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The Dividing Line

The Saviour had just given the call to the thirsty to come to Him and drink, to come and receive from Him spiritual blessings. A large number of those who heard Him were undoubtedly impressed by His words. Many of them said, "Of a truth this is the Prophet", no doubt with reference to Moses' prediction recorded in Deuteronomy 18 – yet considering this Prophet as someone less than the Messiah. Others, however, declared: "This is the Christ", while others asked, "Shall Christ come out of Galilee?" quoting the prophecy of Micah that Christ was to be born in Bethlehem. In his Gospel the apostle John comments: "So there was a division among the people because of Him" (7:43). And today also there is a division because of Christ.

The people had not taken the trouble to find out where Jesus had been born. Calvin asks, "What is the cause of this ignorance but contempt?" And he adds, in words which are equally relevant today: "It is also noteworthy that they are diligent and industrious in seeking an excuse to turn from Christ but are surprisingly slow and dull to receive sound doctrine". In Capernaum also there was a division because of Christ, when He delivered His wonderful teaching about the bread of life. Some of His disciples could not bear His teaching; they described it as a "hard saying". They seemed to find His words incomprehensible. Yet none of them went to Him to ask what He meant when He emphasised the necessity of eating His flesh and drinking His blood. And today sinners depart from Christ because of difficulties which might be readily removed if only they would make diligent use of the Scriptures and ask for light from heaven on them. Does the Lord not still call: "Come now and let us reason together"?

In Capernaum the Saviour turned to the disciples and asked, "Will ye also go away?" Peter, speaking also for the rest of the disciples, confessed: "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that Thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God", demonstrating that he was on the other side of the dividing line from those who found his Master's teaching a hard saying. Was Peter speaking for Judas? No doubt he thought he was, but Judas had never recognised the teaching of Jesus as

words of eternal life; Judas had never in his heart bowed down before Him as the Son of the living God. This incident reminds us that it is impossible in this life to recognise accurately who are on which side of the dividing line between the godly and the ungodly. This was why the servants in the parable were forbidden to gather the tares; they was to be left until the harvest – until this world shall be no more. Then the spiritual state of every individual will be perfectly clear.

But it is our duty to examine ourselves as to which side of that dividing line we are on. Are we like the Pharisee, in another of Jesus' parables, whose trust was in himself completely, who had no doubt that the Lord accepted his self-righteous efforts to please Him? Or are we like the publican, on the other side of the dividing line altogether, who had no confidence in himself, whose only cry was: "God be merciful to me a sinner"? We might also ask ourselves if our attitude to Christ is represented by that of the rebellious servants: "We will not have this Man to reign over us", refusing His authority, particularly as Saviour? Or have we the mind of Nathanael, who, speaking from the depths of his heart, showed his willingness to submit to the Saviour: "Rabbi, Thou art the Son of God; Thou art the King of Israel"?

In Athens most of Paul's hearers rejected his testimony; some of them even mocked at the thought of a resurrection from the dead. And that response is perfectly common today; most people consistently put from them everything that smacks of true, supernatural religion. Others in Athens found what Paul had to say reasonably interesting; so they told him: "We will hear thee again of this matter". They no doubt felt they were commendably open to what he had to say. So perhaps do those who, though they listen to the gospel, put off to the uncertain future the duty of submitting to Christ. But such individuals, whether in first-century Athens or in twenty-first-century Scotland or elsewhere, are refusing to have Him as their King; they are making it plain that they feel more at home in the kingdom of Satan. Yet, even in Athens, a few believed, such as Damaris and Dionysius the Areopagite, who were brought to confess that they were sinners, without hope for eternity, who recognised that their resurrection from the dead would be unbelievably awful unless they looked to Christ. Today also, it seems that only a few believe, while the multitudes pass carelessly by. But it is a believing response to the preaching of the gospel that brings sinners across the dividing line, into the safety provided by the blood of Christ.

That dividing line extends on into eternity, where it is impossible to cross from one side to the other. In the torments of a lost eternity, the rich man was told that there was now "a great gulf fixed" between him and the inhabitants of heaven, Lazarus included. The rich man was told, by Abraham

in paradise: “They which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us that would come from thence”. Which highlights the supreme importance of being ready to die. Lazarus went to heaven because in this world, in spite of all his sufferings, he was walking in the ways of new obedience and was altogether dependent on the mercy of God for salvation. The rich man went to hell because he was perfectly at home in the ways of sin and felt no need for the mercy of God.

We find similar teaching in the parable of the ten virgins. When the bridegroom came, five of them went in to the marriage. But which five? Those who were wise and had already made preparation, those who not only had lamps of religious profession but also had the oil of inward grace. As they all slumbered, probably no one could have discerned if an individual virgin was wise or foolish. But only those who were ready, who were on the right side of the dividing line, could go in. The door was shut on the others, and not even their desperate knocking and crying could take them in when it was too late. So no one without saving grace – no one who refuses to obey the call of the gospel – will be safe at death. Unless sinners enter the kingdom of God in time, they will be shut out from heaven for ever.

However unclear the dividing line between the saved and the unsaved may be in time, it will be absolutely clear on the day of judgement. “When the Son of man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory: and before Him shall be gathered all nations: and He shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats”. To the sheep he will say, “Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world”. And to the goats, “Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels”. How dare we ignore the duty of submitting to Christ immediately?

A new year is surely a reminder that our time in this world is becoming shorter, our opportunities to seek salvation growing fewer, and eternity getting closer. We are now a whole year nearer the time of our death than at the beginning of 2003. It is surely time to consider our position. Which side of the dividing line are we on? When the consequences of passing into eternity unsaved are so tremendously serious, surely it is utter madness to stay away from Christ for one moment longer. Surely those who have been rejecting Christ up till now should at once submit to Him – before the dividing line becomes the great gulf fixed. Let them respond with believing hearts to Christ’s gracious call: “If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink”. And let those who have already believed respond again in faith when they are called to come to Christ to drink from the ever-full wells of salvation.

Strength Renewed¹

A Sermon by Archibald Alexander

Isaiah 40:31. *But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; and they shall walk and not faint.*

Almighty power and infinite wisdom belong to God. The continual exertion of His power in sustaining all things occasions no weariness to Him. As He is strong Himself, so He is the source of strength to such as trust in Him, although they be weak in themselves. But all who rely on their own strength, though they be young and vigorous, will utterly fail; for as human wisdom, in the sight of God, is counted as folly, so human strength in the most vigorous is but weakness. These ideas are beautifully expressed: "Hast thou not known, hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? There is no searching of His understanding. He giveth power to the faint; and to those that have no might He increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall. But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint."

In considering and applying these words, let us, *first*, inquire what are the elements of spiritual strength; *second*, inquire how this strength may be acquired and increased; and *third*, point out some of the benefits and pleasures of spiritual strength.

1. What are the elements of spiritual strength? The Philistines were utterly unable to find out the source of the amazing strength of Samson until he revealed it to his espoused wife; it was his religious observance of the laws of the Nazarite. Not that long hair could produce bodily strength; but as long as he was obedient to the Nazarite vow, the Spirit of the Lord was with him and, when there was an occasion to require a great exertion of strength, the Spirit enabled him to put it forth to a degree never observed in any other man. His uncommon bodily strength therefore was from the Lord; and when He departed from him, Samson became weak as another man.

But the strength spoken of in our text is evidently not bodily strength; it is a power seated in the mind, but not intellectual vigour. It is often found in persons of weak understanding and in minds not highly educated. It is

¹Alexander (1772-1851) was the first professor appointed to Princeton Theological Seminary when it was founded in 1812 and was the author of the excellent volume, *Thoughts on Religious Experience*. This discourse is reprinted, with some abridgement, from his *Practical Sermons*.

evidently a moral or, more properly, a spiritual quality. Spiritual strength can only be found in souls into which new life has been infused and is in vigorous exercise. The elements of this strength include faith – genuine faith – founded on divine illumination. This is the mainspring of all spiritual exercises. All men are influenced and governed by some kind of faith, but worldly men have no true faith in things spiritual and invisible. Some, from education or from the convictions of reason, may give a firm assent to the reality of such things, and thus possess a certain kind of faith, but it does not bring before the mind the true nature of spiritual things – their beauty and glory. They are therefore but little influenced by their belief. “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he that is spiritual judgeth all things.”

Spiritual strength especially consists in that exercise of faith called trust. This is the mind’s full persuasion, when a divine promise is the object. However weak the believer feels, he possesses all needful strength when his confidence is in God. Yea, when he feels himself most weak, then is he strongest – “strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might”.

Another element of strength is in the affections. When love to God is ardent and constant in its exercise, then there is real strength. In our present clouded and imperfect state, this affection is more manifested by desire than delight. The soul which pants after the presence of God, and hungers and thirsts after righteousness, is in a state of vigorous health.

But the essence of spiritual strength resides in the will. A fixed purpose more clearly characterizes the genuine Christian than anything else. When the determination of the will is not only fixed but strong, then the soul is in a vigorous state. Many have raised affections at times, who never arrive at any fixedness and strength of purpose. Some whose will is inclined to the right side possess no strength of purpose; their resolution to serve God is easily shaken. Others are continually vacillating between the service of God and the world. They may be babes in Christ, but they have not attained to the maturity and vigour of young men. The royal Psalmist had this element of strength when he exclaimed, “My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed”. So had Joshua when, before all the elders of Israel, he said, “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord”. Energy properly appertains to the will; indeed, it is nothing else but a strong will; and where this exists there will be active exertion. Where there is strength, there will be diligence in well-doing. Indolence is incompatible with spiritual energy; it is its opposite, its most insidious foe.

Humility, meekness, peace and joy may not seem, at first view, to contrib-

ute anything to strength, but in truth they are among the necessary elements of this vigour of mind. There may be a vigour which is the effect of a disordered state of the bodily system – a feverish or spasmodic action which is much more violent than the strength of a healthy man. So there often is an unnatural energy and enthusiastic vehemence in religion which is not genuine strength but real disease. True piety has no greater enemy than fanaticism, which some are so indiscriminating as to confound with the fervour of true religion. It is strange fire which should never be brought into the sanctuary of God. The more powerful any machine, the more it needs a regulator – something to balance, harmonize and direct its action. So in religion, zeal and energy are necessary to strength, but they need something to moderate and guide them. Humility is a just estimation of ourselves. If it is lacking, the soul will be irregular in its religious exercises and its exertions will be misdirected. Humility is to the Christian what ballast is to the ship; it keeps him in his proper position and regulates all his thoughts and feelings. If a ship with all its sails expanded to the wind were without ballast, it would be capsized by the first violent blast; thus many high professors in the Church make speedy shipwreck because they go forth without humility.

There are also occasions when the best thing the believer can do is to sit still and cease from his own exertions, when everything must be looked for from God. Such a case occurred to the Israelites at the shore of the Red Sea. They were pursued by the Egyptian army, with whom they were unable to contend. They were hemmed in on the right and left, and the sea was before them. In such circumstances, their own efforts were perfectly useless; their help could come alone from God. Moses therefore said to the people, “Stand still, and see the salvation of God”. In Isaiah 30, we have two remarkable texts pertinent to this point: “Their strength is to sit still”, and, “In quietness and confidence shall be your strength”. Often the Christian finds all resources exhausted and yet there is no deliverance. He finds his own exertions can accomplish nothing, and all he can do is to wait on God – to stand still and let the Lord do His own work in His own way. Indeed, often our own exertions answer no other purpose than to convince us of our helplessness, and that is the condition of the soul when the most eminent deliverances are experienced. He says, “Be still, and know that I am God”.

That holy joy is an element of strength is evident from the words of Nehemiah: “The joy of the Lord is your strength”. Most esteem joy to be a high privilege, but few feel that it is a commanded duty. “Rejoice in the Lord alway,” says Paul, “and again I say, Rejoice.” Joy and peace are mentioned as the fruits of the Spirit, next after love, to which these emotions are nearly allied. Paul not only rejoiced in the glory of God, but in tribulation; and the

prophet Habakkuk has left us a lively and beautiful expression of his elevated feelings: “Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation”. While grief and dejection debilitate the soul, joy nerves the mind with resolution and strength. Christians who hang their heads as a bulrush and whose spirits are low are incapable of much vigorous exertion.

The only other ingredient of spiritual strength is zeal – pure zeal, zeal according to knowledge. Zeal is to the soul what heat is to the body. Without warmth in our desires and feelings we shall be feeble and sickly. Fanatics are overheated, but this undue excitement is sure to be followed by a collapse – a cold season which is often connected with death. But if there is life in the body, there will be heat, and it is one sure symptom of vitality. Zeal gives an impulse to the mind. Zeal fills the soul with courage to encounter enemies and surmount obstacles. Zeal is essential in every arduous work and enables the Christian pilgrim to bear adversity and to carry out works of benevolence and piety which would be impracticable without it.

2. How may spiritual strength be acquired and increased? As this strength is not in ourselves but in God, we are exhorted not to be strong in ourselves but “in the Lord, and in the power of His might”. But, in order to obtain aid from on high, we must make use of the appointed and appropriate means. These are all comprehended in one expression, *waiting on the Lord*. Let us then attentively consider what is included in this duty. The allusion is probably to the case of persons waiting for the entrance of a prince whose aid is sought in some important matter. Suppliants cannot command the presence of a king or great man with whom they have business; they must wait his convenience; and sometimes such petitioners are kept long waiting. Analogous to this is the condition of those who seek God. They must attend where He has appointed to meet with humble worshippers. If no means of access had been appointed, they could have little encouragement to prosecute their suit. And if they devise means which He has never sanctioned, they need not expect a favourable answer, but the question put to some of old will be applicable: “Who hath required this at your hands?” The words of our Lord show that such seeking will be without fruit: “In vain do they worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men”.

Now it is our happiness to know that means of access to God have been appointed. The public worship of God, where prayer and praise are offered and where His word is preached and ordinances dispensed, affords to every sincere seeker an opportunity of drawing nigh to God and presenting his

petitions, for the prayers are offered in the name of all who join in the service. And often the very information which we need is communicated through the Word. Not only do we receive light by the Word, but strength and comfort. Therefore, wherever God has recorded His name, wherever the people of God are congregated, God is present in the midst of the assembly; and there should all present themselves who desire any blessing from the Lord. There should they be found waiting to hear what the Lord will speak. Often has He spoken peace there to His waiting people, so that they have said in their hearts, "It is good to be here", and have felt reluctant to depart.

Souls oppressed with a load of guilt have, by waiting on the Lord in His house, often been relieved of their burden by rolling it on the Lord according to His gracious invitation – that is, by faith in Christ crucified they have obtained assurance of the pardon of their sins. And persons whose minds were perplexed with doubts and unbelieving suggestions have, by going into the sanctuary, like Asaph, experienced speedy relief and found their faith wonderfully confirmed. This ancient saint, the author of several precious psalms, seems to have been a man of a sorrowful spirit and much harassed with sceptical thoughts about divine providence. His feet had well nigh slipped when he saw the prosperity of the wicked and contrasted their thoughtless ease and security with his own daily afflictions. But on entering the sanctuary he obtained such a view of the dangerous condition of the wicked as standing on a slippery precipice that all his doubts were dispelled, and his soul was filled with divine consolation, so that he could exclaim, "Whom have I in heaven but Thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee." And from his own delightful experience he could say in the conclusion of the psalm, "It is good for me to draw near to God".

But believers are not restricted to public ordinances; they are encouraged to meet with two or three others. Christ promises to be in their midst and to grant any petition which they shall agree to offer. Not only so, but the throne of grace is accessible to individuals, at all times and in all places. "When thou prayest," says our Lord, "enter into thy closet, and pray to thy Father in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly." The fervent effectual prayer of one righteous man avails much, as is proved by the case of Elijah. And greater encouragement to prayer could not be given than by the words of our Saviour: "Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you; for every one that asketh receiveth, and he that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened". As the influence of the Holy Spirit is the sum of all spiritual blessings, the promise of this comprehensive gift is enforced most emphatically. And we are taught that fasting should accompany our prayers in some cases.

Three things are plainly implied in the expression, *waiting on the Lord*. First, a desire of some benefit, with a petition for it. Second, the exercise of patience. And third, the expectation of receiving what is asked. The desire will be earnest in proportion to our sense of the needs we labour under. A deep sense of sin, and apprehension of the punishment to which it exposes us, will produce importunity in our petitions; and such prayers are effectual. A feeling of unworthiness and entire dependence will cause the soul to wait patiently until it shall please the Lord to show Himself favourable and return an answer to its earnest petitions. We are never more in the way of success in our waiting than when we are conscious that we deserve nothing and that a sovereign God might, without injustice, cast us off for ever. Our hope of acceptance in waiting on the Lord is based on nothing but the mercy of God, the merit and intercession of Christ and the gracious declarations and promises of God, in which He appears disposed to save the lost, pardon the sinner and justify the ungodly who believes in Jesus. And the liveliness of our hope will be in proportion to the strength of our faith. When this is vigorous, the assurance of hope will be enjoyed. Often, in fervent believing supplication at a throne of grace for mercy, there is a delightful assurance that we have the blessing for which we earnestly prayed.

Perseverance is also implied in waiting on the Lord. This is indeed included in patience. Some seekers, if they do not meet with immediate success, are offended or discouraged and cease from striving, believing that it is in vain. Although they might promise well at first, such soon fall away and not only lose their own souls, but become a stumbling block to others. But souls truly convinced of sin persevere in waiting. Their determination is: if they perish, to perish at a throne of grace. All such do find mercy and obtain from the Lord the blessings which they seek.

3. Some of the benefits and pleasures of spiritual strength. They who wait upon the Lord are said in our text “to mount up on wings as eagles”. The soul of fallen man naturally grovels on the earth. But when the Holy Spirit enters into any man, his thoughts and affections are raised to those things which are above, where Christ sits on the right hand of God. By the indwelling of the Holy Ghost, faith, love and hope are brought into lively exercise and these are as wings to the soul; under their influence it rises from the earth and soars on high like the eagle and gazes on the Sun of Righteousness. When the regenerated soul draws near to God by faith, the earth appears to recede and all its objects are seen to be small; the realities of the heavenly state are perceived and operate with power on the mind. The affections, which may be called the wings of the soul, mount up on high. As the soul is borne upwards, it rejoices in the view of the glory of God and in the

lively hope of dwelling with Him for ever. But Zion's pilgrim experiences night as well as day. He has his nights of weeping and often fears that the mercy of God is clean gone. But in one thing he is uniform: his determination to continue seeking God never wavers. He can say, under all circumstances, "My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed."

In general, the course of the humble believer is not an eagle's flight; if he enjoys seasons of this kind, they are few and far between. Yet he rejoices in recollecting them, and the places where they were experienced remain fresh in his memory. When David's soul was cast down within him, he encouraged himself by calling to mind former deliverances: "I will remember Thee from the land of Jordan and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar."

Our text speaks not only of flying, but of running and walking. There is a race to be run in which the strong young men utterly fall, but they that renew their strength by waiting on the Lord are enabled to run without growing weary. Their strength is not in themselves but in the Lord; this is why they do not grow weary. Their strength is continually renewed by waiting on the Lord, so they never grow tired of the service of their divine Master. Their greatest trouble is that they are able to do so little for Him who has done so much for them. Though running is necessary in winning a race, a journey or pilgrimage cannot be pursued in this way. Steady walking is the common method of performing a pilgrimage. And when the journey is long, human strength is apt to fail and the weary traveller to become faint. In this case the suggestion of prudence is to turn aside for a season and rest his fatigued limbs and seek some refreshment. This is especially necessary to Zion's traveller. And he knows where refreshment and new strength can be obtained. The Lord is his strength. By waiting on Him, he is enabled to pursue his journey to the end without fainting by the way.

Reflections. 1. "The men of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light." When the body needs to be strengthened, they spare no pains or expense to recover impaired health. If they hear of a medicinal spring far off in the mountains, they do not hesitate to undergo the hardships of the way to test the efficacy of the mineral waters. This is commonly done in the greatest uncertainty about the efficacy of the means. The diseased in body will apply to the most skilful physicians and be at great expense to procure the medicines prescribed. But although there is a fountain opened for sin and uncleanness, how slow men are to avail themselves of this effectual means of purification! An infallible Physician offers His services, with all the needed remedies to heal the diseases of the soul, and to confer immortal life on everyone who is willing to come to Him and confide his case entirely to

His hands. Yet, although multitudes are perishing within reach of the great Physician and hear His kind invitation every week, they refuse to apply to Him and are unwilling to submit to His prescriptions.

2. Our natural life requires to be nourished by suitable food; without it we would decline and death would ensue; so the spiritual life of the Christian needs continual nutriment suited to its growth and strength. If this be withheld, or sparingly partaken of, the soul will lose its vigour and will fall into dangerous diseases. The stimulus of appetite leads healthy men to take their daily bread, so there is no need to exhort them to do so; but in many professing Christians there is often a manifest defect of both taste and appetite for spiritual nutriment, so that, while the means are accessible without expense or trouble, they are neglected, and their spiritual life shows few symptoms of vitality and none of strength – or in many cases, as there is too much reason to fear, there is no principle of life. Having a name to live, they are dead, and they no more enjoy the rich provisions of the house of God than a dead man would the most savoury and nourishing food. A love to divine ordinances and a disposition to wait upon God in them – in private as well as in public – is one test of Christian character.

3. Every degree of spiritual strength is precious, and we are not permitted “to despise the day of small things” or to reject from our fellowship those who are weak in faith, yet it is the duty and privilege of every believer to aim at high attainments in the divine life, and to encourage and aid others in doing so. They should covet those rich experiences in the divine life which are represented by mounting up on the wings of an eagle. Such seasons of religious experience are not only inexpressibly delightful but exceedingly profitable. One day thus spent, whether in the sanctuary or in the closet, is better than a thousand in worldly business and carnal pleasures. The soul thus favoured possesses an evidence of the truth of the Christian religion which no other can have. Such views and affections also give an impulse to the soul in its spiritual progress which is like what a ship receives from a favourable wind springing up after experiencing headwinds or a calm.

But if we are not so highly favoured as to be able to mount up and fly, we should certainly not be content to creep when, by renewing our strength, we may run and not be weary, or walk and not faint. Some who are strong in the Lord are of a sorrowful spirit and subject to fearful conflicts, but God causes them to triumph. And, following the Captain of salvation wherever He leads, through evil and good report, they are made more than conquerors, through His love, His merit, His faithfulness, and His power. Blessed then are all they who wait on the Lord continually, for they will enjoy spiritual health and vigour, while those who rely on their own strength shall utterly fall.

A History of the Communion Season

Rev D W B Somerset

The practice of congregations making formal preparations for communion dates back to the Reformation. In 1554 John Knox and others drew up 'An Order of Common Prayer' for use among the English and Scottish exiles in Frankfurt. Communion was to be dispensed monthly, and on the Thursday preceding a communion Sabbath there was to be 'an exhortation by the pastor or some other minister.'¹ The earliest record of a preparatory service in Scotland is on the Saturday afternoon in the Canongate church in Edinburgh in 1567, but there was no established pattern to such services at that time.² Fast days are mentioned in connection with communion in the sixteenth century, but these were sometimes held on the previous Sabbath, and sometimes lasted for more than one day. Communion services were often held in the same congregation on successive Sabbaths to accommodate the numbers.

The rise of a recognizable "communion season" can probably be traced to the persecution by James VI of Presbyterian ministers such as Andrew Melville, Robert Bruce and John Welsh in the years around 1600. John Livingstone, speaking of the period of his childhood from 1603 to 1613, mentions "sundry gracious Christians, who used to resort to my father's house, especially at times of the communion, such as Mr Robert Bruce and several other godly ministers."³ Another persecuted minister, William Watson of Burntisland, used to be attended by vast crowds, especially at communions, on account of his sufferings. Between 1609 and 1613 he had about a thousand communicants each year at his September communion, and he would evidently have required assistance on these occasions.⁴ The earliest explicit record of a minister having an assistant at a communion appears to be in Elgin in 1602, but the minister in question was far from being a zealous Presbyterian, and in fact became Bishop of Moray later in the year.⁵

A further impetus to the communion season came from the Articles of Perth of 1618, one of which required communion to be received kneeling, instead of in the sitting posture which had been used since the Reformation. Large crowds attended the communions of those ministers who refused to

¹ C G M' Crie, *The Public Worship of Presbyterian Scotland*, Edinburgh, 1892, pp 83-4, 375.

² John Lee, *Lectures on the History of the Church of Scotland*, 2 vols, Edinburgh, 1860, vol 1, p 396.

³ W K Tweedie (ed), *Select Biographies*, 2 vols, Edinburgh, 1845-7, vol 1, pp 130-1.

⁴ Hew Scott, *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticae*, 6 parts, Edinburgh, 1866-71, part 4, p 529.

⁵ W M McMillan, *The Worship of the Scottish Reformed Church 1550-1638*, London, [1931], p 222.

conform to this Article, in order to receive the elements in the old way. St Giles in Edinburgh was comparatively deserted at communion time, while in the West Kirk, where there was a faithful minister, it became necessary to hold communion on four successive Sabbaths in order to accommodate the multitude. At the same time, the Stewarton revival from about 1622 onwards gave increased importance to the communion season in the south west of Scotland, and “the most eminent and serious Christians, from all corners of the Church” used to come to David Dickson’s communions in Irvine. John Livingstone records how he spent the summers from 1628 to 1630 “travelling from place to place, according as I got invitations to preach, and especially at communions at Lanark, Irvine, Newmilns, etc”.⁶

The communion season was thus firmly established, in some parts of the Church at least, by the 1620s, but generally there would have been services only on the Saturday and Sabbath. A further development came with the Kirk of Shotts revival on 21 June 1630. Robert Bruce was one of the preachers, and the people assembled on Thursday or Friday, although it is unclear whether there were services on those days. On the Sabbath there was a great blessing, and Robert Fleming records how John Livingstone “was called to preach that sermon on the Monday, which then was not usually practised,” and how “near five hundred had at that time a discernible change wrought on them”.⁷ Thereafter Monday services at communions became common among the Presbyterians.

In Ireland, where Livingstone, Robert Blair, Josiah Welsh and others were labouring, Monday services at communions were the normal practice from 1630 onwards,⁸ and David Dickson too used to have them in his congregation in Irvine. Six of his sacramental sermons from Irvine have survived, and the titles indicate the form which his communion seasons took: “At a humiliation before the communion”, “For preparation to communion”, “First communion Sabbath”, “On the Monday for direction”, “Second Sabbath for communion”, “Monday following communion”.⁹ Another Monday service is mentioned in connection with the great communion at Mauchline in 1648.¹⁰ The practice of having a thanksgiving service had been established by Act of Assembly

⁶*Select Biographies*, vol 2, p 7; vol 1, p 138.

⁷Robert Bruce, *Sermons*, Edinburgh, 1843, p 140; Robert Fleming, *The Fulfilling of the Scripture*, 2 vols, Edinburgh, 1845-50, vol 2, p 96.

⁸*Select Biographies*, vol 1, p 144. Crawford Gribben seems to have fallen into a mistake in implying that the full communion season was established in Ulster by 1624 (*The Irish Puritans*, Evangelical Press, Darlington, 2003, pp 61-2). There may have been Saturday and Monday services at that time, but there is no proof of this.

⁹David Dickson, *Select Practical Writings*, vol 1, Edinburgh, 1845.

¹⁰Robert Baillie, *Letters and Journals*, 3 vols, Edinburgh, 1841-2, vol 3, pp 48-9.

in 1645, but the Act seems to have envisaged that this would be on Sabbath afternoon. Probably there was already a difference of opinion over communion seasons among the Covenanters.

In the 1650s the Covenanters were divided into two parties, the Protestors and the Resolutioners. The next development in the communion season was the establishment of a regular Fast day, which was favoured by the Protestors, but opposed by the Resolutioners. Here is an unsympathetic account from Bishop Gilbert Burnet: “On the Wednesday before [communion] they [the Protestors] held a fast day with prayers and sermons for about eight or ten hours together; on the Saturday they had two or three preparation sermons; and on the Lord’s day they had so very many that the action continued above 12 hours in some places; and all ended with three or four sermons on Monday for thanksgiving. A great many ministers were brought together from several parts; and high pretenders would have gone 40 or 50 miles for a noted communion. The crowds were far beyond the capacity of their churches, or the reach of their voices; so at the same time they had sermons in two or three different places; and all was performed with great show of zeal.” Burnet’s account is confirmed by the example of the Protestor Andrew Donaldson, minister of Dalgety, who introduced a Fast day before the communion in 1654. Similarly the Fast day in Glasgow was introduced in 1655.¹¹

The field-preachers in the times of persecution were very much the heirs of the Protestors, and it was the practice of the Protestors that they followed, although there were obvious difficulties in obtaining freedom from molestation for a full communion season. Here is part of John Blackader’s description of a famous communion at East Nisbet in Berwickshire in 1678: “The place where we convened was every way commodious, and seemed to have been formed on purpose. It was a green and pleasant haugh,¹² fast by the water-side. On either hand there was a spacious brae, in form of a half round, covered with delightful pasture, and rising with a gentle slope to a goodly height. Above us was the clear blue sky, for it was a sweet and calm Sabbath morning, promising to be indeed one of the days of the Son of man. There was a solemnity in the place befitting the occasion, and elevating the whole soul to a pure and holy frame. The communion tables were spread on the green by the water, and around them the people had arranged themselves in decent order. But the far greater multitude sat on the brae-face, which was crowded from top to bottom – full as pleasant a sight as ever was seen of that sort.

¹¹ Gilbert Burnet, *History of His Own Time*, London, 1838, p 41; William Ross, *Glimpses of Pastoral Work in Covenanting Times*, in Naphtali Press *Anthology*, vol 4, Dallas, 1991, p 148; W D Maxwell, *A History of Worship in the Church of Scotland*, London, 1955, p 109n.

¹²A piece of level ground.

“The tables were served by some gentlemen and persons of the gravest deportment. None were admitted without tokens as usual, which were distributed on the Saturday, but only to such as were known to some of the ministers or persons of trust to be free of public scandals. All the regular forms were gone through. The communicants entered at one end and retired at the other, a way being kept clear for them to take their seats again on the hillside. Mr Welsh preached the action sermon, and served the first two tables, as he was ordinarily put to do on such occasions. The other four ministers, Mr Blackader, Mr Dickson, Mr Riddel, and Mr Rae, exhorted the rest in turn; the table service was closed by Mr Welsh with solemn thanksgiving; and solemn it was and sweet and edifying to see the gravity and composure of all present, as well as of all parts of the service. The communion was peaceably concluded, all the people heartily offering up their gratitude, and singing with a joyful noise to the Rock of their salvation.”¹³

When they had freedom from interruption, the Covenanters would have had a Fast day as well. In the Scottish Church in Rotterdam, for instance, a Fast day on the Thursday was added to the Saturday, Sabbath, and Monday services at the communion in February 1677, and ordained “to be constantly observed in all time coming”. Robert MacWard and John Brown of Wamphray were present at this communion, though John Brown was not well enough to preach.¹⁴

At the Revolution of 1689 the communion season of the Protestors and the Covenanters was generally adopted in the Scottish Church. Steuart of Pardovan, writing in 1708, said that “by the present practice, the Thursday, or some other day of the week is kept as a Fast day, on which there are three sermons delivered by so many neighbouring ministers . . . On Saturday there are two preparation sermons; and upon the Lord’s Day there are in some churches two action sermons, beside the thanksgiving in the afternoon; and on the Monday there are two thanksgiving sermons. There will be at these occasions, three, five, or perhaps more ministers assisting the pastor of the congregation, because of the great confluence of people that resort thereto.” Pardovan’s account is confirmed by the writings of Elizabeth West, Thomas Boston and others.¹⁵

In the Highlands, there were not only the Thursday, Saturday, Sabbath,

¹³Thomas M’Crie, *The Story of the Scottish Church*, Glasgow, 1988, pp 308,310.

¹⁴William Steven, *The History of the Scottish Church, Rotterdam*, Edinburgh, 1842, p 48n.

¹⁵Walter Steuart of Pardovan, *Collections . . . Concerning the Worship, Discipline, and Government of the Church of Scotland*, Arbroath, 1802, pp 90-1; Thomas Boston, *Complete Works*, 12 vols, Wheaton, Illinois, 1980, vol 12, p 161.

and Monday services but there was also the fellowship meeting on the Friday morning, and latterly there was a Friday afternoon or evening service as well. In the Lowlands, Friday services were less common. Typically conservative congregations, such as those of the elder Thomas M' Crie in Edinburgh or of Alexander Dyce Davidson in Aberdeen, did not have them.¹⁶ They are mentioned, however, at the communion at the Cambuslang revival in October 1742, and at the Kilsyth revival of 1839. The Reformed Presbyterians too used to have them, and they had become the custom in the most prominent Burgher congregation in Glasgow as early as 1802. In 1837 John Macdonald, Ferintosh, preached on the Friday evening of the communion at Rabbi Duncan's church at Milton, Glasgow.¹⁷ The Gaelic chapels in the cities followed the Highland practice, but there were difficulties over daytime meetings on Friday because of the nature of people's employment. In the Duke Street Gaelic Chapel in Glasgow, where David Carment was minister from 1810 to 1822, there was a service on the Friday evening and the usual preacher at this was John Love. In the Edinburgh Gaelic Chapel, however, there was a fellowship meeting on the Friday evening, and John Macdonald presided at this in 1837.¹⁸

The origin of the fellowship meeting is obscure. They seem to be first mentioned in connection with communion seasons in an Act of the Synod of Sutherland and Caithness on 1 July 1737.¹⁹ As this Act was seeking to abolish fellowship meetings, they must already have been well-established in the northern Highlands by this time. The Act is of interest, and we give it in full: "That because the communicants in each Presbytery in our bounds are by the blessing of God become so numerous that their meeting all in one Parish to partake in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper is attended with several inconveniences, particularly that the communicants are often straitened for want of room in the churches, and that the work is rendered tedious, therefore, the Synod should appoint that, at least in the Presbyteries of Caithness and Dornoch where a sufficient number of assistants can be got,

¹⁶John Kennedy, *The Days of the Fathers in Ross-shire*, Inverness, 1897, p 111; David Scott, *Annals and Statistics of the Original Secession Church*, Edinburgh, [1886], p 451; J. Ogilvie Skea, *The Free West*, Aberdeen, 1963, p 41.

¹⁷*Restoration in the Church*, Tain, 1989, pp 28, 139; Matthew Hutchinson, *The Reformed Presbyterian Church in Scotland*, Paisley, 1893, p 228; *Annals of O S Church*, p 456; John Kennedy, *The Apostle of the North*, Inverness, 1932, p 173.

¹⁸S Carment, *Memoir of Rev James Carment*, Dalkeith, 1886, p 225; *Apostle of the North*, p 174.

¹⁹Donald Beaton, "Fast day and Friday Fellowship Meeting Controversy in the Synod of Sutherland and Caithness 1737-1758", in *Transactions of the Inverness Gaelic Society*, 1917, pp 159-182.

the foresaid ordinance shall for hereafter be as often as may be administrated in two parishes on the same Lord's Day.

“As also, that because the meetings ordinarily kept on Fridays before the administration of the Sacrament are often inconvenient to the ministers who join in the ministration by diverting them from what they should be principally employed about, and to the communicants in insomuch as their coming from their apartments and attending these meetings takes up a good part of that day, which ought to be rather spent as much as may be in meditation and other private devotions, and that the main design of these meetings may be obtained without those inconveniencies by the people's communicating their cases of conscience to their ministers at home. Therefore, that the Synod appoint these meetings on Fridays before the Sacrament to be forborne for the future in all the bounds of this Synod; and appoint the ministers before they come from home to assist at that ordinance to give the communicants of their respective parishes opportunities of consulting them about such questions or cases relative to that work as may happen to be straitening to them. But that these conferences be as private as may be.”

The efforts to suppress fellowship meetings in the Highlands continued, with limited success, until June 1758, when the Synod's Act of 1737 was finally set aside by the Commission of Assembly. At first the fellowship meetings at the communion were confined to the northern and eastern Highlands, but they spread into other parts of the Highlands with the revival of evangelical religion. Lachlan Mackenzie, for instance, presided at a fellowship meeting in Lochbroom in about 1800. We have not discovered whether they were held in Lochcarron in his time, but it seems probable, because in 1816 John Macdonald, Ferintosh, John Kennedy, Redcastle, and Thomas Ross, Lochbroom, arrived to assist at a Lochcarron communion on the Wednesday night, and Macdonald was a particular enthusiast for fellowship meetings.²⁰ The lay-evangelist Finlay Munro spoke at a fellowship meeting in Gairloch, probably about 1820, while the first fellowship meeting in Lewis was at the Stornoway communion in 1825 or 1826.

Probably the first fellowship meeting in Skye was at about this time too. The 1812-1814 revival there was largely of a Separatist nature and it seems improbable that there would have been fellowship meetings at communions at that stage, but they had become established in Skye by the 1830s. Perhaps the practice was introduced through the visits of the Apostle of the North. In Harris, where again there was a degree of Separatism, and where there was no evangelical minister until the Disruption, the first fellowship meeting

²⁰*Days of the Fathers*, p 163; Lachlan Mackenzie, *Additional Lectures, Sermons, etc.*, Inverness, 1930, p 13; John Sinclair, *Life of David Ross*, Inverness, 1893, p 24.

might not have been until the first Free Church communion, which was at Leaclee in 1852.²¹

By 1836 fellowship meetings were sufficiently widespread for the minister of Moy and Dalarossie, south of Inverness, to state that they were held in his parish, "as in most parts of the Highlands". They were never the custom in the Lowlands, however, except in congregations with Highland links, and a writer in 1851 speaks of them as something "unknown", not only in the Lowlands but also in the west Highlands.²² He would seem to have been referring to Bute, Perthshire, and the southern part of Argyllshire. In Fort William fellowship meetings were established by the time of the Disruption, if not earlier, and they extended as far as Oban, because there was one at the first Free Presbyterian communion there in 1894. The Apostle of the North, however, makes no mention of fellowship meetings in his visits to Breadalbane in 1835 and 1836.²³ In the southern Highlands the Men never attained to the position they had in the north. Kennedy Cameron, mentioning the difficulty of supply in the Free Church in Arran after 1900, states: "The *men* were unknown on the island."²⁴ Similarly it was never the custom to have fellowship meetings in the Kames Free Presbyterian congregation after 1893.

By the mid-nineteenth century the communion season was starting to decline in many parts of Scotland under the effects of the general decay in religion. The Disruption had left the Moderates in control of the Established Church, and they had always disliked communion seasons as involving too much preaching and religious fervour. The prevailing religion in the Free Church, particularly after the 1859 revival, was a non-doctrinal evangelicalism, and this too was hostile to the communion season. The other large denomination in Scotland was the United Presbyterian Church, most of whose congregations had adopted the practice of quarterly communion by 1860.²⁵ Experience shows that this practice is incompatible with the communion season.

The fellowship meeting was the first to go, where it had been the practice, and even by the 1850s it was "not now so general as it has been in our churches."²⁶ Probably the writer was referring here to Ross-shire and

²¹G N M Collins, *John Macleod DD*, Edinburgh, 1951, p 223; John Macleod, *By-Paths of Highland Church History*, Edinburgh, nd, p 23; Roderick MacCowan, *The Men of Skye*, Glasgow, 1902, pp 46-7,49; George Henderson, *The Poems of John Morison*, 2 vols in 1, Edinburgh, nd, vol 2, p xvii.

²²*New Statistical Account*, Edinburgh, 1845, vol 14, Inverness, p 112; John Rose, *Metrical Reliques*, Inverness, 1851, p xiv.

²³*By-Paths* pp 21, 50; *Apostle of the North*, pp 161,163,168.

²⁴J Kennedy Cameron, *The Church in Arran*, Edinburgh, 1912, p 159.

²⁵William Mackelvie, *Annals and Statistics of the United Presbyterian Church*, Edinburgh, 1873.

²⁶Letter, in possession of present writer, probably written to a Highland newspaper about 1850.

Sutherland. In 1869 Archie Crawford, Kames, was in the north and summed up his impressions of the state of religion by saying that “in Ross-shire he felt that the people were living on the religion of their grandfathers; in Sutherland they were living on the godliness of their fathers; while in Caithness he fell in with a people who had some godliness of their own”. The Monday services were the next to go, in the Lowlands in the period 1870-1880, and in the Highlands rather later. In Caithness “there began to be a large falling off in the Monday attendances” in the 1890s.²⁷

Meanwhile Principal Robert Story started a campaign against the Fast day in 1867 and it too had disappeared from most towns by 1890. In Edinburgh, for instance, the Fast day was abandoned as a public holiday in 1887, following a consultation between the Town Council and the Established Church Presbytery. In Aberdeen the Fast day was abandoned in 1888.²⁸ Curiously, in the very same year the Factory and Workshops Act of 1878 was amended to give women and persons under 18 statutory permission to attend the Fast day of the communion not *once* in the year as before, but *twice*. Thus it was the Church rather than the state that was intent on abolishing the Fast day. The Free Churches in the Lowlands concurred with the Established Church in this matter, and Andrew Bonar in Glasgow regarded the change with distress as “another sign of the times”.²⁹ Only in Highland congregations did the full communion season survive into the twentieth century.

At present the communion season can be found in some, at least, of the Church of Scotland congregations in the Hebrides, and in many of the Free Church congregations in Scotland. In the Free Church, however, fast days and fellowship meetings have been tending to disappear in the last decade, especially in the towns, while extra communions, with just a single preparatory service, have come in their place. In the Free Presbyterian Church the practice is as described in a Synod Resolution of 1983: “The Synod, conscious of the great blessing that Communion Seasons have proved throughout the history of our Church and earlier, call on all the Kirk Sessions of the Church to adhere to the observance of the days of the Communion Season set apart for humiliation, self-examination, preparation and thanksgiving at those times when the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper is observed. With regard to the frequency of the observance of the Lord’s Supper, the Synod is of the view that, ordinarily, as has been the practice in our Church since its inception,

²⁷John Macleod, p 264; George B Burnet, *The Holy Communion in the Reformed Church of Scotland*, Edinburgh, 1960, p 279; Donald Mackay, *Memories of Our Parish*, Dingwall, 1925, p 36.

²⁸*The Holy Communion*, p 289; *A History of Worship*, p 174; *The Free West*, p 78.

²⁹William Mair, *Digest of Church Laws*, Edinburgh, 1904, p 100; A A Bonar, *Diary and Letters*, London, 1894, p 362.

once or twice a year in each place is sufficiently frequent for the observance of this ordinance.”³⁰

In conclusion it might be mentioned that the communion season persisted in Ulster from Covenanting times onward, and was introduced into America in the eighteenth century by the Presbyterian emigrants from Scotland and Ulster. In the same way communion seasons were introduced in Australia and Canada in the nineteenth century, and there is a reference to a fellowship meeting at a Canadian communion at that time. In 1908 Rev J B Radasi held the first communion season in Rhodesia. He wrote to Rev Neil Cameron in the following terms: “We have also had the Lord’s Supper with the few communicants that we have. The services began from Thursday to Monday, just as we do in Scotland. I was surprised to find that other Presbyterian Churches only have the Sabbath services on a communion season – the Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and Monday services are done away with. I have made it clear to our people that as far as our Church is concerned, the communion services will always begin from Thursday to Monday.” At first there was simply a prayer-meeting on the Friday morning, but fellowship meetings were introduced in the 1960s.³¹

The Wedding Garment¹

W K Tweedie

This parable cannot be understood unless we keep in view certain of the customs of the East. At high festivals, the guests were furnished, by the one entertaining them, with a robe befitting the event. These garments were kept in store in the abodes of the rich and, as guest after guest entered the home where hospitality was to be shown, he received the article of dress which fitted him for appearing there. Referring to a similar practice, an Eastern traveller says, “One could scarcely believe the expense incurred by the king of Persia for such gifts. His wardrobes are always full. The dresses are kept in stores, assorted and apart.”

At the marriage supper which is described in this portion of God’s holy Word, that custom was observed. When the feast was ready, the servants of the King were sent to call those who had been previously invited, for in the East a second invitation was the practice. They, however, declined and, after

³⁰*Free Presbyterian Magazine*, vol 88 (1983), pp 224-5.

³¹L E Schmidt, *Holy Fairs*, Princeton, 1989; *By-Paths* p 68; *John Macleod*, p 207; *Life and Labours of Rev J B Radasi*, Gisborne, 1966, pp 36,73,110.

¹Taken, slightly edited, from Tweedie’s book, *Parables of Our Lord*, published in 1865. This article is based on Matthew 22:11-14.

thus trifling with their hospitable king, they mocked him yet more by the pretexts which they pled for their absence. They had something which they preferred to him, and this aptly sets forth the manner in which men too often treat the King of kings and the glorious gospel of the blessed God. The farm or the merchandise has more charms for them than the invitation of the King eternal, immortal and invisible. And rather than comply with His requests, or His tender and loving entreaty, they will despitefully use those who are the messengers of His mercy. So unwise are mortals towards God.

But that is not the portion of the parable which is to be considered here. The guest-chamber was filled after all. The king was not to be disappointed, and his servants soon collected a sufficient number to people his halls. From the very highway “both the good and the bad” were gathered in, and “the wedding was furnished with guests”.

A strange and motley marriage-party that! The highway furnished its contribution. The streets and lanes, perhaps, sent in theirs. There might be some in rags, and some who had never seen such a sight before. As the lights in the royal chamber flashed upon those groups, it would have been a curious study to have marked their conduct, their surprise and amazement at all they beheld. But however motley they might be, just the better did they represent the goodness of the great King of kings in inviting all to come to His Son, the Saviour. That is the meaning of this peculiar sight. It shows that if some men decline God’s gracious invitations and perish on that account, He will find others to welcome them. If some men be so engrossed with worldly things – the farm or the merchandise – as to put away the tender invitations of God, He will raise up monuments of mercy independent of them. To the poor the gospel is preached. To the friendless the Friend of sinners is welcome, and thus God’s purposes of mercy are accomplished, just as the king in the parable had his wedding “furnished with guests” in spite of the shallow pretexts of the others.

It is here then that our present portion of the parable begins. The guests are all assembled; only one thing more is needed – the presence of the king. He appears but, amid the group, the royal eye rests on one who had not on a wedding garment; he was not arrayed as the others were. The king expostulated; the detected one was speechless; and misery beyond what can easily be told was his lot. Now what is the meaning of this? What does Jesus teach us here?

First, a wedding garment was provided for this man as well as for the rest of the guests, but from carelessness or stupidity or satisfaction with his own clothing he had declined to put it on. And does not this just set forth – so plainly that a child can understand it – the manner in which many a sinner

treats the invitation of Jesus, “Come unto me”? He has provided a garment – a seamless robe, His own righteousness – without spot or wrinkle on it. But men are careless and they do not heed the Saviour’s goodness. They are ignorant and cannot comprehend it. They are proud and disregard it. They are satisfied with their own righteousness, and that which Jesus provided they despise or put away. Even in the guest-chamber, among the people of God, many appear without the provided robe. They may have heard of it; they may have looked at it; but they pass in without putting it on. And He whose eye is like a flame of fire at once detects them to be none of His. That is a deep saying, “Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ” – put Him on as men put on a garment.

But again: the man at the guest-table was instantly detected. The question put to him by the king was, “Friend, how camest thou in hither, not having a wedding garment?” There was one ready for you as you entered; why was it not put on? I did not ask you to furnish it for yourself; I provided it. What then has led *you* to despise or neglect what the others have attended to? Why are you here in this plight?

And if such questions might be asked in such a case as the parable mentions, much more in regard to the goodness of our God. He has made all ready in order that we may be satisfied with the goodness of His house. He has given His invitation in these generous terms, “Ho, every one that thirsteth, come”, or, “Whosoever will, let him come”. He has provided the garment in which we are to appear before Him. And, after all this fulness of mercy, should we not blush and be ashamed to enter the presence of the King without that robe? Is not His majesty mocked? Is not His gift refused and His love slighted, when we thus decline?

O what rags men sometimes wear in the very presence of God! One man sacrifices his children to some blood-loving idol and thinks that this will secure the favour which he feels he needs. Another man trusts to his own sufferings; perhaps he scourges himself till his blood flows and then concludes that this will suffice. Again, some men think that their own goodness will do for a robe. Many trust to pilgrimages and fasting and similar things, and not a few suppose that their religiousness is sure to secure God’s favour; they can need nothing more. They count, perhaps, a hundred prayers which they “say” in a day; nay, some employ others to repeat prayers in their stead that the number may be sufficient and, with such poor deceptions, men pass into the presence of God till His holy eye detects them and His holy justice condemns. O how blessed are they who meekly and thankfully put on the wedding garment which God provided – that is, the perfect righteousness of Christ (Is 61:10).

But next: the man was speechless. He had not a word to say in answer to the question of his hospitable king. And will it not be the same with us if we appear before the God and Father of our Lord Jesus clothed in the rags of our own righteousness, not the spotless robe of Christ?

What *can* we reply? The garment is all ready. It is free. It is pressed upon our acceptance. Many others have put it on and found it a sure defence, and well may the tongue cleave to the roof of the mouth when our iniquity is detected, our pride unmasked, our ignorance rebuked, as we stand before the Holy One. O how the discovery will penetrate the conscience like fire, or flash through it like lightning, when men see their true condition *for the first time* as they stand before the throne!

An Eastern traveller tells that he was invited to the table of the king of Persia, and as splendid dresses had been sent to him by the king, he was obliged to appear in the royal presence arrayed in the royal gifts. He hesitated till he was assured that the neglect "would greatly displease the king". Another traveller mentions that a vizier lost his life for appearing without a garment which had been gifted by the Shah. The officer who was to forward it sent a plain robe in its stead, but the vizier would not appear in it, and put on the more gorgeous gift of a former prince. He was declared a dog and put to death. A third traveller tells that, before appearing in the presence of the Sultan, he had – to avoid giving offence, or the danger that might have followed it – put on a robe which had been given to him. So unchanging are Eastern customs, and such is the light which they shed upon the Scriptures.

Further, in the present instance the results of the man's folly speedily appeared. He would not put on the wedding garment, and weeping and gnashing of teeth were to be his lot. Even so: do we refuse the righteousness of the Redeemer? Do we appear before God in our own way, and with our own righteousness, despising His? Then we perish. There is no hope for us. We are in the act of dishonouring the Son of God. And as no name but His can save, the blackness of darkness becomes the portion of the soul. That branch is withered and cast out.

A vessel at sea is in jeopardy from the storm and the waves. But the seamen reach a place of safety on a rock. Now, if we saw them abandoning that rock of their own accord for the heaving waters again, what would be our opinion? Would it not appear that they were bent on self-destruction? And it is the same with us if we decline to put on the wedding garment. No salvation without that. But no death with it; and that soul is hopefully on the way to heaven which takes up the words used in another case and applies them to this, "I will not give sleep to mine eyes, nor slumber to mine eyelids," till I have put on that robe.

Christ's Triumph over Death¹

David Brown

How precious is the view given of "death" in this passage, as the Saviour's "last enemy" – the last enemy of that mediatorial crown which He now wears, as the Redeemer of His people from the whole ruins of the fall! He sits on His own throne, "a Lamb as it had been slain" – taken up to it fresh from the cross and placed upon it in high testimony of Jehovah's complacency in His work. In this character, and vested with this authority and power, will He destroy death, that last enemy of His gracious sway.

Virtually, indeed, it has been done already – on the field of law, though not of fact. "Through death He destroyed him that had the power of death, that is the devil" (Heb 2:14). "He spoiled principalities and powers, and made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in" His cross (Col 2:15). There He "abolished" or "destroyed death" (2 Tim 1:10). A legal basis had to be obtained for the actual destruction of so righteous a penalty as death, "the wages of sin". In the righteousness of that penalty, Satan was strong. On that field, but for Christ's death, he was invincible. In this sense "the accuser of the brethren" had the power of death – power to insist on its infliction, on the same eternal principles of the divine government by which himself was ruined as a sinner; power to see it invested, in its approaches with unmixed terrors to men, with a "fearful looking for of judgement and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries"; power to have a hand in mixing "the cup of trembling" to the dying sinner. Yes, "the sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law"; nor could the Son of God Himself override these awful securities for the execution of vengeance.

But He could draw off that vengeance, by placing Himself under it as Jehovah's substitutionary victim; and this He did – "through death" not actually abolishing death, but obtaining a legal title to abolish it from the Throne. He met the enemy on His own chosen field, that proud arena where "was the hiding of His power". And having "taken from him all his armour wherein he trusted", He has gone up to "divide His spoils" (Luke 11:21,22; compare Is 53:12). And the distribution is going gloriously on. The sweet sense of pardon and reconciliation – the envy of Satan – is one of the spoils He divides. Superiority to the "sin that dwelleth in us" is another of the spoils left on the field of battle. Falling into the Redeemer's hands, He divides it to His people.

But the death of death is reserved for the last. Already death is unstinged,

¹Taken, slightly edited, from Brown's useful volume, *Christ's Second Coming*. The author is at this point commenting on 1 Corinthians 15:24-26.

so that, though he tears asunder soul and body, leaving what Christ redeemed a lifeless carcase, in this he is no longer Satan's but Christ's servant, who "to this end, both died and rose and revived, that He might be Lord both of the dead and living" (Rev 14:9). As such, He "hath the keys of hell and of death" (Rev 1:18). Still the enemy lives. While his victims lie rotting in the grave, he is not "abolished", "destroyed", "put under His feet". But it must, and it shall, come to that. The Redeemer "expects" that what He accomplished sacrificially on the field of law shall be made good royally in the region of fact. The prey shall be taken from the terrible, and the lawful captive delivered. And thus, in the most absolute and comprehensive sense, "He shall see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied".

The Love of Christ to His People¹

John Love

We are to distinguish between His love to them as God – the Second Person in the Godhead – and His love to them as God-man, having a human soul and body existing in personal union with His divine nature. Thus:

1. The Lord Jesus as God-man, the Mediator, now in heaven, has a love of pity and compassion towards those of His elect who are yet lying in an unconverted state, besides that love which, as God, He had to them from eternity: "Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear My voice; and there shall be one fold, and one Shepherd" (John 10:16); "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Me" (John 12:32).

2. As God-man, the Mediator, now in heaven, He has a love of complacency and delight in those of the elect that are born again and in their obedience, distinct from that complacency which, as God absolutely considered, He takes in them (Rev 2 and 3; Song 1:8-11; 2:2; 4:1,7-15; 6:4-13; 7:1-10; 8:5).

3. As God-man, now in heaven, He has a love of sympathy towards His elect, regenerated people on earth, distinct from that love and compassion which, as God, the Second Person of the Godhead, He has for them: "For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (Heb 4:15).

4. The Lord Jesus Christ, now in heaven, has, besides the same love in His divine nature, a love of beneficence, kindness and desire towards His

¹Taken from *Memorials of John Love* vol 2, p 470. Love was the noted minister of Anderston, Glasgow, during the early nineteenth century.

elect, regenerated people: “If any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me” (Rev 3:20; also Song 2:1,2,10-15; 5:1; 4:8; 7:10-12; 8:5).

Book Review

1 & 2 Timothy and Titus, a commentary by Patrick Fairbairn, published by the Banner of Truth Trust, hardback, 464 pages, £13.95, obtainable from the Free Presbyterian Bookroom.

When the call came to Bunyan’s Mr Valiant for Truth to cross the river, he said, “I go to my Father’s and, though with great difficulty I have got hither, yet now I do not repent me of all the troubles I have been at to arrive where I am. My sword I give to him that shall succeed me in my pilgrimage, and my courage and skill to him that can get it. My marks and scars I carry with me to be a witness for me that I have fought His battles who now will be my rewarder.”

This spirit is one of the leading themes of these Prison Epistles. Paul’s eye is not only looking backward over his life of faith but forward to the reward of faith, the crown of righteousness, and out towards others who love His appearing (2 Tim 4:9,10). Fairbairn’s comment is instructive here: “The action of loving being put in the perfect [tense], betokens it as a thing commenced in the past, but continuing on till the proper completion is reached: who have fixed their love on His appearing, and so still love. A remarkable characteristic! How rarely it is possessed by believers as it ought to be! . . . To love Him in this particular aspect bespeaks not only faith, but such a full assurance of faith and hope in Him as casts out fear, and carries with it the confidence that, when He appears, we shall also appear with Him in glory” (pp 392,393).

But if Paul is taken up with the land that is very far off, he does not fail to deal with the practical aspects of church life. He speaks of the sad declension which will mark the latter days; the place of the old, the young, servants and women; and the qualifications required of a gospel minister. Again Fairbairn’s comment (p 138) shows insight: “But even this [the gift of teaching], possessed too in no ordinary measure, will prove of little avail for the great practical ends of the ministry unless it is accompanied with not only the sobriety which shuns all lawless excess, but also the *discreet* and *orderly* or becoming deportment which instinctively shrinks from needless occasions for offence, and indicates a temper and habits under due management and control. How often do ministers, otherwise highly endowed, lose

well-nigh the fruit of all their gifts and labours by marked failings and imperfections here!”

This commentary is attractively produced and gives a solid and reverent exegesis of the text by another Mr Valiant for Truth. At £13.95 it is money well spent for the serious student.

(Rev) J R Tallach

Protestant View

The Situation in Ulster

In the opinion of many who view political events from a Christian, and especially a Protestant, perspective, the outcome of the recent Assembly elections in Northern Ireland, which resulted in the Democratic Unionist Party gaining the largest number of seats, is highly significant. Over the last 30 years, at times openly, but for the most part covertly, successive British Governments have pursued policies towards Northern Ireland which have had as their aim to detach that province from the United Kingdom and have it absorbed into the Irish Republic. This has also been the long-time aspiration of the Papacy, and as it connived at IRA terrorism and skilfully manipulated the political machine it seemed to be only a matter of time before its hope of a united Ireland would be fulfilled.

The election result has, however, revealed that the majority of Protestants in Northern Ireland are now aware of the danger of being railroaded into a united Ireland, the so-called Good Friday Agreement being used as a means to that end. We may be sure that the God-fearing in Ulster will seek to see the Lord’s hand in this turn of events. “Who is he that saith, and it cometh to pass, when the Lord commandeth it not?” We pray that He will hasten the time when, as we believe, Ireland will be united again under the British crown, and when the uniformity of divine worship and church government envisaged in the Solemn League and Covenant will become a reality north and south of the borders on both sides of the Irish Sea.

JM

Notes and Comments

The Queen’s Speech

One of the functions of government is to restrain sin and promote virtue: “For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil” (Rom 13:3). It is particularly reprehensible that the government of this nation, which is still constitutionally Christian and Protestant and which has a history of legislation

formulated in accordance with the Word of God, should be proceeding rapidly to demolish the foundations of whatever recognition the nation has given to God and His revealed will. The Queen's Speech at the recent opening of the new Parliamentary session, outlining the Government's proposals for legislation during the next 12 months, provides further evidence of this God-defying process.

It is a commentary on the state of Parliament and society that the proposed Civil Partnerships Bill is not among the very few items in the Speech which are regarded by commentators as politically controversial. This Bill will provide for the registration of relationships between couples of the same sex before a registrar and two witnesses. *The Scotsman*, 27 November, 2003, reported that "although there will not be an official ceremony, the system has clearly been designed to mirror marriages as closely as possible. It will even offer couples the right to dissolve the agreement in the form of a divorce. Registration as "civil partners" will be available only to homosexuals and not as an alternative to heterosexual marriage. The radical moves, covering England and Wales, will allow gays to benefit from a dead partner's pension, grant next-of-kin rights in hospitals and exempt them from inheritance tax on a partner's home. They would also have the right to register their partner's death and be able to continue tenancy of a property . . . [and be] able to gain parental responsibility for each other's children and be obliged to support each other financially."

The Scottish Executive propose to avail themselves of a parliamentary device which enables them to introduce legislation from the House of Commons to the Scottish Parliament. The Deputy Justice Minister in the Scottish Parliament has claimed that there is no intention to undermine the institution of marriage but that the Executive are solely concerned to give "civil partners" the same tax and pension benefits enjoyed by married people: "We're talking about people in long-term loving relationships who are denied legal recognition for certain very significant parts of their lives. I don't see how giving certain rights to people who cannot get married can possibly undermine marriage." The new Conservative leader is reported to have welcomed the introduction of civil partnerships and Conservative MPs will be given a free vote. This is a departure from the stance of his predecessor, who committed his MPs to voting against homosexual adoption. The development of the party system, and the lack of distinction on religious and moral matters between the parties, deprives Christians in the population of a voice in the parliamentary system.

If the Government, in response to the advocacy of shameless pressure groups, applied the same principle across the whole range of conduct con-

demned as sinful by the Word of God and gave the transgressors of His law the same recognition it gives to those who endeavour to conform to it, society would soon sink into the heathenism from which it was delivered by the gospel. Is it any wonder that the legislators who play fast and loose with God's law for private and public morality are presiding over a nation increasingly characterised by violence, immorality and racial tension, and are at a loss how to deal effectively with the situation? When government and society abandon the framework for morality and politics provided in the Word of God, it is no wonder they become a prey, not only to the will of the majority, but often to the pressures of groups who are quite prepared to take advantage of the legitimate liberty and the illegitimate licence characteristic of a nation at the meeting point of a Christian past and an increasingly pagan present.

It is significant also that, while the Queen's Speech promises a referendum on the euro, there is no promise of a referendum on the European Constitution, which is by no means a mere "tidying up" exercise, but has been described by one involved at a senior level in the discussions as a renegotiation of the Treaty of Rome – a renegotiation which will take us even further along the road to the European superstate and deprive us of many of our dearly-bought national rights and liberties. The same deceit which has characterised the whole process of European integration is still being practised by the Prime Minister and those involved with him in this betrayal of our nation. The deceit is as culpable as the work in which it is employed. "If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do? The Lord is in His holy temple, the Lord's throne is in heaven: His eyes behold, His eyelids try, the children of men" (Ps 11:3,4). *HMC*

Alcohol and Violence

Scotland has been condemned for its "booze and blade" culture after recent figures showed murder rates among the worst in Europe. More than half of these 127 killings in 2002 were the results of stabbings, with alcohol or drugs involved in almost two-thirds of the cases.

The Scottish Justice Minister declared: "Most occur at the weekend and involve young men. It doesn't take a huge leap of imagination to connect many of these tragic incidents with binge drinking and street disorder. This kind of behaviour and its shocking consequences can no longer be tolerated in a modern Scotland." One need only comment that only a few generations ago there were far fewer murders. But that was an age when, properly, the ultimate penalty for murder was death.

The Minister's comments about binge drinking chime in with a report that the UK has the worst record in Europe for binge drinking – 40% of men's drinking sessions and 22% of women's come within the definition of binge

drinking (imbibing more than, for instance, four pints of beer in a relatively short period of time). Such drinking results in social problems on a vast scale, besides murder. But the situation is characteristic of an increasingly godless society which has no conception of that most elementary statement of true religion: "Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him for ever".

Hallowe'en Postscript

On two occasions I have been impressed by the widespread nature of Hallowe'en observance. In 1996, in the late afternoon and evening of October 31, as we travelled through various Czechoslovakian towns and villages on our way to the Ukraine, we saw many people making their way to cemeteries, carrying baskets and greenery. We learned they were going to carry out rituals at the graves of relatives that "All Hallows Eve". As darkness fell, it was not only eerie to see people standing in the ghostly glow of candles burning beside literally hundreds of gravestones throughout each cemetery we passed; it was also so very sad to see these people in bondage to such superstition.

The other occasion is now, as I write from Canada. I am surprised at how many houses in the town where I am staying were decorated outside on the days around October 31 with such things as carved pumpkins; ghoulish figures of witches, wizards and skeletons; lit-up plastic tombstones; and plastic vampire bats. On the main street the lamp posts have bunches of dried corn stalks tied to them with broad yellow ribbons, many shop windows are decorated with Hallowe'en symbols, and some shop assistants and bank workers even wore Hallowe'en caps or waistcoats for the day. In the evening, "trick or treat" young people were out in force.

"All harmless fun," say most people. Not so – and for two reasons at least. Hallowe'en is not only a practical form of superstition but is also firmly rooted in paganism and associated with evil. It has been known too for Hallowe'en activities to encourage some young people to experiment with the occult. If we value Christian principles and seek to live by them, we will avoid Hallowe'en activities and not allow our children to be involved in them. "Church schools around the country," says one British press report, "are banning Hallowe'en celebrations." It would be good for everyone if other schools followed their example.

Another and increasingly disturbing fact in Britain is that "trick-or-treating" has developed into a nasty experience for many householders. A newspaper columnist notes that police forces in, for example, Merseyside, Dorset and West Sussex, are having to contend with "gangs of raucous vandals cruising the streets seeking handouts on demand from homeowners foolish enough to open their doors to them". All the more reason to "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them" (Eph 5:11). *NMR*

For and Against Darwin in Texas

Here in Texas, from where I write at present, there is an ongoing debate about school biology textbooks. The Texas State Board of Education has begun to evaluate current biology textbooks against state standards for accuracy in their presentation of Darwin's theory of evolution. This exercise is generating some heated arguments.

On one side are many Texas scientists, educators and students who simply want biology textbooks to comply with state law by presenting the weaknesses of Darwinian theory and being free from factual errors. They are requesting that students learn all the evidence they need to assess Darwinism – not just the evidence that seems to support it.

On the other side are evolutionist scientists and academics, and their supporters in the media, who cannot suffer any reasoned criticism of Darwinism. Indeed, they go far beyond that. One anti-Darwinian scientist, Stephen Meyer, has written in the *Houston Chronicle*, "Cynical old lawyers have a maxim: When you have the facts on your side, argue the facts. When you have the law on your side, argue the law. When neither is on your side, change the subject and question the motives of the opposition. That seems to be the strategy of many Darwinists [in this debate]."

Defenders of current Darwinian textbooks, who want their theory to be presented uncritically, not only dismiss all critiques of it as religiously motivated (which is not the case) but heap personal abuse on those who present them. Some Darwinists have gone as far as to compare to Stalinists and Nazis those who want a full scientific disclosure, even although some of the errors are obvious, have often been exposed, and are widely admitted in the scientific world.

"For example," writes Stephen Myer, "at least three of the textbooks currently used in Texas use discredited nineteenth-century diagrams of embryos as support of Darwin's universal common ancestry thesis. These now infamous Haeckel embryo drawings allegedly demonstrate the similarity of the early embryological development of fish, chickens, pigs and humans. Yet scientists have long known that these different vertebrate classes do not strongly resemble each other during early embryological development."

As Darwinist apologists pursue their anti-Christian agenda with fanatically religious fervour, they are not only deaf and blind to the testimony of Scripture but even to the simple and obvious fact, stated by Darwin himself in his *Origin of Species* (as Meyer points out) – that a fair result can only be obtained by balancing the facts and argument on both sides of each question.

It is encouraging, however, that the God-dishonouring theory of evolution is being increasingly questioned by scientists. While today the masses of

ungodly and unreasonable men are “willingly ignorant” (2 Peter 3:5) of the most wonderful and glorious fact that God is the Creator, the day will assuredly come when the multitudes worldwide will delight in the truth that “by Him were all things created, that are in heaven and that are in earth, visible and invisible” (Col 1:17). NMR

Church Information

Meetings of Presbytery

Southern: At Glasgow, on Wednesday, February 11, at 5 pm.

Western: At Laide, on Tuesday, March 9, at 6 pm.

Skye: At Portree, on Tuesday, February 10, at 11 am.

Zimbabwe: At Bulawayo, on Tuesday, March 9, at 1 pm.

Urgent Need for Teacher in Zimbabwe

A teacher is urgently required for the John Tallach Secondary School, Ingwenya, particularly to teach Bible Knowledge, Science and Computer Studies. The preferred qualification is a university degree but anyone interested should apply, even for a short-term tour, in the present staffing difficulties. In the first instance please contact the Clerk of the Jewish and Foreign Committee, Rev J R Tallach, F P Manse, Raasay, IV40 8PB.

Acknowledgement of Donations

The General Treasurer acknowledges with sincere thanks the following donations:

Jewish & Foreign Missions Fund: A Friend, Gairloch, for work among the Jews, £300 per Rev JLG; Anon, Leics, £100; Dr J Steele, Northern Ireland, for medical work in Zimbabwe, £500; Ballifeary Residents and Staff; £73; Anon, for Thembisio Childrens' Home, £100; Anon, Wester Ross, for poor relief in Zimbabwe & Kenya, £400; Anon, England, £170.

Legacy Reserve Fund: Anon, USA, for Broadstairs congregation, \$400.

Congregational Treasurers acknowledge with sincere thanks the following donations:

Barnoldswick: *Jewish & Foreign Mission Fund:* Anon, for Zimbabwe, £40.

Bracadale: *Congregational Expenses:* Anon, USA, In memory of Morag Streeton, \$100. *Where Most Needed:* A Friend, Broadford, £40 per Rev JRT.

Dingwall: *Congregational Expenses:* K A MacLennan, in memory of the late Mr K J MacLennan, North Kessock, £200 per Rev NMR.

Inverness: *Broadstairs Fund:* Anon, £20. *Door Collection:* Anon, £15. *Jewish & Foreign Mission Fund:* Anon, for Ingwenya School, £80. *Tape Fund:* FS, £20.

Larne: *Jewish & Foreign Missions Fund:* Anon, where most needed, £20; Anon, for Kenya Mission, £20.

Lochcarron: *Congregational Funds:* Anon, £40; Anon, for manse expenses, £100; Anon, Where most needed, £600 per ER. *Eastern Europe Fund:* Anon, £25; Anon, £5; Anon, £65; A Friend, Applecross, £40; Anon, £10; Anon, £50.

Staffin: *Congregational Funds:* Anon, £20; A Friend, for minister's petrol, £100 per Rev WAW. *Where Most Needed:* A Friend, Raasay, £10 per Rev WAW.