."

So we are back at the 'picture' of that procession. The crowds have gathered hours beforehand. Here are people selling cold drinks. Others selling other refreshments. Some are selling flags and bunting to be waved. Lots of people seeking to offer goods to sell. They are selling their wares because there is something in it for them. That's why people peddle things in the street.

Then there are those super apostles who have arrived in Corinth and are using the Name of Christ to gather a congregation and open the Bible. But their motivation is that there is something in it for them. Some influence or fame. Something. Perhaps even material profit. "I'm not like that," says Paul, Verse 17, "We are not, as so many, peddling the Word of God. We speak from the heart. We speak as ambassadors – not our own message." (As we shall see later in this letter. "They preach another Jesus and another Gospel.") While Paul only preaches the message that God has given through Christ. "We speak in the sight of God in Christ. As we speak, we speak with the consciousness that God in Christ is present as we speak."

Those are his 'pictures'. Next time we will come to the subject of 'letters'. Chapter 3, Verses 1 to 6.

1 Hebrews 7:25 (KJV) <sup>25</sup>Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost (or at all times) those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them. (ESV)

[2114]

**Pray for God's grace, through the Spirit of Christ to live in us all, that we, may live the new life made possible by the Spirit, for all the saints present today. Amen.**

**Delivered Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> November, 2022**

(No sermon recorded)

Delivered Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> November, 2022

2 Corinthians 2:14-3:6

## True Messengers & Counterfeits – Part 2

Per S Olyott

2 Corinthians 3:5

***<sup>5</sup> Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God,***

Paul having made his explanation of how to recognise a true Minister of the Gospel using 'pictures', (the pictures of a triumphal procession and the peddlers in a market place) turns to address the issue of 'those letters'.

Chapter 3:1-3. These opponents of Paul were saying, "What a poor man he is. Ask him for proof that he is a Gospel Minister. All he'll tell you is some story about how Christ met him on the Damascus road and appointed him to preach. He hasn't any letters or any diplomas or certificates. Anything that he can actually give us to prove that he is really a Gospel Minister. We're not like that," say these super apostles, "we've got letters from important people. Who tell us that we are true preachers of the Gospel. We can actually give them to you. Of course, when we go off to other places – as we will do to start churches there - we will ask you for similar letters. So that they in the future will know that we have ministered among you. That you also are commending us!" So wherever they went they carried their Diplomas and letters – their credentials.

Paul had nothing. "So," they say, "when you speak to him. All he will ever do is to spring to his own self defence. But that's all it can be: self defence."

Now we see what is 'behind' Verse 1. <sup>3.1</sup> *Are we beginning to commend ourselves again?* (you see Paul was in a difficult situation: If he said nothing the Corinthian Church would be ruined. While if he did say something then people would say that he was standing up for himself in self defence.) *Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, as some do, letters of recommendation to you, or from you? ...*

<sup>2</sup> *You yourselves are our letter of recommendation, written on our (or your) hearts, to be known and read by all.* (We can be sure that when the Corinthians heard this letter read out. They would have been surprised at this point. Quite suddenly he has said, "You are our letters of commendation.")

What did Paul mean? It's quite clear from the first letter, what he meant: <sup>9</sup> *Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practise homosexuality, <sup>10</sup> nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. <sup>11</sup> And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.* (1 Corinthians 6:9-11)

Paul had come to Corinth and preached. Here were a young couple who were living and sleeping together before marriage. Anyone who does that is on the road to hell. But Paul says, “Well I preached the Gospel. God made it that you were saved. You repented of that sin. You came to Christ. You had your heart washed. You were put right (justified) with God through the Lord Jesus Christ. You were saved by Gospel preaching – my Gospel preaching.”

Paul could continue: “Some of you were idolaters: you bowed down before idols, which were not the true God. Some of you were adulterers. You were in an extramarital relationship. Some of you were in a homosexual relationship. Some of you were thieves – at the market or in your business. Some were covetous – you had your eyes on what someone else owned. Some of you were drunkards – you drank and lost control. Some were revilers – you used scornful or abusive language against each other. Some of you were swindlers – you had in your pocket, money belonging to others. None of you on that road inherited the Kingdom of God. Because anybody who is like that is excluded.” He says.

“But you were washed. You were sanctified. You were justified in the Name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.” This is what he had told them then. Now years later – when Paul is writing to them again – as he is doing in 2 Corinthians. He can think of those people, They were the fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, homosexuals, greedy, thieves, drunkards and revilers. He could point to all these individuals, Who had been changed by his Gospel preaching. “I don’t need any letters. I stake my claim of being a true Minister of Christ on the existence of the Corinthian Church.”

“You are manifestly an epistle (KJV).” he says, verse 3. (In the New Testament you have letters and epistles. Letters are to ‘you’, epistles are what we might call ‘open letters’.) “You are manifestly an epistle of Christ, ministered by us. Christ took up His pen and wrote a letter. The letter was you but the pen was me.” That’s what he says. “Not written in ink but by the Spirit of the living God. As I preached. God came into you. Christ wrote on your heart. You were changed – inside out! Through Gospel preaching – I’m the instrument. What is paper and ink compared with such a letter as that?”

“People were changed. Not just changed but made into new people, by Gospel preaching. I don’t need your letters! There is the proof that I am a minister of Christ: Christ came to you by His Spirit as I ministered.

So, so far we have (from last week) his ‘pictures’ and now we have had his ‘letters’. Now we will conclude this passage with neither ‘pictures’ nor ‘letters’.

Chapter 3, Verses 4, 5 & 6: <sup>4</sup> *Such is the confidence that we have through Christ towards God.* “I’m confident of being a true minister of the Gospel. Not because I’ve stood in a row and measured myself against these other preachers and said that I’m better than they are. But because I have put myself in God’s presence and brought about God’s work through me. That’s the only conclusion I can draw. I don’t,” he says Verse 5, “have any competence in and of myself.”

We see here that the power is not in the preacher. The power is in the Gospel. The power is not in the messenger. The power is in the message.

He preaches a crucified Christ as a crucified man! That's important. The power nonetheless is not in the preacher. Not in the Sunday School teacher. Not in the person who addresses Ministers' meetings or any other religious meetings. The power is in the message. "Not competent in myself. I'm a mere man." He says Verse 5. "I use words. But these words save people or destroy them. That power doesn't come from me, but from God.

You might remember in the Old Testament: Jeremiah wrote, and so did Ezekiel. They said the days were coming when there would be a 'new covenant' – a new testament. The days were coming when God's law wouldn't just be written on stone. It would be written on people's hearts. The days were coming when God would work inside people by His Spirit. "When I preach," says Paul, "that's what happens! God has made me – and my friends – competent ministers of the 'new covenant'." Verse 6. "The experiences which people have as I preach are consistent with those previous promises. As I preach: God's Law is written on people's hearts. As I preach, God's Spirit comes into people."

We should at this point, notice that the 'new covenant' does not abolish the Law. The New Covenant does not abolish the Law! All it does is this: (It's wonderful in effect.) It puts the Law in the only place where it will do any good. Right inside you. So you love it. You're taken up with it. It becomes the whole 'motor' of your being (motivation). All those new preachers could do was to come with rules and regulations of the Old Testament Law. Even though it is the Law of God – nevertheless it remains outside you. It's just words – a letter. As long as God's Word – even His Law – remains outside you: you are still on the road to spiritual death. If it is possible for an already spiritually dead man to die even more. You are dying more each day. Whereas it is the Spirit which gives life.

So what have we learnt? Just this: A message which does not change people into new people is not the Gospel message. Many people are being imbibed into Christianity. Christianised: taking on a Christian flavour. But they are not being made into new people. Because the message they are hearing is not the Gospel message. A message that does not change people into new people is not the Gospel message. The Gospel message doesn't just alter people. It makes them new! It doesn't just reform them as a new version of the old person. Much more radical than that! A message that does not change people – making them into new people – is not the Gospel message. That is the first thing we're to learn from this passage.

The second is: a messenger whose message does not bring about this change is not a Gospel messenger. If a man is preaching a message and it is not the message that brings about this change – and nobody is ever changed. Ever, ever, ever! It's not the Gospel message and he's not a Gospel messenger.

Before we close a few words about the New Covenant: God's programme has existed from eternity. He covenanted in eternity to save the people. Father and Son covenanted together. He covenanted with us to save us through Christ. Who would have ever believed that He would save us by such grace? That's God's covenant. God's covenant is seen in the Old Testament. Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness. (Genesis 15:6) But we see it in all its fullness; all its beauty; all its colour; and all its power, since the coming of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

The believers of the Old Testament times were not in a different covenant from us. We are the children of Abraham through faith in Christ Jesus – the New Testament says so. So the Covenant has a historic length. It was not something that started when the Lord was made incarnate, through Mary. It's history is right back to eternity. Also the Covenant has an ethnic base. It's not just a Covenant for a few Jews. It's a Covenant for all who believe in Christ. They become fellow citizens with the saints. Members of the commonwealth of 'Israel' – literally, the people of God in all ages and races. Inheritors of all the promises. The God of Abraham is their God as well. It is the Gospel which brings men and women – who have faith in Jesus Christ – into all the Covenant privileges of which the 66 Books of the Bible speak so fully.

Our hymn is referenced to 1 Peter 2:9. It's about our Covenant privileges and therefore our responsibilities. Rejoice! 296, *Church of God elect and glorious, holy nation, chosen race; called as God's own special people, royal priests and heirs of grace: ...*

Lord we thank you for the Gospel of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Of whom we are not ashamed. It's the power of God to Salvation. To everyone who believes: to the Jew first and also to the Gentile. We also thank you, Lord, that in this Gospel the righteousness of God is displayed from faith to faith. As it is written: the just shall live by faith. We give you thanks for your mercy and your wisdom and pray that we will live now as "children of the light". In Jesus Name, Amen.

[1977]

**Pray for God's grace, through the Spirit of Christ to live in us all, that we, may live the new life made possible by the Spirit, for all the saints present today. Amen.**

**Galatians 3:1-14**

**The Westminster Confession**

***Galatians 3:5***

***<sup>5</sup> Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith—***

Since newly re-established under the authority of the PCA in WA, we are experiencing a period of greater, visible support from the wider church. Not only with the provision of qualified Ministers to conduct our bi-monthly Communion Services, but also to provide guest preachers each other month in between. Next week will be the first of these in the person of the Rev. Paul Bloomfield.

In our usual series of Sermons (2 Corinthians in recent times) I have chosen to present otherwise lengthy sermons on a particular passage over two weeks. The ongoing plan would have meant that the first of such a pair of presentations would have been today and the conclusion would have to have been delayed for the later week – to provide for Paul's visit next week. Consequently another pair of sermon parts would be straddled over the special Christmas Sermon – since all sermons to near the end of January are already fully prepared.

To ameliorate these minor issues, I will break the usual pattern and preach on an occasional topic today. The Westminster Confession.

While our topic is the Westminster Confession, which was established, firstly in 1647, as the subordinate standard of the Church of Scotland – the 66 books of the Holy Bible being the primary standard of faith & doctrine. Nevertheless we need to go further back to begin our story.

The earliest records we have of the early Christian churches are the letters of the Apostles, Paul, Peter & John. Even in these earliest of times it was clear that false teachers were active in the establishing churches. The Reformation Study Bible has scholarly introductions to all 66 Books which begin with the heading of:

**Overview.**

(This is the entry for the 1<sup>st</sup> (general) Epistle of John.)

*Author:* The Apostle John

*Purpose:* To warn against the false teaching that Christ had not actually come in the flesh and to encourage a lifestyle appropriate for followers of the incarnate Christ.

*Date:* AD 85-95<sup>2</sup>

*Key Truths:*

- a. Receiving salvation from God results in righteous living, and especially in love for fellow believers.
- b. Jesus was fully human.
- c. Many who claim to follow Christ are not true followers.
- d. Believers must be ready to examine themselves to see whether their faith in Christ is genuine.<sup>3</sup>
- e. Full assurance of salvation is appropriate for those whose lives give evidence that they are living for Christ.

Since those early days for over 13 Centuries, the decline, especially in the so called Western World, was catastrophic. It became practically impossible to recognise the Apostolic Church in the official 'established' church – which had become the worldwide Church of Rome. Traditions and the cumulative dictates of titular heads (Popes) – usurping the title of Christ as the only head of His Church – had first become equal to an eventually superior to the Word of God. In non-Latin speaking congregations the Word of God was not accessible to the ordinary people. And errors in translation of the original Greek to Latin made further error customary.<sup>4</sup>

Reform was urgently needed! For years there had been 'grass roots' simmering, which was given little attention or credit by the established church or the general population. But the unique, providential circumstances of Luther's appointment at the University of Wittenberg as Professor of Theology in 1512 and the international spread of his regained insight into the principles of Christian salvation which this permitted in academic circles, fostered a revolt of reform. Which we like to call THE Reformation.

This once hidden, but now revealed, revolt, developed through Europe. But not without vigorous reaction by the Church of Rome. In particular the Reformers and their devotees in France – called Huguenots – were mercilessly hunted and generally eliminated, while others in England and Scotland and other countries, suffered various forms of persecution.

An early effect of this was a gathering of religious, reformed exiles – including in the early stages the French, reformed theologian John Calvin. They gathered in 'neutral' Geneva. Here, under the guidance of Calvin, the developing formalisation of the tenets of the reformation of the Christian Faith was established. Especially through the writing of Calvin's, 'the Institutes of the Christian Religion'.

2 This was later than the letters from Paul. Even at the earlier time Paul makes it clear that false teaching was occurring. See our current studies of 2 Corinthians.

3 See the studies on the first part of 1 John. Where the identification of a true Christian CAN be made by observing their 'birthmarks' received at and by the grace of the 'new birth' in Christ. See item 10 of 'downloads' on our web-site

4 Jerome's rendering of what should have been 'repent' as 'do penance' introduced the scourge of 'works' righteousness as a major tenet of the faith. **μετανοεω** (metanoeo) – *change of mind, repentance*. Also the error in getting the right idea of 'righteous from God' – which Luther identified probably in making his own translation from the Greek into the 'heart' language of his 'flock': German.

The maturation of the expression of Protestantism developed in Europe. One example was that of Holland/Belgium/Germany. Where further refinement occurred with the establishment of a system of 'Standards', where the summary of reformed belief, based solely on Scripture – in fact the 'whole counsel of God' – was rendered as a Confession and supported by the educational aid of a Catechism. Such as the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism. (Note that in today's Service we use as our prayer of intercession the Heidelberg Catechism's phrase by phrase expansion of the The Lord's Prayer.)

Unfortunately the incursion of false teaching began to occur in these areas. Five areas of 'remonstrance' were promoted by the false teachers. Considerable effort was expended to refute these heresies. The Synod of Dort was a year-long (1618/19) examination of the false doctrine of salvation of Jacobus Arminius<sup>5</sup>.

Following the development of formal Reformation standards in Europe. Many former exiles returned to their home countries, where developments continued.

In England other factors were current as well. The developing struggle for supremacy of Monarch and Parliament proceeded for several centuries. And in 1533 Henry VIII encouraged the English Parliament to pass the Act in Restraint of Appeals, which denied papal jurisdiction in England and ended appeals of court cases to Rome. The 1534 Act of Supremacy then recognised the king as the Supreme Head of the Church in England with 'full power and authority' to 'reform' the institution and 'amend' all errors and heresies.

There were many 'divines' in England who had adopted the ideas of the Reformation in Europe. One was the Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranmer. After Henry's death, he began to prepare and formalise the reforms that Henry had allowed after 1534. This became the 42 Articles of the Church of England (1553), a set of doctrinal formulas defining the dogmatic position of the Church of England on current religious controversies. All clergy, schoolmasters, and degree candidates in the universities were compelled to subscribe to the articles, which were later reduced to 39. On paper at least, Church of England Clergy still subscribe to these articles.

The struggle for power between King and Parliament continued and came to a head with the dissatisfaction with Charles I and the resulting civil war. England became a protectorate under Oliver Cromwell – a strong supporter of the Reformation. There were many of influence with similar views who were collectively called Puritans. Through Cromwell, Parliament in 1643, called upon "learned, godly and judicious Divines" to meet at Westminster Abbey in order to provide advice on issues of worship, doctrine, government and discipline of the Church of England. Their meetings, over a period of five years, produced the Confession of Faith, as well as a Larger Catechism and a Shorter Catechism. Officially called, The 1647 Standards and Confession of Faith of the Westminster Assembly of Divines.<sup>6</sup> For more than three hundred years,

5 Both Arminius (1560–1609) and Calvin (1509–1564) were dead by the time of this Synod (1618–1619)

6 The assembly was made up of 30 laymen (20 from the House of Commons and 10 from the House of Lords), 121 English clergymen, and a delegation of Scottish Presbyterians.

various churches around the world have adopted<sup>7</sup> the confession and the catechisms as their standards of doctrine, subordinate to the Bible.

It is of note that the 39 Articles of the Church of England were the starting point for the work of the Assembly of Divines and these articles were essentially affirmed and developed into the Confession. But the Confession did seek to change the episcopal<sup>8</sup> form of church governance to that which is generally called Presbyterian. In particular the English Monarch was no longer to be the 'head' of the Church.

Before the work of the Assembly could be passed into law by Parliament.<sup>9</sup> The Monarchy was re-established in the person of Charles II and the Church of England retained its earlier form. However the delegation of Scottish Presbyterians who were invited to join the Assembly took the whole confession including the 'proof texts', back to the Scottish Parliament, where it was enacted initially in 1649 in its entirety.<sup>10</sup> For most of the past 373 years it has been the 'formula' by which all Ministers and Elders of a Presbyterian Church define their faith and practice.

The Westminster Confession, clearly benefited from the development of the Reformation begun in Europe. It was able to incorporate the result of the care and diligence of the Synod of Dort which emphatically refuted the heresy of Arminius.<sup>11</sup>

Characteristically the ubiquitous and remorseless sin of mankind seeks to undermine the understanding and purposes of God. More so as time passes. This has been the result with respect to adherence to the Church Standards so far described. Alleged Christians, even alleged reformed Christians, want their own standards. Creating yet another heresy – often repeating those that have already been thoroughly discredited. Creating a religious doctrine and practice which suits them. The sin of mankind is so common that they easily find many supporters. John has said: <sup>5</sup> *They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them.* ... (1 John 4:5)

Even churches that claim adherence to a Confession may drift. In Scotland from time to time deviations occurred. In the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Scottish immigrants to Australia brought with them the particular 'flavour' of their faith which was current at their time

7 The Westminster Confession of Faith was modified and adopted by [Congregationalists](#) in England in the form of the [Savoy Declaration](#) (1658) and by [Particular Baptists](#) in the form of the [Second London Baptist Confession](#) (1677/1689). English Presbyterians, Congregationalists, and some others, would together come to be known as [Nonconformists](#), because they did not conform to the [Act of Uniformity \(1662\)](#) establishing the Church of England as the only legally approved church, though they were in many ways united by their common confessions, built on the Westminster Confession.

8 (of a Church) governed by or having bishops.

9 A delay of several years occurred when the secular Parliament, in being presented with the completed Confession and Catechisms, required that they continue work to provide a set of Biblical 'proof texts'. Before this was finished the Monarchy was restored and the Confession for use by the Church of England was abandoned.

10 The Confession of Faith Agreed upon by the Assembly of Divines at Westminster, with the assistance of Commissioners from the Church of Scotland, as a part of the Covenanted Uniformity in Religion betwixt the Churches of Christ in the kingdoms of Scotland, England, and Ireland. Approved by the General Assembly 1647, and ratified and established by Acts of Parliament 1649 and 1690, as the public and avowed Confession of the Church of Scotland, with the proofs from the Scripture.

11 A summary of the findings of the Synod of Dort has been called (somewhat misleadingly) the Five Points of Calvinism with the acronym of T.U.L.I.P. See the detailed comparison of this summary with the Westminster Confession found at Item 9 of the 'downloads' page of our web-site.

and in the part of Scotland they came from. In the Colonies and even in various regions within them, variations could be found in religious practice.

But in 1901, in the worldly spirit of 'Commonwealth' that was abroad politically, The Presbyterian Church of Australia (1901) was founded, by an Act of Parliament calling this new church The United Church. All 'differences' were discretely overlooked. To facilitate this, detailed discussion of doctrine – in the form of the Westminster Confession – were minimised.

By 1972 – when I was first ordained as an Elder – the “formula” that I signed had no mention of the doctrinal standards of the Westminster Confession. Further, in Western Australia at least, theologians trained in the 'new orthodoxy' inspired by German academics of the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, were appointed to train new Ministers of the Presbyterian Church. The so called 'liberal' theology – which brought into question the truth of God's Word, the Bible – that was established in most denominations in WA, was equally present in the local Presbyterian Church. With no full dependence on the Bible or researched and agreed clear statements of what we believe, there was only a nebulous understanding of belief, but a desire for strength of numbers only. So, in 1977 – The Uniting Church!

A relative few Congregations of the Presbyterian Church in WA continued as such. But a return to true Reformation doctrine was still to come. This began, Australia wide, in earnest in the mid '80's' and is still continuing. My second ordination as Elder in 2020 included the Westminster Confession in the 'formula' I signed!

Today it is hard to find a true example of the Reformation being faithfully taught and followed. Many single subject Congregations; corruptions of once orthodox denominations; personal cults. Even straight out 'synagogues of Satan' as the Confession describes. But not Congregations worthy of the name that Luther preferred – Evangelicals. The true Reformation so necessary in 1512 and so much more necessary today!

[1872]

**Pray for God's grace, through the Spirit of Christ to live in us all, that we, may live the new life made possible by the Spirit, for all the saints present today. Amen.**