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God's Law Satisfied

We must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ at last. Each of us, in common with all the rest of mankind, has fallen in Adam. We have come into the world with corrupt natures and, throughout our lives, have gone on adding sin to sin. How then can we feel safe with that uniquely solemn day before us, when even the most secret thoughts will be revealed to all? Unless there is some way by which the guilt of these thoughts, and of all our other sins, may be forgiven, we must remain condemned for ever – which means enduring in a lost eternity the punishment that is justly due to us from God. No wonder David felt moved to ask: “If Thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?” (Ps 130:3).

Yet he did not stop there; he went on to say, “But there is forgiveness with Thee, that Thou mayest be feared”. It *is* possible for sinners to be reconciled to God; there were indeed good grounds for Paul’s words: “Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 5:1). But what does he mean by *being justified*? We might adopt Charles Hodge’s definition: “Justification is pronouncing one to be just, and treating him accordingly, on the ground that the demands of the law have been satisfied concerning him”.¹ On the human level, this is illustrated in Proverbs 17:15: “He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, even they both are abomination to the Lord”. It is important to note that *justifying* is presented as the opposite of *condemning*. For a judge to justify a wicked individual is to refuse to condemn him; it is to declare – completely irresponsibly – that the law he is administering has nothing against the law-breaker. On the other hand, the judge acts righteously when he justifies the innocent, when he declares – in accordance with the facts – that the law has nothing against the individual before him. And it is important at the present time to bear this contrast (of Proverbs 17:15) in mind in view of the claims made about the meaning of justification by those who promote what has become known as the New Perspective on Paul, the most prominent of whom, at least in the UK, is N T Wright, the present Bishop of Durham.

¹*Commentary on Romans*, p 102.

It is unlikely to be particularly profitable to discuss the theories of the New Perspective. But what we will attempt is to bring out a little more of the Scripture teaching on the vitally-important matter of God justifying the sinner. It should be clear, not only from Scripture, but from experience, that we are utterly unable to keep the law of God. Since the Fall, the law of God has never been able to pronounce, on the basis of anyone's obedience, that it has nothing against him. Paul set this down with perfect clarity: "By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in [God's] sight" (Rom 3:20). We cannot earn our own salvation; try as we may, we will never bring about our justification. It should be obvious that we cannot earn our salvation by our own *unaided* powers, but it is important to recognise that we can contribute *nothing* to it. The words: "Not of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph 2:9), are emphatic; boasting is absolutely excluded, and we would inevitably boast if we could make the slightest contribution to our salvation.

Thus Hodge goes on to assert: "The ground of justification is not our own merit, nor faith, not evangelical obedience; not the work of Christ in us, but His work for us – that is, His obedience unto death". What we are so completely unable to do, Christ was altogether able to accomplish. Sinners cannot save themselves; Christ *can* save them. In particular, sinners are unable to bring about their own justification; Christ *has* done all that is necessary so that sinners may be justified. When human beings, by their sin, could do nothing but heap dishonour on the law by their sins, Christ *has* magnified God's law and made it honourable. He did so in suffering its full penalty, even unto death, on behalf of all whom He represented in His work of redemption, and He likewise magnified that law in His perfect obedience through the whole of His life on earth. He satisfied the divine law perfectly, on behalf of sinners. So Paul stresses that they are "justified freely by [God's] grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Rom 3:24).

Then he adds: "Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood". In God's gracious provision, so that there might be redemption for guilty sinners, Christ must become a propitiation – He, in other words, must become a sacrifice which will turn away the anger of God from the sinner. Because God must be just, even in the exercise of His grace, the anger of God must fall instead upon Christ as the sinner's substitute. Thus divine justice is satisfied on behalf of all for whom He died; so, as Paul further emphasises, God is just when He justifies the sinner.

It is "through faith in His blood" that sinners are justified – that is, through believing in Christ as the One who died. So when, on the road to Damascus, Paul believed in Christ as the crucified Redeemer, he was immediately justified. The sentence of acquittal was then passed in heaven; God Himself

declared that Paul had been forgiven all his sins. Paul's guilt was all washed away; there were no charges outstanding against him before the bar of God. It was not because Paul had earned that forgiveness; in spite of all the effort he had put into keeping God's law, he had not contributed one mite to the pardon of his sins. Indeed his attempts to keep God's law, although they seemed so nearly perfect, were fundamentally marred by his pride and self-righteousness. But, imperfect though Paul's law-keeping actually was, Christ kept the law on his behalf – and that law-keeping was absolutely perfect; it fully satisfied the demands of God's law.

That law-keeping on behalf of Paul is the second element in his justification. By the first element, forgiveness, the sentence of eternal punishment was removed, but God's law demanded more. Before Paul, or any other sinner, could enter heaven, he must keep the law perfectly. But what Paul could not do – either in atoning for sin or in keeping the law – Christ did on his behalf. Christ's substitutionary sufferings were entirely the result of a gracious purpose in the heart of God from all eternity – as was Christ's substitutionary law-keeping. Justification is all of grace.

The same gracious sentence was passed in heaven after Paul was confronted, years later at the prison in Philippi, by the jailor, whose fear that all his prisoners had escaped, following the earthquake, brought him to the verge of suicide. By divine grace, even in this highly-disturbed state, the jailor was brought to ask, "What must I do to be saved?" And by the effectual, gracious work of the Holy Spirit, he was brought to obey the call to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. As soon as he believed, he was justified. He was forgiven all his sins and accepted as righteous in God's sight. He was justified, not because of what he had done – and surely no one would think of ascribing any merit to the jailor – but solely on account of what Christ had done on his behalf.

When Paul and the Philippian jailor, and all others who will have believed in Christ, appear before the judgement seat, the sentence passed in their justification will be confirmed. Among the good works to be then brought forward before an assembled world will be their faith. No, their good works will not be mentioned as what *earned* their salvation, for they could not possibly have done so. Not even their faith could earn salvation; it was no more than the instrument by which they laid hold of Christ. But these good works will be evidence demonstrating clearly that these were indeed true followers of Christ. Accordingly, justified sinners may feel perfectly safe in thinking of the day of judgement, for their security lies in Christ and what He has done. Let them remember that He satisfied the demands of God's law on their behalf. There can be no condemnation for those who believe in Jesus. But how dangerous to rely on our own merits in the least degree!

“He Hath Triumphed Gloriously”¹

Synod Sermon by Rev Roderick MacLeod

Exodus 15:1-3. *Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the Lord, and spake, saying, I will sing unto the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea. The Lord is my strength and song, and He is become my salvation: He is my God, and I will prepare Him an habitation; my father's God, and I will exalt Him. The Lord is a man of war: the Lord is His name.*

Moses and the children of Israel sang this song after their safe passage through the Red Sea. By God's covenant faithfulness and His mighty power, they had been delivered from the Egyptian host pursuing them.

When God created man, He condescended to enter into a covenant with him. The covenant of works was a channel in which the goodness of God flowed out to man as a holy, innocent creature. That covenant was founded on the obedience of Adam and his seed. When Adam sinned, that foundation was in ruins; as an immediate result the covenant of works became a broken channel, no longer conveying the goodness of God to man. Though God might have stood by the dreadful terms of the broken covenant and left the rebellious man and his posterity in a ruined, cursed condition, it pleased Him to open another channel in which the divine goodness would flow out – not now to man viewed as innocent, but to man as sinful. This is the covenant of grace, founded on the glorious person of the Lord Jesus Christ and on His mediatorial work. Everyone resting on this sure foundation can say with David: The Lord has “made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure”, sure in Christ. In the administration of this covenant of grace, God freely offers to sinners life and salvation in and by Jesus Christ, requiring of us faith in Him, so that we might be saved. This faith is not a condition meriting salvation; it is the gift of God. “This is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son” (1 John 5:11).

The doctrine of the Covenant of Grace was made known soon after man fell and was developed with further revelations down through the Old and New Testament periods, until the canon of Scripture was closed. Central to our consideration at this time is the fact that God revealed His purpose to establish His covenant with Abraham, and with his seed after him. God's purpose was to establish, not only a nation from the loins of Abraham, in the line of Isaac and Jacob, but a Church and visible ordinances in the world. The Church was to be the means which God would use to convey the

¹Preached in Inverness by the retiring moderator at the opening of this year's Synod.

blessings of the covenant of grace to sinners. Glorious things would yet be said of that Church, the “perfection of beauty”, out of which God would shine in the administration of the covenant of grace.

This covenant was administered in one way before the time of the gospel, and in another way ever since. During the first period, it was administered by promises, prophecies, sacrifices, circumcision, the paschal lamb, and other types and ordinances delivered to the people of the Jews. These all pointed to and fore-signified Christ, who was yet to come. This administration of the Old Testament was, through the operation of the Spirit, sufficient for that time to instruct the elect and build them up in faith in the promised Messiah, by whom they had full remission of sins, and eternal salvation.

Moses is here celebrating the covenant faithfulness and goodness of God in bringing Israel out of the bondage of Egypt and through the perils of the Red Sea, and in destroying those that pursued them. This song of Moses refers to what took place in the history of Israel. However, we must not forget that the Book of Revelation speaks of the “song of Moses, the servant of the Lord, and of the Lamb” (Rev 15:3). We are to understand then that, historically, this is the song of Moses but, typically and spiritually, it is the song of the “Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29), who is now “the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne” (Rev 7:17). Furthermore, the relation of Moses to Christ is clearly seen when we remember that Moses esteemed “the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt (Heb 11:26).

Here then is a song of praise to the God of the everlasting covenant of grace, sung at the time of the glorious triumph over Pharaoh and his host, whom the Lord cast into the depths of the sea. However, it is fully understood only when it is interpreted in connection with spiritual deliverance: the deliverance of the sinner from the bondage of sin and the broken covenant of works. We wish to consider, as enabled, on this occasion:

1. How God delivered Israel from Egypt and how it may be applied spiritually.
2. The ways in which Moses expressed his praise.
3. What Moses resolved to do when he said, “I will prepare Him an habitation”.

1. How this deliverance was wrought. In this connection, we wish to mention some events which are significant to this song, from the time of Abraham to the passage through the Red Sea here celebrated.

Making Israel a nation. God called Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldees. His purpose was to bring Abraham and his seed into a covenant relationship with Himself, and also to give Abraham’s seed the land of Canaan, where the kingdom of Israel would be set up and the Church established. The Lord said to Abraham: “I will establish My covenant between Me and thee and thy

seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee. And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God” (Gen 17:7,8). Before this settlement, however, they were to be in Egypt. In the days of Jacob, Abraham’s grandson, there were only 70 persons in the line of the promise and they came down to sojourn in the land of bondage for 430 years. From this small company God would make a nation. And when they departed from Egypt, there were “about six hundred thousand on foot that were men, beside children. And a mixed multitude went up also with them” (Ex 12:37).

Raising a deliverer: God did not forget His covenant with Abraham. As the generations passed and the suffering of the seed of Abraham became more intense in the land of bondage, God raised up Moses, the writer of this song. We read how he was set apart to be, under the Lord, Israel’s deliverer: “And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed. And Moses said, I will now turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt. And when the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses. And he said, Here am I. And He said, Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground. Moreover He said, I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. And Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God” (Ex 3:2-6).

Then the Lord showed Moses what He was about to do: “I have surely seen the affliction of My people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows; And I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey; unto the place of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites” (Ex 3:7,8). That the Angel of the Lord spoke to Moses from the bush was most remarkable; it was an event he was never to forget. This is evident from his last address, in which he spoke of the “good will of Him that dwelt in the bush” (Deut 33:16).

The Deliverance: Egypt was a house of bondage for Israel, a snare. God was to break the fowler’s snare with ten solemn plagues and set His people free. The manner in which He did this may be considered in three ways:

(1.) It was by the good will of Him that dwelt in the bush. A careful study of the Angel who spoke to Moses from the bush will show that this was not a created angel but the angel who is the Lord, the uncreated Angel. The

word *angel* in both Hebrew and Greek signifies a messenger. It is the God of the covenant, revealing Himself in and by the second person of the glorious Trinity. As a divine person, He is an angel, not according to His nature, but in His present activity of revealing – as a messenger – the will of the Father respecting deliverance; He is the One who was to be later known as the Messenger of the Covenant. Later still, John the apostle was to say of Him: “The Word was made flesh and dwelt amongst us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). Yes, full of the grace (or the goodwill of Him that dwelt in the bush), and truth (or the revelation of that goodwill).

(2.) It was by the blood of the pascal lamb. When the Lord was breaking the snare of Egypt with ruinous plagues, He preserved His people. This was most remarkably seen in the last plague, the slaying of the first-born. Israel was given an ordinance by which their first-born would be spared – the blood of the pascal lamb: “They shall take of the blood, and strike it on the two side posts and on the upper door post of the houses, wherein they shall eat it. . . . And the blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where ye are: and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt” (Ex 12:7,13).

(3.) It was by the power of the Lord. “I will sing unto the Lord”, says Moses, “for He hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea.” Later in the same song, he sings, “Thy right hand, O Lord, is become glorious in power: Thy right hand, O Lord, hath dashed in pieces the enemy. And in the greatness of Thine excellency Thou hast overthrown them that rose up against Thee: Thou sentest forth Thy wrath, which consumed them as stubble” (vv 6,7). Being brought to the farther side of the Red Sea safely, Moses saw their enemies destroyed and said, “I will sing unto the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously”.

Again, if one looks in the context, it is clear that it is the Angel who dwelt in the bush that is looking with devastating frowns upon Egypt from the cloud. He who dwelt in the bush is now in the cloud: “And the angel of God, which went before the camp of Israel, removed and went behind them; and the pillar of the cloud went from before their face, and stood behind them: and it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel; and it was a cloud and darkness to them, but it gave light by night to these: so that the one came not near the other all the night” (Ex 14:19,20). Some say that the words we sang in Psalm 18 refer to the Lord fighting against Egypt: “He bowed the heavens also, and came down: and darkness was under His feet. And He rode upon a cherub, and did fly: yea, He did fly upon the wings of the wind. He made darkness His secret place; His pavilion round about Him

were dark waters and thick clouds of the skies. At the brightness that was before Him His thick clouds passed, hail stones and coals of fire. The Lord also thundered in the heavens, and the Highest gave His voice; hail stones and coals of fire. Yea, He sent out His arrows, and scattered them; and He shot out lightnings, and discomfited them. Then the channels of waters were seen and the foundations of the world were discovered at Thy rebuke, O Lord, at the blast of the breath of Thy nostrils. He sent from above, He took me, He drew me out of many waters” (Ps 18:9-16).

Now, as we have noted before, these things are typical and have a spiritual meaning. (1.) The salvation of a sinner is by the good will of Him who once dwelt in the bush and in the cloud, but now dwells in our nature personally – that is the Lord Jesus Christ, in whom the love and kindness of God towards man appears. And He dwells in the Church by His Spirit. (2.) The salvation of sinners is by the blood, not of the pascal lamb, but the royal blood of Christ, “the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world”. (3.) In addition, salvation is by the exceeding greatness of the power of God in redemption, regeneration, sanctification, and in the perseverance of the saints until they come to glory singing the song of Moses and of the Lamb: “I will sing unto the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously”.

2. The ways in which Moses expressed praise. Moses praised the Lord under several titles.

First, *My Father’s God* and *My God*. This may be a reference to the piety of his immediate father. However, we must remember that the Angel said to him at the bush that burned and was not consumed: “I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob” (Ex 3:6). Those to whom the promises were made had departed the scene of time but the One who made the promises had not. The God of the covenant is the God of eternity. When Moses calls the God of his father “my God”, it points to the eternal existence and unchangeableness of the covenant-keeping God.

Furthermore, Moses saw many obstacles in the way of the work he was called to do. He once spoke as if, on account of his weakness, nothing in heaven or earth could fit him for that work. However, strengthened by the God of his fathers, who was now “his God”, he not only obeyed but was made joyful in the divine service; yea, God gave him a sweet foretaste of triumph. In His strength, Moses was able to encourage others to trust in Him. See his gracious courage before a pathway opened through the depths of the Red Sea: “Moses said unto the people, Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which He will shew to you today: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen today, ye shall see them again no more for ever. The Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace” (Ex 14:13,14). The Lord

did “triumph gloriously” over their enemies, and they triumphed in Him.

The second divine name Moses uses is *LORD*, and it appears many times in this song. In our text, Moses speaks four times of *Jehovah*. As you know, this holy name is translated *LORD* in the Authorised Version (printed in capital letters). He says, “I will sing unto the LORD . . . the LORD is my strength . . . the LORD is a man of war, the LORD is His name.” It is a song unto Jehovah. It is a name Moses uses very often to describe the God of Israel. Jehovah is the eternal, immutable and almighty God – a being who is independent of any other, who has His existence in and of Himself, one who gives being to all His words and works. The name speaks of the self-sufficiency, the all-sufficiency, the independence and the eternity of God. It speaks of Him as a God in covenant – as with Israel of old, so with all His people. As He brought them out of their bondage in Egypt, so He delivers us from our spiritual thralldom.

You will remember that when Moses doubted whether the elders of Israel would receive him, he said, “Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What is His name? what shall I say unto them? And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and He said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you” (Ex 3:13,14). The meaning of the name *Jehovah* and the name *I AM* seem to be the same. In respect of eternal existence, God says, “I am”; in respect of self-sufficiency and all-sufficiency, God says, “I am”.

He is able, without let or hindrance, to perform His covenant promises in the appointed time. Therefore Moses sings to the Lord who had promised, and who “hath triumphed gloriously” over all who would hinder Him. I will sing, says Moses, unto the Lord who long ago made promises to Abraham and is now performing them. “I will sing to the Lord,” he says, who called me to this service, making promises to me; these He is now performing; “the Lord is my strength”. “I will sing unto the Lord,” who hath delivered Israel by good will, by blood and by power, whose right hand hath “become glorious in power” on behalf of Israel. I will sing unto the Angel that frowned upon Pharaoh and his host and dashed in pieces the enemy. “The depths have covered them: they sank into the bottom as a stone.” “The Lord is a man of war.” Yes, the song of Moses and of the Lamb! The song about the Lamb, who was in the fullness of time to come and slay the spiritual foes of the spiritual Israel.

On account of these things, Moses says of the Lord, He “is my strength and song, and He is become my salvation”. I am weak; He is strong. Strength, fullness, mercy and grace are on His side of the covenant, though

utter weakness, sinful emptiness, misery and unworthiness are true of us who are represented on this side of the covenant.

3. What Moses resolved to do when he said, “I will prepare Him an habitation”. God had no visible sanctuary in the world until Moses set up the tabernacle in the wilderness. There the Lord who dwelt in the bush and in the cloud, and who fought against Pharaoh and defended Israel, would be pleased to manifest His glory, or “dwell”, above the mercy seat, between the cherubim within this tabernacle. This habitation Moses would prepare for the Lord according to His own instructions. We read in the last chapter of Exodus that a cloud covered the tabernacle that Moses had made, and the glory of the Lord filled it. This cloud was the symbol of the presence of the Lord, the evidence that He was dwelling with His people.

This too was typical, pointing to the coming of the Lord in our nature. In the fullness of time, the Lord Jesus Christ, the great Head of the Church, in whose name we meet here as a Synod, took our nature into union with His divine person. “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). Now, though He is in the midst of the throne in heaven, yet He is present by His Spirit. In meeting in His name, as a Synod, we have the promise of His gracious presence: “Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matt 18:20). How wonderful, how simple, yet how significant the words of John’s disciples, who asked Jesus as He walked, “Where dwellest Thou?”

When there is so little evidence of the power and presence of the Lord in our own day, the Church might cry out (admittedly in another sense) “Where dwellest Thou?” “How long wilt Thou forget me, O Lord? For ever? How long wilt Thou hide Thy face from me? How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart daily? How long shall mine enemy be exalted over me? Consider and hear me, O Lord my God: lighten mine eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death; lest mine enemy say, I have prevailed against him; and those that trouble me rejoice when I am moved” (Ps 13:1-4).

This then was the resolve of Moses: “I will build Him an habitation”. All God’s people have this desire. Often in the history of our land the Church of Christ has been like Israel in Egypt, where there was no place for the true worship of God. There was no room for Christ and His people in Scotland when John Knox was raised up. The Lord raised him up, and love to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob made him say in his heart: “The Lord is my strength and song, and He is become my salvation: He is my God, and I will prepare Him an habitation; my father’s God, and I will exalt Him”. Down through the ages satanic schemes have been devised to put Christ out of

Scotland. But the Lord has always raised up men who resolved in the strength of grace to “make Him an habitation”.

Robert Bruce, and Christ in Him, was expelled from Edinburgh for preaching the gospel. But He made an habitation for the Lord in Inverness, and preached the gospel here with such success that Christ came to dwell, by His Spirit, in the hearts of very many souls in this place.

Perhaps the names of Patrick Dunbar, David Munro, Donald MacKenzie and John Howieson are not well known. Neither do we know much about their history. But this is recorded of them: they made their way from the Inverness and Dingwall areas as commissioners to the famous General Assembly in Glasgow in 1638. There ministers and men spoke like Moses: “The Lord is my strength and song, and He is become my salvation: He is my God, and I will prepare Him an habitation; my father’s God, and I will exalt Him”. The royal prerogative of the Lord Jesus Christ to rule in His Church, by His own officers, was stoutly defended, and the tyrannical Erastianism of the Stuart kings received a decided setback. This was the resolve of Richard Cameron also and many thousands of Covenanters besides. They expressed these sentiments, many of them with their own lives: “The Lord is my strength and song, and He is become my salvation: He is my God, and I will prepare Him an habitation; my father’s God, and I will exalt Him”.

In the same spirit, the men who formed the Free Church of Scotland knew that there was no room for Christ in a Church whose courts were subordinate to the civil magistrates. They separated from the Church of Scotland, saying, “The Lord is my strength and song, and He is become my salvation: He is my God, and I will prepare Him an habitation; my father’s God, and I will exalt Him”.

That is what thousands in Scotland said in 1893 when Rev Donald Macfarlane made his protest against the Declaratory Act. There was no room for Christ in the Declaratory Act Free Church, and they left it, saying, “The Lord is my strength and song, and He is become my salvation: He is my God, and I will prepare Him an habitation; my father’s God, and I will exalt Him”.

We live in a day of great declension and much discouragement. We have been made stewards of a precious trust by the Lord and we may feel very weak under such a responsibility. Moses felt weak at the beginning of his service, but the Lord strengthened him. As the Lord strengthened Moses to be faithful, He is able to strengthen us also. Joshua felt weak when Moses died, but he had to go on without Moses. We too have to go on without our fathers. Let us be faithful like Joshua, and follow the Lord fully. And let us remember the words with which the Lord strengthened faithful Joshua to lead Israel: “As I was with Moses, so will I be with thee” (Josh 1:5).

Jephthah and His Daughter¹

Jonathan Edwards

That Jephthah did not put his daughter to death and burn her in sacrifice is proved by the following:

1. If it was a lawful vow, it did not oblige him to do so. He promised that whosoever came forth of the doors of his house to meet him should surely be the Lord's and he would offer it up for a burnt offering. And, by right, burnt offerings to God were to be dealt with according to the rules that He had given. Supposing it had been an ass or some other unclean beast that had come forth, as Jephthah did not know but it would, his vow would not have obliged him to have made a burnt offering of it, but he must have dealt with it as the law of God directed to deal with an unclean beast that was not holy to the Lord; in that case something else was to be done that God would accept instead of offering it up a burnt sacrifice.

The direction we have in Leviticus 27:11-13: "And if it be any unclean beast of which they do not offer a sacrifice unto the Lord, then he shall present the beast before the priest, and the priest shall value it, whether it be good or bad; as thou valuest it who art the priest, so shall it be. But if he will at all redeem it, then he shall add a fifth part thereof unto thy estimation." And if he would not redeem it, he was to break its neck, if an ass (Ex 14:12,13); or if another unclean beast, it must be sold according to the priest's estimation (Lev 27:27). But if he would redeem it, he was to do so with a lamb if it were an ass (Ex 14:12,13); if another unclean beast, he was to add the fifth part to the priest's estimation.

If in such a case he had gone about to offer an unclean beast as a burnt sacrifice, he would dreadfully have provoked God. And so, when it was his daughter that met him, he might do to her according to his vow without making her a burnt sacrifice – if he did to her what the law of God directed to be done to a dedicated person instead of actually making them a burnt sacrifice. To offer either a man or an unclean beast in sacrifice to God are both mentioned as a great abomination to God. But to clear up the difficulties more fully, I will observe some things concerning the laws that related to persons that were consecrated to the Lord:

(1.) Every living thing that was holy to the Lord, whether of men or beasts, was by right a burnt offering to God, and must either be actually made a burnt sacrifice, or something else must be done to it that God appointed instead of burning it in a sacrifice.

(2.) Persons devoted to God by a singular vow, unless devoted to be

¹Abridged from Edwards' *Notes on the Bible*, in his *Works*, vol 2, pp 734-737.

accursed (Lev 27:28,29), were to be presented before the Lord that they might be redeemed according to the priest's estimation. But beasts that might be sacrificed were to be sacrificed (Lev 27:7-9).

(3.) Persons devoted to God by the vow of their parents were to remain set apart for God after they were redeemed. This may appear from several things:

First. The redemption was only to redeem them from being slain in sacrifice; it was not to redeem them from being holy to the Lord – persons set apart and sanctified to Him.

Second. The firstborn were to be consecrated to God (Ex 13:2; 22:19). They were, by God's law, holy to the Lord in the very same manner as persons devoted to Him by a singular vow (compare Lev 27:1ff, with Num 18:15,16). Likewise the firstlings of unclean beasts were to be redeemed in the same manner as unclean beasts that were devoted (compare Lev 27:11-13 with v 27), but the firstborn still remained separated to God as His special possession after they were redeemed. Hence the Levites were accepted for the firstborn to be a tribe separated to God, after the firstborn were thus redeemed.

Third. Persons dedicated to God by the vow of their parents were Nazarites, as well as those separated by their own vows. The word *Nazarite* signifies one that is separated. Samuel was a Nazarite by the vow of his mother (1 Sam 1:11). But the Nazarite was to continue separated to God, as long as he remained under the vow by which he was devoted.

(4.) Those thus devoted to God to be Nazarites were, to the utmost of their power, to abstain from all legal pollution (Lam 4:7). They were required to keep themselves pure from defilements by dead bodies, with greater strictness than the very priests, and were obliged to as great strictness as the high priest himself (compare Num 6:6,7 with Lev 21:10,11). The high priest was on no account to defile himself with the dead and was forbidden to drink wine or strong drink when he went into the tabernacle of the congregation (Lev 10:9).

(5.) Those devoted to God, by a singular vow, to be Nazarites were to spend their lives in the most immediate service of God. Though only some things are expressed that they should abstain from, yet this is implied in their being separated to the Lord (Num 6:11), their being holy to the Lord (Num 6:6). This was evidently Hannah's intention in her vow whereby she devoted Samuel to be a Nazarite: "I have lent him to the Lord; as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the Lord" (1 Sam 1:28). Accordingly, she brought him to the sanctuary, to dwell continually there, to spend his time in sacred business, "Elkanah went to Ramah to his house; and the child did minister unto the Lord before Eli the priest" (1 Sam 2:11).

(6.) It was necessary that a woman that was devoted to be a Nazarite –

for a woman might be a Nazarite (Num 6:2) – should thenceforward avoid marrying, on two accounts:

First. Marrying would be contrary to the obligation to avoid, with the utmost strictness, all legal defilements, for marrying unavoidably exposed to great legal impurities, and of long continuance (see Lev 12). These legal impurities incapacitated her from drawing near to God in ordinances, as much as being defiled by the dead body of a man incapacitated a priest from his work and office.

Second. Marrying would utterly destroy the main design of her being dedicated in the vow of a Nazarite, which was that she might be wholly devoted to the more immediate service of God in sacred things. If she was married, her time must unavoidably be exceedingly taken up in secular cares, in bringing up children, and in taking care of a family, which is as inconsistent as possible with the design of the vow of the Nazarite. Anna, the prophetess, was in all probability a Nazarite, or one that, after her husband's death, had devoted herself to the service of God by such a vow as that we have been speaking of, and therefore continued in widowhood to so great an age because her vow obliged her (Luke 2:36,37).

Therefore, when we have an account that after Jephthah's daughter had been let alone two months, to go up and down the mountains with her companions to bewail her virginity, we are told that she returned to her father, who did to her according to his vow. He took her up to the sanctuary before the Lord and presented her before the priest, that he might estimate her, then paid according to her estimation, whereby she was redeemed from being made a burnt sacrifice, according to the law. Thus the Jews that came out of the captivity vowed that they would offer the firstborn of their sons (Neh 10:35). Her separation began from that time, and thenceforward she was to begin her strict abstinence from all legal impurities and to spend her time in sacred duties. It is probable that Jephthah left her in the sanctuary, to dwell there as long as she lived, as Hannah did her son Samuel, whom she had devoted to be a Nazarite (1 Sam 1:22). There Jephthah's daughter probably continued in supplications and prayers, night and day, for she was eminently prepared for such duties by that remarkable spirit of piety that appeared in her resignation to the vow her father had made concerning her. And what time she did not spend in duties of immediate devotion, she might spend in making of priest's garments (Ex 35:25,26) or other such business.

2. The nature of the case will not allow us to suppose that Jephthah did what was so horrid and so contrary to the mind and will of God as putting her to death. God took great care that human sacrifice should never be offered to Him. Though He commanded Abraham to offer up his son, yet He

would by no means suffer it to be actually done, but appointed something else with which he should be redeemed. And though God challenged the firstborn of all living things to be His, yet He appointed the firstborn of men to be redeemed. God ever manifested a peculiar detestation of offering human sacrifices to the idol Moloch.

It is likely that Jephthah, a pious person, as he is spoken of by the Apostle, was restrained from it by God. And then what was done was doubtless agreeable to the mind and will of God, for God otherwise would not, in so extraordinary a manner, have assisted her so readily to resign herself to it. Her resignation was from pious considerations and holy principles, as is evident from what she says to her father: "If thou hast opened thy mouth unto the Lord, do to me according to that which hath proceeded out of thy mouth, forasmuch as the Lord hath taken vengeance for thee of thine enemies, even of the children of Ammon". If he had vowed to do so abominable a thing as to kill her in sacrifice, it would not have been her duty to say as she did; but she seemed to be influenced by the Spirit of God to express herself as she did.

3. Her being slain in sacrifice seems inconsistent with her request to go up and down the mountains to bewail her virginity; it would have been rather to bewail her untimely end.

4. It seems evident that she was not slain when it is said that at the end of two months she returned unto her father, who did with her according to his vow. The consequence is immediately added: "She knew no man". This clause seems evidently intended to explain that, when he did to her according to his vow, what he did was to devote her to God in a perpetual virginity. Nobody would suppose that she would marry and have children after she was devoted to death, and it had been determined both by herself and her father that it should be put in execution. Besides, there would have been no occasion to mention her not knowing man as soon as the two months were out wherein she bewailed her virginity, and she had returned from going up and down the mountains; the vow was immediately executed.

5. That Jephthah so lamented when his daughter met him is no argument that he thought himself obliged to put her to death. She being his only child, his family was entirely extinct by her being devoted to be a Nazarite; he had no issue to keep his name in remembrance, which in those days was looked upon as an exceeding great calamity.

God's plan is that our sanctification ordinarily should not be begun and finished in a day, as was that of the thief on the cross. Nature and grace are like the house of Saul and the house of David. The contest between them is long and deadly; but the house of Saul waxes weaker and weaker, and that of David stronger and stronger, finally getting full dominion.

W S Plumer

John Macdonald of Calcutta¹

2. The London Ministry

Rev Neil M Ross

In the autumn of 1830, John Macdonald was offered what he called “a small English charge in London”. It was the Scots Kirk at Chadwell Street, which had Walter Ross Taylor as its pastor, but was soon to lose him to Thurso. John Macdonald agreed to preach for a period of probation and set off for London on November 16.

“When he first gazed on London,” says Tweedie, “from the deck of the vessel which bore him up the Thames, and thought of the millions there, many of them rushing upon ruin, and all of them exposed to dangerous snares, he often said that his heart sank within him at the idea of ministering in such a place. But when he remembered that his message was from God, and thought of the assurance that it would not return to Him void, he went forward in faith.” True religion was at a very low ebb among the Scots who lived in London, one reason being the injury done by Edward Irving’s erroneous teachings. In addition, many Scottish people simply became careless when they came to the city.

In prospect of preaching his first sermon at Chadwell Street, John Macdonald prayed, “O my Lord and Master, Thou knowest my circumstances, and Thou art the same everywhere. I came here, as I believed, at Thy bidding. I besought Thee, if Thy presence came not with me, not to carry me up thither; but Thou hast done it. And now, here I lie on Thy hands, and I will not leave Thee except Thou bless me.”

Although he was still an unordained preacher, he soon had so much work laid upon him that it is a wonder he bore up under it, considering he was not robust physically and had very little human help. A month after he arrived, he wrote, “I am now left alone to labour in this place, as Mr Taylor, my worthy predecessor, is gone. I have now no dear friend to commune with. . . . But O what a privilege to have Jesus still the same dear friend – ‘the same yesterday, today, and for ever!’”

On 17 March 1831, four months after his arrival, John Macdonald was ordained by the Presbytery of London as a minister of the gospel and was settled as pastor of the Scots Kirk at Chadwell Street. He was 24. “A brief period of probation had sufficed to exhibit his devotedness and worth to the men of spiritual discernment among those to whom he ministered,” Tweedie comments. “That led to a cordial call which he accepted, amid much conscious

¹Last month’s article dealt with the early years of this son of John Macdonald, Ferintosh.

weakness and self-distrust.” His congregation was increasing and the Lord was giving him much of His gracious presence in preaching.

As he viewed the defections from the truth in the Church at large, he wrote to a friend: “I dare not shrink into my chamber here, neither do I want to stride over the field with a drawn sword, but I want to walk the high road of appointed duty and fear no man’s face and no man’s steel. But this cometh only from above.”

He was not without personal afflictions. In the spring of 1833, he was very ill with bronchitis. He and others feared that he had tuberculosis. On medical advice he returned to Scotland, but in the mercy of the Most High he was restored to his London charge five months later. Afterwards he wrote, “How precious the gospel of Christ! This is made evident in the hour of affliction. . . . O how precious is one divine beam of the precious gospel shining from afar! ‘It is finished’ – what a rock!”

When approached by other congregations to become their pastor he was constrained to remain in what he called “the metropolis of Christ’s and Satan’s kingdoms as well as of Britain”. He also felt that the promising condition of his congregation, and the measure of heavenly assistance he felt in his work among them, stood in the way of his leaving them. Another tie to the city, he said, was that he had started open-air preaching. Begun less than three months after he was ordained, it was a work which he loved and in which he was used by God. In one of his first diary entries about this work, he writes, “In the afternoon I preached in a tent in the fields, from ‘Why will ye die?’ There was a considerable congregation of stragglers sinners. O, I felt in my element among such. . . . Lord, pity Thy poor worthless servant!” “His attractively-mild demeanour,” says Tweedie, “his pathetic pleadings, which were in harmony with the strong love of his heart, and his solemn appeals to the consciences of men, often assailed the loiterer, or arrested the sinner on the streets of London. . . . Some are known to be now glorifying God for the lessons which they learned from his lips in the haunts of the Sabbath-breakers of London.”

In 1835 John Macdonald responded to an English minister who sought his advice about open-air preaching: “During the summers and autumns of 1831, 1832 and 1834, but chiefly of this year, I have deemed it my duty and my privilege . . . to preach in the open air in various parts of London. . . . In Farringdon Street, at the gate of the market, at seven in the morning, I have had a congregation varying from 200 to 400, perhaps 450. At White Conduit Fields, within a tent . . . from 100 to 300 persons. On Islington Green, during this summer . . . I have preached four times . . . during the season, on the Sabbath afternoons – on the last two occasions to congregations not much

under 500 persons.” Tweedie adds: “Need we wonder to hear Professor Tulloch say, ‘It was not till I met him in London in 1836 that I had any idea of the zeal with which he prosecuted the great, the only object of his life – the winning of souls to Christ. I sometimes accompanied him in his preaching visits of mercy to those who appeared as if steeped in misery, and I have witnessed the effect produced by the announcement that the way to the throne of grace was still open.’”

John Macdonald was not content to minister to his own flock alone. Besides preaching to as many others as he could in the open air, he seized other opportunities for doing good. On the last day of 1836 he wrote, “As to openings of usefulness this year, I have had my usual Sabbath and weekday services. I had much pleasure in my Tuesday evening meetings with my young men. I have, with much satisfaction and encouragement, carried on my Wednesday morning expositions at Mr Meux’s². My attendance at the Hackney Penitentiary has been not unacknowledged; and my open-air preachings during the summer and autumn have much encouraged me. I have also got acquainted with Christians who have been profitable to me. Lord, for all Thou hast done for me and by me, I thank Thee, and would conclude the year in the words of thy servant of old: ‘And now, Lord, what wait I for? My hope is in Thee.’”

He also became deeply involved in the London City Mission when its founder, David Nasmyth, sought his advice. “From the first,” says his biographer, “he entered with zeal and energy into the measure. He prayed for it; he assisted in planning it; he wrote for its magazine; he became one of the examiners of the applicants for the office of missionary; he frequently addressed them after they were elected; and, in short, did all that thorough devotedness and a congenial spirit could achieve in an undertaking which he ranked among the most Christian of his day.”

He also had an active interest in Bible Society work. He attended a meeting of the British and Foreign Bible Society, but it was a most painful experience for him. “The question was brought forward,” he said, “whether Socinians and Arians should be admitted to the agency of the Society. Some faithful, and to me dear, witnesses of the Lord spoke; but, alas, they were drowned by the crowd of compromising, worldly-minded friends, or of bold and decided enemies. O my Lord Jesus, I thought of Thee and was sad!” It was therefore a great relief to himself and many others when the Trinitarian Bible Society was formed at the end of the year. He said in a letter to his father: “I think it is a noble and legible-enough protest against the dreadful leaven of latitudinarianism that is abroad”.

²Meux was a God-fearing man at whose home Macdonald regularly held services.

One cause of deep concern to John Macdonald during his London days was Edward Irving's case. Irving's erroneous views, especially about the human nature of Christ, greatly disturbed the peace of the London churches and brought him into sharp conflict with his brethren. Tweedie observes: "Tenets that amazed by their extravagance, or startled by their novelty, were propounded, while loud condemnations were uttered against all who questioned or denied them. The doctrine of universal pardon, distorted views of the millennium, the peccable humanity of the Redeemer, the gift of tongues and the power of working miracles – these and similar doctrines were put forth." At this time John Macdonald was Clerk of the London Presbytery, and he records in his diary: "I have been much engaged with my co-presbyters this week, in the case of the Rev E Irving. It has been exceedingly trying and painful; but I bless my God, who has preserved me in soul and body." A week later he wrote, "On Wednesday, all day, I sat with my co-presbyters on the case of the Rev E Irving, which terminated in our deciding against him. It has been a most painful case. It has taught me many important lessons, and especially my own weakness. O how subtle error is! How insufficient I am to stand against it!"

He does not record what actually happened at that Presbytery meeting, but Arnold Dallimore in his *The Life of Edward Irving* indicates that there was "a technicality involved. The Trust Deed of Irving's Church stated that its minister must be ordained by a Presbytery in Scotland. Irving interpreted this requirement as freeing him from any relationship to the London Presbytery. Therefore after the trial opened he informed his would-be judges that he was not obliged to submit to their petty adjudication and in high dignity he walked out of their Court. The Presbytery of course continued the trial. It heard the evidence against him and found him 'guilty of heresy' on four counts, as charged."

What part did John Macdonald himself play in the case? His biographer records that "without one vituperative syllable against the greatly-fallen man, he spoke with decision regarding his tenets and practices. He viewed the proceedings which then agitated no limited portion of the Church as 'offering dishonour to that Being who is King of kings and Lord of lords'." At the same time he was mindful of the exhortation, "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall". He had the sad duty of preaching Irving's pulpit vacant. He afterwards wrote, "O it is a hard thing to keep out of the snare of the devil in this place".

His work in his congregation was so greatly blessed that it became necessary to build a new church. It was erected in Islington and was opened at the end of 1834. There was a further increase in his congregation, and the

Lord continued to bless the preaching of the Word to the people. "I have reason," he wrote some weeks later, "to bless the Lord that of late He seems to have granted me some revival in my soul and work."

Benefiting from Affliction¹

1. Consider Adversity

James Buchanan

There is a beautiful harmony between the Word of God and His providence. When providence smiles, the Word allows us to be joyful; when providence frowns, the Word calls us to serious thoughtfulness. The scope and strain of God's revealed will accord with the natural tendency and apparent design of His dispensations towards us; He neither requires us to rejoice in what is evil, nor to grieve for what is good. It is true that we are taught as Christians to deny ourselves in the midst of outward prosperity and to rejoice in the midst of tribulations; but it is only because self-denial in the one case, and joy in the other, are the proper fruits and manifestations of religious principle and the means of promoting our highest ultimate good.

There is no such thing in the Bible as a disparagement of what is naturally good, or a recommendation of what is naturally evil, except in so far as these are respectively injurious or favourable to our true and lasting happiness. We are not required to take bitter for sweet, or sweet for bitter; but as prosperity, which is joyful in itself, may become ruinous to our spiritual interests, we are warned against its dangers; while we are taught that adversity, however bitter, is the wholesome medicine by which our spiritual health may be restored and preserved. In a word, the Bible regards each of these states chiefly as it respects their moral influence on our hearts; and while it admits that the one is joyful and the other painful in itself, it teaches us that each has its peculiar dangers and proper uses, and that in both we are to have a supreme regard to those great religious principles which alone can render prosperity safe and convert sorrow into joy.

We are not to conclude, then, from the expression of the preacher, either

¹The first of a series of articles, slightly edited, from Buchanan's book, *The Improvement of Affliction*. They form the first part of a chapter entitled "Consideration", based on the verse: "In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider" (Ecc 7:14). This little volume is a sequel to Buchanan's *Comfort in Affliction*, which has been reprinted by Free Presbyterian Publications at £5.95; it is available meantime from the Free Presbyterian Bookroom for the reduced price of £3.60. The author was, at the time of writing (1841) one of the ministers of the High Church in Edinburgh; he later became a professor in New College, Edinburgh.

that we may not be joyful in the day of adversity, or considerate in the day of prosperity. On the contrary we learn, both from the lessons and examples of Scripture, that God's people have much reason to be wary and thoughtful while they walk in the sunshine of temporal prosperity, and that it is both their privilege and duty to rejoice even in the darkest night of adversity. A long season of uninterrupted prosperity is accompanied with so many dangers and, in many cases, produces so much positive evil that the disciple, who really regards the salvation of his soul as the one thing that is needful, will find that a holy seriousness of spirit and a habit of thoughtful consideration are essential to the right use and improvement of that condition and to his preservation from the evils which are incidental to it. On the other hand, a season of adversity, if it be the blessed means either of commencing or of renewing his communion with God – of implanting for the first time in his soul, or of maturing and strengthening, the graces of the Christian character – will be an occasion of joy such as the world can neither give nor take away.

It is not prosperity and adversity, considered simply in themselves, but the presence or the absence of religion that, in either case, tells mainly on our present happiness or on our eternal welfare. Without religion, prosperity becomes our ruin, while, with religion, sorrow is turned into joy. But although this is the light in which these two states are, for the most part, presented to our view in the Word of God, we are nowhere taught to reverse the dictates of nature so as to regard prosperity in itself as evil, or adversity as good. On the contrary, the former is declared to be a proper source of joy and a strong motive for gratitude, while the latter is described as, for the present, not joyous but grievous. Accordingly the duties which are specially appropriate to each, and the exercises which they require, are stated in express terms and illustrated by beautiful examples – in the one: a cheerful gratitude, a bountiful charity and self-denial, devoting all God's gifts to His glory and the good of our fellow men; in the other: a resigned and submissive spirit, meek contentment, combined, not with an anxious but with a serious thoughtfulness, and a considerate regard of God's dealings towards us, such as may best qualify us for reaping the fruits of affliction and enjoying religious comforts under its heaviest pressure.

In the day of adversity we are called to serious consideration on many accounts. Without this we are in danger of allowing God's dispensations towards us to pass away unimproved, and of forfeiting the precious benefits which they are designed to confer. The whole advantage of affliction depends on a due scriptural consideration of it. It does not operate as a charm; its wholesome effects are produced only through the medium of our own thoughtfulness. In all His dispensations God has a regard to our rational nature and

addresses Himself to the thinking principle within us. It is not till that principle has been awakened into lively exercise, and directed to scriptural views of divine truth, that we can either expect to enjoy solid comfort under affliction, or to be sanctified by means of it. It is only to “them that are exercised thereby” that it becomes the means of producing “the peaceable fruits of righteousness”.

And, as on these accounts we are called to serious consideration by a day of adversity, so it offers many important and impressive subjects to our thoughts, some of which we shall enumerate, with the view of directing you in your private meditations.

The Unsearchable Riches of Christ¹

Henry Law

Ephesians 3:8: *Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.*

Paul’s eye continues to be fixed on his high calling to be a minister of Christ and on the glorious subject which it was his privilege to unfold. He speaks of himself and of his Lord. His view is twofold. When self appears, he sinks into the lowest depths of humiliation and of shame. When Jesus is discerned, his mind ascends with rapid wing to the heights of unbounded praise. Thus two points are before us. (1) The minister as viewed by himself. (2) Jesus as a treasury of heavenly gifts.

(1) Paul calls upon His followers to be clothed with humility. He here shows that this was the raiment in which he was clad. He appears as the follower of Jesus, who was meek and lowly in heart. Humility is indeed a precious grace. It thrives not in nature’s rank soil. The heathen had no term to depict it. How could they speak of that which was utterly unknown to them? It is a grace which the Spirit deeply implants, when He reveals the misery and filth of indwelling sin. It grows with the growth of faith, and ripens as the celestial home is approached. Paul is a notable example. With what shame he viewed himself when writing to the Corinthians! He says, “I am not meet to be called an Apostle, because I persecuted the Church of God”. When writing to the Romans, he humbles himself as the very bond-slave of iniquity. He states that, when he would do good, evil was present with him. He finds a law in his members bringing him into captivity to the law of sin which was in his members. In the passage before us he gives

¹Reprinted, with slight editing, from Law’s *Meditations on the Epistle to the Ephesians*.

precedence to all the people of God, and by invention of a new word in language, he calls himself “less than the least of all saints”. Can he sink lower in self-estimation?

When his long career of service reaches its close, he casts his eye along his life of labour and humbly bewails that of sinners he is the chief. Far be from us the thought that he did not recognise God’s gracious work within. He truly felt that by the grace of God he was what he was, and with ascending step he pressed toward the mark for the prize of his high calling in Christ Jesus. His was no mock humility. He did not disparage self that he might win applause. But the more the light of heaven shone inwardly, the more it revealed the continuance and the vileness of inbred corruption. The more he knew God, the more he loathed himself. The branch laden with abundance of fruit bends beneath the load. The barren twigs shoot upwards. Thus Paul deeply felt, and humbly avowed, that he was less than the least of all saints.

(2) From these depths of humility he lifts up his eyes to Christ. He strives to behold unsearchable riches. What an object here meets our gaze! We approach hallowed ground. Let us take off earthly sandals and approach with hallowed minds. Angels veil their faces when they contemplate the heavenly glory. Into what abasement and reverence should we poor sinners sink! But we are bidden to search the field in which Christ, the boundless treasure, is hid. He is indeed a treasure-house in which all-surpassing wealth is amassed. Who can measure the infinitudes of thought contained in the revelation: “In Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily”? He is as great as God can be, He is Jehovah’s Fellow; co-equal, co-eternal with the Father, God of God, Light of light, very God of very God. Mark the attributes which are revealed to us. His power is omnipotence. His wisdom is omniscience. His presence is everywhere – without centre, without circumference. Vain is the imagination which strives to embrace such an object, vain the utterance which would venture to depict it. These riches are indeed unsearchable.

But He takes the manhood into God. He humbles Himself and becomes bone of our bones and flesh of our flesh. What motive urges Him to such condescension? It is zeal for His Father’s glory, and love for sinners of our vile race. Behold again these marvellous riches! They are verily unsearchable. Shall we think of the merits of His cleansing blood, which obliterates for ever the crimson dye of our iniquity, or of the beauteous robe of perfect righteousness in which He decks His bride and presents her faultless in the courts of heaven? Shall we speak of His prevailing prayers, which solicit and obtain all the blessings which heaven can bestow? Shall we speak of His coming glory? Vision indeed is dazzled. We can only exclaim, The riches of Christ are unsearchable. But though the search can never reach an end – for while

upon earth we can only see through a glass darkly – we should daily strive to advance more and more in the pursuit, to dig more deeply in this field, to draw water more and more from these unfathomable wells.

Let too the truth be devoutly pondered that all that Christ is, is for His people – all His possessions are for them; His riches are their inheritance. True is His Word in supplication to the Father: “The glory which Thou gavest Me I have given them”. He reveals that His gospel is for them – that the love, wherewith the Father loved Him, may be in them, and He in them. Such is the subject which Paul was called to preach unto the Gentiles, and which the faithful pastor is privileged to unfold unto his flock. What a subject is here before us! How vast, how boundless, how limitless, how inconceivable, how inexhaustible, how infinite! Let it not then be thought that matter for the pulpit is scanty and barren. Let not the preacher speak of littleness, of frivolity, of earthly speculations. Let him preach Christ – Christ only, Christ fully. The theme will be ever new. Hearers will never weary. They will be cheered and gladdened and saved.

The of Faith

2.

Rev H M Cartwright

Repentance¹

John Owen

There ar

The Nature of Vital Piety

Archibald Alexander

Book Reviews¹

Thoughts on the New England Revival, by Jonathan Edwards, published by the

¹Taken

¹Both books reviewed here are available from the Free Presbyterian Bookroom.