

Introduction

John Berridge (1716-1793) was, as Nigel R.Pibworth put it, an ‘individual’, one who demonstrated ‘a singular spirituality’.¹ One-time Senior Fellow at Clare College, Cambridge, in 1755 Berridge was installed as the Anglican incumbent in the village of Everton on the borders of Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire. Even so, he was, as yet, unconverted. At that time, he held to – and preached – salvation by works and the acceptance of orthodox theology. Towards the end of 1757, however, he was converted. Let his epitaph, which he himself prepared, tell the story – as it does to this day in the churchyard at Everton, where it speaks to all who will read and heed it:

Reader art thou born again?
No salvation without a new birth.
I was born in sin Feb. 1716
Remained ignorant of my fallen state till 1730
Lived proudly on faith & works for salvation till 1754
Admitted to Everton vicarage 1755
Fled to Jesus alone for refuge 1756²
Fell asleep in Christ Jan. 22nd 1793.

Berridge, now converted, was soon branded as a Methodist. I do not mean in the denominational sense; I am using the term as in the mid 18th century, as it applied to Berridge and his fellow-Methodists at the time – men such as George Whitefield, the Wesley brothers, William Grimshaw, John Fletcher and the like.³ In his enthusiasm

¹ See the two volumes by Nigel R.Pibworth.

² This date is wrong. It should be 1757. See Pibworth: *Letters* p21.

³ ‘Methodist preachers were notorious for their enthusiastic sermons and often accused of fanaticism. In those days, many members of England’s Established Church feared that... doctrines promulgated by the Methodists – such as the

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for preaching the gospel, Berridge refused to be confined to his own pulpit. Breaking the rules of the State Church, he itinerated widely in his local counties, preaching in the open air, in barns, in kitchens and the like. He also supported other preachers – financially, sacrificially – in furthering this spread of the gospel. As a result, in time, independent churches, Nonconformist churches, sprang up as a direct consequence of these labours.

But Berridge was not only at home when preaching to the labouring classes in the villages. Selina Hastings, Countess of Huntingdon, recognised his talents, and made extensive use of him, not least to preach the gospel among the upper classes and the fashionable in London and Bath. Berridge would also spend the winter months (when the unmade roads were unfit for his itinerating travels) preaching in the capital, taking Whitefield's place when he was unwell or away preaching.

Berridge, it goes without saying, met with fierce opposition for all this. Just one example must suffice. John Green, Master of Corpus Christi, and Dean of Lincoln, attacked Berridge on the grounds that:

1. Berridge relied on the supernatural; his work was 'unreasonable'.
2. His preaching of free grace and election was welcomed by the poor because it gave them inflated notions of their interest in heaven.

necessity of a new birth for salvation, of justification by faith, and of the constant and sustained action of the Holy Spirit upon the believer's soul – would produce ill effects upon weak minds'. 'During the 18th century... Methodists... were accused of blind enthusiasm, a charge against which they defended themselves by distinguishing fanaticism from "religion of the heart". Such "enthusiasts" looked for the demonstration of the Spirit in power'. Remember, 'the word "enthusiast" was originally used to refer to a person possessed by a god' (Wikipedia). Do not miss the idea of 'possession': 'a man possessed'.

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3. Berridge preached justification by faith alone.
4. His 'easier' gospel encouraged antinomianism.

I leave Berridge's fascinating story there, but I heartily recommend Pibworth's books. In his latest volume, he has done the evangelical world an immense service by his prolonged labours in collecting, thoroughly editing, annotating and publishing his subject's letters. Of course, Berridge's language is quaint, and his humour dry. But as Pibworth's chosen title puts it, in reading the letters we are brought face to face with 'a singular spirituality'. I personally have been challenged, rebuked and encouraged by reading Berridge's letters.

And that is why I want to introduce the man to a wider audience by means of this small volume. On reading the letters, I have come across gems on a variety of topics. Berridge's valuable observations, I am convinced, should be more widely known. He has a great deal to say to us today, and say on vital aspects of the spiritual life.

But certain cautionary remarks are in order at the outset. Letters are not theological treatises. Berridge did not write his letters ensconced in an ivory tower as a Fellow in the hallowed halls and libraries at Cambridge, but often in haste, under continual pressure of work, knowing that he was obliged to give time to correspondence even though it was not his first love. That, of course, was preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ, especially as an itinerant. Furthermore, many of his letters were written in times of personal stress, when he was suffering from the dragging effects of illness, increasing age and weariness. Then again, Berridge penned his letters with no thought of publication or their preservation for posterity. He certainly did not, as some others have done, write letters with an eye to publication. In fact, he was very reticent to publish anything – even when he had prepared works for that very purpose! For all these reasons, and more, by

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producing this volume, in a sense it could be said that I have not treated Berridge fairly.

So why have I done it? Because, as I say, the material is too good, too valuable, to leave it where it is. Berridge's letters were certainly appreciated in his own time. After all, we only have the letters because their recipients treasured them enough to preserve them, following which, down the years, others have included selections in their works and publications. Then again, although Pibworth's latest volume is a rich mine, with many seams of valuable ore waiting to be opened, I fear that many will find the nearly 500 pages too much for them, even to start excavating. Without intending the least patronisation, I hope that my booklet might help many to make that start. Could it be that some, maybe some who have never even heard of John Berridge, might find my little work an encouragement to delve for themselves into the full collection, and see what profit they can find for their souls? Judging by the response I have received when publishing snippets from time to time, others, besides myself, will find a necessary challenge, rebuke and encouragement.

I do not want to give the impression that I agree with everything Berridge wrote. As I make clear, I have several reservations about his opinions, and I say so – not to score points off the man but to use him to try to help believers who find themselves in difficulty over certain vital aspects of the spiritual life. Although I could have restricted my selection from his letters to topics on which I see eye to eye with Berridge, I am convinced that the issues I raise really do need serious consideration.

There is another point. Over the years Berridge changed his views on several major issues, and was quite open about it. I do not deal with this. Moreover, there are many issues which Berridge addressed in his letters that I have not included here. Consequently, this booklet does not

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pretend to be a detailed academic or critical study of Berridge. No! It is simply an appetiser, an introduction to this good man and his work.

And talking of an appetiser leads me to explain my title: *Bread From Berridge's Bakery*. Yet, in a sense, I do not need to explain. My chosen epigraph says it all, which epigraph I have taken from a criticism levelled against Berridge for something he said in his prayer when preaching in London. He was, of course, breaking the rules of genteel society by his quaint expression, but it thrills me! As a preacher – and as a hearer – I fully understand what he was talking about, and I endorse the sentiment. Indeed, I hope that my own preaching comes up to the mark. And, as a hearer, I want far more of it than I generally get from the men I listen to! Berridge prayed that:

God would give us new bread not stale, but what was baked in the oven on that day.

In other words, Berridge wanted God to use him to give the people a living word, not to deliver a dry lecture. He wanted his preaching to be full of life and flavour, zest and newness! Even so, for putting it the way he did, he got the following rebuke, a rebuke from one – John Thornton⁴ – who was, nevertheless, one of Berridge's staunch and loyal supporters:

An expression of yours in your prayer before sermon when at Tottenham Court struck me, 'that God would give us new bread not stale, but what was baked in the oven on that day'. Whether it is that I am too little, or you too much, used to such expressions, I won't pretend

⁴ John Thornton (1720-1790) was a godly man, very rich, but one who did an immense amount of good with his wealth. (It is estimated he gave away £15m. in today's money. See Pibworth: *Letters* p184). He and Berridge remained spiritual friends over many years, writing numerous letters to each other.

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to determine; but I could not help thinking it savoured of attention to men more than to God.⁵

I have no doubt Berridge repeated his ‘offence’. We know he had said much the same when writing to Rowland Hill in 1773:

Study not to be a fine preacher. Jerichos are blown down with rams’ horns [Joshua 6] [not golden trumpets, he might have added]. Look simply unto Jesus for preaching food, and what is wanted will be given, and what is given will be blest, whether it be a barley or wheaten loaf, a crust or a crumb. Your mouth will be a flowing stream or a fountain sealed, according as your heart is.⁶

For my part, I am most decidedly with Berridge on this, and not with Thornton.

And now for a personal note. I have a vested interest in presenting these gems from Berridge. Berridge, to put it mildly, was not fond of controversial writing, and said so,⁷ whereas many of my works, I freely admit, *are* of a polemical nature. I do not apologise for this, however, since, as the New Testament makes clear, there is need for controversy, and we are commanded ‘to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints’ (Jude 3). Nevertheless, there is a danger in polemics, as Berridge stressed, and the great need is to exalt Christ. In self-defence, I hope it is evident that even in my polemical works I still try to publish Christ. I think I can say that ‘Christ is all’ (Col. 3:11) is a recurring theme in my books. And although I feel the balance is, in any case, restored by my preaching (witness my sermons on

⁵ Pibworth: *Letters* p249.

⁶ Pibworth: *Letters* p205.

⁷ See Pibworth: *Letters* pp133,192,200,202-203,205-206,209-213,263-264. As a necessary corrective to Berridge on this, see ‘The Benefits and Dangers of Controversy’ in Iain H.Murray: *Evangelical Holiness and other addresses*, the Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 2013, pp111-137.

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sermonaudio.com), nevertheless, I am pleased to use Berridge in this booklet to speak of Christ. And whatever else may be said about Berridge, he certainly did that! By publishing this selection from his letters, and my comments upon them, therefore, I am able to catch hold of Berridge's coat tail as I enable him, though dead, to speak again (see Heb. 11:4), and, I hope, speak of Christ to a new and wider audience. May the Lord move and warm all our hearts as we read these words (see Luke 24:32). Yes, these words written about 250 years ago, and yes, the illustrations Berridge used often sound (shall we say?) picturesque if not odd to our modern ears, but, I assure you there is real spirituality here. And true spirituality is what this generation needs. There is plenty of so-called spirituality about, but in Berridge we get the real McCoy.

In bringing this Introduction to a close, I need to make one or two practical points.

In order to make each chapter as complete as possible, I will repeat my sources and relevant comments at appropriate points. Although this will annoy some, it has the merit, at least, of obviating the need to hunt backwards and forwards to find the source of what I am saying.

But since there is one very important word – sanctification – that will come up in various chapters, it will be convenient to say what I mean by it at this point. 'Positional sanctification' is the perfection the believer has in the sight of God by virtue of his union with Christ at his conversion: the sinner, on coming to faith, is united to Christ and is justified and positionally sanctified. Thus, in God's sight, in Christ he is immediately and permanently accounted or made righteous, free of sin and condemnation, and perfectly separated unto God (see, for instance, 1 Cor. 1:2,30; 6:11; Eph. 5:25-27; Heb. 10:10-18; 13:12). In his Christian life, he has to work out his

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perfection in Christ, and he will be moved to do so by the Spirit under the direction of Scripture; this is his progressive sanctification or holiness of life. But this, alas, is imperfect. The believer will only be absolutely sanctified in the eternal state. Berridge agreed with this and effectively spoke in this way, even though he did not use my specific terms. When he rightly linked progressive sanctification with the believer's justification, as I will explain at the appropriate place, I would extend this to the believer's positional sanctification in Christ at the point of faith.⁸ It is impossible, of course, to keep all this in neat self-contained packets, so in dealing with these issues a measure of overlap is inevitable. I say this here to explain my interpolations in his letters.

Finally, I have taken the liberty of modernising Berridge's grammar without altering the sense.

⁸ See my *Fivefold; Positional*.