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Distinguishing Desires

“Lord, all my desire is before Thee”, sang David in Psalm 38. Here was the sweet Psalmist of Israel with, as it were, his heart fully open before God. And he knew that it was full of sin. Yet he was going out in living desire towards God, although this was the One against whom he had sinned. David was fully aware that God knew his desires and everything implied by these desires – indeed that even the most hidden activity of his heart was fully open to the all-seeing Jehovah, as he himself acknowledged on another occasion: “Thou understandest my thought afar off”.

But David knew too that his only hope was that the God he had sinned against would act *for* him in forgiveness and healing. And these desires said something about David himself. The nineteenth-century Aberdeen minister James Stewart pointed out that “our hopes or desires, even more than our actions, depend upon our characters”. Accordingly our hopes and desires are a better indicator than our actions of what our state of soul really is. The fact that David was taking the side of God against himself made clear that he was on the side of God. And John Newton emphasised that holiness is not so much to be looked for in what others can see; it consists, he said, “in spiritual desires, in hungerings, thirstings and mournings”. These longings of heart, which the Most High can see perfectly, indicate the presence of spiritual life, and their absence shows that spiritual life has never begun. Let us glance in four directions where living desires may be recognised.

1. Sin. If our character has been renewed by divine grace, our desires will go out to God because of our guilt. This was certainly true of David. “Mine iniquities”, he mourned, “are gone over mine head: as an heavy burden they are too heavy for me” (Ps 38:4). He yearned for forgiveness but, in common with the children of God in every generation, he would not be content merely to be assured that he was free from all liability to be punished for his sin. He was concerned also because of the evil of his sin; he went on to say: “My wounds stink and are corrupt because of my foolishness”. So, when he expressed his repentance: “I will be sorry for my sin” (v18), it was not only because of the guilt which would follow him eternally if he was to bear the

consequences of his transgressions. His desires went out to God even more because of the offensiveness of sin in the sight of God.

Apart from grace, we will be satisfied with what is only a poor approximation to keeping the law – though what God demands is perfection. “Saul said unto Samuel, Yea, I have obeyed the voice of the Lord” (1 Sam 15:20), when only in a very imperfect way had he done what God had directed him. Saul found it very easy to excuse his sin. The immediate consequences of his sin caused him concern, but that was all. He told Samuel, “I have sinned: for I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord, and thy words: because I feared the people, and obeyed their voice. Now therefore, I pray thee, pardon my sin, and turn again with me, that I may worship the Lord” (1 Sam 15:24, 25). Saul had no desire to draw near to God, only to engage in the outward formalities that would maintain his standing before the people. Similarly sinners may wish to escape a lost eternity, but they have no desire to be free from sin or to enjoy communion with God. John Owen points out that “all that a sinner’s most choice consideration of God, in all His own essential excellencies, can lead him to” is “a desire to avoid Him to all eternity”. The desire of God’s children is different; they long not only to be rid of particular sins but for sin to be removed from them altogether. W S Plumer expressed it well: “God’s people are holy. If they were as holy as they desire, they would never sin any more.”

2. Christ. In what direction do our desires go, when our conscience is awakened because of our sins? Have we anything more than a wish to be *less* sinful, to work out a righteousness of our own? Or do we realise that, if we are left to ourselves, these are vain hopes, altogether dishonouring to God? Paul had a truly God-honouring desire: to “be found in [Christ], not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ” (Phil 3:9). And how many of God’s people since then have found that Paul’s words expressed their own desires perfectly! Their desires for Christ were open to God; only He could satisfy them.

When Christ insisted on the necessity of faith in Himself as a crucified Saviour, many reacted strongly against it. “This is an hard saying”, they said; “who can hear it?” (Jn 6:60). They departed; they had no desire for such teaching. Not so the disciples; they wished to go on listening to Him. Peter expressed their desire: “Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life” (Jn 6:68). They had felt the preciousness of Christ’s teaching and their hearts were drawn towards Him in the hope of their souls being fed by Him again and again in the future. No wonder the Greeks who came to Jerusalem for the Passover, in whose hearts also the Holy Spirit was evidently working, expressed the desire: “Sir, we would see Jesus” (Jn 12:21).

Thomas Watson demonstrated his understanding of spiritual life, so typical of the Puritans, when he wrote: “You value grace above the gold of Ophir. How could you see the worth and lustre of this jewel if God’s Spirit had not opened your eyes? You desire to believe, and mourn that you cannot believe. Are these tears not the beginnings of faith? You desire Christ and cannot be satisfied without Him. This beating of the pulse evidences life. The iron could not move upwards if the lodestone did not draw it. The heart could not ascend in holy desires for God if some heavenly lodestone had not been drawing it.”

3. Eternity. The desire of the unconverted is focused on the things of this life. They have no wish to live a godly life though, like Balaam, they may pray, “Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my *last end* be like his!” (Num 23:10). He had no desire to live the life of the righteous. He wanted to remain as long as possible in the company of those who thought like himself, and only when it was too dangerous to stay away from God any longer – when death stared him in the face – would he wish to be among the righteous. But it would seem that Balaam was too hardened in sin ever to seek the Lord. The time to seek salvation is *now*. Yet the world always desires to enjoy the present moment in sin, rejecting God and His claims. This was the scene Isaiah saw when God called Judah to repentance: “Behold joy and gladness, slaying oxen, and killing sheep, eating flesh, and drinking wine: let us eat and drink; for *tomorrow* we shall die” (Is 22:13) – without ever thinking that God may require their souls that very day. Let us heed the warning of Rowland Hill: “You cannot be happy while you live, you cannot be happy when you die, you cannot be happy in eternity, unless you go to the blessed Jesus to save your precious souls. Why should you delay?”

The desire of God’s children is to enjoy God in this life as well as in eternity. Joseph Irons expressed clearly the contrast between them and the ungodly: “The blissful prospect of spending an eternity in the immediate presence of God is never valued but by those who know something about enjoying His presence on earth. . . . If you know nothing about enjoying the presence of God on earth, it is among the worst of all acts of presumption for you to expect to go to heaven. All whom God takes home to glory, He trains up for the enjoyment of it.” Asaph was being trained up in that way; his outlook on life could be summed up in his words: “Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory” (Ps 73:24). And God’s children turn these words into a desire. Helpless creatures that they are, they need the Lord to guide them through all the days they are to spend in this world and they most certainly need Him to take them safely on that last, momentous step which will bring them out of this life

and into heaven. Often do they send up such petitions at the throne of grace. **4. God's glory.** God's children know that the glory of God in this world is bound up with obedience to His commands. Their desire is to do the will of their Father. He makes them willing to obey the call: "Son, go work to day in my vineyard" (Matt 21:28). Theirs is a life of service, whatever position they may, or may not, occupy in God's kingdom in this world. They have been given talents and they are beginning to use them to God's glory – including the talent of time. But others, even if they do not squander their talents in the ordinary affairs of life, never use them to the glory of God. And they never use them for the good of their souls. When challenged by the Most High, their reaction is: "I feared Thee, because Thou art an austere man: Thou takest up that Thou layedst not down, and reapest that Thou didst not sow" (Luke 19:21). When the unbeliever feels in his conscience the force of God's commands, he will lay the blame for his defects on God – alleging that He is unreasonable in what He demands. But the believer knows that the law is "holy and just and good". He desires that God would be glorified in multitudes being made willing to obey that law.

Yet God's children fully realise that merely outward obedience, however close it might come to the letter of the divine law, is not God-glorifying. So they desire such an outpouring of the Spirit as would bring large numbers of sinners everywhere to a saving knowledge of Christ. They would echo the prayer of the disciples: "That signs and wonders may be done by the name of Thy holy child Jesus" (Acts 4:30). There is no greater miracle, no greater display of the glory of God, than in the salvation of one sinner.

The desires of believers may be feeble in this world, and that is something to mourn over. But God's children will grow in grace; their gracious desires will become stronger, including their desire for God to be glorified in this world. Indeed Archibald Alexander declared that "there is no surer standard of spiritual growth than a habit of aiming at the glory of God in everything".

In conclusion, we may note that gracious desires are bound to be fulfilled, as far as it will be for God's glory. All the believer's desires are before Him, and He does not ignore them. David assures us that "He will fulfil the desire of them that fear Him" (Ps 145:19). And Christ's promise is: "If ye shall ask anything in My name, I will do it" (Jn 14:14), for, if prayer is to be heard, it must ascend to heaven in the name of Christ, the "one Mediator between God and men". So at last, we can be perfectly sure, God's children will all be brought into the realms of perfection in heaven – where all the imperfections of their desires will have been washed away. But let us examine our desires and let us ask ourselves if *our* desires are indeed those of God's children.

The Gospel Minister's Crown (2)¹

A Sermon by *John Macdonald*

1 Thessalonians 2:19,20. *For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? For ye are our glory and joy.*

2. How shall those of whom we have spoken **become a crown of rejoicing** to us in the day of the Lord? On that day the ministers of Christ shall partake of that joy which shall animate all the saints of God, in all the separate reasons of that unequalled joy.

They shall rejoice in the manifested glory of their Lord Jesus Christ, now reappearing after so long an absence in the body, with all His holy angels, and clothed with all the Father's glory. They shall rejoice in the grand assembly of the whole Church of Christ from the beginning to the end of the world; not one shall be wanting. They shall rejoice in the consummation of the whole economy of grace, then completed and brought to a glorious and everlasting issue. They shall rejoice in the eternal separation between the good and the evil, then begun, and nevermore to cease. They shall rejoice in the opening glory of heaven, spread out before them in the first ripe fruits of eternity, now increasing every moment into an exceeding weight of glory. They too shall glory in their assurance of an individual interest for ever in all the blessings of heaven, together with all saints, through their Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. In all this joy, common to the saints of God, shall the ministers of Christ then participate. And theirs, according to their faith, shall be no small measure of this rejoicing in the Lord.

But, according to our text, the ministers of Jesus shall have other grounds of joy in immediate connection with the saving effects of the gospel on their fellow men. Those just mentioned they will have in common with all true Christians; but there is something special above all this. The pastor will rejoice as a pastor:

(1.) When he sees the *grace of the Lord Jesus Christ perfected and glorified* in those who were once his flock and to whom he was formerly the minister of that grace. When the love of Christ in redeeming you with His blood, His continued grace in sanctifying you by his Spirit, His perfect righteousness which ever justified you, His unchanging faithfulness in ever preserving you, His immeasurable condescension in revealing the Father to

¹This is the second and final part of a farewell discourse in May 1837 to Macdonald's congregation in London, before he left to become a missionary in Calcutta. It is taken, slightly edited, from the little book of his sermons, *A Pastor's Memorial to His Former Flock*. The first head showed who would constitute the preacher's "crown of rejoicing".

you as your covenant God, His inconceivable mercy in conforming you to Himself, His unfathomable wisdom in making all things to work for your good, and His irresistible yet tenderly-exerted power in bringing you through death and the grave, out of sin, the curse and hell, to the gates of eternal light and bliss; when all this glory of Christ shall be seen in the saints, in the great day, shall we not rejoice and triumph for the Lord's sake?

And if I shall be privileged to behold this sweet sight of Christ my Lord, so glorified and admired in any of you, so dear to me, shall I not be glad with exceeding great joy? Nothing shall ever be able to take my joy from me. No more temptation, no more backsliding, no more sinful world, no more sinful flesh shall there be. No, not for evermore! To behold Christ in you, and you in Christ, will be a sight for a pastor's heart. Who would not live and die to see the blessed Son of God glorified and admired in any of this poor flock? Lord, suffer not such to fall away and dishonour Thy name, but do Thou cause them to be "unto praise, and honour, and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ".

(2.) One grand seal of the *acceptance of our ministry* will be when you are judicially accepted on the day of the Lord, and will not this also be a source of joy? In our work among you we have often become weary, through inward faintness and sin. Often have we on our bended knees given way to sighs and tears and groans over the seeming hopelessness of our work; often have we mourned before God, if not before the world, that we saw nothing like the evidences of conversion, for a long time, among you. We felt the burden of having our ministry despised and rejected by some, and of having our weekly message disbelieved and disobeyed by others. It seemed to the eye of sense as if we had run unsent, and as if the straining of a minister's heart was unnoticed by God and man. O sinful and unbelieving thought! "Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, my way is hid from the Lord, and my judgement is passed over from my God?" Yet so it was.

But of late God has brought hidden things to light among us; yea, even before the great day He has revealed them. He has caused us to bear mutual testimony, one to the other, and I now know that I shall not be without a seal from you in the Lord. You are now, some of you by present testimony and some by the testimony which they gave before they entered into glory, my own children in the Lord; and shall I not entertain the hope that this ministry which was so dear to me shall be yet sealed by the signet of divine salvation? Yea, shall I not this day rejoice in the hope that, notwithstanding all my unbelief and fear, I shall yet receive from the Lord, the righteous Judge, a crown of rejoicing in the everlasting acceptance of the remnant of my flock? Yea, so will I wait and hope before my Lord until He comes.

(3.) Shall we not rejoice *in sympathy or unison with your blessedness* in the great day of the Lord? When we shall see you standing on the right hand of the Judge, clothed in your resurrection bodies, when we hear pronounced upon you the sentence, "Come, ye blessed of My Father," when we behold beaming from you the joy that is "unspeakable and full of glory", when we shall hear bursting forth, in loved and sweet hallelujahs, the voices that sang here most willingly but weakly, when we shall see you, and feel ourselves with you, gradually transported into the glorious light of the risen and eternal Sun, and when we shall behold, in the presence of God and of the Lamb, those hearers whom we have so often addressed within these poor earthly walls, O how shall we rejoice in your gladness, how shall we triumph in your joy, how shall we glory in your salvation, and how shall we be blessed in your everlasting and incorruptible happiness! Such sympathy results from union to Christ and is the sure fruit of continuance in His love. And shall we not look for the full fruit of that tree which the Lord has planted? Shall we not expect the produce of what our "God manifest in the flesh" has sown? Yea, in this no man shall take from us our crown of rejoicing.

(4.) Shall not a minister rejoice in the prospect of renewed and everlasting *fellowship* with those spiritual children whom he has loved as himself? After we have been separated for a time in this life, by one half of the earth's circumference; after we have, one by one, gone to rest and our bodies have slept separately in our distant graves; then, after that, to meet in our visible persons, to recognize our spiritual relationship, to join in the same anthem of triumph: "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" Surely such fellowship will be joy, not in the way of sympathy only but of participation. Then shall we again serve the same Lord, again sing the same praises, again be found in the same employments, again obey the same will, again be joined in the upper sanctuary. Whether we shall for ever see each other or not, we shall be for ever assured of each other's welfare and shall never entertain a doubt of our mutual bliss and glory. Whatever I may have felt of care or anxiety heretofore as to some of you, if I then meet you in glory, I shall nevermore be careful or anxious about you. Meeting you in Christ's presence, as the rays meet each other in the centre of the circle, we shall have fellowship one with another in Him for evermore.

O how cheering is such a prospect as this in the hour of painful separation! Why should we mourn as they that have no hope? Why weep as those who can never hope to meet, or to meet only in hell? Nay, for my own part I do not weep; my blessed Lord has made my eyes tearless this day. Does He not show us things to come? And who shall weep in sight of bliss and glory, save for joy?

Beloved fellow-pilgrims, we have walked long together – a few of us, at least, for about seven years. This day we part. My path now turns from you, but our meeting-place is fixed. Behold yonder great white throne afar off, and Him that sits upon it! Before His face we meet. Till then, farewell!

3. Meanwhile, to help you, let me give a **parting word of advice** to such as would meet there in peace and joy. Abide in the gospel of free grace. Ever abide in all its scriptural simplicity, in all its personal fitness. By no wisdom of words, by no excellency of speech, by no snare of popularity, be ever moved from this everlasting basis. Cleave in all things to the blessed Lord Jesus Christ. However painful your trials, however great your sacrifices, however heavy your reproach, however dark your day, however small your company, however unworthy you feel yourself to be, still cleave to Christ, even unto shame and death, yea, even to the very end of all.

Watch against the world and its evil. Let your eye ever be upon it; let your ear ever search its insidious sounds; let your hand be ready to repel its impudence and your foot to flee from its cruel subtlety. Remember, the world crucified your Lord and would debar you from heaven. Resist it therefore and retreat from its power; so shall we meet with joy. Devote yourselves to the pursuit of holiness. As others pursue after riches, so seek to be holy and righteous. Cherish the Holy Spirit's work, and walk under His influence habitually. Die unto sin and live unto righteousness; so shall the Word of God abide in you, and you shall know that you are the children of God.

Be ever found in the Lord's service. O remember His cause; live for it. What else have you to live for? Remember the world of sinners. Remember the church of saints. Do not forget that evangelistic cause whose claims now separate us. Remember those words, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature". Do not forget them, until all the elect of God meet in glory. Do not neglect to pray for your former pastor as long as he remains on this side of the eternal home. He has loved you well, although he may ill have helped you. He has ever needed, and will ever need, your fervent prayers. Do this; and may the God of peace be with you all!

4. But what shall I say to **those who cannot meet either their Lord or His unworthy minister with joy**? As a man, I have received kindness from you; but as the messenger of Christ I have not been entertained. You are still the servants of sin, the slaves of the world, the drudges of self-righteousness, the victims of Satan and of the flesh. One short word must I speak to you, before we part.

Have I not warned you of sin and its awful consequences? Say, have I not? Have I not endeavoured to explain what sin is and what hell is, and the awful road between them? Have I not in God's name called on you to repent

and to return unto your God? Have I not quoted to you the very chapter and verse of the divine threatenings and commandments as my authority for disturbing your sinful and ruinous repose? Have I not sometimes spoken until you were wearied of resisting where you could not overcome, and of listening where you could not contradict? Are you not my witnesses in this? You know that you are, and shall be for ever!

Have you not been invited to come to Christ, in Christ's own words and in Christ's own presence? Have you not been assured, in the express terms and words of the Spirit of God, of the Saviour's readiness to save any one of you that would but yield himself unto Him? Has not the offer of His precious blood and perfect righteousness been made to every one of you? Was not the offer a true and sufficient one? Others relied and acted on it and they have found salvation. Was there any cause to exclude you? Was not the gospel this: *whosoever*? Have you not been besought in God's name, in Christ's stead? Have you not been reasoned with, and lamented over, many times? Are not these things so? Is there any exaggeration in this appeal? Are you not now some five or six years nearer to hell than you were when we first met? Has the preaching of the gospel been preparing you for deeper misery and for more intolerable suffering in eternity? How could I help it? May the Lord interpose! O how little can man accomplish! Yea, nothing.

Alas, alas, my poor hearers, who are *still* in this sinful, impenitent and miserable condition, is it so that we are not to meet again – never to meet? Is our parting to be eternal? Are we to stand on different sides of the Judge? Will you not, even now, come over to us? Will you not, even at this eleventh hour, join yourselves unto the Lord? Once more, this morning, let me as in God's name, in Christ's stead, beseech you: "Be ye reconciled to God!" What more can I say or do for you? Yet one thing: I leave with you this one testimony: the *oath* of my Lord against your impenitence and for your salvation. Hear and believe it: "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn ye, turn ye, from your evil ways; for *why will ye die?*" Turn them, O Lord God, and they shall be turned, for Jesus' sake, Amen.

The life, vigour and comfort of our spiritual life depend much on our mortification of sins.

Every unmortified sin will certainly do two things: (1) It will weaken the soul and deprive it of its vigour. (2) It will darken the soul and deprive it of its comfort and peace.

Learn to be contented with your lot. He is wise also who took a view of it and measured it and found it just commensurate to your good. Had He known that a foot's breadth more had been needful, you would have had it. *John Owen*

Rev Donald MacDonald, Shieldaig¹

1. Called by Grace

Rev J L Goldby

In contemplating the life of Rev Donald MacDonald², we should note the many and varied influences which, in the wisdom of God, contributed to shaping his character and ministry, while bearing in mind that this work was “all of grace”. These influences were ordained in providence and no doubt contributed to his coming honourably through the great trials that he was to encounter during the course of his ministry.

Donald Macdonald was born in 1825, the seventh of 11 children of a tenant farmer at Langash, North Uist (one of the islands of the Outer Hebrides, which lie off the north-west coast of Scotland). His mother died when he was only 11 and his father 18 months later. The loss of both parents at so young an age, combined with early religious impressions, no doubt played a part in causing the orphaned child to give consideration to the solemn fact that there is no continuing city. He completed his early education in the parish school at Tigharry when he was 18.

When Donald was young, laymen such as Finlay Munro were bringing the true gospel to the people of North Uist. The Gaelic School Society contributed largely to the progress of this good work and distinctly Christian schools were opened in various districts.

When Donald Macdonald was 18, Rev Alexander MacIntyre, a probationer from Strontian in Argyllshire, visited North Uist. This was about the time of the Disruption of the Church of Scotland. He had studied for the ministry during the “Ten Years Conflict” between church and state and was a firm supporter of those defending the crown rights of King Jesus against the unjust encroachment of the civil power in the affairs of the Church of Scotland. Most of the Evangelical party, to which he belonged, subsequently left the Church of Scotland to form the Free Church – that is, the Church of Scotland *free* from unjust state interference. Those who sided with the government belonged to the Moderate party. While a student, MacIntyre was under the Presbytery of Mull, which was dominated by Moderate ministers. They knew that he was firmly of the Evangelical persuasion and unlawfully

¹The greater part of this series comes from a paper given at the Theological Conference in 2002. However, the first few articles consist of material not included in that paper.

²The main source for this period of his life is Rev D Macfarlane’s *Memoir and Remains of Rev Donald Macdonald, Shieldaig* (available at £10.95 from the Free Presbyterian Bookroom and elsewhere), from which we have drawn freely. Mr Macfarlane himself well understood the work of God’s grace manifest in Mr Macdonald’s deep spiritual exercises.

hindered his entrance on the work of the ministry by delaying, for about two years, his licence to preach. He therefore went north to Ross-shire, where he spent six months before being licensed by the Synod of Glenelg on 17 August 1836. At this time he was about 30 years of age.

Lochaber, we are told, had its first taste of the revival of religion under Mr MacIntyre's preaching. One hearer wrote, "Wherever he preached, the people from all quarters flocked to hear him, and the effects were wonderful. The earnestness of the preacher, his electrifying eloquence, and his awful description of perdition and the deplorable state of the unconverted, produced such effects upon the hearers as baffles my power of description. The people fell under the power of the Word like the grass before the mower. One night in particular . . . in a crowded church in Fort William, the weeping was so loud and continuous that the voice of the preacher was completely drowned. After repeated attempts to still the people . . . the congregation had to be dismissed. The effects of such times of refreshing from the Lord upon the whole district was truly great and never to be forgotten. The wilderness blossomed as the rose." Between 1843 and 1847 he made frequent visits to Skye, Mull and Uist, where similar blessings attended his labours. The young people flocked to hear him, and among the many awakened under his preaching in Uist was the young Donald Macdonald.

Halfway through Mr MacIntyre's first sermon in North Uist, Mr Macdonald and a few other young men rose to leave the service but, from the pulpit, Mr MacIntyre called them to remain until the service concluded. Donald Macdonald was the only one who remained and, before the service concluded, the "arrow of conviction had entered deeply into his soul". Thereafter Donald attended Mr MacIntyre's ministry as long as he remained in North Uist. Under this preaching he would be at times "so overwhelmed with a sense of his lost condition that he could not walk home from the place of worship and had to be carried by friends". At other times Mr MacIntyre's preaching was the means of causing him to leap for joy. He was in this condition for about two and a half years, sometimes cast down by the law and at other times uplifted by the gospel. When Mr MacIntyre preached in Benbecula, so thirsty was Mr Macdonald for the water of life that, to attend the services, he would with others walk 12 miles each way, including the crossing of a ford three miles wide.

Mr MacIntyre (1807-1878) is a rather interesting figure from a Free Presbyterian perspective. Mr Macdonald regarded him as the most solemn preacher of the law he had ever heard. Many of those who were called out of darkness under his preaching were bright lights in their day at home and abroad and some of them became sharp instruments in the conversion of

others. When a minister is used as an instrument in bringing a person from spiritual death to life, his ministry will leave a mark on the one who is thus born again. When we trace Mr MacIntyre's life and work, it becomes evident that he and Mr Macdonald were kindred spirits in preaching, and contending for the faith once delivered to the saints. From the time that Mr MacIntyre was licensed to preach until 1847, he laboured as an itinerant evangelist in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, followed by three years in Canada under the auspices of the Free Church Colonial Committee.

In September 1852 he set sail for Australia on the *Typhoon* in company with Donald MacMaster, who had been spiritually awakened in the same year as Mr Macdonald, under a sermon of Mr MacIntyre on Judges 5:23 "Curse ye, Meroz, said the angel of the Lord". They encountered such a storm in the Bay of Biscay that the ship was almost lost, and only after a voyage of six months did they reach Melbourne, on 6 March 1853. From then on he laboured diligently in Australia until his death in Geelong in 1878. Mr MacIntyre's influence was crucial in convincing expatriate Highlanders in New South Wales to resist the union movements in Australia in the 1850s and 1860s. This is noteworthy in the light of Mr Macdonald's significant part in resisting a similar movement in Scotland. Rev Neil Cameron wrote of Mr MacIntyre that he "was a truly polished shaft in the hand of the Holy Spirit, and many, not only in Scotland but also in Australia, will bless the adorable Head of the Church throughout eternity for making the feet of this witness beautiful upon the mountains of these widely separated lands".

Returning to Mr Macdonald's spiritual struggles, we find Mr Macfarlane writing: "Notwithstanding [his] diligent attendance on the means of grace, he was . . . like Noah's dove flying about without finding a resting place for his weary feet. He was still asking the important question: 'What must I do to be saved?' He was for the long space of six years, more or less, under law work before he attained to satisfactory evidence of his interest in Christ. During that long period his mental agony was at times, as he himself said, 'indescribable'. The doctrine of election caused him much perplexity. He was daily crying to God for mercy and, as he was not getting the relief he so much needed . . . he came to the conclusion that he was not of the number of those whom the Lord purposed to save. This brought him to the verge of despair, and occasioned him to cherish hard thoughts of God: thoughts which he often afterwards described as 'bordering on blasphemy'. The carnal mind naturally rebels against the sovereignty of God in salvation and, under conviction of sin, Satan is sure to suggest to the self-condemned sinner that he is not of the number of those who are to be saved." Mr Macdonald later believed that his difficulties about election were caused by the devices of Satan.

“In his despondent state of mind he disclosed his case to one of the good men in the neighbourhood, with the result that his misery was aggravated rather than alleviated. . . . Some old Christians at that time spoke to anxious inquirers in a manner calculated to drive the arrow of conviction deeper into their souls rather than to minister comfort to them in their distress. This did not arise from a lack of sympathy with those in soul trouble, nor from want of an earnest desire to do them good, but from fear lest they should, by expressing a favourable opinion of their case at an early stage, be the means of putting a pillow under their head which might ultimately prove ruinous to their souls. This mode of dealing with persons brought under soul concern, may be a wise one, but it should not be carried too far.”

There were, however, other good men in North Uist who dealt more tenderly with him, and took a fatherly interest in him. In due season, he “is brought from Mount Sinai, at which he stood so long trembling, to Mount Zion, to behold the beauty of Christ, His all-sufficiency, suitableness and ability to save to the uttermost them that come to God by Him. He is enabled to receive Him as He is freely offered in the gospel, and to rest on Him alone for salvation; and the peace of God, which passes all understanding, is communicated by the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, to his troubled soul. He feels the great change; the wonderful manifestation of God in Christ to his soul is so evident that he cannot, dare not, for the moment, doubt the reality of it. His joy is great; his cup is running over! As his tribulations abounded before, his consolations abound now. He is brought up out of the horrible pit, out of the miry clay, his feet are set upon the rock, Christ, and a new song is put in his mouth, even praise unto his God. He is now in a frame of soul to sing with the Church: “O Lord, I will praise Thee; though Thou wast angry with me, Thine anger is turned away, and Thou comfortest me. Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and not be afraid; for the Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song: He also is become my salvation.”

Mr Macfarlane says that Mr Macdonald’s happy transition from darkness to light took place in 1849, after being first brought under concern of soul in 1843. Now he had full assurance of his saving interest in Christ, and the language of his soul was: “My beloved is mine, and I am His”. A person may have true saving faith and yet lack full assurance that he has passed from death to life. Indeed Mr Macfarlane thought that his friend may have been a real believer in Christ for a considerable time before full assurance of his salvation was granted to him.

God hath put more honour on His law by the death of His Son than if the whole race of Adam had endured its penalty to all eternity in hell.*ashbel Green*

Advice to a Preacher¹

A Letter by *Alexander Stewart*

I read your last letter with much interest and willingly offer my remarks on the subjects to which it refers.

First, as to the personal plan. No doubt many modern sermons are utterly useless, because they are very general, pointless, pithless things – “an infinite deal of nothing” – for there is no making them into any definite something that will bear to be handled and grasped and dissected. The substance of them is just that religion is a very good thing. But the opposite extreme is not the thing; neither is every offence “the offence of the cross”. Were a stranger, or even a general acquaintance, to ask me, “Are you a Christian?” “Are you at peace with God?” I might say, “These are very important questions; but what right have you to put them, or to insist on knowing the state of my mind? And how am I to know that you will direct me aright and not mislead me?” There may be an impertinence in a person’s asking me the state of my soul, as well as in asking me the state of my finances. And there is a spirit of wisdom in religion, as well as a spirit of fidelity.

The plan I try or wish to follow, in regard to private contact, is “to watch” opportunities, circumstances, characters, “as one who must give an account”. A minister is warranted in saying things, especially to parishioners, which another is not. And when people come for baptism etc, I am often as downrightly personal in private with them as English will go. Then as to public ministrations, my object is to let the Bible speak out. It surely is faithful; and if a minister “speak as the oracles of God”, declaring “all the counsel of God”, and keeping “back nothing that is profitable”, he can hardly be called unfaithful. At least I think there are many passages which so plainly condemn common sins, and all sin, and our own sins, that to declare all, and keep back nothing, will try our fidelity. To put such direct questions as you mention, when not warranted by mutual intimacy between the parties or other such circumstances, may do good in certain instances and take for a while; but if it become anything *common* and *general*, many exorcists like the sons of Sceva will appear, and they will meet with similar treatment. We are not all able for all things. Singular men can successfully do singular things, and men of a highly spiritual state of mind will succeed where others will not only fail but make fools of themselves.

¹Dated Cromarty manse, 22 February, 1827. Stewart was minister of Cromarty from 1824 to 1847. His fine work on the Old Testament types, *The Tree of Promise* (£16.95), has been reprinted by Free Presbyterian Publications. This letter is taken, with slight editing, from the *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, vol 6, (£16.50), also recently republished.

Next as to the simplicity of the gospel. The gospel is no doubt very simple; so also is the scientific law that bodies attract and are attracted, directly as the mass, and inversely as the square of the distance between them. But this simple principle, when carried out among various bodies moving in orbits of varied and ever-changing eccentricity, involves problems which tax the highest powers of human calculation. And the simple gospel, when carried out through all its bearings and aspects, involves many an exceedingly complex problem.

The gospel, I again admit, is sublimely simple – as much so as a thousand moral problems solved and understood every day in domestic life between parents and children – but men are not so simple in their aims and intentions in regard to the gospel. There is a bias and a duplicity and a dishonesty in the human heart on this subject; there is a blindness too; and however simple it may be to look at an object and see it distinctly, it cannot be simple to one who is half or wholly blind. While then I subscribe heartily to the simplicity of the gospel, considered in itself, I despair of anything making religion in actual fact and practice a simple matter, except an outpouring of the Spirit from on high. Discard all encumbrances and try your simple gospel. One and another believes, but a third misunderstands in one way, and a fourth errs in another. You correct and refute until at last you find it necessary to call back the very discussions and distinctions and defences which you threw away as marring its simplicity and beauty.

Next as to the subject of doubts and fears. These, I conceive, are often well-founded – that is, the person has the best reason to doubt his Christianity and to fear the worst. Often they are mere cant and pretence. Often they arise in the Christian's mind from temptation, sin and jealousy of himself. I do not think doubts and fears a certain evidence of grace; neither do I consider strong confidence an unequivocal indication of a change of heart. There cannot be a simpler case than that of the jailor: "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ"; and he believed and rejoiced.

But I have just been lecturing on Luke 5:27-36. I can understand a sinner rejoicing on his first believing, when he is assured of all his sins being blotted out. But think, is it everyone who 20 or 30 years, or half as many, afterwards can ponder the passage I have quoted and look at his own life and have such a full assurance of the *superiority* of his benevolence and charity to that of sinners, as unhesitatingly to conclude himself a saint – such a consciousness of his love to enemies, his perseverance in doing good, his forbearance of injury, his liberality – as to "lift to heaven an unpresumptuous eye" and say, "I am a son of the Highest"? Yet read the passage and say whether that ought not to be the case. And is there anything self-righteous in this, or anything

inconsistent with his being then, as at first, a sinner saved by grace? Is there not a danger of our saying, “Lord, Lord,” and yet building on the sand and being overwhelmed in great and final ruin? (John 14:24). How self-denying and difficult are Christ’s sayings! Is it easy to say that we so keep them as to be sure that we love Him? Mark the strong language of 1 John 3:6-10, and say if there be not ground for doubts and fears lest we should mistake reigning sin for remaining sin. And these and a multitude of similar passages have as high authority as any in the Bible. You see then how many grave and valid doubts may arise which can hardly be called sinful except as it was wrong to indulge that sin which occasioned them.

Observe that the promises of Scripture are very generally connected with character, clearly showing that it is the possession of the character that warrants the self-application of the promise. And the promise will accordingly be of something very suitable to the character: a kingdom for the poor, fulness for the hungry, mercy to the merciful, seeing the holy God to the pure in heart – something to comfort or animate or guide or strengthen as it may be.

Beware of confounding promises and invitations – two very distinct things, and addressed to different classes. The invitations are to sinners, the promises to saints only. They are yea and amen in Christ, and to those only who are in Christ – who possess the suitable character (as observed above) and they convey grace suited to the time of need. The invitations to embrace the gospel are to “every creature”.

I dare say there are some who are a good deal employed in scrutinizing their “first act of faith”, when they would be more comfortably and more usefully employed in eating their spiritual food and doing their spiritual work. Faith is not an act performed once and for ever, any more than the first mouthful of food or the first inhalation of the lungs. But what do you understand by faith? You speak of the convinced sinner believing that God has given to him eternal life in Christ. What does he believe? That God hath given him eternal life? How does he know that? Christ “gives His *sheep* eternal life” and of course “they shall never perish”. But has God or Christ given all men eternal life? And if not, as assuredly He has not, how does your sinner know, or on what authority does he believe, that God has given *him* eternal life? You allude, I suppose, to 1 John 5:11; but as to the actual gift and possession of life, the *us* must be the *sheep*. This will lead you to reconsider the “gift of full pardon to the chief of sinners”, by which in that connection you must mean any or all sinners.

What do you mean by God’s being “already *reconciled* to the world, and now beseeching sinners to be reconciled to Him”? You allude to 2 Corinthians 5:18-20. The *reconciled* are the *us*; the reconciliation is open to the world

and the ambassadors beseech them to embrace it. A person, by taking up a theory, may persuade himself, or imagine, that he is at peace with God and on the way to heaven. This is a pleasing idea and the uneasy apprehensions usually felt in the prospect of death are quieted or removed. Thus a joy and peace are the natural consequences of entertaining such an idea; consistency and novelty will lead to a pleasure in ordinances, and a good deal of religious talk and bustle may follow. But to be a Christian is another thing altogether. In almost any account of a shipwreck you can take up (I have just been reading one) you will find instances of the unfortunates being thrown into ecstasies by appearances of deliverance which have afterwards proved delusive. Their belief and hope naturally made them joyful, although quite unfounded and imaginary. What then would their joy prove to a bystander? Evidently that they thought deliverance at hand, but not that it actually was at hand.

These things are of prime importance to all, but especially to us who teach publicly, lest we mislead others and the mistake be irretrievable ere we can correct it. There is a most solemn responsibility attached to the ambassadors of Christ treating with men on the concerns of eternity.

I am much persuaded that there is no bringing our own minds into the truth. If you were ever in a steamboat in the narrow windings and bays of the Argyll coast, you would often see yourself apparently landlocked, and the surrounding hills would shade into each other so naturally that no scrutiny of the eye, or even of the glass, could discover an outlet, and yet there would be more than one outlet sufficient for the British navy to pass. So also many a theory, invulnerable to metaphysical scrutiny, has flaws which neither reason nor philosophy can discover. Did it not puzzle the blind Sodomites to discover Lot's door?

I shall be very glad to hear your sentiments on the agency of the Holy Spirit. And closely connected with this will be the nature of regeneration, its necessity and the place it holds in the system of truth; likewise what the apostle means by being "spiritually minded", and "carnally minded".

I like the emphasis you put on "the simple word of God". Unquestionably it is the warrant of faith. But, observe, the confidence and submission demanded by Scripture, and most justly due to it, is due to the sentiment or truth intended to be conveyed by the Spirit of inspiration, and to that only, not to any perversion or misunderstanding of ours. I am near the end of my paper, else I might point out some not uncommon mistakes on this subject. You might try for yourself to answer satisfactorily the following questions: To what is a student of Scripture to look as his security so that he will not materially err in interpreting Scripture? What place ought to be assigned to human comments and interpretations? Are they to be completely

discarded? Or if not, what kind and degree of deference is due to them?

Make religion a personal concern. Be honest and conscientious and faithful in regard to yourself, and this will lead to fidelity and success in the great cause in which you are engaged. May God bless you and make you a blessing for many birthdays to come.

Clean and Unclean¹

Henry Law

Leviticus 11:47. *To make a difference between the unclean and the clean.*

Where is the spectacle which can compare with the true child of God in Christ? He once was a withered branch. No comeliness, no worth adorned him. But in due time a gracious eye looked on his ruined state; a gracious hand removed him to the garden of the Lord. And now unflinching grace continues its preserving care. Old things are gone. All things are fresh in verdure, fragrance, bloom.

The believer is a new-born heir. As such he journeys in new companionship along new paths to his new home. He is no longer of the earth and earthly. While his hands hold the title deeds of heavenly life, his separated walk is worthy of his lofty prospects. His bearing is as distinguished as his hope. His heart is far away, and an uplifted heart uplifts his thoughts and words and works. An impulse from on high compels his motives and desires. The stream must seek its native level. The attracted steel must tend towards the magnet. The new man is drawn towards God, and thus he soars above the world's debasing plain.

No doubtful text proclaims this truth. Come, is the constant gospel cry. What is it to come but to leave sin, the world and self and enter fenced pastures where Jesus guides His guarded flock? But more than precept teaches separation. A nation is its living type. Israel's children picture the family of grace. Were they commingled with the common race of man? Far otherwise. Peculiar ordinances set them apart. Special institutions were a broad barrier around. Special laws raised the high pathway in which they walked alone. Their every act in every way was a distinction. Their code was a signpost guiding from open thoroughfare. Many rules enclosed them within holy bounds. Many commands secured a differing life.

But one especial instance here claims notice. Their tables were hedged around. A garrison of interdictions circled them. Their diet was rigidly confined. Were all the beasts which browsed in meadows, or which climbed the

¹A further chapter, slightly edited, from *The Gospel in Leviticus*.

hills, or lurked in forests, their allotted food? Might they partake of all the fish which sported in the lakes or hid in the sea's depths? Did all the winged creation bring delight to their palate? Might choice select all creeping reptiles at its will? It was not so. Some only might be touched. The rest must be most scrupulously shunned. A mark was fixed on each. There was no animal, no fish, no bird, no insect of the soil, which was not clean or unclean – permitted or forbidden. Each had its voice. Taste or taste not.

Reader, it is well to probe the mine of this extensive law. It must be wise: the God all-wise ordains it. It must be good: the hand of love indites it. What then is the intention? May the Spirit's light reveal!

They stop far short who limit the design to some intrinsic difference in created flesh, or only find a guidance to nutritious food. The palate needed not such heaven-sent aid. Luxury would soon discern the luscious and the vile. Besides, the mark is not healthy – unhealthy; tasteful – tasteless; but clean – unclean. No. These instructions teach the wing of faith to stretch to higher regions of exalted thought. Here is a school to benefit the soul. The mind is hereby disciplined to spiritual advance. The need of inward purity is here prescribed.

The first result is far removal from all heathen contact. God's chosen tribes could hold no social fellowship with idol-worshippers. There was no common banquet house. The tables of the nations were unclean. The Jew could have no seat at impure boards. The dish there proffered might contain polluted food. Thus a wide gulf divided. Thus a strict ordinance prevented intermixing union. Reader, this law commands God's people to be separate.

The literal code, indeed, has ceased. All shadows vanish. The gospel substance is revealed. But still the principle is divine. It cannot die. The holy intent lives, and will live on till the last saint shall pass through glory's porch. The need remains, because the world is still the world. Its baits, its filth, its vile corruptions, are unchanged. It still extends a net for the unwary soul. It still is the broad road going down to hell. It still is the wide gate courting the giddy multitude. Hence Scripture's voice still cries, Beware. Beacons still show a coast bestrewed with wrecks, and wisdom calls the holy pilgrim from the treacherous path.

Reader, you grant that a clear precept interdicts the world. But perhaps the term conveys no definite idea. Some shrouded phantom passes in shadowy guise. No features broadly stare you in the face. Be not deceived. The world, though masked, has still its own most fearful form. The mass of mankind, strangers to God and rebels to His grace, are its material. They whose chief good resides in things of time and sense, they whose horizon stretches not beyond this fleeting scene, they whose one object is to press most earthly joy

into earth's little day, they who dance after pleasure's bubble, and scorn the cross, and make not Christ their all, are the vile stones which form the worthless pile. All who bear Satan's yoke and do his work and wear his badge and heed his will are subjects of that wide empire – world. The line is really broad. Enlightened eyes discern it. Believers may not cross it. They must be separate, as light from darkness, filth from purity, life from the dreary grave.

There is much mercy in the strict command. Come, mark this. The climate of the world checks growth in grace. True godliness is a tender plant. It cannot thrive when nipped with chilling winds. A clinging weed destroys the opening flower. A coiling serpent sucks the heart blood. Rough contact blunts an edge. Thus the world injures souls. It must be left, or holiness will sicken, wither, die. The sun of Solomon goes down in clouds of shame, because his swerving heart declined to pleasure's lure. Love therefore warns: "Be not conformed" (Rom 12:2).

The world stands forward as Christ's open foe. It wages an incessant war against pure truth. Is it not then a traitor's part to hold close converse with the adverse camp? Is it not shame, and worse than shame, to take familiar counsel with a rebel host? He who wavers between hostile ranks cannot raise the banner of the cross, or march to victory by Jesus' side. Love cries again, Come out; be separate. The true believer glories in his Lord. In every company, act and step, he is to show the livery of his King. It is false witness to adopt the language of an alien race. It is desertion of the holy service to take the garb of a strange household. Can Moses live as an Egyptian prince? He chooses hardships, that he may testify allegiance to the cause of God. We "are the salt of the earth". But, mixed with filth, the salt will lose its savour.

All usefulness is slain when Christ is left. It is a common sneer that saintliness is a mere pretence and faith is but hypocrisy's disguise. Suspicion fastens on the wavering steps. The world, with all its blindness, quickly reads the language of the life. It slowly credits a consistent saint. But soon, how soon, it derides inconsistent walk! In such case, zeal is a pointless arrow and a broken bow. No argument, no eloquence, no diligence prevails. Words which seem insincere touch not the heart. No teacher really teaches with a doubtful fame. Therefore Jesus says, "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world" (John 17:14).

Believer, ponder well these obvious thoughts. Would you know peace as an unfailing stream? Would you pluck joys from ever-verdant boughs. Would you, from morn to night, bask in the sunshine of Christ's smile? Would you have happy consciousness that every step is an ascent towards heaven? Would you be cheered with the sweet hope that life is not a barren field or summer brook? Would you pour comfort into many hearts, and wear at last a diadem

of saved souls? If such be your desires, avoid the poison of the world. If you tread down the barrier line, if you stray out beyond the fold's wide fence, you wrong your soul; you bring reproach upon the Lord; your days will be uncertain sound; your memory will be no instructive page. Cling to the confines of the cross. There is no blessedness without.

But this rule of meats did more than cause the Jews to dwell alone. It forced unceasing vigilance. It placed them in the tower of constant circumspection. It always whispered in their ears, Beware. Their eyes could scarcely look around, without the thought of God's dividing line. Each object of their touch was *clean or unclean*.

The lesson is most obvious. We thus are taught at every step to ask God's will – at every moment to inquire, Is this a lawful path? It is a grievous error to suppose that each minutest matter is not the seed of some results. The circumstance of every moment affects the soul, and so affects the endless state. The stamp, *clean or unclean*, belongs to every movement of each mind, to every act throughout each day. Reader, learn hence to cultivate a watchful course. Apply a constant test.

When thoughts arise – and multitudes which baffle number hourly pass the threshold of the heart – examine them in gospel light, and let none linger which are found to be unclean. In converse, words roll forth – many as drops in the fast-flowing tide – each is according to God's will or adverse to His mind. Pause and reflect. Pause and lift up the prayer: "Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips". Let all be checked which go not forth, as clean, to minister pure grace.

No ground is neutral. We always stand in right or in wrong path. Hence the inquiry should often sift the soul, "What doest thou here?" Is clean or unclean God's judgement of this place? This line, when drawn by Scripture rule, would sweep God's children from many a contaminating spot.

No book is so insipid as to have no character and leave no tinge. How many trifling offspring of the worldly pen would find an early and unknown grave if the inquiry, Clean or unclean, were solemnly applied? Each moment flies on high, recording clean or unclean concerning life's employ.

Reader, another thought demands reply. Your soul, your precious soul, your never-dying soul, is it clean or unclean? By nature it is the vilest filth. All Adam's race flow forth, as unclean waters from an unclean spring. But are you cleansed? Do you live bathing in a Saviour's blood? Are you the mansion of His purifying Spirit? Jesus can cleanse from every sin, and He alone. Cleave then to Him. The Spirit sanctifies, and He alone. Seek His indwelling. Now is the only cleansing day. The door will soon be closed. "He that is filthy, let him be filthy still" (Rev 22:11).

Christian Experience¹

1. Conviction of Sin

Archibald Alexander

The called of God have no distinct knowledge of the true nature of conviction of sin prior to their experience of it. There is, no doubt, a great diversity in the exercises and circumstances of souls under conviction. Some are agitated with awful terror, while others are gently led to a view of the aberrations of their hearts and lives from the law of God, but in all that is essential to conviction there is a precise similarity in the experience of all Christians. The end is the same in every case, though the steps by which it is attained may be exceedingly different.

Every man who is brought under the convictions of the Spirit – for all true conviction is His work – is made serious and brought to a solemn consideration of his ways. Serious consideration may therefore always be called the first step in a religious life. The multitude are destroyed for want of this. They cannot be persuaded to lay aside their frivolity and their worldly cares, nor to consider what they are and whither they are going. But the first touch of divine influence on the mind renders the hitherto-careless soul deeply serious. An awakened attention to divine things is experienced. The man begins to hear with other ears, to see with other eyes and to entertain other thoughts and feelings than he was wont to. The past, the present and the future engage his attention. He asks himself, “What am I? Whither am I tending? What have I been doing all my life? And what are my prospects beyond the grave?”

Though accustomed to hear the Word all his life, it now appears like a new thing – like a message from God to himself. And he can hardly be persuaded that the preacher has not undergone a great change or has not learned to preach new doctrines, for he never understood the truths which now rivet his attention, and they made only a momentary impression on his mind before. The awakened soul is often ready to exclaim, Surely I never heard these awfully-solemn and highly-important truths before or I should have been affected by them.

Not only the Word preached, but the Word read, appears new. He takes

¹A first extract, slightly edited, from a sermon on Isaiah 42:16: “And I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them”. Alexander was the founding professor of Princeton Seminary, in America. His volume, *Thoughts on Religious Experience*, is highly recommended (available in paperback from the Free Presbyterian Bookroom for £7.95).

down from the shelf the perhaps-long-neglected Bible, which was kept in the house more for the sake of decency than for use and, shaking off the dust of years, he opens the sacred volume. And whilst he reads, he holds up a faithful mirror which exhibits to him his own moral features. Here he sees the evil of his past life reflected upon his conscience in a clear, strong light. Sometimes the truth is so pungent, and penetrates the mind with so much pain, that he is tempted to lay aside the book. The more the awakened sinner reads, meditates and hears of the truth, the more uneasy he becomes and the more dangerous does his condition appear to be. At first, gross sins or the obvious neglect of duty engage his attention and affect his conscience, and these defects he attempts to reform. But he is soon made to see that not merely a few, but all his actions, have been evil, and only evil, continually from his youth up.

As the light of conviction increases, he becomes conscious that the fountain from which these streams issue is within him and is entirely polluted – that “the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked” – and is continually sending forth streams of wicked thoughts and desires. To reform the life, where habits of iniquity have become inveterate, is no easy task; but who can regulate the thoughts, desires and volitions? Who can command the affections to fix with due intensity on their proper objects? Who is found able to purify the inner man and restrain all wanderings of thought and desire? Alas, boasted ability turns out to be a mere illusion of an unenlightened mind, yet the sinner under conviction does not excuse himself on account of his inability. He is deeply conscious that it is his own fault. It is the very core of his iniquity. He knows that he ought to serve God, but his wicked heart refuses. He is convinced that it is his duty to come believingly and penitently to Christ for grace and salvation, but his obstinate will is reluctant, and his heart remains callous and ungrateful under all the representations of God’s wonderful love and Christ’s tender compassion, which induced Him to endure the cross and despise the shame.

This conviction of deep-rooted depravity and helplessness is the most distressing state of mind that can well be conceived. The convinced sinner feels as if he could take vengeance on himself for having acted so shamefully, so foolishly, so wickedly. He groans under the burden of his iniquity like a slave under hard bondage, and under the lash of a severe taskmaster. But the sinner thus convinced does not feel tenderly, nor is he conscious of pungent pain. This absence of tender feelings and of a consciousness of heart-breaking is the very thing which gives him most distress. Such a one will often be heard to exclaim, “I have no conviction of sin, no conviction bearing any proportion to my enormous transgressions. Surely a heart so impenetrably

hard never was lodged in any human breast. Nothing moves or softens it in the least. It remains equally unaffected with the joys of paradise and the pains of hell; even the bitter agonies of Christ in the garden and on the cross produce no tender relentings.”

Another unexpected conviction which is commonly experienced is that the person is growing worse instead of better. Some have strenuously maintained that this is a fact – concerning which we will not now dispute. What is asserted is that, to the apprehension of the convinced sinner, it seems to be a truth that he is growing worse and worse; but this can be accounted for from the increase of light. Just as a man placed in a dark and loathsome dungeon would see the filth increasing on every side if he should have the light let in gradually, so the heart appears to become more and more vile and abominable when the covering is withdrawn which concealed its depravity.

Now we say to anyone under these convictions: “If you feel nothing, as you say, why do you yet complain? What mean these deep-fetched sighs and these abundant tears? Why are you not contented and at ease as the multitude are and as you once were?” To such questions and expostulations he would reply, “I am distressed because I feel so little distress. I am grieved because I cannot feel grief. My most earnest desire is to fall under deep conviction of sin. O if I could feel my heart tenderly affected, I should be in a comfortable state compared with what I experience!” Now this is real conviction, and it is one of those paths into which the blind are led, of which they knew nothing prior to experience.

Before this they may indeed have formed a conception of the feelings of a convinced sinner. They imagined that conviction of sin would be effected by some flash like lightning by which their souls should be stunned and shaken to the very centre, and melted as the ice by the rapid heat. Very commonly the awakened person strives to produce conviction of this kind by bringing up to view the most frightful images and by reading the most awful and moving descriptions of death, judgement and hell. He frequents that preaching which denounces with the most awful severity the wrath of the Almighty, still hoping and praying to be overwhelmed with such feelings as have been described. But if the convinced sinner could experience all the feelings which he has imagined, and for which he longs and prays, the end of conviction would not be at all answered, for the end of conviction is to lead the sinner out of himself, to destroy all self-confidence and self-complacency, to show him how evil and how helpless his condition is.

But if he could experience such feelings as he wishes, he would think well of himself as being in the frame in which he ought to be. The views and feelings produced by the conviction of the Spirit lead the soul to despair of ever

saving itself. Thus self-righteousness, which is so deeply inherent in every man, is cut up by the root. "I through the law, am dead to the law," says Paul, "that I might live unto God." Again, "I was alive without the law once, but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died". Thus "the law is a schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ".

It is an unexpected thing, of which the blind could form no practical conception, that the nearer the sinner approaches towards deliverance, the further he recedes from hope and comfort, in his own apprehension. That is therefore found true in spiritual things which has been remarked in natural things: the darkest hour is that which immediately precedes the dawning of the day. When the convinced sinner is brought to the point of fully condemning himself, acknowledging that the sentence which dooms him to misery is perfectly just, then is the time of God's mercy; so that salvation is found in the moment when it expected nothing but death. Thus the richness and freeness of the grace of the gospel are magnified, and the saved sinner is prepared to give all the glory to God and ever afterwards to confess that he deserved nothing but to be cast off for ever.

Book Review

The Beauties of Ebenezer Erskine, published by Reformation Heritage Books and Christian Focus Publications, hardback, 696 pages, £19.99, obtainable from the Free Presbyterian Bookroom for £15.99.

The Beauties of the Rev Ebenezer Erskine first appeared in 1830. It is a selection from his sermons compiled by Samuel McMillan, who was himself a minister in Aberdeen.

One might feel slight reservations in commending this book, in that the unedited *Works* of Ebenezer Erskine are in print again. They are presently available in a set of three volumes, published by Free Presbyterian Publications¹. What is given in the *Beauties* in isolated parcels is printed in the *Works* in a meaningful order and in its native context.

However, there is no doubt that this volume of extracts has been useful to the Lord's people since it was first produced. Often books that claim to be the abbreviated essence of a work are more like painful amputations than sweet distillations. This book, however, covers in great variety some of the most refreshing themes a thirsty soul could wish for, in extracts of varying length. The hinge upon which all turns is the glory of God in salvation: that supernatural application to sinners, by His Holy Spirit, of the redemptive

¹Available from the Free Presbyterian Bookroom for £44.50, reduced from £59.50.

work of Christ. Together with the memoir of Ebenezer Erskine published in the original edition, the present reprint of the *Beauties* has a very interesting and useful 53-page introductory essay, “Ebenezer and Ralph Erskine: their lives and their preaching”, which identifies the distinctive emphasis of the Marrowmen’s preaching.

The Marrowmen were ministers who filled their churches with the heavenly sound of the doctrines of free grace, at a time when that was rare. While many of the Scottish pulpits had become legalistic because of the pernicious effects of the dangerous error of Neonomianism², poor perishing sinners heard the law and the gospel from the Marrowmen. The law showed them their lostness; the gospel, the Saviour. Their preaching was wine on the lees well refined to those who, by the imparting of spiritual life to their souls, had ears to hear and hearts to understand. While others hid the freeness of God’s grace behind legal husks, they presented the truth as it is in Jesus, which is what the Holy Spirit will bless to the salvation of souls. Their hearers were presented with those doctrines of the grace of God which have found many a lost soul and have fed and built up believers in holiness and comfort, through faith, unto the consummation of their salvation. While the Neonomian preachers hung about the foot of Sinai, pointing to an atonement which was obtained by, and veiled in, a new law, the Marrowmen stood at the foot of the cross of Christ directing sinners and saints to a complete salvation. From that stance, they compelled sinners to come to Jesus Christ, by authority of the divine warrant.

We live in a day when the Holy Spirit is grieved by our worldliness, and we fear His blessed influences have largely – but not, we trust, entirely – departed from us. In the hope that the Lord will bless this work to our present generation as He did in the past, we heartily commend it.

(Rev) Roderick MacLeod

Notes and Comments

Gender Recognition

“Civil Partnership” is being followed by “Gender Recognition”. These innocent-sounding words obscure the serious departures from biblical, and even natural, morality which parliamentary legislation promotes under these titles. At the time of writing, legislation is passing through Parliament – and therefore capable of amendment – allowing persons to be issued with birth

²For a brief explanation of this error, see *The Free Presbyterian Magazine* for November 2002, p 344.

certificates which state that they were born with the genders which they later claim to have acquired. For example, a person actually born male would be legally regarded as having been born female and require to be treated accordingly. Further, it will be an offence for any person who has privileged access to this information to divulge it to any other.

Apart from the unsoundness of this method of dealing with a psychological problem and the dishonesty of the new birth certificates as to matters of fact, the legislation will provide a new and mandatory ground of divorce in the case of married individuals, will promote civil partnerships and facilitate marriages between persons of the same natural gender. There can be little doubt that the legislation, if not amended, will interfere with the freedom of Churches, social bodies and public servants to act legally in accordance with biblical convictions when having to deal with individuals in this situation who may seek membership, office, services or privileges.

It is a phenomenon of our day that those who recognise situations as they are, and endeavour to deal with individuals with firmness and compassion as the Saviour did, are regarded as guilty of victimisation. In this way those who are labelled as vulnerable, and so excluded from moral or spiritual challenge, are shut in to their own lifestyle and deprived of the provision in the gospel: “to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound” (Is 61:1).

Once again, to quote Hugh Henry, the Deputy Minister for Justice in the Scottish Executive, this legislation “flows from the United Kingdom Government’s obligation to comply with the judgements of the European Court of Human Rights . . . under the European Convention of Human Rights” – particular regard being had in this case to the right to respect for private life and the right to marry. On 5 February 2004 the Scottish Parliament, by 76 votes to 35, with 7 abstentions, voted in favour of adopting the United Kingdom legislation.

During the debate in the Scottish Parliament, questions were raised about the practical implications of the proposed legislation, but the impression was given that much of the opposition was to the procedure of allowing devolved matters to be decided at Westminster rather than to the substance of the legislation. The official argument for pressing ahead in Scotland in this way was to ensure “a consistent UK approach, and early compliance with, the rulings of the European Court of Human Rights”. Yet again the Scottish Parliament has proved itself incapable of taking a principled stand on the basis of the Christian morality of this nation and has been to the fore in breaking down the bulwarks of many generations. Once again we have an

illustration of where we are being led, all too willingly, by the European Convention of Human Rights. *HMC*

Lack of Moral Leadership

It is well known that every sitting of the House of Commons is opened with prayer. This prayer may be formally read from the appointed Church of England prayer book and not, as we would desire, extempore from the lips of a man of God. But it nevertheless constitutes a daily, public acknowledgement of the Most High, and for that we have reason to be thankful. What a pity that political leaders in that chamber are so little inclined to consider their accountability to that God – whose sovereignty is in this way acknowledged by Parliament – when it comes to framing policies and passing legislation, particularly legislation which is patently dishonouring to Him.

We had hoped that the appointment of the Rt Hon Michael Howard as leader of the Conservative Party would signal the adoption of a more morally-responsible attitude on the part of the Opposition but, alas, what we find is that, for reasons of expediency, he is ready to go with the stream. Thus we find it reported that he has announced that he will support the Civil Partnerships Bill, which legitimises same-sex relationships. It is all very well for him to express the view that “the conventional family remains the best environment”, but what value are we to attach to these words when we find him, at the same time, stating, “Families are changing. Not all conform to the traditional pattern. . . . To recognise civil partnerships is not, in any way, to denigrate or downgrade marriage. It is to recognise the fact that many people want to live their lives in different ways”? Is Britain then soon to sink to the moral and spiritual state to which another once-highly-privileged nation descended, when, in the absence of a caring leadership, “every man did that which was right in his own eyes”? *JM*

Anglicanism – a House Divided?

There are those within the Church of England who regarded the appointment of Dr Rowan Williams as Archbishop of Canterbury to be ill-judged; their fears have now surely been proved well-founded. That this man should be regarded as worthy of any office in a Christian Church, far less that of a leader, beggars belief. If such leadership embraces the obligation of following the example of Christ and walking in His footsteps, we must conclude that Rowan Williams, when weighed in the balances, is truly found wanting. Christ, the great Head of the Church, honoured the moral law and obeyed it to perfection. Sin is transgression of that law. Sodomy, of all sins, has divided the Anglican communion, and its leader has failed to condemn it outright.

We would expect any Christian worthy of the name to do so unreservedly and unequivocally.

Last November, a sodomite Bishop was, in the face of some opposition, consecrated as Bishop of New Hampshire in the American Episcopal Church, and now the Archbishop has to face up to the consequences. Compromise is in the air. *The Daily Telegraph* (10/02/04) reports that the members of the international commission, which he set up after this so-called consecration with a view to keeping the “warring parties” apart, are to hold critical meetings at Windsor Castle. “Dr Williams”, we are told, “hopes to persuade the liberal leadership of the American Episcopal Church and the conservatives to agree on a new system to allow them to co-exist.” What does this mean? Is it possible, after all, for light to have communion with darkness – for there to be concord between Christ and Belial?

On the other hand, it would appear that the Anglican clergy in Africa are determined to leave no doubt as to where they stand, and their forthrightness is to be commended. It is reported that, when a new Archbishop was to be “enthroned” in Uganda recently, a delegation from the United States who desired to be present were told that they would be neither “welcomed, received, nor seated”. Anglican Church leaders in Kenya and Nigeria are equally adamant that they will not maintain communion with the Episcopal Church of the United States of America. This is all the more remarkable on account of the fact that the financial cost of such a stand is, as one might expect, very substantial. JM

Camouflaging Death

It has become not at all uncommon for funerals to be conducted in such a way as shows that those involved, including the ministers of religion, have no concept of the serious matter involved in a soul passing into the presence of God in eternity. By means of anecdotes and jokes, some bordering on the blasphemous, the significance of the event is trivialised and the thoughts of all present are channelled away from anything that would be truly profitable or helpful at such a time.

In their *Directory*, the Westminster Divines advised that friends attending a burial “apply themselves to meditations and conferences suitable to the occasion; and that the minister, as upon other occasions, so at this time, if he be present, may put them in remembrance of their duty”. The trivialising of death leads to the trivialising of life, and a funeral is an appropriate occasion for focusing attention on the spiritual and eternal realities which make life meaningful and which make preparation for death imperative. From all reports, even where the particular abuses mentioned do not exist, how

rarely are funerals occasions when the biblical perspective on life and death is presented!

What a difference there is between the emptiness of human endeavours to grapple with, or exclude, the solemnities of death and the solid hope entertained by, and on behalf of, those whose faith in Christ is such that they have reason to say with Paul: "To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Phil 1:21). Indeed, "devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him" (Acts 8:2). "But I would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him" (1 Thess 4:13,14). There is all the difference here between those who seek to enlighten their darkness with sparks which they themselves have kindled and those whose darkest days are enlightened by the rising of the Sun of righteousness with healing in His wings. How we long to see the people of our land come to experience the power of the gospel to provide an unshakeable foundation for living and dying.

HMC

Church Information

Meetings of Presbytery (DV)

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

Outer Isles: At Stornoway, on Tuesday, March 30, at 1 pm.

Australia & New Zealand: At Auckland, Monday, June 7, at 2.30 pm.

Zimbabwe: At Bulawayo, on Tuesday, March 9, at 11 am.

Synod Agenda and Committee Reports

Clerks of Presbyteries, conveners and clerks of committees, and all interested parties should note that all items of business intended to be placed on the Synod agenda must be in the hands of the Clerk of Synod by April 6.

Conveners and clerks of all standing committees of Synod should note that all committee reports must also be in the hands of the Clerk of Synod by April 6, for printing. These reports should contain information about the work of the committees during the year. Recommendations and proposals should be sent as separate items for the Synod agenda.

(Rev) John MacLeod, Clerk of Synod

Jewish and Foreign Missions Fund

By appointment of Synod, the first of the year's two special collections on behalf of the Jewish and Foreign Missions Fund is due to be taken in congregations during the month of March. *R A Campbell, General Treasurer*