

Preface

In 1955, I bought 42 volumes of the Parker Society works of the English Reformers. I found that my understanding of the Bible resonated with the theology of the earliest English Reformers. Before I was ordained in 1956, I decided that I would obtain my doctorate on some aspect of the theology of those early English Reformers. Because I felt that God wanted me to have a pastoral ministry covering ‘all sorts and conditions of men’, and which covered all ages, from the cradle to the grave, I realised that my doctorate would have to wait until after I retired.

As I approached retirement, I knew that I had to get my ‘academic’ brain working, and so, I started work on a Lambeth Diploma. I chose for my research the topic “Church and State in the theology of the Early English Reformation”. William Tyndale, Hugh Latimer, Nicholas Ridley, John Bradford and John Hooper were chosen. Then I wondered if what I was doing was the best way for me to achieve my purpose. I felt that I was going to end up with a shallow doctrine of Church and State from five Reformers (otherwise I would need more words than I was allowed for my Lambeth Diploma). I asked my Supervisor, “Would it be better to only deal with one Reformer, and look at the doctrine in depth?” He, seeing how my mind was working, said, “It would be better. As you have done more work on William Tyndale than the others, you should concentrate on him.” He then got this change in plan approved by the Archbishop’s Theological Committee.

Shortly before I retired, I had a sabbatical so that I could plan the subject for my proposed doctorate. I knew that it had to be on a doctrine in Tyndale’s theology. As I read the Parker Society’s three volumes of the *Works of William Tyndale* for the fourth time, I was struck by the frequency with which the words “the blood of Christ” appeared in his writings. Further readings of Tyndale’s Works made me realise that it was impossible to consider any single doctrine of Tyndale’s until one understood the whole of his theology. So, my doctorate had to be “The Theology of William Tyndale”.

The year 1994 was the year of my retirement; my wife and I were looking

for a suitable place to live and wanted to make it ready for us to move. There was still the Parish to care for, and I also wanted to ensure that the early days following my retirement ran smoothly for the first three months of the interregnum. I hardly had any time to think further about my retirement task, even less about my doctorate when the Quincentenary of William Tyndale was announced. At the first “Oxford International Tyndale Conference” (September 1994), I presented a paper, “Tyndale and the blood of Christ”. Before preparing this paper, I had extracted all the doctrinal references to the blood of Christ¹ in the three Parker Society volumes of Tyndale’s Works. These, plus the references in the 1525, *New Testament*, and in Tyndale’s “Supplication to the King”,² are the base texts for this present work.

To keep this book within reasonable bounds, it has been necessary to keep separate the blood of Christ in each doctrine or division, but also not draw Tyndale’s doctrines into a coherent whole, for this would have doubled the length of this book. Also, I have not been able to use every reference under the relevant heading. As Tyndale’s 1525 *New Testament* was not included in the Parker Society Works, I have modernised its spelling, and also, where necessary, capitalised proper names.

This book had to wait until I had written *The Theology of William Tyndale*, which is based on my doctoral dissertation, and *The Roots of William Tyndale’s Theology*. The roots of Tyndale’s theology, I had discovered in my research for my Lambeth Diploma, reached back to the English Wycliffites, and not to the Continental Reformers.

What will be obvious to the reader of this book is that the blood of Christ flows like a golden river through every aspect of Tyndale’s theology, and the blood of Christ affects every aspect of man’s salvation.

First, the importance of the blood of Christ is not just for man’s new creation – faith and repentance leading man to his new birth as a child of God – but for God’s elect children to fulfil every aspect of their Christian life. It became clear that the Holy Spirit must sprinkle the Christian life with the blood of Christ if one was going to be acceptable to God.

Christ’s work was to restore creation to its pristine glory, and I have been asked, “If you are right, why do we say, ‘Christ came for us men and our salvation?’” The answer is simple, although my illustration can only be an imaginative picture. My car has broken down, and I take it to the garage. The mechanic is only interested in the broken part. He repairs it, and the whole car is restored to its original condition. It was man, through Adam’s disobedience to God’s commandment, that caused the breakdown of God’s creation.

1. This does not include references to ‘the blood’ in the sacrament, except where it has a theological meaning.

2. Foxe, *Acts and Monuments*, vol. 5, pt 1, p. 131.

Second, man's salvation is totally the work of God, with the Father electing those to be his children, the Son shedding his blood for the elect and the Holy Spirit working in applying the blood of Christ to enable the elect to fulfil every aspect of their life as a child of God. Although the Christian can do nothing without the Holy Spirit's enabling him through the blood of Christ, the child of God has a free will, with the ability to disobey as well as to obey God's will. In the same way as a child, in a loving family, wants to please his parents but sometimes does things that are wrong and wishes that he hadn't done so, a child of God, even if he would not sin deliberately, nevertheless, he does sin of frailty and regrets what he has done.

I apologise if there seems to be a repetition of what is written in my earlier books. These books view Tyndale's theology more from the point of separate doctrines of our Christian faith. This book examines one doctrine only – the doctrine that is the base for every doctrine that affects the whole of one's Christian life.

It is easy for us to separate our life into several compartments, as if we can isolate one from another. Books have been written on one aspect of our Christian life, as if it can be considered apart from the many other aspects of our life. There are books on Christian doctrine; on worship; on prayer; on spirituality and on the Christian's life.¹ But, the doctrine of the blood of Christ does away with all these divisions – it covers every part of our life, and there is nothing we think or do that does not depend on the Holy Spirit sprinkling Christ's blood on us, sanctifying our every thought and action, enabling us to grow and develop as children of our heavenly Father. In considering 'the blood of Christ' in relation to its place in other doctrines, I have sometimes stayed only with references to Christ's blood; but there are times when that makes that section jerky, and so I have smoothed it out with other references from Tyndale's writings.

When I discovered the importance of Christ's blood as I approached retirement, it revolutionised my theology. I wondered why I had not seen it as I read my Bible. I had always had some unanswered theological questions that did not seem to have a scriptural answer. Tyndale had found the scriptural answer to those questions in the blood of Christ.

Of course, there will always be some unanswered questions, although there are still those where Christians have sought to discover an answer. But is it right for Christians to seek an answer when God has not revealed, in the Bible, what we would like to know? The commonest hidden secret concerns predestination. Did God predestine those who were to be saved, or were any predestined to damnation (double predestination)? This is perhaps the most divisive question between different Christian theologies, but there are

1. This does not mean that these books are not important; they need to be written and read alongside the Scriptures.

others that divide the Church into different schemata or denominations. In his *Prologue to Romans*, Tyndale has the clearest statement for us regarding these questions where the scriptures do not give us a clear answer.

But here must a mark be set to those unquiet, busy, and high-climbing spirits, how far they all go; which first of all bring hither their high reasons and pregnant wits, and begin first from an high to search the bottomless secrets of God's predestination, whether they be predestinate or not. . . . But follow thou the order of this epistle, and noosel thyself with Christ, and learn to understand what the law and the gospel mean.¹

There are also other instances where Tyndale warns us not to try to probe God's secrets, where there is no answer to be found in the Bible because God has not revealed it to us.

So was the scripture given us to guide us in our way and works ghostly. The way is Christ; and the promises in him are our salvation, if we long for them. Now if we shall leave that right use and turn ourselves unto vain questions, and to search the unsearchable secrets of God; then no doubt shall the scripture blind us, as it hath done our schoolmen and our subtle disputers.²

In conclusion, Tyndale writes in *Mammon*, "Let us therefore give diligence rather to do the will of God, than to search his secrets, which are not profitable for us to know."³ In this book, there are no answers to God's secrets, but a revealing of God's open will through the writings of William Tyndale, who, I believe, was one of the great Reformation theologians.

When one reads Tyndale's writings, one is struck by his English. Although he was writing almost six hundred years ago, his writings are easy to read and understand. Furthermore, his every word counts, for he does not waste words, which means that if one tries to express Tyndale's meaning in one's own words, it would invariably be much longer and probably be less easy to understand.

Therefore, I have allowed Tyndale to speak for himself, rather than summarising what he has written, or trying to put his thoughts in my own words. My aim, in writing my books, is to be faithful to Tyndale, so that his understanding of the Scriptures may be clearly seen, and not my interpretation of his theology. Therefore, in some of my quotations I have followed Tyndale's advice regarding the scriptures that we might see the truth through "the circumstances, and what goeth before and after; that I may know whether thine interpretation be the right sense."⁴

1. William Tyndale, *Romans, PS-I*, p. 505.

2. William Tyndale, *Obedience, PS-I*, p. 317.

3. William Tyndale, *Mammon, PS-I*, p. 89.

4. William Tyndale, *Obedience, PS-I*, p. 147.