

# Book Reviews

## "The Five Points of Calvinism" by William Parks M.A.

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**£4.95 Paperback** (xii + 111 pages)  
Reviewed by Paul Hayden.

This book is a welcome reprint of the substance of five sermons preached by Rev. William Parks B.A., Anglican minister of Openshaw, Manchester during Lent 1856. The original material was published at the request of his hearers, undergoing two editions, the prefaces to both of which are included in this volume. In 1919 a new edition was published by C. J. Farncombe & Sons, London, on behalf of the Sovereign Grace Union with a preface by Henry Atherton. This latest book is effectively a reprint of that edition with a new (rather flimsy) cover with a picture of a bunch of tulips on the front.

Today we live in a world of Arminian "Calvinists", where many churches claim to be "Calvinistic", yet if one should try to examine the ordinary people in the pews of these churches, they turn out to be as Arminian as ever. This proves that whatever is taught in these churches is not true Calvinism at all, because it is not sinking in. The "hard" Calvinist teachings are being discarded and the "loving" Arminian doctrines are the ones being imbibed. The situation was remarkably similar in Parks's day. This book is therefore extremely useful to us today, and shows us how vital it is to stand for the doctrines of sovereign grace, and those alone.

Henry Atherton in his preface writes:

"The present day weakness of the Evangelicals is due to their lack of boldness in proclaiming the doctrines of Free and Sovereign Grace. We live in a day of apostasy, when even those who call themselves Protestants deny the glorious truths of a Triune Sovereign God..."

The book is not a great theological tome of many pages, which the ordinary punter would despair of ever getting to grips with, rather it is a series of homely sermons which Parks gave to his flock to warn and

encourage them amidst the ravenous wolves that seemed to overwhelm the church. The position is no different today.

Parks knew that these sermons would create a stir. In the preface to the first edition he writes:

"I dare say the publication now in your hands will bring down maledictions and denunciations upon my poor head; but these I am used to. As I live before God today, I believe these Sermons to contain the very pith and marrow of His Word; and to Him I commit them."

He goes on to show how vital it is to know the truth rather than to believe a lie. It is as vital as life and death itself. He says of the false professors of his day:

"Ay, when the cold and clammy sweat of death is upon yon doctor's brow; when the voice of yon preacher becomes clogged by approaching dissolution; when this or that idol of the religious world has made the last harangue in favour of free will, and comes to gurgle out his fast-failing breath upon a bed of death, - where, where is his authority, influence or power? Nowhere! Poor, helpless, vanishing sinner, haply terrified with the awful prospect before him, after deceiving and being deceived!"

Indeed in the preface to the second edition in 1858, Parks wrote:

"...but now, just suppose for an instant the bare possibility of your minister, or preacher, or teacher or neighbours, being all wrong! What then?"

Consequently this is seen to be a very up-to-date problem. Today, people would rather blindly believe an eloquent, domineering speaker rather than know the truth for themselves, crying to God to reveal it to them. Such easy, laid-back religion is the scourge of the modern age. These warnings are timely indeed. Hence this book's publication today meets a vital need for all those wanting to re-discover the foundations of the truth of God's electing plan of salvation.

The five sermons in this book deal with each of the five points of Calvinism in turn. They are easy to read and the sermons pull no punches. In the first chapter on **Total Depravity**, Parks says that it is vital to boldly and fearlessly tell man:

"You are a fallen, ruined, and power-



less creature, and until you know it, you are living without hope and without God in the world." (p.4).

I ask, where in the evangelical churches is that preached today? What we hear everywhere today is that man must have some sense of dignity and self-worth. "Oh yes, we're all sinners, but God will forgive us, don't worry about it!"

Parks goes on:

"Be assured, my brethren, that it is the absurd and unscriptural notion of innate power, and strength, and dignity in man, that keeps so many professing Christians in darkness, and hopelessness, and practical infidelity."

Many contemporary issues are dealt with, albeit briefly, but straight to the point. Such as campaign evangelism:

"Great efforts are being made just now to 'convert the masses'. We have 'sermons for the working classes,' and lectures upon all sorts of subjects, serious, comic, and scientific, delivered by men whose zeal is manifestly not according to knowledge, in the hope of reaching 'the million'. But I can tell those reverend and other gentlemen that they are spending their strength for nought. It is not an appeal to the feelings that will ever be blessed by God to the conversion of a soul. God will own nothing but His own Word (Isa. lv:11), and where 'the Word' is faithfully preached no crowds or masses will be found." (p.19).

Or how about the following comment which must surely ring true to all of God's poor flock, ostracised by mainstream evangelicalism:

"Observe the general disinclination to pray, to read the Scriptures, to speak upon serious subjects. Mark that spontaneous mocking smile that passes round nearly all companies when any religious topic is adverted to, and tell me, has there been no fall?" (pp.19-20).

In the chapter on **Unconditional Election**, Parks blows away the notion of the natural man ever being inclined to receive of the things of God, and there being a "common grace" to all:

"To talk of all men experiencing this change (i.e. an experience of God's 'universal grace' - PH) at some time or other of their lives, and of some improving it and others neglecting it, or as some will have it 'sinning away the day of grace,' is to my mind unmitigated nonsense." (pp.28-29).

Another very common idea today is that if anyone cannot get to a church where the doctrines of grace are preached, then it doesn't matter all that much where they go, it is better they go somewhere to "get fellowship" as go nowhere. Parks responds to this:

"Some have got it into their heads that even supposing such men as I allude to do not preach the gospel with the precision that is expected from a 'workman who needeth not be ashamed,' it is better that crowds should go and hear them than not go to any place of worship. This objection is specious. But what is so dangerous to the soul as a false gospel? Whose position is so perilous as his who would explain away God's sovereignty? Whose doom so awful as he who knew his Master's will and did it not? Whose soul in greater jeopardy than the free-willing Pharisee?" (p.30).

How many times have we heard it said that doctrine doesn't matter, so long as we know Jesus? Parks responds, in the context of the doctrine of election:

"Some may be inclined to ask.....Can't we get to heaven without a knowledge of this doctrine?...To which I reply, it augurs badly for the state of the soul to make such objections. I cannot believe that any awakened child of God has ever murmured thus." (p.46).

Parks goes on later:

"You might as well ask me to paint a landscape without trees, water, hills, sky, fields etc., as ask me to 'preach the gospel without electing love or predestinating grace, etc.'" (p.71).

With reference to the doctrine of **Particular Redemption**, Parks makes the important point, to those who say that there are many passages in Scripture that seem to indicate an atonement for all men:

"The universal terms I allude to may be readily made to harmonise with the restrictive; but no man can make the restrictive harmonise with the unlimited." (p.55). The universalist must come to terms with the passages which restrict the extent of the atonement to the elect only, rather than simply ignoring them as they are wont to do.

Another common disposition today is that of what the Westminster Confession calls "implicit faith" (i.e. blind faith). There are people around who put their Confession of Faith on a par with Scripture. That is not to minimise the need for creeds and confessions



in the slightest, but these people do not believe in thinking through their faith for themselves (with whatever capacity God has given them). Rather they blindly believe that the church that they grew up in (or maybe one that has a particular dominant, eloquent minister) is the one true church, and trust in the Confession of that church implicitly, without thinking. Parks puts such an implicit faith on a par with popery:

"Is any man to be found who really believes that everything in the Prayer Book was placed there by the direct teaching of the Holy Spirit? If so, he has a faith that may possibly remove mountains, but he is manifestly untaught of God. He is a papist at heart, and yet he professes to be opposed to Popery; and thus do we behold two 'infallibles' opposed to each other!" (p.67).

In the chapter on **Effectual Calling**, Parks shows us that men will twist the Scriptures to give them what they want rather than believing the plain sense of the words:

"Anything but predestination for proud, inflated, yet fallen man! The most arrant nonsense, the veriest trash, the most insane rhapsody, and the very gambols of a mountebank, will all be tolerated by poor deluded man; but God's word in its awfulness, and grandeur, and dignity, and majesty, and glory, will be scouted and abhorred by him until he is changed!" (p.75).

And what about this for all those, many of whom call themselves Calvinists, who think that God desires all men to be saved but can't do anything about it? Parks calls such a doctrine precisely what it is - Arminianism:

"A question for an Evangelical Arminian would be - Is a human being whom God is 'striving' to convert, a 'creature'? If so, how comes it that God's power is not sufficient in all cases to convert? For, according to the Arminian theory, God is 'striving' to bring all to repentance." (p.80).

Parks goes on to ridicule the idea that God is ever unhappy or frustrated at the damnation of the reprobate:

"God is essentially happy. It matters not to his happiness whether all men are lost or saved." (p.83).

But what about all those passages which speak of God seemingly giving man a conditional promise?

"Now it is in this sense that God speaks both to the world and to His people

with His 'ifs' and His proposals such as, 'Behold this day do I set before thee the way of life and the way of death,' etc. The world thinks when God uses such language that of course it follows power must be in man.....whereas, on the other hand, the people of God when they hear such language, and are taught of God, know they cannot do this or that to inherit eternal life, and so cry out to their Father to undertake for them." (p.84).

Also: "The fool takes it for granted that because God commands, he is able to obey! The wise sees he cannot, and cries out for help, and so acknowledges his ruin." (p.85).

So we see clearly that God's commanding a man to do something is not in any way an indication that man has the ability to do so, for by the law is the knowledge of sin (Romans 3:20).

No apologies are needed for quoting extensively from Parks in this review, but it is done to show the extent and number of subjects that are addressed in this short book of sermons. These are not just subjects which have a passing interest, or that are on an academic level only. No, what we have in this little book is the true marrow of Biblical divinity. These issues are vital to all of God's people today who are being persecuted and ostracised by the powers that be in the churches for their "unloving" behaviour and their "hard" doctrine. The desperate spiritual state of the church today calls for people with the ability to stand firm in what they believe. This little book will help us do that as we find that we are not alone. Parks was in the same position in the last century. These truths, so inimical to the natural man, are the truths of God which have been fought over throughout the history of the church. By God's grace alone we know that, no matter what may assail us, we can stand firm in them to the end.

### **No Place for Truth: or, Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?**

David F. Wells (Eerdmans USA) 1993  
318 pages, paper

**Reviewed by Rev. Ronald Hanko**

David F. Wells' answer to the question posed in the title of his book is that evangelical theology no longer exists, to the ruin of modern evangelicalism. According to him, evangelicalism today has "no place for truth." He is intent, therefore, on probing the reasons



for this and calling evangelicals back to their theological roots.

We believe that Wells has gone to the heart of the problem in this scathing indictment, and have therefore decided to review the book in spite of the fact that it was not given as a review copy. The book is a "must read" for every evangelical pastor and leader and for those laymen who have the courage and perseverance to tackle a book this large. We are offering this review, then, in order to bring the book to the attention of those who are not aware of it.

The book is also very well written and worth reading simply for the many pithy remarks Wells makes by way of condemning tendencies of evangelicalism. We can only offer a few representative samples.

In condemning the loss of doctrine and truth by evangelicals, Wells says, for example, "Whatever follies the Marxists committed - and their follies and wickedness have been manifold - they always had the wisdom to know that if they yielded their worldview, they yielded their reason for existence. Evangelicals are not quite so wise" (p. 136).

Again, he points out that "What is now in place is not exactly an alternative system of belief. What is in place is no system of belief at all. . . . It's essence is not right doctrine, values, and behavior; its essence is the freedom to have no doctrines, no values, to be free to follow the stream of instinct that flows from the self wherever it may lead, a point that the evangelical apologists for this approach advocate quite unabashedly and unselfconsciously" (pp. 169, 170). Thus, "stripped of doctrinal substance and rendered unreflective about and uncritical of the culture, theology now transforms 'virtue' into a set of everyday skills for finding success in a world of technology and affluence" (p. 112).

Speaking of evangelical leaders, Wells says: "In the evangelical world, there are many organizers and many managers but only a very few leaders. There are only a few because there can be no leadership without a vision, and the ability to see is now in very scarce supply. And seeing is what theology is all about" (p. 217).

The problem, he says, is that: "they lead by holding aloft moist fingers to sense the changes in the wind. In all this they show themselves to be different indeed from the One who embodied what servanthood was intended to be and who never once tailored

his teaching to what he judged the popular reception of it would be" (p. 215).

Regarding the people themselves he can be equally biting: "Being evangelical has come to mean simply that one has had a certain kind of religious experience that gives color to the private aspects of daily life, but in which few identifiable theological elements can be discerned or, as it turns out, are necessary." "It is enough for them," he says, "simply to know that Christ somehow died for people" (p. 131).

Regarding the usual evangelical formula for success, that is, revival, revival, and more revival, Wells states: "We need reformation rather than revival. The habits of the modern world, now so ubiquitous in the evangelical world, need to be put to death, not given new life. They need to be rooted out, not papered over with fresh religious enthusiasm" (p. 301).

There is much other excellent material in the book. The few pages on the relationship between theology and the church are themselves worth the price of the book. Wells says there: "A theology oblivious to the Church as the people of God soon loses a sense of wonder because it is cut off from worship, and it soon loses productive connections to the world because it is not driven by a commitment to service" (p. 292). How true! The little serious theology that is done today is usually done by theologians for theologians and is entirely divorced from the life and walk of God's people. It is of very little value, therefore.

The one point where we differ from Wells has to do with the reason for this decline in truth and theology. He traces the cause entirely to the pressures of modern society: "The emptiness of evangelical faith without theology echoes the emptiness of modern life" (p. 301). While this is partly true, it is not the only reason, we are convinced.

For one thing, there has been a deliberate abandonment of truth on the part of evangelicals, usually for the sake of unity. An example of this is found in the little book of Lloyd-Jones, **What is an Evangelical?** In this book, Lloyd-Jones calls the doctrines of election and predestination, the age and mode of baptism, church government, millennialism, the way of sanctification, and the question of the charismatic gifts "non-essential" and comes perilously close to contradicting



the doctrine of Scripture (Banner of Truth Trust, 1992, pp. 86-90). Indeed, there are only four doctrines that Lloyd-Jones lists as essential.

The book also shows that this is all in the interests of evangelical unity, yet with a notable lack of success. In spite of the fact that Lloyd-Jones himself was better at this point in practice than in theory (he himself, especially on such matters as predestination and the way of sanctification had clear views which he preached and taught), his influence is at least partly to blame for the loss of theology in present-day evangelicalism. Nor has it produced evangelical unity. If anything it has undermined such unity, as Wells predicts. "In the absence of conviction," he says, "all belief collapses, even belief in unity" (p. 132).

So too, this abandonment of truth has come about through the efforts of so many evangelical leaders and theologians to teach and maintain a theology that is a mass of contradictions and paradoxes - a theology, in other words, that is unsystematic. This, perhaps more than anything else, has sown the seeds of the demise of evangelical theology. What does not "hold together" will most certainly fall apart.

With that caveat, this is a book that must be noted and read. We are certain, however, that most of evangelicalism will pay little or no attention to what Wells has said. It is easier to be "at ease in Zion" than to seek truth.

### **Making Shipwreck of the Faith: Evangelicals & Roman Catholics Together**

Kevin Reed

Protestant Heritage Press USA 1995

96 pages, paper

**Reviewed by Rev. Ronald Hanko**

This book is a response to the document published in 1994, entitled "Evangelicals and Roman Catholics Together." That document, with its ecumenical emphasis, has been widely criticised, and those evangelicals who signed it, the most notable of whom is Dr. J. I. Packer, have also received their share of criticism.

Kevin Reed has written and published this book because, as he says, "Most of the critics of ECT take aim at areas where Rome

is an easy target; but they avoid critical aspects of doctrine and practice where modern evangelicals exhibit remarkable similarities to Rome" (p. 7). He is right on target.

Reed mentions especially three areas where both Romanists and evangelicals have rejected Scripture teaching: "(1.) the essence of the gospel, (2.) divinely instituted worship, and (3.) the marks of the true church." Indeed, Reed goes on to show that many evangelicals have not only rejected Scripture teaching, but have actually adopted the doctrines of Rome. The Romish doctrine of free will, so widely believed today by evangelicals, is a good example.

Of this Reed speaks particularly in pages 21-28. He points out that invitations and altar calls, the recitation of the "sinner's prayer," mass evangelism, and the exhortation to "accept Christ into your heart" are all forms of this error, and mentions the Synod of Dordt which condemned these very errors as "Pelagianism brought again out of hell."

Reed also points out rightly, that in its manner of worship, its use of images of various kinds, its mutilation of the sacraments, and in its failure to understand the Biblical teaching regarding the church, evangelicalism is not really very far from Rome. He says, for example: "One suspects that contemporary evangelical writers are reluctant to press the issue more forcefully because of the embarrassing implications. A due regard for the marks of the church would not only unchurch Rome, but a major part of modern evangelicalism" (p. 63).

As usual Reed pulls no punches in his condemnation both of Rome and of evangelicalism. But as he says, "The issues which fostered the Protestant Reformation are not simply matters for academic debate. They are great and eternal matters respecting the way of salvation and the proper worship of God (p. 84). The book, though it addresses a specific issue that has largely been forgotten, continues to be of great relevance and is highly recommended.

**For if I build again the things  
which I destroyed, I make myself  
a transgressor.**

**Galatians 2 : 18**