

Churchill's Portrait

By Dennis Allan

Winston Churchill, British Prime minister during the Second World War, was serving in his second term when he celebrated his 80th birthday. An artist named Graham Sutherland was contracted to do a portrait to honor the famous statesman and the painting was unveiled in a public ceremony. According to historical reports, Churchill detested the portrait and it was never hung in the Parliament building as originally intended. After Churchill died, his widow destroyed the painting out of respect for her husband, an act that the artist considered to be vandalism.

It is not difficult to imagine the pride or even vanity of a man whose name appears among the first in almost every list of the most influential figures of the past century. Churchill wanted a portrait that would reflect his own self perspective, but the painter saw a man who was nearing the end of his life and depicted the natural characteristics of his advanced age. The subject wanted to be seen as strong and firm, but the artist had a different perception.

The history of a portrait painted decades ago serves to illustrate an important fact. It is normal to want to have a positive image in the sight of others, and it is extremely difficult to see the reality of our own condition. The Scripture teaches us about these facts.

The Bible speaks of the danger of having distorted images of ourselves. One of the greatest risks is to overrate our own ideas: ***“do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the LORD and depart from evil”*** (Proverbs 3:7). ***“Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!”*** (Isaiah 5:21). The problem of thinking too highly of ourselves and of our own wisdom manifests itself when we have trouble accepting instruction and correction.

The person who considers himself wise does not show appropriate respect to the Creator, an attitude of impunity that leads to disaster. David wrote: ***“An oracle within my heart concerning the transgression of the wicked: There is no fear of God before his eyes. For he flatters himself in his own eyes...”*** (Psalm 36:1-2). Any person who measures himself by his own opinions and not the Divine standard continues in the filth of sin: ***“There is a generation that is pure in its own eyes, yet is not washed from its filthiness”*** (Proverbs 30:12).

In a society that values egotistical self-realization, the idea of humble submission seems strange and undesirable. But it is precisely the attitude that God requires. The first king of Israel erred gravely when he moved up in position and began to think of himself differently. When he was little in his own eyes, Saul was chosen and blessed by God (I Samuel 15:17). But when the king exalted himself, he sinned against God and was rejected. The apostle Paul warned of this danger in our lives: ***“For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith”*** (Romans 12:3).

We must also be careful with the portraits others paint of us. If Graham Sutherland had painted an image that pleased the prime minister, flattering the leader with the strokes of his brush, would the image have been realistic? The support and praise of other people can be dangerous. Herod Agrippa I made a fatal mistake when he accepted the flattery of his subjects (Acts 12:20-23). Sometimes, other people support what God approves (Romans 14:18), but those who seek the endorsement of men lose God's approval (Galatians 1:10).

At the end of the day, the only perspective that matters is God's. Paul said: "***For not he who commends himself is approved, but whom the Lord commends***" (2 Corinthians 10:18). God does not look at the image we project to other people, nor at the image that appears in our mirror. He penetrates our thoughts (Psalm 139:1-4). "***And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account***" (Heb. 4:13).

We do not need to be concerned about artists; we need to focus on God and what He thinks, because the only image that matters is the one that He sees!

The Alcoholic's 23rd Psalm

"The bottle is my friend; I shall not rest. It maketh me to lie down with drunken hang-overs; it leadeth me before whiskey peddlers and courts of law. It destroyeth my soul; it leadeth me in the paths of wickedness for Satan's pleasure. Yea though I stagger through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear for my soul: for the bottle is with me; its bite and its sting make me miserable. It prepareth a hospital bed before me in the presence of mine doctors: it annointeth my head with debts I can never pay; my cup of sorrow runneth over. Surely hopelessness and tragedy shall plague me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the pit of Satan forever."

*** —B. Witherington

Addendum: It may be that the preceding article will cause some to conclude that I despise alcoholics (and drug users in general). Such is **not** true! I despise the **sin** involved, and I despise the profit motive that causes merchants of misery to prey upon unsuspecting men and women by getting them "hooked" on the "devil's brew." I know what it is to step over a man lying on the sidewalk with bottle in hand, lying in his own pool of vomit, sleeping off a "hang over," away from family and friends. I know what it means to try to calm a worried wife whose drunken enraged husband is barreling down the busy streets of a large city with their two small children in the car with him. I know what it means to try to help a distraught brother in Christ who has an "alcohol problem," and to witness a grown man's tears of alcoholic agony. I know what it means to try to talk a drunken, close friend out of committing suicide. I am not a friend of alcohol, but I am ready to be a friend to an **alcoholic** in any **scriptural** way possible. He (and usually his family) **needs** help! (BW)

Sympathy is herein extended to Belinda Ehl and family due to the passing on Friday night, April 27, of her mother, Violet McDonald. Violet had been a member at Seffner for several years prior to her move to Plant City, where she attended at the time of her departure. A memorial service is planned for later in the month, when all family members are able to be present. "*Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord...*" Rev. 14:13.