

# The Free Presbyterian Magazine

Vol 110

November 2005

No 11

## Archibald Alexander's Conversion

Alexander was brought up in a religious home. He learned to read the Bible by the time he was five and within two more years had committed the Shorter Catechism to memory. Charles Hodge comments on “the inestimable advantage of a correct doctrinal education in his youth”,<sup>1</sup> which gave Alexander a foundation of knowledge when the Holy Spirit began to deal savingly with his soul.

While at school, he began to experience a sense of his sinfulness. At the age of 17 he became a tutor in the family of a General Posey, where a conversation with a godly millwright focused his attention on his need of being born again. About the same time he came in contact with a Mrs Tyler, an old Christian woman, who had problems with her eyes. She often had Alexander read to her, in particular from books by John Flavel. He acknowledged: “To John Flavel I certainly owe more than to any uninspired author”.

Secret prayer was now his regular practice. But one day as he read, to Mrs Tyler, Flavel's sermon on Revelation 3:20: “Behold, I stand at the door and knock”, his feelings overwhelmed him. He had to put the book down and go away to pray. He takes up the story: “No sooner had I reached the spot than I dropped on my knees and attempted to pour out my feelings in prayer; but I had not continued many minutes in this exercise before I was overwhelmed with a flood of joy. It was transport such as I had never known before, and seldom since. I had no recollection of any distinct views of Christ, but I was filled with a sense of the goodness and mercy of God; and this joy was accompanied with a full assurance that my state was happy, and that if I was to die then, I should go to heaven. This ecstasy was too high to be lasting but, as it subsided, my feelings were calm and happy. It soon occurred

<sup>1</sup>Alexander (1772-1851), born into a Scots-Irish family in Virginia, became a noted minister and first professor in Princeton Seminary. Quotations in this article are from chapter 1 of James M Garretson, *Princeton and Preaching* (Banner of Truth), reviewed in the October issue. The original source of quotations from Hodge is his “Memoir” in the *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* 27, no 1; other quotations from Alexander come from the biography by his son J W Alexander, *The Life of Archibald Alexander* (this volume has been reprinted by Sprinkle Publications and is available from the F P Bookroom for £12.50).

to me that possibly I had experienced the change called the new birth.”

Hodge comments: “With instinctive wisdom, he left that question to be determined by his future conduct. He knew that the only satisfactory evidence of regeneration was a holy life. The reading of Jenks on *Justification* was attended with feelings of delight . . . . The way of acceptance with God became to him now ‘as clear as if written with a sunbeam.’” Alexander was still unclear if he was converted. Yet, he wrote: “if I had not the beginnings of a work of grace, my mind was enlightened by the knowledge of the truth, of which I had lived in total ignorance. I began to love the truth and to seek after it as for hid treasure.” Hodge analyses his experience: “It would be presumptuous to express any confident judgement on the nature of the religious exercises above delineated. The ‘joyful frames’, more than once experienced, could of themselves decide nothing. The sources of such joy in the imagination, in the physical constitution, in the natural affections, are so numerous and so wonderful, that it is a familiar fact that such seasons are often experienced by those who give no satisfactory evidence of genuine conversion. But the clear apprehension of the truth, the cordial approbation of it, and desire for divine knowledge, are indications which can hardly be mistaken.”

After Alexander’s duties as tutor were over, he accompanied his minister William Graham on a preaching trip. “I understood his discourses,” Alexander tells us, “and thought I could find the evidences of vital piety, as proposed by him, in myself. But hearing much of sudden conversions, and of persons being convulsed with severe conviction, I concluded that the hopes which I entertained must be fallacious and that they prevented my being truly convinced of sin.” Though reluctant to speak about his experiences, he confided in Graham, “who made little or no reply”. He also spoke to another minister on that trip, John Blair Smith, a noted preacher of the time. “I related to him my various exercises, but added that I had still fallen into sin after these exercises; upon which he said in his decided, peremptory way that then they were certainly not of the nature of true religion, which always destroyed the power and dominion of sin, and proceeded to account for the joy I had experienced on other principles.” The possibility is that Smith misunderstood what Alexander was telling him about the continuing influence of sin in his life. But the result was that “from this time I abandoned all persuasion that I had experienced regenerating grace. My desire now was to be brought under such alarming convictions of sin as I had heard of in the case of others. But that evening, which I spent in the forest, I was greatly distressed on account of my exceeding hardness of heart. I rolled on the ground in anguish of spirit, bewailing my insensibility.”

Hodge continues the account: “Happily he found in the Rev James Mitchell

a wiser counsellor than his previous advisers. That gentleman sought an interview with him and drew from him the statement of his difficulty, that he had not 'experienced those convictions without which he could not expect to be saved'. To this Mr Mitchell answered that no certain degree of conviction was prescribed, that the only purpose which conviction could answer was to show us our need of Christ, 'and this', added he, 'you have'."

"He then", Alexander adds, "represented Christ as an Advocate before the throne of God, ready to undertake my case and able to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by Him. A new view opened before me at this moment. I did feel that I needed a Saviour, and I knew Christ as an Advocate was able to save me. This mere probability of salvation, after having given up all hope, was like the dawn of morning on a dark night; it was like life from the dead. From that instant I entertained a joyful hope that I should yet be saved. These new views affected me exceedingly. I was like a man condemned to die, who is unexpectedly informed that there is a friend who can obtain a reprieve. I was unable to say anything. My tears prevented utterance."

Hodge's comments are worth quoting: "Dr Smith undertook to judge of the exercises of the heart, and to decide whether or not they exhibited evidence of regeneration. He led the inquirer to refuse to hope in Christ until he was satisfied he had experienced the new birth. He thus drove him to the borders of despair. Mr Mitchell pointed the wounded spirit to Christ, and bid him hope for acceptance on the ground of His merit and mediation. This brought peace. Had anyone persuaded the bitten Israelites not to look in faith on the brazen serpent until they felt themselves cured, they too would have despaired. Our first duty is to receive Christ and, in receiving Him, He brings conviction, repentance and all the graces and blessings of the Spirit."

However, Alexander continued unsure of his state. He himself describes a further stage in his experience: "Being much dissatisfied with my state of mind, and now sensible of the corruption of my heart, I resolved to enter on a new course and determined to give up all reading except the Bible and to devote myself entirely to prayer, fasting and the Scriptures, until I should arrive at greater hope. My life was spent almost entirely in religious company, but our conversation often degenerated into levity, which was succeeded by compunction. Telling over our private exercises was carried to an undue length, and instead of tending to edification, was often injurious. . . .

"A young woman of my acquaintance . . . appeared more solemnly impressed than most of the company. All believed that if anyone had experienced divine renewal, it was Mary Hanna. One afternoon, while reading a sermon . . . on the need of a legal work preparatory to conversion, she was seized with such apprehensions of her danger that she began to tremble, and

in attempting to reach the house, which was distant only a few steps, fell prostrate and was taken out in a state of terrible convulsion. The news quickly spread, and in a short time most of the serious young people in the town were present. I mention this for the purpose of adding that I was at once struck with the conviction that I had received an irreparable injury from the clergyman who had persuaded me that no such conviction as this was necessary. I determined therefore to admit no hope until I should have the like experience.

“I read all the religious narratives I could procure and laboured much to put myself into the state in which they described themselves to have been, before enjoying hope. But all these efforts and desires proved abortive, and I began to see much more of the wickedness of my own heart than ever before. I was distressed and discouraged, and convinced that I had placed too much dependence on mere means and on my own efforts. I therefore determined to give myself incessantly to prayer until I found mercy, or perished in the pursuit.

“This resolution was formed on a Sabbath evening. The next morning I took my Bible and walked several miles into the dense wood of the Bushy Hills. . . . I began with great earnestness the course which I had prescribed to myself. I prayed and then read in the Bible, prayed and read, prayed and read, until my strength was exhausted; for I had taken no nourishment that day. But the more I strove, the harder my heart became, and the more barren was my mind of every serious and tender feeling. I tasted then some of the bitterness of despair. It seemed to be my last resource, and now this had utterly failed.

“I was about to desist from the endeavour, when the thought occurred to me that, though I was helpless, and my case was nearly desperate, yet it would be well to cry to God to help me in this extremity. I knelt upon the ground and had poured out perhaps a single petition, or rather broken cry, to God, when in a moment I had such a view of a crucified Saviour as is without a parallel in my experience. The whole plan of grace appeared as clear as day. I was persuaded that God was willing to accept me, just as I was, and convinced that I had never before understood the freeness of salvation, but had always been striving to bring some price in my hand, or to prepare myself for receiving Christ. Now I discovered that I could receive Him in all His offices at that very moment, which I was sure at the time I did. I felt truly a joy which was unspeakable and full of glory.

“How long this delightful frame continued I cannot tell. But when my affections had a little subsided, I opened my Bible and alighted on the eighteenth and nineteenth chapters of John. The sacred page appeared to be

illuminated; the truths were new, as if I had never read them before; and I thought it would be always thus . . . I expected now to feel uniformly different from what had preceded, and to be always in lively emotion, thinking my troubles all at an end. As I had been much distressed by discovering the sins of my heart, and as I read in Scripture that faith works purification, I resolved to make this the test. At the time indeed I had no doubt as to the sincerity of my faith . . . For several days my mind was serene. But before a week had elapsed, darkness began to gather over me again. Inbred corruption began to stir. In a word, I fell back into the same state of darkness and conflict as before.”

Let us quote some final conclusions from Hodge: “The narrative . . . is surely adapted to teach us in matters of religion to look not at processes, but at results. If a man is led to forsake sin, to trust in Christ, to worship Him and to keep His commandments, it is of small consequence how these results were brought about. The attempt, however, is constantly made to force our experience through the same steps of progress with that of others. God deals with souls in bringing them to Christ and holiness variously . . . yet in every form accomplishes the same great work. Delay, suffering and waste of strength would be prevented if men could learn wisdom by the experience of others and be induced to believe that Christ will accept them just as they are, that waiting to become better or striving to attain certain states of preliminary feeling is only one of the various forms of unbelief. . . .

“Then again, when men tell us that conversion is effected when their soul summons all its powers and determines to make God its portion, or purposes the general good, how does this agree with the experience of God's people? Is conversion, so far as it is a conscious process, a self-determination so much as it is a beholding the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, as that glory is revealed to it through the Word and by the Spirit, taking the whole soul captive in admiration, gratitude, love and submission? Men do not create themselves; they do not come forth from the darkness of spiritual death to behold the light of God's countenance and the glories of the new creation by any energy of their own. The whole change is one of which man is the subject, rather than the agent.”

This account illustrates the difficulties and the confusion many people encounter in passing from death to life. In later life Alexander believed that the saving change in his soul took place when he was still a tutor with General Posey; given Alexander's deep understanding of the work of the Spirit – seen in his useful volume, *Thoughts on Religious Experience* – one is reluctant to argue. But far more important than to discover the precise time of his conversion is the fact, evident from his later life, that he *was* truly born again.

## Folly's House<sup>1</sup>

A Sermon by R M M'Cheyne

Proverbs 9:13-18. *A foolish woman is clamorous: she is simple, and knoweth nothing. For she sitteth at the door of her house, on a seat in the high places of the city, to call passengers who go right on their ways: Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither: and as for him that wanteth understanding, she saith to him, Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant. But he knoweth not that the dead are there; and that her guests are in the depths of hell.*

In our last lecture from this chapter, we saw that Wisdom is the Lord Jesus Christ, that He has built a house and prepared a feast, and that He is inviting poor, simple sinners to turn in to Him and be saved. We now come to the opposite side of the picture. Another woman (but O how different!) sits at the door of her house and cries to the same passers-by. She invites them to turn in and partake of stolen waters and bread eaten in secret. But "her guests are in the depths of hell". I have little doubt that this second woman represents the devil, the great enemy of God and man.

**1. The name and character:** "A foolish woman is clamorous: she is simple, and knoweth nothing". This is the name and character of Satan: "Foolish, simple, knowing nothing". Satan was once one of the brightest spirits that stood before the throne of God. He is called Lucifer, son of the morning: "How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!" (Is 14:12). There is reason to think that, of all the creatures, he was most like the Son of God. All the fallen angels were like morning stars, and Satan was the brightest of them all. When they fell, these bright spirits were darkened – they lost the Holy Spirit. They still remain full of amazing powers and faculties, but all distorted now. Satan himself has lost all his true wisdom. He is very crafty still, full of cunning and lies, but he has no wisdom. He has no true knowledge or understanding. His name is Folly – he is simple and knoweth nothing.

I shall give three examples of his folly: (1.) *In the fall of man.* It was Satan who brought about the fall. He beguiled Eve through his subtlety. He wanted to destroy the glory of God. He wanted to rob God of the praise and glory which a holy world would have given Him, and he thought he had succeeded. He smiled when he saw man fall under God's wrath and curse. But it proved the occasion of far greater glory to God than if man had stood. It proved the occasion of God manifesting His justice, His truth, His grace and love, in

<sup>1</sup>This sermon follows on from last month's and it also is taken, slightly edited, from *Life and Remains, Letters, Lectures, and Poems*, published in New York in 1849.

quite a new manner, so that God gets far more glory and far louder praise than if man had never fallen. The songs of the redeemed would never have been heard if man had not fallen. Satan thus showed his folly; he is simple, and knoweth nothing.

He wanted to make man miserable; he envied the happiness of Adam and Eve. When he saw poor dust and ashes rejoicing in the love of God, out of which he had been cast, he envied them and resolved to make them miserable. He said: "Ye shall be as gods"; but he meant it as a lie, and so he deceived them and brought the world under the curse of God. But God turned it into a blessing to them that are saved. It was the occasion of God sending His Son in our nature, and of our becoming united to Christ, clothed with a divine righteousness and loved with the same love with which God loves His Son. We did indeed become as gods in a sense which Satan knew nothing of. We are brought far nearer to God and are far more happy and glorious than if man had never fallen. He wanted to make man his slave. He wanted to make him his drudge to do his bidding – his captive so that he might torment him. But man by this became his judge: "Know ye not that we shall judge angels?"

(2.) *In the death of Christ.* It was Satan who stirred men up to destroy Christ. He opposed Christ from His birth to His death. He moved the Jews and Gentiles against Him. He entered into Judas and persuaded him to betray Christ. He urged on the crowd to cry, "Crucify Him, crucify Him;" and the soldiers to pierce His hands and His feet. By all this he destroyed himself. Christ, by His death on the cross, destroyed the dominion of the devil over all his own; and so He triumphed over the devil in His cross. By this Satan was shown to be a fool.

(3.) *In the temptations of the saints.* Satan has great enmity against the children of God. He stands at their right hand to resist their conversion. Afterwards he tries to corrupt them from the simplicity that is in Christ. He shoots fiery darts at them. "He sitteth in the lurking-places of the villages: in the secret places doth he murder the innocent: his eyes are privily set against the poor" (Ps 10:8). He seeks whom he may devour, and yet he has never been able to destroy one soul that believes in Jesus, who says, "They shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of My hand". Their temptations are made the means of keeping them in the dust and clinging tremblingly to the arm of Jesus. Thus Satan is cheated of his prey. O surely you are witnesses that Satan is simple and knoweth nothing.

## **2. Those whom Satan invites.**

(1.) *Simple ones, and without heart.* The same persons mentioned in verse 4. I showed you that Christ cares for those who do not care for Him: those who do not know their danger; those who are like Ephraim, a silly dove with-

out heart; those who have no heart for Christ, no heart for holiness, no heart for prayer – Gallios, who care for none of these things. It is a solemn and affecting truth that Christ not only loves them that love Him and seeks those who are seeking him, but He is yearning over those of you who are so lost that you do not seek Him, who do not care for Him. He “is longsuffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance”.

Perhaps some may say, O this is very comfortable doctrine, and we shall remain in our present condition. But observe, there is another seeking you, saying, “Turn in hither”. The foolish clamorous woman sits at the door of her house, on a seat in the high places of the city, crying, “Whoso is simple, turn in hither”. Yes, my brethren, Satan desires to have you, that he may sift you like wheat. Satan is striving to keep you living in your sins, till the day of grace is past and the day of reckoning has come. Every tavern you see is an open mouth of Satan’s dwelling. Every haunt of pleasure – the theatre, the dancing room, the card table – these are open doors into Satan’s dwelling, and he is busy inviting you in.

(2.) *Passengers who go right on their ways.* There are none against whom Satan is so angry, or whom he so much desires to lead aside, as those who go right on their ways. When a man is awakened, and goes right on towards Jesus, crying, “What must I do to be saved?” then Satan begins to allure that man, to get him to turn quickly out of the way. When God spoke the commandments, Israel began to seek the Lord in right earnest. But Satan allured them to turn aside and make the golden calf: “They turned quickly out of the way”. So with Lot’s wife.

When a soul has come to Christ and goes on his way rejoicing, Folly redoubles her cry: “Turn in hither”. Satan loves well to get a joyful believer to fall. “Simon, Simon, behold Satan hath desired to have you, that he might sift you as wheat.” Ah, do not say, I am on the right way, and therefore I am safe; Satan cries to passengers who go right on their ways.

**3. The invitation:** “Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant”. The pleasures of secret sin form the baits by which Satan allures and destroys thousands. It is not open sin that he first invites to. Many would shrink back if he were to propose open sin all at once. He does not say, Come and be a drunkard; come and be an open profligate. But he invites you to secret sin. This is the way he destroys simple ones, who are without understanding. He says, Come and take a little secret sin; no one shall ever know. He does not allow you to remember that no sin is secret, that what you do in dark places is all naked and open to the eye of Him with whom you have to do, that the lusts and unclean imaginations in which you delight yourself are all as open as day before the eye of God. He says, They are sweet and



pleasant; but he does not tell you that at the end it biteth like an adder. He does not tell you that the end of these things is death.

This is the way he calls those who are under concern, going right on to Christ. Stop, he cries; "stolen waters are sweet". Are you going to leave all your pleasures – the glass, the dance, the song, the game, the pleasant companion? May you not take a little secret sin and be saved too? You do not need to let it be known. Do it secretly. Ah, how many here have been thus turned quickly out of the way!

This is the way he calls those who are Christ's own, going right on the way of holiness. He invites to secret sin. A skilful fisher lets his fly fall gently on the stream; if he shows the line or makes the line splash the water, the fish are alarmed and the bait is thrown in vain. But he lets it fall gently upon the stream; the sharp-barbed hook is concealed beneath the shining fly, and so the silly fish is caught. So when Satan catches men, he does not show the hook. He says, Take a little secret sin; do it so that none shall see and none shall know. The poor believer catches at the bait and feels the iron enter into his soul.

Beware of secret sin. No sin is secret. All is naked and laid open, and all will be made known before an assembled world. Do not say you do not need to fear, for it is but a small temptation. Satan always begins with a small temptation. Take heed of going as far as you can in temptation without committing the sin. Thus fell Noah and Samson, and David and Solomon. "She hath cast down many wounded; yea, many strong men have been slain by her."

**4. The end of Satan's house:** "He knoweth not that the dead are there, and that her guests are in the depths of hell." Do many hear the voice of Folly? Ah, look to your crowded taverns teeming with God-defying brawlers; look to your theatres and other haunts of wicked pleasure crowded with shameless worshippers of Satan; look at your crowded steamboats on the Sabbath, or your crowds of daring Sabbath-breakers that pollute the highway. All those began with the stolen waters that are sweet, and the bread eaten in secret that is pleasant. And what becomes of all that enter there? "The dead are there", the eternally dead. Ah, this is the end of sin. "What shall the end be of those that obey not the gospel?" The depths of hell! Those who are now going right on their ways, who turn aside and die in their sin, sink into the depths of hell.

*He knoweth not.* Satan hides this from you. When Satan bids you enter, he shows you nothing but what is sweet and pleasant. The cup is sparkling; the lights are glancing; all that your eye can desire to see is there. But ask to see the inner chamber; ask Satan to show you the innermost room. "The dead are there", and "her guests are in the depths of hell."

Choose this day whose voice you will hear. On the one hand, Christ invites you to receive pardon and a new heart and eternal life. On the other hand Satan beckons you to receive stolen waters, and then the depths of hell. O pray that your eyes may be opened; pray that you may not be deceived for eternity.

---

## John Macdonald of Calcutta<sup>1</sup>

### 5. Mr Valiant for the Truth

*Rev Neil M Ross*

We cannot conclude this review of John Macdonald's ministry without underlining his faithfulness to the exhortation: "Earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered to the saints." He courageously and clearly exposed, for example, the errors of Rome. He really began to prize Scotland's Protestant heritage during his divinity studies, when he closely examined the doctrines of Rome against those of Scripture. "While thus busily putting on the armour which was to fit him in future years for the good fight of faith," Tweedie emphasises, "he was not rash or precipitate in employing it."

When the country was agitated by the Government's proposal to give greater political privileges to Roman Catholics, "he could not decide," his biographer tells us, "where the justice lay till he saw the bearings of the measure upon the truth of God. Then only did his views become clear and decided in favour of preserving our constitution as a Protestant one." At the same time he sought the spiritual good of Roman Catholics themselves when he had the opportunity to do so. "I had a long conversation with a Roman Catholic today," he writes in his diary, "and, at parting, gave him a copy of Baxter's *Call*. O may the blessing of God render effectual what was done in His name!"

In India he observed that the gospel was in conflict, not only with the idolatry of Hinduism, but also with Popery as Hinduism's ally in perpetuating idolatry. "So baneful was the influence of Romanism in Bengal," writes Tweedie, "that no fewer than three missionaries of our Church, in Calcutta alone, have had to assail it." He was referring to the polemic pamphlets published by Alexander Duff and W S Mackay as well as by John Macdonald.

The influence of Roman Catholicism in Calcutta increased rapidly as convents, schools and colleges sprang up – with the help, sad to say, of the subscriptions and other support of many professing Protestants. John Macdonald therefore proposed, at the 1844 Calcutta Missionary Conference, that a series of public lectures about Popery be given. An Association of min-

<sup>1</sup>This is the last section of a paper given at the 2004 Theological Conference.

isters of various denominations was formed, a programme of nine lectures drawn up – John Macdonald being assigned the preliminary explanatory address and the third lecture, *The Doctrine of Grace as perverted by Romanism*, with special reference to justification by faith. These two lectures and an article entitled, *Protestant Subscriptions to Popish Institutions*, were later published together as a book of more than 100 pages.

In his opening address he declared, “We boldly say that the man who cares not about the system of Popery when existing before his eyes, or for the salvation of Papists when they are spread around him, is neither loving God with all his heart, nor loving his neighbour as himself”. He asked: “Shall we expose the paganism that disowns God’s Word, the Muhammadanism that supplants it, the Deism that denies it, the Socinianism that sports with it, the Nominalism that dishonours it; and leave untouched and unexposed that deadly Romanism which mixes, corrupts, perverts, and thus destroys, the very substance and essence and power of the gospel committed to our trust? Brethren, can we, dare we, then be silent in regard to it?” We note too that he did not accept Roman Catholic baptism. “If Rome be Antichrist, the Man of Sin, the Whore of Babylon,” he wrote to a friend, “ought any of her ordinances to be acknowledged as Christian, valid ordinances? Ought her baptism to be acknowledged as *Christian* baptism?”

In his trenchant pamphlet, *Protestant Subscriptions to Popish Institutions*, based on the text, “For whatsoever is not of faith is sin” (Rom 16:23), he says, “We are neither ashamed nor afraid to maintain that the Roman apostacy is ‘Babylon’, and an ‘Antichrist’; and that, as such, it is under the ban of Almighty God”. He then asks, “Why do some Protestants support Popery? . . . O Protestant friends and brethren,” he pleaded, “have ye no channels of benevolence more consistent than this? Is there no less doubtful, no surer, way of doing good?” “Take heed”, he warned, “lest the Judge find you partakers of her sins.”

Undoubtedly it was love for the honour and glory of the great Head of the Church and tender concern for precious souls that lay at the root of his detestation of the delusive and destructive system of Romanism. “I am sorry that your views of Popery do not permit you to ‘hate’ it,” he wrote to one correspondent. “I do not, and I did not, speak of Papists, but of Popery; and I rejoice to say that I hate it with my whole soul, and I pray God I evermore may abhor it as evil; and the more I hate it, the more am I able to pity and compassionate those who are its victims.”

John Macdonald was also a noted and decided opponent of worldliness. He had begun his pilgrimage to the better country and he was not minded to return. When he settled in his London pastorate, he saw, Tweedie points out,

that “he either resolutely opposes the world’s ungodliness, and is repaid with the world’s coldness and antipathy, or he imbibes the world’s spirit, panders to the world’s love of novelty and excitement, mingles in the world’s frivolities, and enjoys the world’s smile”. He was in no doubt about the path he ought to tread.

“His spirit was deeply stirred,” says Tweedie, “when he saw how the Church and the world were commingled – how the boundary line between them was effaced – till men too often acted as if God and mammon could both be served.” “The Lord help me!” he wrote. “O for more faithfulness! My heart beats with longing at the thought of speaking out against the world and hell. O for help in these trying times!”

It need hardly be said that he did not testify against worldliness from a “holier-than-thou” attitude. He humbly confessed, “I felt ashamed that such a wretch as I should preach on *holiness*, but I felt that I must go on. O there is a loud cry here for firmness and decision, for breaking the fearful compromise between the Church and the world. . . . O Lord, arise and have mercy; deliver, deliver me; save Thy people and bless Thine inheritance.”

In his sermon on Enoch walking with God, he asserted, “Separation from an evil world must evidently arise out of a life of communion with God. . . . It is vain to think that we can walk with God and with the world too. We must separate ourselves from the world’s principle, for it is pride; we must separate from its practice, for it is rebellion; we must separate from its profession, for it is hypocrisy; we must separate from its motive, for it is selfishness; we must shine as lights, making manifest the evil that is around us, bearing testimony for God and against sinners even unto the death, despising the world’s censure as dross and counting its reproach as the dust under our feet.”

In Calcutta, as in London, he was deeply grieved by the spirit of the world as he saw it operating constantly in the lives of so many professing Christians. Consequently he published articles on, for example, attendance at the theatre and at heathen festivals. It is not surprising that he was regarded, says Tweedie, as “a troubler of the world, and a disquieter of many in the Church” and “did not escape the vituperations of an ungodly world; but he was unmoved thereby”. “He might be reckoned strict, severe, uncompromising,” Tweedie continues, “and he was so to sin, but not to the sinner,” a fact that was demonstrated by his tender compassion for those that were out of the way and far astray.

There were, of course, professing Christians who decided that John Macdonald was not sufficiently compliant to worldly men in order to win them to Christ – that he was not as willing as he should have been to become all things to all men, in order to save some. How right Tweedie was when he

commented that the man “who would compromise God’s truth, or deal with worldly men as if they were not worldly, in the hope of attracting them to the Saviour, will speedily find that he is only entangled in their snare, instead of leading them to the Lamb of God”!

Although John Macdonald mourned over, and fought against, what was contrary to sound doctrine and a life of godliness, he was very hopeful about the future. He believed with his whole heart the promises of Scripture which speak about the worldwide coming of Christ’s kingdom. Unlike some Scottish ministers of his day (the Bonar brothers, for example), he was a convinced post-millennialist.

In his preliminary address of the Calcutta lectures on Popery, he asserted, “The day will certainly come when it will be said, ‘Babylon is fallen, is fallen, is fallen!’ We believe that Popery is yet, perhaps soon, to acquire a short but fearful ascendancy in the earth, that we shall yet, if we be faithful and true, have with her a fearful struggle, so that the witnesses of God on the earth will seem to be slain for a time; but a glorious resurrection will follow; awful judgements will strew the earth with the wrath of God, until His enemies be broken; the Spirit of the Lord shall be poured out on all flesh: the latter-day glory shall then appear. Popery shall be gone for ever . . . then the true Catholic Church, the universal assembly of the true believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, as revealed in the gospel, shall prevail and cover the earth. . . . Such is the triumphant prospect held out to those that hold by the Word of God; and shall we not enter on the conflict that we may partake of the triumph too?”

Such a glorious prospect comforted his soul. Preaching from Isaiah 51:9, “Awake, awake, put on thy strength, O arm of the Lord!” he declared, “The most glorious movement is yet to come, when ‘a nation shall be born in a day’, and the vastly-peopled world shall become the diadem of our God. Then indeed shall the ‘arm of the Lord’ be made bare before all nations, and the long-known Redeemer shall be hailed as ‘King of kings, and Lord of lords’. Such future glory is present to faith, and we suck out the benefit of it as if it even now existed.” As John Macdonald was being given foretastes of the promised glory of the Church of Christ both in this world and in the world to come, he was also being steadily prepared for that eternal glory into which he entered in his forty-first year.

There is no doubt that the life of John Macdonald was, as John Macleod notes in his *Scottish Theology*, “the life of an unusually saintly man”. When he was lying unconscious and nearing his end, he was visited by the veteran Swiss missionary Lacroix, who said as he looked at the dying man: “There lies the holiest man in India”. One mark of his saintliness was the very low view he had of himself, as is shown by his diary and the testimony of those

who observed him. His constant resolve regarding his Saviour was: "He must increase and I must decrease". We cannot read the life and writings of John Macdonald of Calcutta without feeling how far short we come of what we ought to be and do. Truly, he being dead yet speaks to us.

## The Reformed Doctrine of Inspiration

### 2. The Reason for Believing It

*Rev Hugh M Cartwright*

The fundamental reason is that it is taught in the Bible. This is not unwarranted circular reasoning. We are dependent on the Bible for all we know of God's special revelation of Himself. If we cannot believe what the Bible says about itself, we cannot believe what it says about anything. If it is trustworthy at all, it is trustworthy in what it says about itself. The divine Word carries its own authority, and all who are given spiritual perception believe it on account of that authority. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor 2:14). Scripture does not depend on something outside itself for testimony or verification. If it did, we would be putting our confidence in that "something" instead of in the Word itself. The inspired Word has authority in itself, whether or not we recognise it, though we need to be enlightened to that fact. "The authority of the holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed and obeyed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man or church, but wholly upon God (who is truth itself), the author thereof; and therefore it is to be received, because it is the Word of God"<sup>1</sup>.

Scripture bears witness to its own character. This does not mean that human testimony does not corroborate the truth and authority of the Word of God. In all areas in which men have any competence to ascertain truth the Bible emerges with its integrity intact. Every human means of testing what can be tested by human means testifies to the integrity of the Bible. And the testimony of the Spirit in the souls of His people promotes "our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority thereof"<sup>2</sup>.

*What is the Bible's testimony to itself?* Two passages summarise the biblical account of the origin of Scripture: "All scripture is given by inspiration of God" (2 Tim 3:16); "We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place,

<sup>1</sup>*Westminster Confession of Faith*, 1:4.

<sup>2</sup>*Westminster Confession of Faith*, 1:5.

until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man; but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (2 Pet 1:19-21). These passages refer to "all scripture", the "word of prophecy", and every "prophecy of the scripture". The prophets were God's spokesmen, and the Scriptures are the written record of what they spoke in God's name. Without twisting these statements, no one can deny that the Bible teaches that Scripture has been breathed by God, that holy men, chosen and equipped by God, produced it when God moved and directed them, and that the end product of their inspiration by God is our possession of the revelation which God wished us to have in the terms in which He wished it to be expressed.

*The Old Testament bears witness to its own inspiration.* This appears from its testimony to the prophetic function to which its authors were called. God spoke through the prophets. They were moved to speak only the words which He gave them. Isaiah often expressed his sense of divine inspiration by using such terms as "thus saith the Lord". Jeremiah is introduced as one "to whom the word of the Lord came" (Jer 1:2). Calling him to his work, God said: "Whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak. . . . Then the Lord put forth His hand, and touched my mouth. And the Lord said unto me, Behold, I have put My words in thy mouth" (Jer 1:7,9). "The word of the Lord came expressly unto Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the river Chebar; and the hand of the Lord was there upon him" (Ezek 1:3). What was true of the prophets applied to the law and to the psalms. In Malachi 4:4 we read: "Remember ye the law of Moses My servant, which I commanded unto him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments". In 2 Samuel 23:2 the sweet psalmist of Israel says: "The Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and His word was in my tongue".

*Our Lord testifies to the inspiration and authority of the Old Testament Scriptures.* He did not refer specifically to each book of the Old Testament, but in His time the canon, or content, of the Old Testament Scriptures was not in doubt and His statements applied to the entire Old Testament canon. When accused of blasphemy for calling God His Father, He referred His accusers to the Psalms (Ps 82:6), described as their law. He thus referred them to the authority of the Old Testament and made this appeal: "If He called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken; say ye of Him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God?" (Jn 10:34,35). The Word of God coming to men is the Scripture which cannot be broken. Scripture is infallible and cannot fail of fulfilment or be rendered irrelevant.

The authority of Scripture was upheld by Him after His resurrection, when He impressed on the disciples that what was spoken by the prophets and written in the Scriptures – in the law of Moses and in the prophets and in the psalms – had to be fulfilled (Luke 24:25-27,44-46). He referred to specific Old Testament passages and identified the words of the human speakers as the words of God. For example, “David himself said by the Holy Ghost, The Lord said to my Lord, Sit thou on My right hand” (Mark 12:36).

*This view of the Old Testament Scriptures as inspired and infallible is also set forth by the Holy Spirit in the New Testament in the teaching of the Apostles. They refer to God speaking through men.* “Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet” (Matt 1:22). “Men and brethren, this scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas” (Acts 1:16). “Lord, Thou art God . . . who by the mouth of Thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage . . . ?” (Acts 4:24,25). “The gospel of God (which He promised afore by His prophets in the holy scriptures)” (Rom 1:1,2). “God . . . spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets” (Heb 1:2).

*They ascribe to men what was spoken by God.* “Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto Me with their mouth, and honoureth Me with their lips; but their heart is far from Me” (Matt 15:7,8). “For Moses saith, Honour thy father and thy mother” (Mark 7:10). “For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, that the man which doeth those things shall live by them. . . . First Moses saith, I will provoke you to jealousy by them that are no people. . . . But Esaias is very bold, and saith, I was found of them that sought Me not” (Rom 10:5,19,20).

*They say that Scripture spoke when it was God who spoke.* “For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up” (Rom 9:17). “And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham. . . . But the scripture hath concluded all under sin” (Gal 3:8,22). “Nevertheless what saith the scripture? Cast out the bondwoman and her son” (Gal 4:30).

*They quote what is spoken in Scripture by man as spoken by God.* “Wherefore He saith also in another psalm, Thou shalt not suffer thine Holy One to see corruption” (Acts 13:35). “Wherefore, as the Holy Ghost saith, Today if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts” (Heb 3:7,8).

*They refer to the Old Testament Scriptures as the oracles of God.* “Our fathers . . . received the lively oracles to give unto us” (Acts 7:38). “Unto them were committed the oracles of God” (Rom 3:2). “Ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God” (Heb



5:12). If one wishes an authoritative word from God, one must go to the Scriptures – that is where God’s voice is heard.

The New Testament, referring to the Old, manifests a high view of the divine origin and infallibility and authority of Scripture. *The New Testament witnesses to itself as part of Holy Scripture, with the same divine origin, infallibility and authority as the Old Testament.* A significant passage is 2 Peter 3:15,16: “And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, *as they do also the other scriptures*, unto their own destruction”. Peter includes Paul’s epistles with the “other scriptures”. His view of the other scriptures is seen in 2 Peter 1:19-21: “Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost”. It has been observed that in 1 Timothy 5:18 Paul refers to a passage in Deuteronomy and to a passage in Luke’s Gospel, describing both as scripture: “For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The labourer is worthy of his reward” (Deut 25:4; Luke 10:7).

*The view of the New Testament Scriptures taken by their writers is clear.* 1 Corinthians 2 is relevant, particularly verses 9-13 and 16: “But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him. But God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? Even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, *not in the words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth*; comparing spiritual things with spiritual . . . we have the mind of Christ.” In 1 Corinthians 14: 37 Paul writes: “If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord”. In 1 John 4: 6 we read: “We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth and the spirit of error”.

We can reasonably assume that God, having taken such care in communicating His revelation in Old Testament times, a revelation preparatory to the coming of Christ, took equal care with the fuller revelation accompanying that coming. The Old and New Testaments are parts of the one revelation of God. We need the same authority for believing what is written in the New

as for believing what is written in the Old. That this is no mere assumption is clear when Paul writes in Ephesians 3:2-7 of “the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: how that by revelation He made known unto me the mystery (as I wrote afore in few words, whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ by the gospel; whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of His power”.

The inspiration claimed by Paul was promised by the Lord to His apostles. “These things have I spoken unto you, being yet present with you. But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in My name, He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you” (Jn 14:25,26). “I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth: for He shall not speak of Himself; but whatsoever He shall hear, that shall He speak: and He will show you things to come. He shall glorify Me; for He shall receive of Mine, and shall show it unto you” (Jn 16:12-14). Christ being the subject of the Old and New Testaments, God ensured by inspiring prophets and apostles that the record concerning His Son accords perfectly with reality.

The New Testament, like the Old, is Scripture given by inspiration of God, not the personal reflection of men to whom God revealed Himself but the words of holy men moved by the Holy Ghost to express the thoughts of God in the words which the Holy Ghost taught them. The New Testament, like the Old, is Scripture which cannot be broken. Significantly, the supernatural revelation given to apostles and communicated by them to others under the influence of divine inspiration was accompanied by miracles as was the case with the Old Testament revelation (Heb 2:4).

Many *objections* are raised against the biblical doctrine of Inspiration. Critics once spoke confidently of the “factual errors” of the Bible, but the progress of human knowledge has swept many of these allegations away. Those who dismiss inspiration as mechanical, and inconsistent with the rationality and personality of the writers, unwarrantably restrict the power and wisdom of God, the creator of man’s personality and rational faculties, and ignore the fact that they counted it their highest honour to be chosen as spokesmen for Jehovah. Those who object to the science, morality or religion of the Bible, and maintain that it therefore cannot be inspired, do not let the Bible speak for itself. They approach it with the anti-supernatural

---

presuppositions and prejudices of ungodliness and unbelief. The objections cannot stand before the authority of Scripture or before the persuasion of the Holy Spirit when He graciously enlightens a mind in the truth or even before such evidence as men can properly summon in such a case, as will be indicated in the next article.

---

## Benefiting from Affliction<sup>1</sup>

### 4. Sent for Reproof

*James Buchanan*

The day of adversity is intended not only for our instruction, but also for our reproof. As a chastisement, it is designed to rebuke and humble us. The grand design of God, both in His Word and providence, is to produce genuine humility of heart. Many of His most solemn messages to us in the Bible are intended for this purpose. But the evil is that pride is too apt to resist the application of these passages to ourselves; nay, the more proud any man is and the greater his need of being humbled, so much the more averse is he from this faithful application of God's revealed truth to his own soul.

But in the day of adversity, the Lord takes the rod in His hand and, by singling out an individual or a family for His fatherly chastisement, He makes a *personal application*, as it were, of the truth to that individual or family, so as to make them feel that they are under His reproof and correction. Then many sins that they had made light of at the time of their occurrence, and which had perhaps escaped altogether from their remembrance, are forcibly recalled and pressed upon their consciences. They realise the threatened judgements, which had failed to awaken their apprehensions when heard merely by the ear, and feel them to be certain as well as awful now that they are actually suffering under the rod. God's holiness and justice are now known to be active as well as essential attributes of His nature, and His moral government is felt to be at work in reference to themselves. Thus pride is slain, repentance awakened, and humility produced. God has applied the truth by the agency of the rod. And while they smart under His chastisement, they feel that it reproves them for sin and that they dare not utter one word of complaint, or submit one plea in self-justification. Thus God has humbled them and proved them and shown them what was in their hearts.

The day of adversity is *designed for our probation and trial*. It brings with it particular temptations, which are fitted to test, as well as to exercise,

<sup>1</sup>Taken, slightly edited, from Buchanan's book *The Improvement of Affliction*. The previous article appeared last month.

the graces of God's people. Thus Abraham was tried or tempted when he was commanded, apparently in direct opposition to God's covenant promise, to offer up his son Isaac. This was, in every point of view, a sore trial; it brought with it peculiar temptations to unbelief and disobedience, such as had never assailed the patriarch before. But he was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and his faith and obedience were rendered only better and more illustrious by means of his trial.

So is it with the people of God, who are the children of faithful Abraham. God visits them with adversity, not merely with a view to instructing or chastising them, but for the purpose of trying and exercising their Christian graces; and by means of such trial and exercise, these graces are strengthened and matured. For just as the bodily frame is more fully developed, and grows in vigour by means of active exertion, so the principles of spiritual life in the soul are improved and perfected by means of discipline – that discipline calling these principles into exercise, and thereby increasing their strength and vigour.

Thus, when a man who has long been weak in faith is visited with adversity, he is laid under a necessity, as it were, of having recourse to God in his straits; he feels that he has no other being on whom he can depend for succour or support. And as one consideration after another presents itself to his mind, as to the all-sufficiency and faithfulness and love of his Lord, his faith acquires increasing confidence; and when he is weak, he feels that he is strong.

So the man who, while he lived in the sunshine of earthly prosperity, may have been easily annoyed by trifling inconveniences and been reluctant to submit to them, is, as it were, compelled to recognise God's hand in it when he is visited by a signal and sore affliction. Thus he exhibits a holy resignation to God's will and a submissive temper in his severest trials, such as he was unable to preserve in former times – these graces of the Christian character being called into lively exercise, and thus strengthened and matured. And if this be the benevolent design and this the happy effect of affliction, how much reason he has to rejoice that, while his outward man perishes, his inward man is renewed day by day! Who that knows the unspeakable value of those heavenly graces, which are thus invigorated and strengthened, will murmur at the discipline which God uses to call them into exercise and to carry them onward to perfection.

The day of adversity is designed as *a means of preparation for the future* which lies before us. This is an interesting aspect of our present trials. We are too prone to take a retrospective view of their causes and occasions, while we think little of their prospective design and results. But we ought not

only to look back on the causes which may have rendered our afflictions necessary; we should also look forward to the events for which they are designed to prepare us. I believe that affliction is often sent, not so much as a chastisement for past sins, but as a means of preparation for future duty. And it is most suitable and efficacious for this end.

It is a means of fitting us for *future trials*. All the afflictions of life are not sent upon us at once; otherwise we should be in danger of being overwhelmed by them. But one is sent at a time, and this makes way for another and prepares us for enduring it. The Lord, in His providence, follows the same rule as in His instructions: He gives line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little; according as the disciples are able to bear it. One affliction, duly improved, prepares us for enduring another and deriving good from all.

There is great diversity indeed in God's methods of dealing with His different disciples. Sometimes by a sudden stroke He visits a prosperous disciple with the heaviest calamity at first; and it is not wonderful if, thus unprepared by previous discipline, he should feel it to be almost overwhelming. But then, if such an affliction be at all improved as it should, it must serve, by its very magnitude, to suppress all repining and to produce a meek and resigned spirit under the smaller afflictions which may follow it. In other cases, the smaller trials are sent first, and one follows after another until the disciple is prepared for enduring the heaviest of all. The mind that is in any measure duly exercised by the former, becomes, as it were, familiar with the principles which administer support and comfort, and is ready to have instant recourse to them when the latter arrives.

O how mercifully does God deal with His people in thus adapting the method of His discipline to their respective circumstances. He sends on one, who might otherwise fail to be awakened to his highest interests, a stroke like a sudden thunderbolt; and on another, whom such a stroke might overwhelm, such preparatory minor trials as initiate him gently in the school of affliction. Some may wonder that we speak of so many successive trials and of the wisdom of God in making one affliction prepare the way for another, but it is even so in the experience of God's people. Affliction is not one act of chastisement but a *course* of salutary discipline, a series of preparatory trials leading on to the glorious consummation – for it is “through much tribulation” that we must enter into the kingdom of God.

Adversity is a means of fitting us for *future temptations*. God, whose foreknowledge extends to all future events, sees that a disciple is ere long to be placed in circumstances which will throw strong temptations in his way. And He, whose knowledge extends to the secrets of the heart, knows also

that, in the frame of mind which present prosperity has induced, that disciple would be ill qualified to resist these temptations – perhaps prone to yield to them. He must be called off from the world, brought to his knees, and strengthened inwardly with strength in his soul. But so long as prosperity continues, this moral change, so essential to his future safety, is not to be expected; and therefore, in the exercise of His unfailing love and faithfulness, the Lord takes him into His own hand and visits him with affliction. The disciple is grieved, no doubt, but he is also humbled and instructed and strengthened by this discipline; a new and more spiritual frame of feeling is produced; the truths of religion acquire a firmer footing in his mind and a fuller ascendancy over his heart. And these truths, thus applied to his soul, furnish him with new and stronger motives, so that, when the hour of temptation comes, he is prepared, through God's grace, to meet it, and his very sorrows are his preservative from sin.

Little do we know the temptations from which we have been preserved or delivered by means of such salutary discipline. Little do we know what we might have been if we had fewer trials. The Christian disciple who has been subject to protracted illness may be apt to wonder why he should be kept for so long a time in a condition which apparently hinders or impairs his active usefulness. But perhaps that very disciple had the seeds of vanity, worldliness, or intemperance in his heart, which the constant sunshine of prosperity would have caused to spring up and ripen; or he was likely to be placed in circumstances which would have tempted him to open sin. How thankful then should he be for God's restraining grace, even though that grace has operated through the discipline of sorrow – especially if he finds that during his sickness his spiritual health has been preserved and increased, while he sees that many a prosperous professing Christian has fallen before the power of the temptation from which he has been so graciously preserved.

---

## Lessons from Bethany<sup>1</sup>

*J C Ryle*

John 11 describes a miracle which is not recorded in the other Gospels – the raising of Lazarus from the dead. Nowhere shall we find such convincing proofs of our Lord's divine power. As God, He makes the grave itself yield up its tenants. Nowhere shall we find such striking illustrations of our Lord's ability to sympathize with His people. As man, He can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities. Such a miracle well suited the end

<sup>1</sup>Taken, with slight editing, from Ryle's comments on John 11:1-6 in his *Expository Thoughts on John*, vol 2.

of such a ministry. It was right that the victory of Bethany should closely precede the crucifixion at Calvary.

These verses teach us that *true Christians may be sick and ill as well as others*. We read that Lazarus of Bethany was one whom Jesus loved and a brother of two well-known holy women. Yet Lazarus was sick, even unto death! The Lord Jesus, who had power over all diseases, could no doubt have prevented this illness, if He had thought fit. But He did not do so. He allowed Lazarus to be sick and in pain and weary, and to languish and suffer, like any other man.

The lesson is one which ought to be deeply graven in our memories. Living in a world full of disease and death, we are sure to need it some day. In the very nature of things, sickness can never be anything but trying to flesh and blood. Our bodies and souls are strangely linked together, and that which vexes and weakens the body can hardly fail to vex the mind and soul. But sickness, we must always remember, is no sign that God is displeased with us; nay more, it is generally sent for the good of our souls. It tends to draw our affections away from this world and to direct them to things above. It sends us to our Bibles and teaches us to pray better. It helps to prove our faith and patience, and shows us the real value of our hope in Christ. It reminds us, before it is too late, that we are not to live always, and it tunes and trains our hearts for our great change. Then let us be patient and cheerful when we are laid aside by illness. Let us believe that the Lord Jesus loves us when we are sick no less than when we are well.

These verses teach us, secondly, that *Jesus Christ is the Christian's best Friend in the time of need*. We read that, when Lazarus was sick, his sisters at once sent to Jesus and laid the matter before Him. Beautiful, touching and simple was the message they sent. They did not ask Him to come at once, or to work a miracle and command the disease to depart. They only said, "Lord, he whom Thou lovest is sick", and left the matter there in the full belief that He would do what was best. Here was the true faith and humility of saints! Here was gracious submission of will!

The servants of Christ, in every age and climate will do well to follow this excellent example. No doubt, when those whom we love are sick, we are diligently to use every reasonable means for their recovery. We must spare no pains to obtain the best medical advice. We must assist nature in every possible manner to fight against its enemy. But, in all our doing, we must never forget that the best and ablest and wisest Helper is in heaven, at God's right hand. Like afflicted Job, our first action must be to fall on our knees and worship. Like Hezekiah, we must spread our matters before the Lord. Like the holy sisters at Bethany, we must send up a prayer to Christ. Let us

not forget, in the hurry and excitement of our feelings, that none can help like Him and that He *is* merciful, loving and gracious.

These verses teach us, thirdly, that *Christ loves all who are true Christians*. We read that “Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus”. The characters of these three good people seem to have been somewhat different. Of Martha we are told in a certain place that she was “careful and troubled about many things”, while Mary “sat at Jesus’ feet, and heard His word”. Of Lazarus we are told nothing distinctive at all. Yet all these were loved by the Lord Jesus. They all belonged to His family and He loved them all. We must carefully bear this in mind in forming our estimate of Christians. We must never forget that there are varieties in character and that the grace of God does not cast all believers into one and the same mould.

Admitting fully that the foundations of Christian character are always the same and that all God’s children repent, believe, are holy, prayerful and Scripture-loving, we must make allowances for wide varieties in their temperaments and habits of mind. We must not undervalue others because they are not exactly like ourselves. The flowers in a garden may differ widely, and yet the gardener takes an interest in them all. The children of a family may be curiously unlike one another and yet the parents care for all. It is even so with the Church of Christ. There are degrees of grace and varieties of grace; but the least, the weakest, the feeblest disciples are all loved by the Lord Jesus. Then let no believer’s heart fail because of his infirmities and, above all, let no believer dare to despise and undervalue a brother.

These verses teach us, lastly, that *Christ knows best at what time to do anything for His people*. We read that “when He had heard that Lazarus was sick, He abode two days still in the same place where He was”. In fact, He purposely delayed His journey, and did not come to Bethany till Lazarus had been four days in the grave. No doubt He knew well what was going on: but He never moved till the time came which He saw was best. For the sake of the Church and the world, for the good of friends and enemies, He kept away.

The children of God must constantly apply their minds to learn the great lesson now before us. Nothing so helps us to bear patiently the trials of life as an abiding conviction of the perfect wisdom by which everything around us is managed. Let us try to believe, not only that all that happens to us is well done, but that it is done in the best manner, by the right instrument and at the right time. We are all naturally impatient in the day of trial. Like Moses, when beloved ones are sick, we are apt to say, “Heal her *now*, Lord, we beseech Thee” (Num 12:13). We forget that Christ is too wise a Physician to make any mistakes. It is the duty of faith to say, “My times are in Thy hand. Do with me as Thou wilt, how Thou wilt, what Thou wilt and when



---

Thou wilt. Not my will, but Thine be done.” The highest degree of faith is to be able to wait, sit still, and not complain.

Let us turn from the passage with a settled determination to trust Christ entirely with all the concerns of this world, both public and private. Let us believe that He by whom all things were made at first is He who is managing all with perfect wisdom. The affairs of kingdoms, families and private individuals, are all alike overruled by Him. He chooses all the portions of His people. When we are sick, it is because He knows it to be for our good; when He delays coming to help us, it is for some wise reason. The hand that was nailed to the cross is too wise and loving to smite without a needs-be, or to keep us waiting for relief without a cause.

---

## Book Review

***The Old Evangelicalism, Old Truths for a New Awakening***, by Iain H Murray, published by The Banner of Truth Trust, hardback, 240 pages, £14.00, available from the Free Presbyterian Bookroom.

This volume is a collection of conference addresses subsequently revised. Their common thrust is that “on a number of fundamental truths, the Evangelicalism of the last hundred years contrasts unfavourably with what went before” (p xi).

The first three chapters have recurring themes. “Preaching and Awakening: Facing the Main Problem in Evangelism” makes the pertinent point that “a recovery of the fear of God, and of the greatness of His displeasure against sin, is the great need of our times” (p 31). There is a call for preaching the moral perfections of God, the law of God, the predicament of the sinner and his need to be convinced of his sin and of his obligation and yet inability to believe. There is a useful brief discussion of whether the time of the new birth can be determined. We agree that there is a legal conviction unrelated to regeneration which may or may not be followed by regeneration but we also believe that the conviction of sin and misery which issues in the sinner coming to embrace Jesus Christ is the fruit of regeneration and not merely the context in which regeneration takes place.

In “Spurgeon and True Conversion”, stress is again laid on the necessity of regeneration and of preaching the law to the unregenerate, “because it teaches them not what they can do but what they ought to do. Far from encouraging salvation by works, it demonstrates the impossibility of rendering the obedience that God requires. It brings home to the non-Christian that he cannot change his own nature, he cannot save himself” (p 52).

“Christ our Righteousness – God’s Way of Salvation” deals with the critical importance of the truth of imputed righteousness. It explains the natural man’s self-righteousness by the fact that “he neither knows God nor himself . . . he has not seen his own depravity and has never experienced the convicting work of the Holy Spirit. . . . There is therefore nothing more adverse to man’s highest interests than to hide from him his true condition and the wrath of God which he deserves” (pp 79,80,81).

The fourth and fifth chapters present ideas propounded in other publications already reviewed in this magazine. In “The Cross – the Pulpit of God’s Love”, Mr Murray appears to defend the view that those who hold to a definite atonement, as he does, can only preach the gospel to all and invite them to know the love of God in their own experience if they can tell sinners that God loves them, even “if this love is not necessarily saving” (p 121). For a writer of unusual clarity, the treatment of this subject is confusing. The key to the truth is hinted at in his own statement that “it is not a doctrine either of special love or of general love that is to be offered to sinners; it is rather *Christ himself*” (p 122); and again, “Where is this love to be found but in the Saviour Himself?” (p 129). In gospel preaching, sinners everywhere can and must be invited and urged to come as sinners to Christ, as the One in whom they shall know that everlasting love of God for sinners as such which is expressed in election and redemption and regeneration – “the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 8:39). The chapter entitled “What Can We Learn from John Wesley?” presents views similar to those in Mr Murray’s previously-reviewed volume, *Wesley and Men who Followed*.

The chapter entitled “Assurance of Salvation” proceeds on the basis that, “next to the issue, how one becomes a Christian, there can be no question more significant than, how does one know one is a Christian”. Mr Murray provides a biblical and helpful discussion of the relation, in the promotion of assurance, between “the testimony of the Spirit of adoption witnessing with our spirits that we are the children of God”, “the divine truth of the promises of salvation” and “the inward evidences of those graces unto which these promises are made” (*Westminster Confession of Faith* 18). John Colquhoun of Leith is quoted favourably: “If the disquieted Christian, then, would recover spiritual consolation, let him ‘hold the *beginning* of his confidence, steadfast unto the end’ . . . Let him come frequently to Jesus, the Consolation of Israel, and come every time, as if it were the first time” (p 192).

The final chapter, “Christian Unity and Church Unity”, properly emphasises that the communion of saints transcends denominational and national boundaries. While we recognise that in the present situation the Church is more extensive than the denomination, we find Mr Murray’s treatment of

this subject defective, one-sided and basically Independent. The emergence of denominations has certainly complicated the situation since the seventeenth-century Scottish theologians expounded a biblical doctrine of the Church which recognised one Church in each locality and nation, whose unity was expressed in a common government; and we need a good statement of the bearing of that doctrine on the present ecclesiastical scene.

While there is much to commend, this book reminds us to read all human works in the spirit of the Bereans, who “searched the scriptures daily, whether these things were so” (Acts 17:11). We regret the continuing trend to abandon the Authorised Version of the Bible in quotation. *(Rev) H M Cartwright*

## Protestant View

### Infallible?

The Roman Catholic Church claims absolute infallibility for itself, and since 1870 it has explicitly claimed infallibility for the Pope “when he proclaims by a definitive act a doctrine pertaining to faith and morals”. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* seems to go on to extend the same authority to the Bible: “This infallibility extends as far as the deposit of the divine Revelation itself”.

Now their British bishops have published *The Gift of Scripture*, which tells their followers that they are not to expect to find “full scientific accuracy or complete historical precision” in the Bible. It is particularly the early chapters of Genesis which fall victim to this expression of unbelief; the Garden of Eden and the creation of Eve from Adam’s rib, for instance, are described as “symbolic language”. At most, the book says, these chapters may contain “historical traces”. Yet the Virgin birth and the resurrection of Christ are declared to be factually correct. The Bible is considered to be true in those passages which relate to human salvation.

And how is one to know what to believe in the Bible and what to dismiss as merely symbolic? One assumes that we must listen to Rome, which has always relied on tradition as its authority for bringing in doctrines with no foundation in Scripture. Rome always wants to feel in control. She, we are expected to believe, has authority over the Bible. But, in reality, the situation is the other way round: the Church is under the authority of God speaking exclusively in His Word. Indeed, that is one of the marks of the true Church, a test which Rome plainly fails.

Michael McMahon, a Scottish priest and one of the writers of *The Gift of Scripture*, has said: “In order to believe that every passage of the Bible is the

literal truth, you have to suspend your critical faculties. You have to suspend the God-given ability to reason.” Yet Roman Catholics are expected to suspend their critical faculties when the teachings of their Church are presented to them; they are required to accept as true whatever doctrines Rome teaches, whether they are aware of them or not. In any case, it requires the total suspension of one’s critical faculties to believe that a priest can change bread and wine into the body and blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, while the bread to all appearance remains bread and the wine remains wine.

Although, until now, Rome has claimed to believe in the infallibility of Scripture, that claim was fundamentally flawed because she gave the same authority to tradition. What is to be believed may have changed; but the total control exerted by the Church is still the same. Yet God’s Word has not changed, and never will. The inspired, and therefore infallible, testimony of the Psalmist, as he addressed the Most High, remains totally valid: “Thy word is true from the beginning: and every one of Thy righteous judgements endureth for ever” (Ps 119:160). May the Word of God – true in its entirety from the beginning, and for ever – be our unchanging guide throughout our lives!

---

## Notes and Comments

### Physician-Assisted Suicide

Earlier this year the annual representative meeting of the British Medical Association decided to drop its opposition to the legalisation of what has become known as physician-assisted suicide – where a doctor prescribes drugs for a patient to use to put an end to his life, but takes no part in administering them. The *British Medical Journal* of September 24 published a number of articles on the subject, most of them in favour. However, the overwhelming majority of the responses on the BMJ website, mostly from doctors, opposed any change in the law. One doctor expressed the opinion: “We all need a lighthouse to guide us during the storm, and we are currently living in particularly stormy times”.

There is indeed a lighthouse, and it was good to see an Aberdeen surgeon draw attention to it. He pointed out that the heart of the debate on euthanasia revolves around our concept of who man is. Accordingly he drew attention to the teaching of the Bible that man was made in the image of God “and that his purpose is to govern the earth, to populate the earth and to enjoy God’s presence (see Genesis 1-3). Furthermore, the deliberate taking of human life is forbidden (see Exodus 20). Whilst I regularly am in the situation of withdrawing or withholding futile treatment from moribund patients, and see this

as a compassionate act, it is quite a different matter to become involved in the deliberate ending of a patient's life, as in Dutch-style euthanasia. It seems to me that such acts represent a failure of compassion on the part of the doctor rather than the opposite. As doctors, it is ours to heal sometimes, improve things often, but to encourage our patients always. Our patients quite often are discouraged, or even despairing, of their situations. What a tragedy it would be if all the doctor had to add in such a situation is that he agrees with their outlook and recommends ending it all. We need to remember that God is the one who appoints the time for each person's death (see Hebrews 9:27)."

In a debate on the subject in the House of Lords, Lord Joffe indicated that he expected to bring in a bill permitting physician-assisted suicide (his previous bill ran out of time in the last session of parliament). Even if, sadly, he is determined to close his eyes to the light the Bible sheds on the matter, he surely ought to listen to the weight of arguments from doctors concerned that, as one family doctor put it, "it will require a paradigm shift in the role of the GP as carer and healer to that of killer". As in other moral issues where the law has been changed over the last 40 or more years, there seems to be a small, assertive and highly-articulate group of people determined to force their views on the nation in the face of much public opinion and, altogether more significantly, the law of God.

### **Sabbath Petition**

The Synod in May endorsed a proposal of the Sabbath Observance Committee that a Petition should be addressed to the Scottish Parliament, requesting it to "legislate in favour of a weekly day of rest from work throughout Scotland, with Business and Commerce closing on that day, and that the day appointed be the Christian Sabbath". The petition, now with the Parliament's Petitions Committee, makes the point that the general lack of legislation prohibiting Sabbath work reflects the fact that in past centuries such legislation was considered unnecessary in Sabbath-keeping Scotland. The situation is very different now and Scotland is behind Europe in its legal recognition of a weekly day of rest.

The petition appeals to the divine authority and perpetual obligation of the Fourth Commandment, the Christian and Protestant Constitution of our Nation, and the duty of Government to legislate for the good of the people of our land. It claims that the failure to keep the first day of the week as a day of worship and rest from work, according to God's appointment, is causing the nation to suffer economically, socially, morally and spiritually.

It is common today to divorce morality from religion, and many indignantly protest that they can be perfectly moral without subscribing to any belief in

God or accepting biblical doctrines and precepts. Such persons repudiate claims that there is a connection between the attitude to the Fourth Commandment and morality. However, rejection of divine authority at this point reveals an attitude to God which cannot but permeate the whole moral outlook and undermine the foundations upon which conformity to absolute moral standards depends. The rapid decline in morality undoubtedly reflects resentment at that interference with personal sovereignty over one's own life and arrangements which is seen to be embodied in the Fourth Commandment.

Daniel Wilson, in *The Divine Authority and Perpetual Obligation of the Lord's Day*, describes the Sabbath as "the institution which sustains Christianity". He also claims that it "sustains those duties and habits, those virtues of the heart, that mildness and humanity, that regard to truth and the sanctity of an oath, that sense of conscience and prospect of the tribunal of Christ, which strengthens human authority, preserves the peace of communities and nations, and is the bond of human society" (p 181). There is so much involved even in the outward observance of the Lord's Day which makes its recognition beneficial to body, mind, morality, family life, social relations, business efficiency and national life, not to speak of its contribution to the spiritual well-being of individuals and communities.

Apart from the specific ways in which a neglected Sabbath is detrimental to the overall well-being of individuals, families, businesses and social and national life, there is the consideration that it deprives the guilty nation which has abandoned the once-acknowledged Sabbath of the blessing of the Lord. "Then I contended with the nobles of Judah, and said unto them, What evil thing is this that ye do, and profane the Sabbath day? Did not your fathers thus, and did not our God bring all this evil upon us, and upon this city? Yet ye bring more wrath upon Israel by profaning the Sabbath" (Neh 13:17,18).

We may feel ourselves to be in the position of those endeavouring amidst much opposition to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, of whom Sanballat contemptuously said, "What do these feeble Jews?" (Neh 4:2). But, like them, we should seek to have "a mind to work" and make our appeal to God. No doubt we should be more diligent than we often are in bringing this matter before the attention of those in, or seeking, public office. May those who value the Sabbath and the well-being of our nation pray that this petition will receive favourable attention, first by the Petitions Committee of Parliament, and then by Parliament itself. It is to the Lord Himself we must look for the revival of religion among us, which will undoubtedly promote the recovery of the Christian observance of the Lord's Day. But we must acknowledge our responsibility to use means and face the question put in the

---

metrical version of Psalm 11:3: "If the foundations be destroyed, what hath the righteous done?" *HMC*

---

## Church Information

### Day of Humiliation and Prayer

The Synod decided that Wednesday, 14 December 2005, be held throughout the Church as a day of humiliation and prayer. The motion included the exhortation: "Let us thus seek to prostrate ourselves before the God of glory, acknowledging in some degree our fearful provocations against the living and true God. Only with our eye fixed on Christ, our glorious Mediator, can we cherish any decrease in the present moral spiritual and ecclesiastical crisis." *(Rev) J MacLeod, Clerk of Synod*

### Theological Conference

This year's Theological Conference will be held, DV, in Inverness Free Presbyterian Church on Tuesday and Wednesday, December 6 and 7. It is expected that Rev H M Cartwright will be chairman and that the following papers will be read:

**The Spirit and Regeneration**

*Rev J R Tallach*

Tuesday 2.30 pm

**The Doctrine of Forgiveness**

*Rev Neil M Ross*

Tuesday 7.00 pm

**The Religious History of the Netherlands**

*Mr Jan Freeke*

Wednesday 10.00 am

**Millennialism and A-millennialism**

*Rev D W B Somerset*

Wednesday 2.30 pm

**The Theology of Missions**

*Rev John MacLeod*

Wednesday 7.00 pm

The paper on Wednesday evening is to be given in public.

*(Rev) J R Tallach, Convener, Training of the Ministry Committee*

### Meetings of Presbytery (DV)

***Southern:*** At Glasgow, on Wednesday, November 16, at 6 pm.

***Outer Isles:*** At Stornoway, on Thursday, November 17, at 5.30 pm, and at 7 pm with the congregation, to moderate in a call.

***Australia & New Zealand:*** At Auckland, Friday, January 27, at 2.30 pm.

***Skye:*** At Portree, on Tuesday, February 7, at 11 am.

### Projects and Maintenance Manager for Zimbabwe Mission.

Applications are invited for the post of Projects and Maintenance Manager

for the Zimbabwe Mission. This involves supervising the erection of new buildings and the maintenance of existing buildings on the Mission. With the retirement of Mr J Mpofu this year, this is an aspect of Mission work which has fallen behind, to the detriment of the work at the John Tallach School and the Hospital in particular, but church buildings are also affected. The position need not be long-term. Further information may be had from the Clerk of the Foreign Mission Committee, the Rev J R Tallach, F P Manse, Raasay, IV40 8PB.

### Outreach Fund

By appointment of Synod, the Special Collection on behalf of the Outreach Fund is due to be taken in congregations during November.

*R A Campbell, General Treasurer*

## Acknowledgement of Donations

**The General Treasurer** acknowledges with sincere thanks the following donations:

*Bookroom Fund:* Mr B Burgess, Belfast, £25.

*College & Library Fund:* A Friend, Newcastle, Lam 3:24, £40; The McCarter Family, USA, \$300.

*Jewish & Foreign Missions Fund:* Inverness-shire Friends, for our Church work in Israel, Rom 2:10, Ps 122:6, £75; Anon, Isle of Lewis, £100; Anon, Ross-shire, for poor children in Zimbabwe & Kenya, £300; The Barn Chapel, Bury St Edmonds, £75.

**Congregational Treasurers** acknowledge with sincere thanks the following donations:

**Breasclete:** *Communion Expenses:* MF, £5 per AG; Anon, £50.

**Edinburgh:** *Jewish & Foreign Missions Fund:* Anon, for work in Israel, £100.

**Glasgow:** *Bus Fund:* Anon, £10; Anon, for Covenanting tour, £20; Anon, £20; £20. *Congregational Funds:* Mr & Mrs C, £60 per RAC. *Eastern Europe Fund:* Anon, £30; £30; £35; £25; £35; £35; £30; £35; £40; £40. *Fabric Fund:* MTP, for use of car park, £800. *Home Mission Fund:* Mrs AB, £100 per RAC. *Jewish & Foreign Missions Fund:* Mrs AB, £100 per RAC; Anon, for Kenya Mission widows, £300. *Sustentation Fund:* Mrs DM, £200 per AM; Mrs AB, £100; Anon, £100 per RAC. *TBS:* Anon, for display of Scripture texts, £500.

**Greenock:** *TBS:* Anon, £40.

**Laide:** *Congregational Funds:* A Friend, New Zealand, for taped sermons, £20 per DAR. *Eastern Europe Fund:* Anon, Shieldaig, £25; Friends, Grafton, Australia, £40; Friend, Gairloch, £20; R Kershaw, £40; Friends, Edinburgh, £100; Anon, Shieldaig, £25; Anon, £500; Friend, Skye, £50; MM, Gairloch, £20; IM Gairloch, £10; IM, £10; MM, £20; Friends, Beauly, £5 (last five for travel expenses); Friend, Holland, for building, £3 000 per DAR; Friend, Ullapool, £10; BC, Edinburgh, £25 per CR; Friend, Laide, £10, and for travel expenses, £50; Isle View Residents, for Bibles, £16, £21.

**Lochbroom:** *Congregational Funds:* A Friend, £40.

**North Harris:** *Communion Expenses:* Anon, £20; Anon, Stockinish, £20; MN, £24 per RM.

*Congregational Funds:* MM, Glasgow, £40 per Rev JBJ. *Where Most Needed:* JN, MacQueen St, £70; CM, MacQueen St, £20 per AJM.

**Portree:** *Communion Expenses:* DRM & AM, £100; Friend, £30; Friend, £20 per SYM. *Dominions & Overseas Fund:* Anon, £25. *Sustentation Fund:* Friend, £10 per SYM. *TBS:* Friend, £50.

**Stornoway:** *Communion Expenses:* Anon, £110; £50; £10.