

# Essays & Ideas

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#101, An Essay

## Warts and ...WARTS!

King James occupies an amazing place in the history of the British Empire. He became King James VI of Scotland just after turning one year old on July 24, 1567, replacing his Roman Catholic mother, Mary, Queens of Scots. (Not “Bloody Mary” of English history.) He became King James the I of England on March 24, 1603, after the death of his cousin, Queen Elizabeth I. Upon his death on March 27, 1603, his son Charles became King Charles I. James was saved at an early age and raised by Presbyterians in Scotland. When he ascended the English throne he became the head of the Church of England. He is amazing because he was born of Roman Catholic lineage but became a Protestant. (Yes, Anglicans **are** Protestants because they came out of the Roman Catholic Church.) His son, Charles, returned to the Roman Catholic Church and began to persecute Christians. Thus, James was a “Protestant parenthesis” in his own lineage which God used to establish the foundation of the British Empire and commission the translation of the King James Bible.

Charles I’s brutal religious tyranny led to the English Civil War fought between the Royalists, (Charles’ supporters) and the Parliamentarians, (the “Roundheads”) who sought a more representative government. Charles was forced from the throne and replaced by the leader of the Parliamentarians, Oliver Cromwell (April 25, 1599 – September 3, 1658). Cromwell was saved and steered England through some of its darkest days. In a poll taken by the BBC in 2002 named him one of the ten greatest Britons of all time.

Cromwell sat for a portrait to be painted by artist Sir Peter Lely. Like all portrait painters Lely was accustomed to “painting out” any unflattering physical features, warts, moles, scars, etc. Among other things Cromwell had a large wart just below his lower lip. Asked by the artist if he wanted “the usual treatment” Cromwell replied, “Mr Lely, I desire you would use all your skill to paint my picture truly like me, and not flatter me at all; but remark all these roughnesses, pimples, warts and everything as you see me, otherwise I will never pay a farthing for it.” From this came the popular phrase “warts & all” which illuminates the desire to be completely honest and hide nothing even if it’s unflattering. To allow oneself to be presented “warts & all” illustrates a great deal of humility. To be described “warts & all” against oneself will basically give the reader a bit of “the other side of the story.”

Today, we all like to think of ourselves in the most flattering ways and may flippantly demand we be shown “warts & all” when **the last thing we want** is to have people know about our warts. Today’s news journalists wear “warts & all” like a badge of honor which they call “hard-hitting, investigative reporting!” Of course, most of this “hard-hitting, investigative reporting!” is usually practiced only when it hurts someone they hate.

This brings me to the point of this essay. We Christians readily acknowledge that we are all just “dirty-rotten-sinners” who are saved by the marvelous grace of a loving God. Although some do, as a rule we don’t exalt men and every now & then we point to a great man’s “warts & all” either to keep things in perspective or to humble a self-important brother whose head we notice growing out of proper proportions. That is good. It is realistic. It is needed.

Unfortunately, something this “full disclosure” policy ends up not just reporting on someone’s “warts” but **defining them** by them. Once I read a book about the King James translators in which the author felt a need to mention a “wart” of translator, John Overall. What was it? While out hunting he accidentally killed a man. That’s horrible! That’s tragic and...**it’s true!** You say, “Gipp, are you just afraid of someone finding out something bad about one of the King James translators?” Nope. It’s just that I noticed the author tried to **define** Overall by this unfortunate accident into something of a reckless killer. He didn’t mention he was: Regius Professor of Divinity at Cambridge, 1596; Master of Cathrine Hall, 1598; Dean of St. Paul’s, 1601; Bishop of Coventry and Lichfield, 1614; Bishop of Norwich, 1618 and a member of the Court of High Commission. Nor did he report that Dr. Overall was present at the hanging of the Jesuit Henry Garnet, mastermind of “the Gunpowder Plot” and tried to lead him to Christ. As to his part in the translation work he was vital because of his knowledge of quotations of the early church fathers which helped with the authentication of 1 John 5:7. Thus, “Warts & all” became “warts, warts & more **warts!**”

Take a look at King Uzziah in 2 Chron. 26:1-23: he ascended the throne at age 16; subdued both the Philistines and the Arabians; fortified Jerusalem and placed strategic outposts in the desert; dug many wells providing water for thousands of people; greatly increased Israel’s military might; invented great engines of war; yet loved husbandry and did amazing things in that field also. In fact, God’s epitaph for him reads: *And he did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father Amaziah did.* 2Chron. 26:4.

But if I stop there someone will shout, “Gipp, you’re ignoring his (wart) violation of the Temple!” Right. For which the very God who stated the above smote him with leprosy until the day he died. Because of this one **wrong act** (I didn’t say “mistake.” It was a willful improper act.) we tend to always demean him and use him for a bad example. We let the only, one, single bad act that God reported about him outweigh every good thing he did. I call this, “Judging a good man by his worst moment.” His “wart” doesn’t **define** him. His **good acts did!** He was a **good man** who did a **bad thing** but the “bad thing” wasn’t what he was. At least that’s what God thought. If you claim his evil needs to be exposed so we can judge him...well...God gave him leprosy! Isn’t that enough to satisfy you?

What am I saying? **Everybody has “warts.”** The question is, are you seeing a manifestation of the evil that truly is this person or is it simply a **good man** who did a **bad thing?** (I’m **not** condoning sin.) But look at your pastor. He studies his Bible and tries to feed you spiritually four times a week. He may have: led you to Christ; married you; spared you great grief with some timely guidance; helped one of your family members; successfully exalted Christ and inspired others to live better lives for Christ. But then one day he loses his temper or “gets in flesh” at a church softball game and suddenly he’s the anti-christ! He needs to be driven from the pulpit, no from town...no, from the ministry! Let’s just kill’im! Was he wrong? Yep, but does his “wart” **define** him or is it just something true and real about him that you’d rather not see? (Imagine talking face-to-face with Oliver Cromwell and always having to see...**that wart!**)

I’m afraid we, who have so benefitted from God’s mercy, **have none** for each other. Especially our best soldiers of Christ. The more time you spend around someone the better chance you have of one day noticing a “wart” that you never noticed before (Again, I’m **not** condoning sin.) I’m simply saying **let’s not judge our best men by their worst moment.**

I have no one in mind as I write this. I have no act in mind as I write this. I simply hope to temper our violent reaction when we discover someone’s “warts.”

He that covereth a transgression seeketh love; but he that repeateth a matter separateth very friends. Pro. 17:9