

The Origin and Witness of the churches with which John Warburton was in communion

Not only was John Warburton in association with the denomination of Strict Baptists called "Gospel Standard", he was, to all intents and purposes one of the founders of this body which came into being through William Gadsby, John Kershaw and the author of the present Autobiography. It is not easy to describe in precise and happy terms all the distinguishing features which originally bound together, in strong spiritual fellowship, these remarkable men and which issued in a definite and distinctive witness; but from a careful study of the situation (and especially the state of the churches at the time) these facts emerge:

The teaching of the Puritans with their insistence on the need of a solemn, deep and powerful work of grace in the experience of their hearers, their concern that a profound conviction of sin should be made known by the Spirit's indwelling, and their earnest desire that this should be followed by a manifestation of God's love to the soul—all these weighty matters had largely lost their influence. The zeal for a heartfelt knowledge of Election and the holy fervour for divine teaching made known under the Spirit's power by George Whitefield and his fellow labourers were subjects no longer having the serious and widespread influence they once had. Apathy, lightness and frivolity was rapidly replacing that manifest separation from the world which is so needful a fruit of true godliness, and one cannot help feeling that the Holy Spirit raised up and prompted William Gadsby, John Kershaw and John Warburton to declaim against the lack of spiritual exercise in the ministry and to warn the people in clarion tones of the terrible danger of professing the Name of God without clear evidence of the new birth.

They were men of like passions with ourselves, and those who were satisfied with the "status quo" not only sought to magnify any weaknesses they thought they perceived, but did not scruple in an endeavor to identify them with gross evils of which they were wholly innocent. The charge of Antinomianism, by which these critics understood libertinism, was hurled at them, yet it would be difficult to find men of more consistent walk or more irreproachable conduct.

They and the Gospel Standard denomination they represented were characterized as Hyper-Calvinists antagonistic to all efforts to have the Gospel proclaimed with missionary zeal. True they were witnesses of the gross abuse of much missionary effort, and of missionaries who spread liberal views, and true they rebelled against these things; but the chief Gospel Standard leaders gave glowing tribute to George Whitefield and to those who were identified with him in the mighty outpouring of the Holy Spirit in which these missionaries were instrumentally prominent. They

gave wide publicity to the tributes of John Newton and others to the work under Whitefield; they sought to have their periodical packed with reformed teaching (and the magazine enjoyed phenomenal success with a wide circulation). They also ensured that accounts of Whitefield's experience were circulated both at home and abroad.

As with every other body of Christians there were found amongst them men who deviated from Scriptural doctrine and practice, but these were publicly castigated by their great leaders. No it was not the outpouring of the Holy Spirit they were unconcerned with, but they were mortally afraid of zeal without knowledge.

These three men pioneered a witness for deep spiritual and vital godliness which helped to stem the tide of modernism and false profession at a critical period in the history of the Church. When the inspiration of Scripture and the cardinal-the vital points of the faith of our forefathers and for which the martyrs gave their life blood, were assailed, this body of men, and, in England almost they alone, stood firm for the truth of the Everlasting Gospel.

If in analysing their outlook good men think they see weaknesses, let them not forget or overlook the priceless benefits which resulted from their unflinching stand for truth. Rather may we one and all ply the Throne of Grace that an outpouring of the Holy Spirit may descend and so revive the Churches that numbers may be brought to the foot of the Cross!

Let us, as dear Warburton and his fellow labourers did in their day, express our desires for true religion and a revival of it in our prayers and praises, begging God to

Collect Thy scattered flock once more,
And open wide the Gospel door.
(285 Gadsby's Collection)

and with John Berridge at the death of George Whitefield, may we cry:

O Lord, stir up thy power,
To make the gospel spread;
And thrust out preachers more,
With voice to raise the dead;
With feet to run where thou dost call;
With faith to fight and conquer all.

The flocks that long have dwelt
Around fair Zion's hill,
And thy sweet grace have felt,
Uphold and feed them still;
But fresh folds build up everywhere
And plenteously thy truth declare.
(274 Gadsby's Collection)