



# The Burning Bush - Online article archive

## THE WITHDRAWAL OF COMMON GRACE

For some time I have been pondering this subject. I see the undeniable increase in lawlessness and sin amongst the nations as proof that in judgment God is withdrawing His restraint upon wicked men.

So it will continue until the end of this age, which surely draws very near!

*"And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness," 2 Thessalonians 2:11-12.*

*"But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived. But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them," 2 Timothy 3:13-14.*

These two passages tell us clearly the trends we will see developing in the very end of this age.

Do we not see these things taking place! Let us therefore take heed and watch.

*"Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man," Luke 21:36.*

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Who is there amongst the professing church but has been distressed beyond words at the reports in recent years of the horrendous crimes committed against infants and babes in arms, young children and the frail elderly, wives and mothers and the vulnerable generally?

In recent times, there have been revelations, almost on a daily basis, of what can only be described as indescribable cruelty and devilish malice within family units and upon the unsuspecting stranger.

As well as that, from within institutions, supposedly devoted to kindness and care, there have come reports of the most inconceivable cruelty committed against helpless children under care, elderly patients, both of whom are defenceless against the abusive criminal because of their weakness.

I for one, have thought back to my childhood in the 1940s and have sought in vain for a record of similar wickedness wrought upon those for whom feelings of concern and love are aroused by their weakness and infirmities.

Why then do we have the dreadful events of today? What has happened to society?

There are two passages of Holy Scripture that ever come before me when I contemplate such matters.

*"To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David the servant of the LORD. The transgression of the wicked saith within my heart, that there is no fear of God before his eyes. For he flattereth himself in his own eyes, until his iniquity be found to be hateful. The words of his mouth are iniquity and deceit: he hath left off to be wise, and to do good. He deviseth mischief upon his bed; he setteth himself in a way that is not good; he abhorreth not evil," Psalm 36:1-4.*

*"As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips: whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness: their feet are swift to shed blood: destruction and misery are in their ways: and the way of peace have they not known: there is no fear of God before their eyes," Romans 3:10-18.*



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That final statement - "there is no fear of God before their eyes" - is a general characterisation of those described in these verses!

Mankind has ever been as described above, but God in His mercy has restricted and restrained the manifestation of such depravity. It is as happens in society. The person convicted of a crime is sentenced to imprisonment. In the prison cell he or she is just as evil in the prison as they were when enjoying freedom BUT they no longer can engage in the acts of wickedness which they would, were they free to do so!

Today, we see a marked decline in the fear of God and it follows that there is a corresponding decline in the restraint that such a fear brings upon the individual. It is because of this that we have seen taking place amongst us the criminality that was largely unheard of but a generation ago.

The truth is that there is a withdrawal by God of that restraint which He was pleased to exercise upon the nation, for its good, but a short time ago.

That restraint is part of the blessings bestowed upon mankind by the Lord and termed COMMON GRACE.

Here is a definition of what it is I refer to as given by Dr. Alan Cairns in his 'Dictionary of Theological Terms' (page 25, 1982 edition)

COMMON GRACE - A term used to describe the goodness of God to a sin-cursed world, not including salvation. Thus, it is pointed out that by His common grace God places a restraint upon sin and its natural results, and upon the execution of wrath against sinners. Moreover, it is not merely negative, but includes the bestowal of favour and blessing of a general nature, but not of that special kind which leads to salvation. Thus, Prof. John Murray defined common grace as "Every favour of whatsoever kind and degree, falling short of salvation, which this undeserving and sin-cursed world enjoys at the hand of God".

Were we to see a marked abandonment of the pursuit, prosecution and punishment of criminals by all the law enforcement agencies of Government we would be greatly alarmed for our safety and that of our loved ones and for the future wellbeing of the nation. We would be very correct in harbouring such fears.

Well, how much more should we not tremble as we see God lifting His restraining hand from off society in general so that the norm of decency and neighbourly concern seems to dissipate and dissolve into thin air!

That is what is happening before our eyes in the United Kingdom today and indeed, across the world! The restraining hand of God has been lifted and the depravity of mankind is loosed and ever more visible and evident.

Where will this all end?

The lifting of such restraint is ever a sign of approaching judgment. It is in effect, the ripening of a people for the descent of God's judgment upon them.

Let me demonstrate this from Holy Scripture.

Paul in Romans chapter 1, verses 21-25 indicates the consequences of man's rebellion against the very evident truth of God.

*"Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things. Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen."*



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They “knew”, they “changed the glory of the incorruptible God” and, in consequence, “God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves.”

Restraint was lifted and defiant man was allowed to hasten to his own destruction, having refused the truth of God and its saving grace.

That has happened throughout the ages to nations and peoples. The great empires of Babylon, and Greece and Rome are examples of this.

We see this taking place in our own nation today. The land was known as “Great Britain” and, as Queen Victoria explained, the secret of its greatness was the Word of God. But the churches and the peoples of the British Isles have abandoned God’s Word! It is mocked and ridiculed in pulpit and pew and pub!

In consequence, we clearly see the evidence of God removing His restraining hand and the floodgates being open, for the land is swamped by iniquity of every form! Iniquity, I might add, that was long held back by God in His mercy!

A feature of the close of this age is given us in Revelation 12:7-12.

*“And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, and prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death. Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time.”*

I don’t think I can improve upon the comments I made on these verses in my book, **“The Shadow of the Antichrist”**.

“Woe to the earth, verse 12.

“Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time,” verse 12.

**1. Satan provoked.** Satan being cast out of heaven provokes him to great wrath. Three things in particular provoke him. His time is short. Though he knows he has only a short time before he faces certain defeat, still the devil goes on in his rebellion. Here is a picture of the functioning of a sinful nature. Nothing will alter or reform it. There is nothing within the sinner’s nature that enables him to reason his ultimate destruction and the wisdom of repenting and seeking mercy. Such a course of action is impossible to the totally depraved. Rejection of God and the hope of somehow defeating God ever burn within the depraved breast. That is why salvation is by grace alone. None of us who are saved ever concluded, as a result of the reasoning of our own hearts, that it would be wise to cease from sin and seek the Lord for mercy. We did reason so, but it was the result of grace renewing our hearts and wills that brought this about. “Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure,” Philippians 2:12-13.

He is defeated by the church on earth through the blood of Christ. Satan must relive his defeat at the cross every time a child of God responds to his attack by pleading the blood of Christ in prayer. Little wonder he is provoked! We tread upon his broken head every time we pray and testify in the power of



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the blood of the Lamb. The emergence of a strong church in Jerusalem is particularly vexing to the prince of darkness. For a lively church to be raised up in Jerusalem after the city has been in a state of great spiritual desolation for such a long period, and that at a time when the devil is hopeful of making it the centre of his God-denying empire, enrages him.

**2. His rage is like a flood.** And the serpent cast out of his mouth water as a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away of the flood, verse 15. As we have already commented on this verse, let it suffice to draw your attention to the satanic flood that will pollute the earth at this time of antichristianity. And there was given unto him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies, 13:5. The reference is to the Antichrist. Daniel tells us more. And he shall speak great words against the most High, and shall wear out the saints of the most High, and think to change times and laws: and they shall be given into his hand until a time and times and the dividing of time, Daniel 7:25.

**3. Believers will not be left without a refuge.** Again, since we have commented on the provisions of God for His people in the midst of such satanic hatred, let us close this section with a reminder of the Saviour's promise. "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. For I am the LORD thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour," Isaiah 43:2-3. It is the lot of God's people, as strangers and pilgrims, to pass through flood and fire. But they shall not destroy us. Neither shall they separate us from our God. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord," Romans 8:35-39.

Let these words be our constant stay and support no matter what hell casts up in rage against us!

This age is to end with an unprecedented period of unrestrained wickedness on this earth, particularly evident in the area dominated by the Antichrist, that is the ten kingdoms covering the old Roman Empire.

Are we not seeing the beginning of this scourge? Do we not see in the legalising of the slaughter of the unborn, the acceptance of the abominable perversions of sodomy and same-sex marriage, euthanasia on demand, the increasing legalisation of drug-taking, the break-down of marriage and of decency and morality in general within western society, coupled with the advancing and promotion of multiculturalism within the education system and its sister philosophy, syncretism, the amalgamation or attempted amalgamation of different religions, cultures, or schools of thought.

Of late, we have seen a darker evil invading the public school system. Educationalists are determined, with government backing, to introduce the whole vile programme of the evil LGBT lobby! Children are being corrupted and parents objections count for nothing. The nation seems bent on dumbly allowing it to happen!

Public representatives are largely too frightened of the 'backlash' from the sodomite faction which may jeopardise their public standing. Consequently, they silently 'go with the flow' and remain silent!

This interweaving of every form of man's degeneracy can lead only to the excluding of the truth of God from among men. It means the dimming, the excluding of the light of the gospel from the nations and its resultant works of darkness.

Isaiah speaks of the time of the Saviour's return and the circumstances prevailing.

*"Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the LORD is risen upon thee. For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the LORD shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee."* Isaiah 60:1-2.



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The Lord is here speaking to Jerusalem and the nation of Israel and is declaring the effect of His return upon His ancient people. He also declares the state of the earth at the time of His return. "Behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people."

That darkness is to be seen creeping across the nations. It is the time when the creatures of darkness creep forth, Psalm 104:20.

Grotesque 'creatures' have crept forth in recent days, spreading their evil notions and decadence everywhere. The airwaves and pages of the media echo with their siren song of enticements.

That is what distresses true believers as they observe and look out on this world.

David's cry is ours today. "Attend unto me, and hear me: I mourn in my complaint, and make a noise; because of the voice of the enemy, because of the oppression of the wicked: for they cast iniquity upon me, and in wrath they hate me. My heart is sore pained within me: and the terrors of death are fallen upon me. Fearfulness and trembling are come upon me, and horror hath overwhelmed me. And I said, Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest. Lo, then would I wander far off, and remain in the wilderness. Selah," Psalm 55:2-7.

This then is what is taking place before our eyes. The world is descending into the darkness of the latter times as the advent of the Antichrist and the ensuing return of Christ in judgment upon man's defiance and rebellion draw near.

May you find comfort and instruction in these words, dear Christian.

Ivan Foster.

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