NEW FOCUS

Come and Welcome to Jesus Christ by John Bunyan

Banner Of Truth Publications

George M. Ella | Added: Feb 19, 2006 | Category: Reviews

Bunyan is all gold and his Come and Welcome to Jesus Christ is beset with the finest jewels of Christian preaching. The very title alone infuses hope and joy into the hearts of sorrowing sinners. Taking John 6:37 as his text, Bunyan displays the evangelical truths behind Christ's words, 'All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." Outlining how Christ's chosen Bride is lovingly prepared to meet her Bridegroom, Bunyan starts with the doctrine of God's electing love in Christ who delights in saving the most miserable of sinners. No one is too vile or too wicked to find forgiveness and saving grace in the Saviour's embrace. One by one, Bunyan deals expertly with the fears of sinners made sensible to their plight by the gospel call and guides them on their sure way to salvation.

This is not a reprint of the BOT's George Offor edition of 1991 but a new version, couched in an altered language, featuring a new foreword and blurb containing a highly irrelevant and misleading new divinity. Andrew Fuller is praised for his The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation, viewed by the publisher as freeing the churches from the grip of Gill's alleged Hyper-Calvinism. Apparently the Banner will have us believe that Bunyan's sermon reflects Fuller's theology. However, Bunyan gives the lie to Fuller's wayward teaching regarding the atonement, reconciliation, imputed righteousness, law, gospel, justification and the believer's eternal security. The publisher says Fuller "was raised under a ministry which had become unbalanced due to its Hyper-Calvinist emphases" as if he were innocent of its teaching. The fact that Fuller pastored this church for several years and never gave up a number of these 'emphases', such as his insistence that the full gospel was for believers only, is suppressed. On the other hand, Gill was never part of the Hyper-Calvinistic system and preached repentance and faith to all throughout his far more successful ministry. The myth that Gill lagged behind Fuller in exhorting the sinner to turn to God is exploded by Gregory Wills in his fine essay A Fire that Burns Within: the Spirituality of John Gill.1 Indeed, in the same volume Tom Nettles claims Gill "sang in unison" with Whitefield. Who would honestly deny (except the Banner of Truth) that Gill stood far closer to Bunyan than Fuller?

The publisher sees Bunyan as practicing what they call ‘the free offer of salvation to sinners without distinction’ but Bunyan, from the start, says that this is not the purpose of his text. Indeed, he says that "no rational man in world will conclude" that his text refers to all and not some. Here, the call is absolute and specific. Bunyan explains that a conditional call would entail God saying "I will if you will" but here God is saying "I will and you shall". Thus Bunyan outlines the distinctions God makes in drawing in those whom he has justified from eternity and emphasises the discriminating work of the gospel, saying, "The gift intended in the text must be restrained to some, to a gift that is given by way of speciality by the Father to the Son". Bunyan repeatedly stresses that hearing is different to turning and all those who God turns to himself are all those whom He has given to his Son and for all of whom His Son died. Also, contrary to the BOT’s promotion of this sermon as addressing all, Bunyan explains that all by nature are insensible to such a call but some are made sensible and it is these ‘coming sinners’, drawn by God who will be received. Christ gives these sensible sinners ‘a glimpse of Himself’ and they ‘receive a kiss of the sweet lips of Jesus Christ’ and feel ‘the very warmth of His wings overshadowing" their souls.

A book of this length (230 pages) needs an index. The quite unnecessary and inconsistent alterations to the sweet music of Bunyan’s language and his AV text in this work are baffling. Why, for instance is ‘commeth’ left but ‘saith’ altered to ‘says’? Hacking at Bunyan’s language and theology in this amateur way is inexcusable and deceptive. Come and Welcome to Jesus Christ is Christian literature at its best and it can happily be obtained in its original form elsewhere. Concerning this BOT publication under review, what bridegroom would give his bride such a precious jewel hidden in a box of such dubious and unwelcome origin?

[1] The Life and Thought of John Gill, ed. Michael Haykin, Brill, 1997.

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