

John Warburton

by J.C. Philpot

John Warburton's life and death demonstrate the power and presence of a Covenant Jehovah, and his legacy is a minister blessed to the church of God.

Scripture: Psalm 139:16, Proverbs 16:23, Romans 8:28, 1 Corinthians 1:27, 2 Corinthians 3:6

Topics: "God's Providence", "Divine Grace"

Description

J.C. Philpot reflects on the miraculous workings of the Lord in providence and grace, emphasizing that though visible miracles may have ceased, Jesus continues to perform wonders in the lives of believers. Through the life and death of Mr. Warburton, Philpot illustrates how God's providence and grace are evident in the intricate details of each individual's journey, leading to a deeper understanding of God's power and love. Despite Mr. Warburton's lack of formal education, his life exemplified the truth that God does not require human wisdom to accomplish His work, but rather a yielded heart and a willingness to be taught by the Lord.

Transcript

JOHN WARBURTON

A Tribute of Affection and Regard

By J. C. Philpot, 1857

Who that knows anything of the wondrous doings and dealings of the Lord in providence and grace can say that miracles have ceased? It is true that the croaking raven no longer brings bread and flesh, morning and evening to an Elijah by the brook Cherith; nor does the palsied leave his bed, or the dead come out of his grave, as in the days when Jesus walked here below. But wonders as great, though less visible to the eye of sense, are daily and hourly wrought by the same Jesus, now sitting at the right hand of God.

The life and death of our dear and esteemed friend, the late Mr. Warburton, proclaim this truth as with trumpet tongue to those who have ears to hear, and write it up, as with a ray of light, to those who have eyes to see how great are the signs of the Lord, and how mighty His wonders to those who fear and love His great Name. He was indeed a special instance of those miracles of providence and grace which testify to the power and presence, the mercy and love of a Covenant Jehovah.

But most Christians have a history of their own, a wondrous tale to tell of the providence of God, as displayed in their past life--dull, indeed, and trivial to carnal men, unimportant and uninteresting, if not a scoff and a jest, to such as would push God out of the government of His own world--but precious beyond all price to themselves, as affording them, through its intimate connection with the work of grace, blessed evidences of their present sonship and future inheritance. When faith is in living exercise, and can roll out and read the long, and, it may be, intricate scroll of bygone years--sweet is it to see the providence of God in well near every line.

However long may be the chain, it is all linked together from beginning to end, nor can one link be severed without breaking asunder the connection of the whole.

Why born of such and such parents? Why so, in earliest infancy, brought up? Why so circumstanced in childhood? Why so situated in this or that locality? Why exposed at this or that period, to such trials and difficulties? Why directed to such a spot as years grew on? Why, in tender youth, cast into this or that deep trouble, and heart-breaking sorrow? Why these fair prospects blighted, those warm affections withered, these airy castles shattered--when least expecting, and least able to bear the shock? Why this sudden and unexpected turn of events, bringing on the hour when grace first visited their souls?

All who have any living experience of the 'path of the just' have their individual life-history in which they can at times trace the wonder-working hand of God holding the marvelous chain--and winding out link by link all these varied circumstances.

All, it is true, cannot tell the moving history recorded in Mr. Warburton's "Mercies of a Covenant God." They have neither had the deep troubles nor the blessed deliverances of the Lancashire weaver. Their goods have not been marked for rent, nor they and their children trundled off to the workhouse. They have not had the heavy trials in their families, in their churches, or in their own souls, which Infinite Wisdom had assigned to our departed friend. Still less have they had his great blessings and powerful manifestations of the love and goodness of God in providence and grace. Nor has their tongue, if ministers, been clothed with that rich savor and divine unction which so marked his words in the pulpit, and in the parlour.

God designed him for a great work in the Church of Christ, and therefore abundantly and eminently qualified him for it. However at the time hidden from his eyes--his heavy trials in providence--his deep and long poverty--the sinkings of his own desponding mind--the continual debt into which he was plunged--his dismal and gloomy forebodings of a still worse future--his fears of bringing a reproach on the cause of God--the temptations of Satan with which he was assailed--the hidings of the Lord's face--his quakings and tremblings lest he had run unsest--and the whole series of anxieties and distresses through which he was called to pass--all, connected as they were with the manifestations of God's love and mercy to his soul--were mysteriously tending to make him what he eventually was--a minister to the suffering Church of Christ, a feeder of the 'flock of slaughter', a feeling experimental man of God to the mourners in Zion, the broken in heart, and the contrite in spirit. As in Paul, God chose an instrument wherein "to show forth all patience to those who would hereafter believe on Him to everlasting life," so in John Warburton the Lord chose a vessel of mercy to show the power of His grace above all the wisdom of the creature.

But it has been well and wisely said that though God saves by "the foolishness of preaching"--He does not send fools to preach. This is eminently true in the instance before us. Mr. Warburton was not a man of learning, or even much education--but he was naturally possessed of a sound, vigorous understanding, without which original gift, mere school-cram is nearly useless. Great mistakes prevail on this subject.

Education is one of the grand idols of the present day, and is continually spoken of and cried up as the one thing needful, not only to root out of the land all immorality and vice--but to convert the rising generation into a race of philosophers, lawyers, statesmen and divines. It is quietly assumed almost as a first principle--a mere matter of course, that the mind of man is naturally like a peach tree or a vine, which has only to be trained in a certain way and laid in to a certain length, and it is sure then to produce unceasing crop of fruit; or that it resembles a bale of cotton, which may be folded, doubled and drawn, twisted and spun, woven and printed into any length, shape size, and pattern that the manufacturer chooses.

Just as if the original force, and feebleness of the mind, its natural quality and staple, were of no account--and just as if education could convert weak intellect into a strong one--and schools and colleges turn out Miltons and Bacons by contract, at so much a pupil. The school and the academy cannot turn a 'noodle' into a Newton, nor educate a blockhead into a genius. We do not deny that education will, according to the literal meaning of the word, draw out what is in the mind--but it must first be in the mind. You may draw and draw, but your thread will never have any strength or length, unless there be at the bottom the needful staple and the requisite supply.

What Mr. Warburton might have been, had his naturally strong and vigorous intellect been cultivated by a sound education in early boyhood and youth, cannot now be said. But most probably, we might rather say most certainly--it would have ruined him. We might have had Warburton the acute lawyer, or Warburton the learned divine--but we would not have had Warburton the preacher, Warburton the feeling and experimental minister, the tried and exercised man of God. That he might not be thus spoiled, God Himself took charge of his education, by placing him in early youth, not in an academy for young gentlemen, nor in a classical and commercial establishment--but in the school of Christ.

'Moses' was made his schoolmaster, and first caught hold of him in Bolton Church, where, instead of charming his ears with the melodious tones of the new organ--he sounded in them such a terrible peal of death, hell, and judgment to come--that his pupil dropped down half dead at his feet. Here he learned his A B C in experimental religion--here Moses shook over him for the first time the rod--here the first lesson given to him, amid many sighs and tears, was to learn to spell the first letter of that dreadful sentence--"Cursed is everyone that continues not in all things written in the book of the law to do them."

What school or college could have experimentally taught him what he first learned in Bolton Church--that he was a sinner, under the curse of God's righteous law? What labored course of lectures, free library, or institute of learning, could have made him cry out, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" all the way home, until his breast-bone was sore?

Education is admirable in its way, excellent for a time state--but no education--classical, theological, moral, or religious--could have made, though it might have marred, a John Warburton--either as a Christian or a minister, or brought him with sighs and groans to the Redeemer's feet. And when peace and pardon first reached his heart--when rich, free, sovereign, and superabounding grace poured salvation into his soul, as he sat in Mr. Roby's chapel--he learned more in one moment what the love of God was--whence it came, and where it led, what it could do, and what bliss and blessedness it could create--than all the doctors and proctors, pastors and masters, schoolmasters or scholars, lecturers or libraries, teachers or tutors, could have taught him in half a century!

When fierce temptations assailed his soul, when hell rose up in arms, and Satan--enraged to see so useful a tool lost to his service and enlisted in God's--hurled his fiery darts thick and fast against him--he was still at school, still learning better and wiser lessons than the Academy or the University could have taught him.

When dark clouds rested upon him in providence--when poverty and need knocked hard at his door--when little work and scanty wages, hard times and an increasing family plunged him into a sea of debt and distress--he was still learning deep and blessed lessons, never taught at college or learned at the university. When the clouds of darkness broke in showers upon his head--when the Sun of righteousness gleamed upon his path, in providence and grace--when he could set up an Ebenezer here and a hill Mizar there--when he could "look from the top of Shenir and Hermon, from the lions' dens, from the mountains of the leopards," and see the valley beneath all flowing with milk and wine--what books or book-makers could have taught him there was such a God in Israel--or have raised up in his heart such faith, hope, and love towards Him?

So with all his long experience of the ups and downs, ins and outs, joys and sorrows, risings and sinkings, feastings and fastings, smiles and tears, songs and sighs, mercies and miseries, heavens and hells of a living experience--what substitute could be found in human genius, or human learning, for this course of heavenly instruction?

We are not setting up Mr. Warburton--but the grace of God in him. We are not daubing his memory with oily eulogy--extolling and idolizing a worm of earth--or dressing out his poor cold remains with carnal flattery and empty praise. Could he speak out of the graveyard, he would bid us, with that voice which has struck awe into whole congregations--to be silent. And would admonish us in tones that would make us tremble, to ascribe the glory first and last to God. By the grace of God alone he was what he was. Grace began, grace carried on, and grace completed the whole work, from first to last, upon his soul.

Great, especially in his early days, were his afflictions, and proportionately great were his consolations. But the Lord was with him in all his troubles and sorrows, temporal and spiritual--and brought him triumphant through them all. His debts which had lain so heavy a burden upon him for many years, he was enabled honorably and fully to discharge, mainly through the blessing of the Lord resting on his little work, "The Mercies of a Covenant God." Thus his very providential trials proved providential blessings, and his debts were paid by his experience of their burden.

Yet if many his miseries--many were his mercies. He was blessed with a large measure of health and strength for many years--was favored with an affectionate wife and family, some of whom he had the happiness of seeing called by grace--was much loved and esteemed by the church of Christ, to which he was made so signal a blessing--was spared to a good old age, without many of its usual infirmities--was sweetly supported on his bed of sickness and languishing by the presence and love of his dear Lord--and, after many longings to be gone, yielded up his spirit into His bosom with "Hallelujah" upon his lips.

He was not, indeed, without his faults and failings; but these much sprang from, and were closely connected with, the warmth of his natural feelings. If at times he was irritable, it arose, not from moroseness and sullenness of temper--but from that same depth and warmth of feeling which, flowing in another channel, made him so fond of his wife, children and grandchildren--and so opened his heart to sympathize with their afflictions and trials, and take such a lively interest in all their concerns. He was also often considered overbearing with his church and congregation. But Scripture and experience alike show that in a church, as in every other group, there must be order and government. If then the pastor does not

exercise his legitimate influence and authority, there are those in every church who will rule the rest if they can--and as the other members will not quietly submit to this, the necessary consequence is strife and confusion.

If Mr. Warburton held the reins with a firm hand, and sometimes sharply lashed the unruly, it was, in most cases, for the general good of the whole. He viewed himself as the father of the church and congregation, as indeed he was--for the former church was chiefly made up of his spiritual children--and the latter church was gathered and kept together by his gifts and grace. If then, as a father, he fed them--as a father he thought it right to govern them. His post was to lead, not to follow--to rule and govern--not to yield and obey. If sometimes he stretched his power beyond the usual limits of a pastor, and used the rod as well as the crook in ruling the church and congregation committed to his charge--it was not to exalt himself, make divisions, or introduce error--but for the good of the cause and the glory of God.

He was naturally gifted with much sound good sense, knew the weakness and wickedness of the human heart, and seeing how soon divisions arise in a church, and what havoc they make of its prosperity and peace, he at once, with his broad, weighty foot, trampled upon the rising flame which other ministers, of weaker and less determined minds, would let smoulder on--lest, in putting it out, they should burn their own fingers. Lack of order and discipline is a prevailing evil in our churches--and when a pastor uses the authority which the Lord has given him to rule as well as feed the church, a cry is soon raised by those who are opposed to all order and discipline--that he is tyrannical and arbitrary.

He might sometimes, when thwarted and opposed, speak sharply, and look angry--and there was something in his fine, portly person, commanding look, and loud voice, that struck terror into the timid and silenced the talkative--but a tenderer heart never beat before the throne of grace and at the footstool of mercy. There indeed he was a little child--a babe, a humble, broken-hearted sinner. Much has been said of his temper and obstinacy, especially of late years, when painful divisions broke out in his church. But we challenge all his opponents and detractors to name a minister more broken and humble than he was before God. We have known many ministers, many good and gracious servants of God, but we never knew a man more tender in real soul feeling, more broken, and simple, and child-like, when the hand of God was upon him. His temper was naturally stubborn and obstinate, but this made the contrast all the greater to what he was by grace.

Thousands can testify to what he was in the pulpit. No one who knows what spiritual tenderness, divine sensations, and heavenly blessings are, could hear him pray or preach, when the Lord was with him--without feeling there was a peculiar savor and power in his words. This dew and unction, with which he was favored above any living minister, made him so acceptable to the tried and experienced family of God. It was not his gifts of eloquence, or powers of thought and expression--it was not the beauty of his language, or the force of his arguments--for in these external things he did not shine--that drew such crowds to hear him in London and the country--but the peculiar savor and sweetness that dropped from his lips.

He was truly and peculiarly an experimental minister of God's truth. He preached what he knew in his own soul by the power of God--what he had tasted, felt, and handled of the word of life for himself--what had been wrought in his heart and conscience by the operations and influences of the Holy Spirit. For him it was eminently true, that "the heart of the wise teaches his mouth and adds learning to his lips" (Proverbs 16:23). He was, therefore, "a minister of the Spirit, not of the letter," "a workman who needed not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." He honored God--and God honored him.

No minister in these last fifty years, excepting Mr. Huntington and Mr. Gadsby, has been so blessed to the church of God, or had so many seals to his ministry. Let those men or ministers who, for years, have been snarling at him and secretly whispering their slanders, produce as many witnesses on their behalf. Let them search and see whether God has blessed them as He blessed Mr. Warburton. Can they preach with his savor and power? Can they describe the trials and afflictions of the people of God as he could? or the feelings of the soul under His smiles, as he was enabled to?

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