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## Relevance in Preaching

Today there is a widespread cry for relevance in preaching. But, generally, relevance is measured by the subjective feelings of those who sit, or might sit, in the pews of a particular church. Latching on to such feelings, a community church in Arizona advertised: “Stronger family relationships . . . greater satisfaction at work . . . and you can get all these things through Church”. They acknowledge there are limits to what a church can do, “but a good church gives you a place to explore what God has to say about the kinds of everyday problems we all face: family relationships, stress . . . ethics, work, health, romance, kids . . .”.<sup>1</sup>

Now, of course, the Bible – and every responsible preacher expounding the Bible – will have something to say about contemporary everyday problems, and where the answer to them lies. But to put these things in the first place is to ignore the Saviour’s teaching: “Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matt 6:33). Christ had referred to the everyday problems of His time; He mentioned the questions, “What shall we eat?” and, “What shall we drink?” and, “Wherewithal shall we be clothed?” These obviously were important, as were a whole host of other issues. But there was something far more important: man’s relationship to God.

And it is only through a divine revelation that man, with his understanding disturbed by sin, can grasp what his fundamental needs are. He is a sinner; he is alienated from God by wicked works; he needs to be forgiven; he needs to be made holy; he needs to be ready to enter eternity. He needs a place in the kingdom of God and he needs a righteousness which he can never produce by his own efforts. Now these truths are not attractive to the natural mind – least of all perhaps to respectable, affluent, sophisticated hearers who are fundamentally satisfied with their own religious efforts. They accept that they need help, certainly in some areas of their lives, but they do not wish to be confronted with the fearful realities of guilt, death, judgement or a lost eternity. They do not wish to be confronted with the fact that salvation is

<sup>1</sup>Quoted in David F Wells, *Above All Earthly Powers*, p 270.

altogether of the free grace of God, and not at all by works; they cannot appreciate the glory of the salvation which God has provided in Christ Jesus, through His perfect life and His sacrificial death on the cross.

However, it should be perfectly clear to anyone who takes the Bible as his guide that its teachings about sin and salvation are basic to our spiritual well-being in time and in eternity, and therefore totally relevant. We must be willing to receive direction from the Word of God in every aspect of our lives. The Bible, not our subjective preferences, is to be the test of relevance – in particular as to sermon content. Every word in it was given by the all-wise God to a world characterised by profound spiritual ignorance. The world, including the religious world, has its own wisdom, and “the world by wisdom knew not God” (1 Cor 1:21), and never will. The world has no power to recognise God’s wisdom, and so, in particular, “the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness” (1 Cor 1:18). Unless sinners are awakened to a sense of sin, they cannot begin to appreciate how relevant the doctrine of the cross is to them as sinners under eternal condemnation.

But, as Paul goes on to say, “unto us which are saved it is the power of God”; the preaching of the cross is the instrument which God, through the power of the Holy Spirit, is pleased to use to the salvation of condemned sinners. The preaching of the central truths of divine revelation may be despised by the vast majority today – and treated as utter foolishness – but “after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe” (1 Cor 1:21). This is what proves the relevance of sound, scriptural preaching: that under it sinners are brought to salvation, and make progress in the way of life until at last they pass into a blessed eternity.

Mankind’s deepest need has not changed since the Fall; we are all sinners needing forgiveness and all the other benefits of salvation. And the message we most need to hear remains unchanged in its fundamentals since it was first announced in the Garden of Eden, although further revelations have made this message much fuller and clearer. Which means that the preaching of law and gospel remains relevant to man’s deepest needs, and always will. Unless sinners receive Christ as revealed in Scripture, they cannot have a blessed eternity. What need today that the Most High would raise up faithful preachers of the gospel – men thoroughly convinced that their message will only be relevant if it majors on the doctrines of sin and salvation!

Even among those who claim to take the Bible seriously, it seems as if God is viewed as being almost on the same level as we are, as One whose main responsibility is to help us, however rebellious we might be, and to make us perfectly successful in this life. How much better to face up to reality,

as it is graciously brought to our attention in Scripture! We live in a sinful world. We are sinners ourselves. Our sins deserve eternal punishment. We will not continue in this world for very long. We must appear before God in judgement. And we cannot begin to deliver ourselves from this desperately-serious position.

Yet there are those whom the Bible describes as “blessed”. God has made the pronouncement: “Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful” (Ps 1:1). This is the one who hates sin, who seeks to flee from it. At the same time, “his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in His law doth he meditate day and night” (v 2). Surely this is someone who will be satisfied with solid scriptural teaching and will discern its relevance to his condition. The Psalm goes on to declare that “whatsoever he doeth shall prosper” (v 3). In his commentary, J A Alexander explains: “That the common experience, even of the best men, falls short of this description, is because their character and life fall short of that presented in the two preceding verses”. But their main activity in this life is to build for eternity, and that work is guaranteed to prosper; it can never fail. So, the Saviour said, “Whosoever heareth these sayings of Mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock” (Matt 7:24,25).

Here is a man with a good hope for eternity. Thus John Flavel, in his *The Fountain of Life*, wrote: “Happy is that man who can say in a dying hour, as one did, who being desired, a little before his dissolution, to give his friends a little taste of his present hopes and the ground of them, cheerfully answered, ‘I will let you know how it is with me’. Then stretching forth his hand, he said, ‘Here is the grave, the wrath of God, and devouring flame – the just punishment of sin – on the one side; and here am I, a poor sinful soul, on the other side. But this is my comfort: the covenant of grace, which is established upon so many sure promises, hath saved all. There is an act of oblivion passed in heaven: “I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more”. This is the blessed privilege of all within the covenant, among whom I am one.’”

One can surely assume that this was a man who valued sound preaching while he was able to attend the means of grace and that this was the kind of preaching he found relevant. A realistic man, he knew that his deepest needs were spiritual and were described in the Word of God. He built for eternity on the sure foundation of Christ and His finished work. And we cannot doubt that, when he died, the angels carried his soul into Abraham’s bosom.

## The Philippian Jailer<sup>1</sup>

A Sermon by Rev D A Macfarlane

Acts 16:34. *And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house.*

**I**n the early part of the chapter, we have an account of the vision which the Triune God gave to Paul. The vision was from the Father, and from the Redeemer as the alone adorable Head of His body the Church. It was supernatural; the manner in which it was given cannot be comprehended in any way. It was a revelation – a vision from the Most High through His Holy Spirit, for the glory of God and the good of the Church. It is the equivalent of a promise; there is embodied in it a promise as in Psalm 89:19:

“In vision to thy Holy One Thou saidst, I help upon

A strong one laid; out of the folk I raised a chosen one”.

To come at once to the back-bone of the matter – to the kernel of the covenant – here is the strong new testament David. The Father laid help upon the Lord of glory, the new testament David, who is now in glory with the boundless, inconceivable value of His atonement. He is the Foundation laid in Zion for the poor of His people to trust in, or take refuge in.

In this vision, the Redeemer, by the Holy Spirit, brought before the Apostle a man of Macedonia. He brought home to him that this man who appeared in the vision was a man of Macedonia. He likely showed him the man wearing the clothing common in that place – whatever kind of garments they were in the habit of wearing. Probably he heard this man say, “Come over . . . and help us”. He did not say, and this is not what is meant: “Help us with money. We are very poor; endeavour to bring us some money.” He did not say, “Help us as Joseph helped the sons of Jacob in Egypt with corn”.

Evidently the sum and substance of the message to Paul in that dream, “when deep sleep falleth upon man”, was a request to help them by bringing the gospel to the pagan world of Macedonia. There would have been many Jews there who would have read Moses and the Psalms and the Prophets, but generally the world of Macedonia and Achaia, in Greece, and on to Italy, was pagan and given to idolatry. As you read concerning those in Thessalonica, although no doubt there were converted Jews there, the emphasis is on how God the Holy Spirit turned them from idols and dark places of horrid cruelty, and from lust in its manifold forms, to serve the living God. And Jesus, who delivered them from the wrath to come, has promised to come again.

This is what they were needing in Macedonia. They were in a low state,

<sup>1</sup>A hearer’s notes of a sermon reached in Dingwall in November 1968, where Mr Macfarlane was then minister. Many of the Scripture quotations are taken from the Metrical Psalms.

a state of ungodliness – aliens and enemies in their minds, without God and without hope in the world. But the time to favour them had come. Paul had this vision and a promise, or promises, were implied in it: “No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper, and every tongue that shall rise against thee . . . thou shall condemn”. According to the divine guidance of the Holy Spirit – the Comforter who came in Christ’s name – they were warned in the holy providence of the Lord not to go to Bythinia, a district beyond Troas. So they had the Lord’s guidance and His gracious, sanctifying presence, which implied that He would be as a wall of fire to them, their shield, song and salvation. In all their ways they would seek to acknowledge Him and He would direct their paths. He was the One who commanded the wind and waves on the Lake of Galilee, and He led them to this sea port of Troas and on to Philippi. And they preached the gospel there.

Here we go on to read of the well-known case of Lydia, who heard them at the river side, where prayer was wont to be made. Very likely they were not permitted by the Roman officers to meet in the town itself; it was a Roman colony. The Lord opened Lydia’s heart, so that she attended to the things spoken. So, though Paul planted, and Apollos may have watered – and Luke and Timothy – it was the Lord who opened her understanding and her heart. Now may our prayer be: Open mine eyes that I may see my need of the Redeemer. And, as a minister taught the little girl, “Show me myself”, and “Show me Thyself”.

Lydia saw her malady and, on the other hand, she saw the balm of Gilead, the holy remedy, and was brought to close in with the Redeemer on His own terms. At the river side, when Lydia was convinced and converted and bound up in the bundle of life with the Lord, Paul preached through the Holy Ghost. We may put it like this: Paul preached for eternity. He himself has it in the Galatian Epistle, “ If any man [even an angel from glory] preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed”. The truth must have been very solemn. The holy Word, which is the divine truth from the Father within the Godhead, is solemn and ought to be holily precious to us. May it be wheat to us, the finest of the wheat, and honey from the comb! May we get a little of what Job had through the secret work of the Holy Spirit: “I have esteemed [it] more than my necessary food”.

We are not ready to do so. We need food each day. We say that the words of His mouth are not at all so necessary as food for our mortal bodies. Where grace is, the grace of God from Immanuel, in His bowels of mercy and kindness and pity and compassion, there will be a desire to seek the fear of His great name, to feed upon Immanuel, to feel our need of Him, to have a little of what Jeremiah had when he said, “Thy word was found, and I did eat it”.

He had holy boasting, holy joy and rejoicing. O may we have a little of that! We cleave so much to the dust. The sin is your own and my own. May the Lord visit us, touch us, draw us, incline us! The Lord fulfil the promise, "I will take away the stony heart"!

Paul preached for eternity, in love, and yet all the time he looked to the Lord to break up the fallow ground. Lydia was an honourable, hard-working woman. You would call her, in the way of ordinary morality, beyond reproach. But, from the point of view of spiritual morality, the veil was still on her soul. Through the preaching of Paul, God took off the veil and she saw herself in the mirror of the law and said, "I am a woman of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips. What a thorn I am and what a briar, and how fruitless I am! I have no holy fear, no consecration, no holy insight!"

She had need of being born of water and of the Spirit, as Jesus said to Nicodemus; suppose Paul referred to that portion. What is it to be born of water? I do not know if that came up at the time, but Paul's answer would be: If you are born of the Spirit, you are born of water, and this satisfies the longing soul. Ask the Lord that you would be steeped in the grace of the Holy Spirit. The work of the Holy Spirit is compared to fire which burns up the dross of self-wisdom, self-will, self-dependence. Dross is still left in the dear people of God, but where He begins the good work, He will keep on baptizing them with the Holy Ghost and with fire. They will long to turn unto the Lord, to be meek, to get the promise, "The meek shall eat and shall be filled".

Lydia was blessed; she got in suitable measure what Paul himself had, which is eternal life. Say to yourself, "Is it so that I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live? I have gone down to the grave in and with Him, and the life I now live in the flesh I live by dependence on the Son of God." You say, "I am ashamed of myself and desire to have tears in Thy bottle", shutting the door and wrestling to be dependent on Him. Paul could say, "He loved me and gave Himself for me". If you are crucified – but, nevertheless, living – the Father gave you to Him before the foundation of the world. Your names are in the Lamb's Book of Life. The Son loved you and died for you, and it is wonderful to think that there are such here tonight. Christ, coequal with the Father as to His eternal person, and of the same divine essence, has grasped our nature, without sin in Himself. The Lord laid on Him the iniquity of the flock: "For the transgression of My people was He smitten". May Christ be precious to you! If He is precious, He loved you. You may say to yourself that you can scarcely believe that. If I could do something myself, you might say, He ought to love me. Stop that! The Lord give us grace!

Paul and Silas had much trouble in the holy providence of the Lord. The vision implied that the Lord would be with them and be as a wall round about them. Here they were attacked; then they were reviled and persecuted and they landed in the prison. The jailer was charged to keep Paul and Silas safely; their feet were made fast in the stocks. It did not look as if the gospel was going to prosper in Macedonia. The people who lost their gain from the damsel with the spirit of divination, when the spirit was cast out by Paul, would not, we believe, care whether Paul and Silas were dead or alive. On the following day, if they were alive, they would perhaps permit them to get out of prison if they would never come back again.

One wonders how, in their bodily suffering – and they must have suffered grievously – they could pray and sing praises unto God. The prisoners heard them. They rose at midnight. It was a wonder they were not in a stupor, that they were not faint and weak in body, that they could speak at all. The Lord revived them in spirit. He visited them with a time of holy refreshing from the presence of the Lord. They got what we may call a breeze of the Holy Ghost, and of His grace, to refresh them – such a gale of the holy love of God: Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Perhaps they practically forgot their bodily weakness and discomfort, and how their feet were fast in the stocks. The Lord could do that. This may have been the case, though it is not becoming on my part to say how things were, beyond what was revealed.

They began to pray and sing praises unto God. We are not told what praises they sang. No doubt they would sing the Psalms; they were at home in the Psalms. Even in the days of their spiritual ignorance they would be at home in chanting the Psalms in the synagogue at the times of the feasts. No doubt Psalms would be brought before their minds. Paul quotes one of them in the Epistle to the Romans, chapter 8: “We are killed all the day long”. That is Psalm 44. They were only regarded as sheep for the slaughter. A sheep in good condition would be more valuable than two Jews causing a lot of trouble.

They may have been singing Psalm 9, a particularly appropriate psalm: “My bands Thou didst untie”. The Lord did that already, spiritually; He was able to do it miraculously. They may have prayed and sung Psalm 116. The Lord make it graciously precious to us and give us an insight into it, a sanctified insight for eternity that would be hidden in us as the leaven in the three measures of meal! The Lord is merciful in virtue of the Redeemer doing what He did, drinking the cup to the last drop.

It would perhaps be appropriate to remember some of the verses in Psalm 9. Seek to commit them to memory, lovingly and humbly, for your own good and the exercise of your soul.

“God also will a refuge be for those that are oppressed.

A refuge will He be in times of trouble to distressed.”

We read also that “the name of God is a high tower, the righteous runneth into it and is safe”. No doubt Paul often had trouble inside himself; what groanings he had in himself! “They that know Thy name, in Thee their confidence shall place”.

Another might be Psalm 18. This Psalm probably refers, to begin with, to the Children of Israel at the Red Sea, though it is put in mysterious language. The illustrations of it are indeed very difficult to follow.

“And He upon a cherub rode, and therein He did fly;

Yea, on the swift wings of the wind His flight was from on high”.

The first reference may be to the passage of the Red Sea, the strong wind that came to fulfil His will; it was the same omnipotence, the finger of the Most High, His holy will and commandment.

“And from above the Lord sent down and took me from below;

From many waters He me drew, which would me overflow”.

Paul and Silas were not in waters literally, but they were in great difficulties – very great difficulties which might be compared to storms and waters. The part we were singing, “For Thou wilt the afflicted save in grief that low do lie”, perhaps they were singing that when the Lord said to an earthquake, “Work, earthquake”. By His own hand He touched the manacles of the prisoners. Everyone’s bands were loosed. Can you tell how? Not for a moment. It was the invisible finger of the Most High. The sparrow falling on the ground, fowls of the air, fish of the sea, earthquakes – they are all under His control. We are slow to lay this to heart.

“Who but the Lord is God? But He who is a rock and stay?”

You may say, Paul’s feet were not very fast. But while they were singing, there was an earthquake, and a man came running with a sword, going to kill himself. While he had a high enough countenance, he came tumbling down. He fell flat before Paul and Silas asking, “What must I do to be saved?” He had a lot to be saved from. He brought in the word *do*, if I do something. A doctor in Inverness said to a woman there who was telling him that, if she only felt she had something to do, she would feel easy. “My dear woman,” he replied, “faith is not doing anything but resting on the work Christ has already done”. That was a word in season to the woman: not do, do, do – but give a bill of divorcement to our doing, to be enabled to stand upon Christ’s merits and “know no other stand, not even where glory dwelleth in Immanuel’s land”.

“He made my feet swift as the hinds.” Was this true with regard to Paul and Silas? Yes, we do not say that they began to run in a physical way, but

we do say their hearts, and the feet of their affections and minds and consciences, were running to help the poor, miserable man and his family. They preached the gospel to them; they told them the sum and substance of it. I do not begin, to any extent, to refer to the details. Paul began to preach, and the Holy Spirit melted the heart of the man, and his household. They became like Lydia. They listened solemnly with lowliness. Grace came in, though they did not know how grace melted them. Grace is a great warrior. There was a man who was very reckless, and foolish for drink, and who was fond of fighting men at markets and places like that; the Lord visited him and brought him down to stand where the publican stood. When a certain elder was told that the man was converted, he said, "What a warrior grace must be, when grace overcame this man!" There was no man in the place as strong as he was.

What was the sum and substance of the gospel which Paul preached? The God-given gospel, not sealed with the blood of bulls and goats, but with the sacrifice of Immanuel. How little we appreciate and prize it! You have the prayer, "Turn Thou me and I shall be turned". You may add, "Help me to come to Thy Son". Paul would tell of the Redeemer and how He came. Perhaps He told about the shepherds at Bethlehem. He would tell how Christ lived, and how He offered Himself without spot to God. The Redeemer was a prophet, priest and king for ever, and of His kingdom there would be no end. He who received the gospel would be saying from his heart, with lowliness and self-aborrence, "Be merciful to me a sinner; I am a poor lost sheep on the mountains of vanity. Help me to come 'and, waiting not to rid my soul of one dark blot', to drink in the gospel – and in the act of drinking in the truth as it is in Jesus, drink in Himself as my priest, my righteousness, and advocate with the Father, my propitiation for the forgiveness of my sins, my King to reign in me and strengthen me to die to my rebellion and unprofitableness."

All that was put in brief compass, but seek to be prayerfully exercised in these things. The Lord granted that, as the jailer saw his need of the Most High, he went out to the holy sufficiency of the gospel of Immanuel. No doubt Paul was led to speak in a way suitable for him at the time – first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear. I might venture to say that Paul did not mention the blood of the sacrifice put on the mercy seat. The man did not know what the mercy seat was. These things would come in time. We are very apt to bring in things like that.

The jailer was led to see the Redeemer, to discern the Lord as Prophet, Priest and King, to confide in Him and hang on Him as on a nail in a sure place. Paul and Silas were drinking in with their eyes, ears and mouths, and in the depths of their spirits, with lowliness and simplicity and gratitude, the

Word which was mixed with faith of the operation of God. They were mounting up on wings of gratitude and holy wonder, and thanking the Lord for His goodness “and for His works of wonder done unto the sons of men”.

“They shall run”,<sup>2</sup> refers to the king’s messengers. Whatever messages they had, they shall run. We train men for running; Paul as a trained messenger of the King was preaching that the Lord is in Zion and that the poor of the people shall trust in His name and become messengers of the King. People will take knowledge of you that you have been with Christ. You will spread a sweet savour, and you will be greatly grieved if you are not doing so.

A soldier may be very strong. One who used to visit us was asked if he felt the marching wearisome. He said, No. Everyone is not like that. Where Christ is precious to the soul, they begin to mount up with wings as eagles. You may feel heavy, but you will never cease to mount up. Throughout eternity you will never cease to walk into the riches of the covenant. His people may be nearly fainting, but He will never leave them. “That which concerneth me, the Lord will perfect make.” “For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” They may have their faults and failings and come to the throne of grace many a time in one day. The jailer, and perhaps the prisoners, though we are not told – the Judgement Day will declare it – might say, We got a bite of Christ. Then to them to live was Christ, and to die was gain.

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## The Doctrine of Forgiveness (3)<sup>1</sup>

*Rev Neil M Ross*

**I**t is wonderfully true, as someone has said, that “the pardon of sin in justification is one perfect act; completed at once, and never to be repeated”. Nevertheless, the believer prays daily for pardon. Thomas Brooks says, “It is most true that sin and grace were never born together; neither shall sin and grace die together; yet while a believer breathes in this world, they must live together; they must keep house together”.<sup>2</sup> So the believer must and does confess with Paul: “The good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. . . . O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” (Rom 7:19,24). He continues to echo the heartfelt prayer of the publican, “God be merciful to me a sinner”; and at other times that of godly David, “Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Thy

<sup>2</sup>The reference seems to be to Isaiah 40:31. The connection would no doubt have been made clear by remarks which the note-taker was not able to take down.

<sup>1</sup>Parts 1 and 2 dealt with God’s judicial forgiveness.

<sup>2</sup>*Works*, vol 1, p 91.

lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of Thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions” (Ps 51:1).

God answers such cries of His children by sealing anew upon their hearts a sense of His pardoning mercy in Christ. God does this, not as a judge remitting the guilt of a criminal – this God has done already in their justification – but as a father lovingly pardoning his repentant child. “If a justified person could ever again be actually liable to the eternal wrath of God for his sin,” wrote Boston, “then either he must fall from his union with Christ, which is indissoluble, or he may be in Christ, and yet under condemnation [which is impossible] (Rom 8:1).”<sup>3</sup>

When believers go astray like lost sheep, backslide from God’s ways, or fall into heinous sin, and hence come under the holy displeasure of God, they may well experience the fulfilment of His solemn word of warning: “Then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes” (Ps 89:32). Boston says, “As to sins to come, a justified person, being in Christ, can never more incur the guilt of eternal wrath, but only the guilt of fatherly chastisements, so that the pardon before described [what is received in justification] need never be renewed”.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, it is a solemn matter to be under the rod of paternal correction. Although God declares about His believing people: “Their sins and iniquities will I remember no more” (Heb 10:17), there is a certain sense in which He has their sins before His mind. Thus Charnock addresses the believer: “God puts them out of the memory of His wrath, though not out of the memory of His knowledge. He doth remember them paternally to chastise thee for them, though not judicially to condemn thee.”<sup>5</sup>

Such chastisements may be most painful and grievous, but not only are they of a paternal nature, they also actually confirm the believer’s sonship and the Father’s love for him. “Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons” (Heb 12:6-8).

How comforting it is to the believer, smarting under the rod of God’s fatherly displeasure, to be brought to the assurance that he has received God’s fatherly forgiveness. It is then the believer gets a renewed view of what John Duncan called the magnanimity of God. “It is wonderful in God,” he said, “it is a mighty heart, a magnanimous heart in God, to forgive sins.

<sup>3</sup>*Commentary on the Shorter Catechism*, Edmonton, 1993 reprint, vol 1, p 587.

<sup>4</sup>*Commentary on the Shorter Catechism*, vol 1, p 587.

<sup>5</sup>*A Discourse of the Pardon of Sin*. [www.puritansermons.com](http://www.puritansermons.com).

Not the less that it is through the atonement – for it is His sovereign grace that admits of mediation and atonement and provides it. It is grace (not the less is it grace that it reigns through righteousness): and, as grace, it is magnanimity in God to forgive sins. Moses takes it as such. He says to God, ‘Let the power of my Lord be great’ – in what? In forgiveness – ‘as Thou hast forgiven this people from Egypt even until now.’ It flows from greatness of heart, from magnanimity.”<sup>6</sup>

What is the basis of this paternal pardon? John Brown answers, “Paternal pardon and acceptance are founded on, but not included in, our justification; [they] make no change in our state before God, but only in our spiritual condition and comfort, and are granted from time to time as our sins are committed and repented of and our obedience of faith performed, and are preceded as well as followed by true evangelical repentance. . . . Paternal acceptance respects not our persons, but our holy services, and introduces us to the enjoyment of God’s fatherly smiles and favours.”<sup>7</sup>

It is necessary then for the child of God ever to remember that, when believers go astray, God will not cast them off but will continue to administer fatherly chastisement and bestow fatherly forgiveness. Louis Berkhof makes this helpful comment: “In justification God indeed removes the guilt, but not the culpability, of sin; that is, He removes the sinner’s amenability to punishment, but not the inherent guiltiness of whatever sins he may continue to commit. The latter remains and therefore always produces in believers a feeling of guilt, of separation from God, of sorrow, of repentance, and so on. Hence they feel the need of confessing their sins, even the sins of their youth (Ps 25:7). The believer who is really conscious of his sin feels within him an urge to confess it and to seek the comforting assurance of forgiveness. Moreover, such confession and prayer is not only a subjectively-felt need, but also an objective necessity.”<sup>8</sup>

How does the believer attain to a comforting sense of forgiveness when he feels God’s fatherly displeasure because he has sinned? He is to follow the example of the Psalmist, who cried to the Lord, although he was in the depths of distress on account of his sin, as we see in Psalm 130. “He cried out,” as someone has said, “from under the weight and waves of his sin.” In brokenness of heart he acknowledged that there would be no standing for him if God were in strict justice to deal with him for his sins. In faith he looks to the Lord as the sin-forgiving God: “But there is forgiveness with Thee that Thou mayest be feared” (v 4). Thomas Adams makes this beautiful

<sup>6</sup>*Pulpit and Communion Table*, Inverness, 1969 reprint, p 91.

<sup>7</sup>*The Systematic Theology of John Brown of Haddington*, Fearn, 2002 reprint, p 362.

<sup>8</sup>*Systematic Theology*, London, 1971 printing, p 515.

comment on this verse: “Solomon tells us that it is the glory of a man to pass by an offence. Herein is God most glorious, in that He passeth by all the offences of His children. Lord, who can know Thee and not love Thee, know Thee and not fear Thee? We fear Thee for Thy justice, and love Thee for Thy mercy; yea, fear Thee for Thy mercy, and love Thee for Thy justice; for Thou art infinitely good in both.”<sup>9</sup>

It is clear then that there can be no felt sense of God’s fatherly forgiveness for the children of God when they err until they believingly draw near to God with a broken and contrite heart. “They ought, therefore,” says Robert Shaw, “to humble themselves before God, make ingenuous confession of their offences, renew their faith and repentance, and earnestly supplicate the removal of His fatherly displeasure, and the restoration of His paternal smile.”<sup>10</sup> A A Hodge comments similarly: “As they came, in the first instance, to God in the exercise of repentance and faith in Christ, so must they always continue to return to Him after every partial wandering and loss of His sensible favour in the exercise of the same repentance and faith; and thus only can they hope to have His pardon sensibly renewed to them”.<sup>11</sup> To sum up, our Confession states, “God doth continue to forgive the sins of those that are justified; and, although they can never fall from the state of justification, yet they may, by their sins, fall under God’s fatherly displeasure, and not have the light of His countenance restored unto them, until they humble themselves, confess their sins, beg pardon, and renew their faith and repentance” (11:5).

John Brown thus answered the objection that, if the sins of believers do not render them liable to God’s eternal wrath, they will take encouragement to live in carnal security and licentiousness. He argues that it would greatly discourage their earnest following of holiness to maintain the contrary – that is, to maintain that believers are only loved by God with a fluctuating affection, and are liable to be eternally ruined by some small mistake. And, in any case, how is it possible for one who has any real experience of the new nature in believers, or regard to the Scriptures, to be so super-diabolically wicked as to sin because he has grace? Furthermore, it is most terrible to a heaven-born soul to be, by his sins, exposed to the temporary prevalence of indwelling lusts, rage of devils, hidings and frowns of God’s face, and other fatherly chastisements.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup>Quoted by C H Spurgeon in *The Treasury of David*, London, 1905 printing, vol 7, pp 79,80.

<sup>10</sup>*The Reformed Faith – An Exposition of the Westminster Confession of Faith*, Inverness, 1973 reprint, p 126.

<sup>11</sup>*Class Book on the Confession of Faith*, London, 1870, p 188.

<sup>12</sup>Paraphrased from his *Systematic Theology*, p 366.

There is a question which sometimes arises in the minds of believers, especially when they are under God's fatherly correction and mourn over their defections and backslidings. It is this: "Will God expose my sins publicly on the day of judgement?" Thomas Brooks believes that God will not do so, and gives several persuasive reasons for his view: (1) On that day Christ will only enumerate their good works (Matt 25). (2) Christ said to the Jews that the believer "shall not come into condemnation" (Jn 5:24), that is, says Brooks, "shall not come into judgement or damnation". (3) That the Lord will not publicly manifest their sins is what best agrees with His statement that He has blotted them out as a thick cloud, and similar expressions. (4) For the Judge to expose the faults of the saints to all the world would seem not to suit the glory and solemnity of that day, nor the relationship of love in which Christ stands to His people, nor the duty He lays on His people to cast a mantle of love over one another's infirmities. (5) As it is the glory of a man to pass over a transgression, much more will it be the glory of Christ to pass over the transgression of His people on that great day.<sup>13</sup>

## Jonathan Edwards<sup>1</sup>

### 6. Division in Northampton

One day in May 1747 David Brainerd, who for the previous four years had laboured with some success among the American Indians, arrived at the Edwards' home. Brainerd was ill from tuberculosis and was to spend in the Northampton parsonage most of the brief time – just over four months – he had yet to live. This was a man who could write in his diary: "I saw clearly that I should never be happy, yea, that God Himself could not make me happy unless I could be in capacity to please and glorify Him for ever"<sup>2</sup>. He was, he said, longing for the holiness of heaven. Edwards wrote to a friend: "Mr Brainerd is a very desirable man indeed; I am glad I have had such an opportunity of acquaintance with him"<sup>3</sup>. It was a time of division in the congregation and Edwards must have appreciated these days of spiritual communion with the younger man.

The Edwards' daughter Jerusha nursed him in his illness, regarding him "as an eminent servant of Jesus Christ". And the following year Jerusha herself took ill and died five days later. Brainerd, it seems, had a high regard for

<sup>13</sup>*The Complete Works of Thomas Brooks*, Edinburgh, 1866, vol 1, pp 220-4.

<sup>1</sup>The previous article, in the October issue, summarised Edwards' teaching on revival.

<sup>2</sup>Quoted in Iain H Murray, *Jonathan Edwards, A New Biography*, p 305.

<sup>3</sup>Quoted in Murray, *Jonathan Edwards*, p 304.

her also; he “looked on her”, said her father, “not only as a saint, but as a very eminent saint”. She was, Edwards said also, “esteemed the flower of the family”, and her death must have been a very sore blow. Brainerd had committed his personal papers to Edwards to be disposed of as he thought “would be most for God’s glory and the interest of religion”. Here was a man whose religious affections were indeed the result of the work of the Spirit of God, and at once Edwards laid aside the other books he was preparing and began to write Brainerd’s *Life*, drawing heavily from his diary. This volume proved to be the most popular of all Edwards’ writings.

It was when the outward signs of revival had faded away that the biggest trial of Edwards’ life burst over his head. Solomon Stoddard had for most of his ministry admitted individuals to the Lord’s table who made no profession of conversion, provided they had a competent knowledge of the Scriptures and were not guilty of open sin. During most of his time in Northampton, Edwards had followed his grandfather’s example. But over a considerable period, he moved towards a more scriptural view on the matter. At about this time, however, his authority in the community was undermined by a case of discipline which involved a number of young men.

Five years passed during which no one applied for membership in the congregation. But at the end of 1748 there was such an applicant and Edwards told him that he must make a profession of saving faith before he could become a communicant. This the applicant was unwilling to do, although Edwards believed that the man was indeed converted. News of Edwards’ response to this application caused a degree of disturbance in the town. He proposed to the Committee of the Church that he would explain in a sermon the reasons for his change of mind. This was opposed, though it was accepted that it was proper for Edwards to inform the Church of his reasons. Accordingly Edwards at once began to write what was to become a substantial book.

Another applicant for membership, who gave her minister “a hopeful account of her religious experience”, was willing to make a profession of faith such as Edwards was looking for, if the Committee of the Church would agree to accept it. But 12 of the 15 members of the Committee argued that to do so would be to prejudge the issue at stake. At this stage Edwards offered to resign if the people still rejected his views after reading his book. Within a few months, Edwards’ book was ready for the printer and by the middle of August 1749 copies were available in Northampton. Almost nobody, however, read the book and the controversy rumbled on throughout the year.

In February of the following year, at a series of five weekday lectures, Edwards presented the case for his new position on church membership. On

the first of these Thursdays, not many of his congregation turned up but the Church was full, with people from elsewhere. Edwards seems to have made no impression, at least on the bulk of the congregation. After a number of meetings of a council composed of representatives of nearby churches, a further meeting on 19 June 1750 concluded by a small majority that the pastoral relation between minister and congregation should be dissolved. The council had previously taken steps to ascertain the mind of the congregation – when only 23 of the approximately 230 male members voted to support their minister. A proportion of them, it should be noted, had been admitted to membership without ever making a profession of saving faith and many of them would have felt uncomfortable, to say the least, about admission to the Lord's table being in future confined to those who felt able to make such a profession. Edwards believed, however, that he had more support among the female part of the congregation, but they did not have a vote.

One member of the council who was sympathetic to the dismissed pastor noted: "That faithful witness received the shock unshaken. I never saw the least symptoms of displeasure in his countenance the whole week, but he appeared like a man of God, whose happiness was out of the reach of his enemies and whose treasure was not only a future, but a present, good, overbalancing all imaginable ills of life, even to the astonishment of many who could not be at rest without his dismissal."<sup>4</sup> Five days after Edwards preached his farewell sermon, he wrote with amazing calmness to William M'Culloch, minister of Cambuslang, near Glasgow, which had itself been the scene of a remarkable revival in 1742: "I am now separated from the people between whom and me there was once the greatest union. Remarkable is the providence of God in this matter. In this event we have a striking instance of the instability and uncertainty of all things here below."<sup>5</sup>

Looking back on the causes of the trouble, Edwards noted that there were various factors which had combined to foster pride among the people of Northampton. These included their religious knowledge and their increasing outward prosperity. But especially they were "a people that have excelled in gifts and grace and had God extraordinarily among them, which has insensibly engendered and nourished spiritual pride, that grand inlet of the devil in the hearts of men, and avenue of all manner of mischief among a professing people. Spiritual pride is a most monstrous thing. If it be not discerned and vigorously opposed in the beginning, it very often soon raises persons above their teachers and supposed spiritual fathers and sets them out of the reach of all rule and instruction. . . . There is great reason to think that

<sup>4</sup>Quoted in Murray, *Jonathan Edwards*, p 327.

<sup>5</sup>Quoted in Murray, *Jonathan Edwards*, p 333.

the Northampton people have provoked God greatly against them by trusting in their privileges and attainment.”<sup>6</sup>

There can be no doubt that for Edwards to attempt single-handedly to turn around the whole basis of religious profession in Northampton was a massive undertaking, especially in view of the regard in which Stoddard was still held and also the frictions which already existed in the congregation. Indeed the town had been notorious for its party spirit for over 30 years. Edwards believed, as he looked back, that he should earlier have done more to teach the people to distinguish between true spiritual experience and false, for, he said, “many of them never could be made to learn to distinguish between impressions on the imagination and living spiritual experience”.<sup>7</sup>

Nor was the situation helped by the absence of an eldership, which had been allowed to die out in his grandfather’s time. But, besides God’s wise yet often-inscrutable providence, we must bear in mind the words of the Saviour: “An enemy hath done this”. Edwards wrote to Thomas Gillespie, another of his Scottish correspondents: “I believe the devil is greatly alarmed by the opposition made to the lax doctrine of admission to the Christian church”.

He knew that his conscience was clear in connection with the communion controversy, but with manifest humility he wrote: “God knows the wickedness of my heart and the great and sinful deficiencies and offences which I have been guilty of in the course of my ministry at Northampton. I desire that God would discover them to me more and more, and that now He would effectually humble me and mortify my pride and self-confidence, and empty me entirely of myself and make me to know how that I deserve to be cast away as an abominable branch and as a vessel wherein is no pleasure.”

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## Eastern Europe Mission News

*Rev D A Ross*

The services in Odessa continue each week, and the regular attenders keep coming to listen to sermons read by Mr Igor Zadoroshney and Mr Dmitriy Levitskiy, while others attend from time to time. No doubt the visitors find read sermons unusual, but one new adherent enjoys this and appears to be very much attached to the form of worship there.

Rev Donald Macfarlane’s sermons have now been printed in Russian and are being enjoyed in the congregation. But one man who lives 400 miles from

<sup>6</sup>Quoted in Murray, *Jonathan Edwards*, p 341.

<sup>7</sup>Quoted in Murray, *Jonathan Edwards*, p 343.

Odessa wrote: "I thank you heartily for the collection of truly wonderful sermons . . . . If you have anything like these sermons – I mean a volume of theology . . . .", and asks that this be sent to a pastor. This writer went on to complain that many people in the local church community are inclined to Arminianism and do not want to hear of *The Westminster Confession of Faith* or of Calvinism, but there are no obstacles to God's Word. He concluded: "I have many problems at home. I hope that five grivna [75 pence] will cover some postage expenses. Give my kind regards to all the brethren."

Someone else wrote to Mr Zadoroshniy: "We thank you for the priceless books", one of which is *The Westminster Confession*. He referred to them "as a key to the Holy Scriptures". He wrote about their gathering, of five people: "We study your books with joy and reverence and pray to our Lord Jesus Christ". They wish to set up a Reformed congregation. It is indeed a great mercy to know that the sowing of the good seed of the Kingdom through literature is appreciated by these people, among others.

Building work in Odessa began some months ago, and the basement is now completed and paid for; it will form the Bible and literature store. We are humbly thankful to the Lord for this. "Hitherto hath the Lord helped us" (1 Sam 7:12). The next stage of the contract, the shell of the ground floor and the storey above, will be more expensive, in the region of £40 000. It is hoped that if, in the good providence of the Most High, the money becomes available, this part of the structure will begin in the not-too-distant future.

In January 2007 it is intended, God willing, to have another communion season in Odessa, but we look forward to the day when a more accessible and spacious place of worship will be provided in the new building. Meantime we are very much indebted to Mr and Mrs Igor Zadoroshniy for a room in their home which serves as a meeting place for public worship, and for the use of their home for the storage of Bibles, literature and office.

Mrs Inna Levitskiy continues to make progress in translating the Psalms into Russian, in metre; these are put into book form by the men. We know of no place of worship in the region of Odessa which uses Psalms exclusively – the only scriptural praise in the public worship of God.

Mr Levitskiy continues to study English and puts it to good use in various ways in connection with mission activities in Odessa and beyond. He is our interpreter when we take services in the congregation and when we meet with officials on mission matters. May the Lord richly provide for our needs in Odessa and other parts of Eastern Europe. The large sums of money needed for the building may seem too great. "But with God all things are possible" (Matt 19:26), and He is able to move people's hearts to give to this necessary work for the furtherance of the gospel in Eastern Europe.

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## Book Reviews<sup>1</sup>

***History of the English Calvinistic Baptists 1771-1892, From John Gill to C H Spurgeon***, by Robert W Oliver, published by the Banner of Truth Trust, hardback, 432 pages, £16.50.

Initially one might wonder why a book bearing this title would be published by the Banner of Truth Trust, and even more why one would be invited to review it in the *Free Presbyterian Magazine*. However, while it does deal with matters historically related to the body of Christians specified in the title, and so helps inform us with regard to developments among them (in itself a useful service to the wider Calvinistic community), it raises issues of wider interest and significance. These are discussed in a biographical and historical context, which gives them much human interest and should tempt readers who are not into reading straight theological works, and even encourage them to read such works – perhaps beginning with *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, which provides a good Biblical perspective on various issues discussed here.

While recognising the impact of individuals' personality and experience on their positions on theology and the doctrine of the Church, Dr Oliver seeks to concentrate on the principles under discussion. The book, a popular presentation of the fruit of doctoral research, manifests extensive reading and thorough sympathy with the 1689 Baptist Confession – the Baptist modification of the *Westminster Confession of Faith*. The developing divisions between those with a common Particular Baptist origin are seen as accounted for by departures from the unifying basis of the 1689 Confession. "In all the attempts to promote union among the churches from the 1830s onwards, no attempt was made to bring the churches back to the original basis of Particular Baptist unity as expressed in the *1689 Confession of Faith*. The various discussions took place as though that *Confession* had never existed" (p 336).

We do not have sufficient acquaintance with many of the individuals or writings discussed in this volume to allow us to comment on the accuracy of the representations made or the conclusions reached regarding them. Accordingly this review is confined to a general reference to the significant principles discussed throughout the book, which is written in a pleasing and readable style.

(a) There was lengthy controversy over strict or open communion. Strict communion in this context meant that only persons baptized on the basis of their own profession of saving faith in Christ were admitted to the Lord's

<sup>1</sup>The books reviewed here are obtainable from the Free Presbyterian Bookroom.

Table. The book does not enter into the controversy between paedobaptists and anti-paedobaptists and does not promote the anti-paedobaptist view. It deals with the debate between those, on the one hand, who followed the logic of their position and excluded paedobaptists, and those, on the other hand, who desired to recognise the church membership of persons who did not adhere to their position but shared their commitment to the gospel of the grace of God. We concur with those who contend that, as the appointed sign of membership in the Christian Church, Baptism is required in order to admission to the Lord's Table, but we regret that Baptist theology has departed from the covenant theology of the Bible in this respect and excludes from Baptism, and so from membership of the visible Church, many who have a God-given right to it – "infants descended from parents, either both or but one of them professing faith in Christ, and obedience to Him" (*Larger Catechism*, 166).

(b) Controversy over how the gospel ought to be preached centred upon such issues as the free offer of the gospel, the nature of faith, the warrant for faith, the legitimacy of calling sinners to repentance and faith and, to a lesser degree, upon the meaning of the imputation of sin to Christ and of Christ's righteousness to the believer and upon the particularity of redemption. The author highlights the danger of confusing the objective warrant to believe and the graciously-created subjective tendency to do so, of confusing the exercise of faith in order to be saved with the assurance that one has salvation, and of confusing pressing upon sinners the call to repentance and faith with the suggestion that they have the ability in themselves to do either. While greatly relishing Biblically-experimental preaching, he sees the danger of theology being formulated in the light of experience rather than by the Word of God. It may be added that it is the application of human logic rather than submission to the Word of God that accounts for both Hyper-Calvinism and Arminianism. Both wrongly assume that exhortations to repentance and faith imply creature power and deny electing love and particular redemption – though they react to this assumption in opposite ways.

(c) Controversy over the place of the moral law in the life of the child of God is seen by Dr Oliver as producing differences among the Particular Baptists deeper than those caused by the debates over the terms of communion or the preaching of the gospel. He affirms that many who might have been regarded as "doctrinal antinomians" lived godly lives, but concurs in the assertion of one of his subjects that the moral law "is a friend and guide, pointing to the way in which the Christian ought to walk, so as to express gratitude to God for His benefits, and glorify the Lord Redeemer. It shows him also, at the same time, how imperfect his own obedience is, and so is a

happy means of keeping him humble at the foot of sovereign grace, and entirely dependent on the righteousness of his divine Sponsor" (p 115).

Other matters are introduced in the course of the book, such as the Eternal Sonship of Christ, the question of when a sinner is justified, and the relation of regeneration to faith, but the three noted above occupy most attention. The book is provocative of thought on matters which ought to exercise our minds and concerning which we ought to have clear views. While glad to have made the acquaintance in these pages of godly men who were deeply exercised in their day to promote the glory of God and the good of the Church, we are thankful for the heritage we have in our own Scottish pastors and theologians of olden times who were enabled to guide the Church into views of the gospel and Christian living and church order which we believe to be in accordance with the Word of God.

(Rev) *H M Cartwright*

***The Secret Key to Heaven, The Vital Importance of Private Prayer***, by Thomas Brooks, published by the Banner of Truth Trust, paperback, 304 pages, £6.25.

Brooks is without doubt one of the easiest of the Puritans to read; C H Spurgeon claimed that he was "the *most* readable". Surprisingly, although Brooks ministered in London, very little is known about him.

This attractively-produced paperback is based on Matthew 6:6 and was first published during the London plague of 1665. Brooks was particularly conscious that, in these circumstances, God was particularly calling "for closet prayer". Such a volume, however, is always relevant; Brooks' fear applies in every generation: "many Christians do not clearly nor fully understand the necessity, excellency and usefulness of this subject". Accordingly, besides other useful teaching, he presents 20 arguments for private prayer, eight pieces of "closing advice", and 11 instructions, which include: "Do not perform closet duties merely to still your conscience"; "Put your heart into all closet duties"; "Be constant and persevering in closet prayer"; "Thirst and long after communion with God in private prayer"; "Always pray in the name of Christ alone"; "Look for answers to your closet prayers".

To whet the appetite of readers, some quotations follow:

"You can as well hear without ears, and live without food, and fight without hands, and walk without feet, as you are able to live without prayer."

"If closet prayer be not an indispensable duty that Christ has laid upon all His people, why does Satan so much oppose it? Why does he so industriously and so unweariedly labour to discourage Christians in it, and to take off Christians from it? Certainly Satan would never make such a fierce and constant war as he does upon private prayer, were it not a necessary duty, a real duty, and a soul-enriching duty."

"God, in the great day, will recompense His people before all the world,

for every secret prayer and secret tear and secret sigh and secret groan that has come from His people.”

“One sigh and groan from a broken heart is better pleasing to God than all human eloquence.”

“All the grace and all the holiness which we have from the regenerating Spirit at first conversion is but a drop to that sea, a mite to those talents, which we shall receive in the life to come.”

“The Comforter always abides with the saints, though He does not always actually comfort the saints. The Spirit many times carries on His sanctifying work in the soul when He does not carry on His comforting work in the soul; the Spirit many times acts in a way of humiliation when He does not act in a way of consolation.”

“As there is no mercy too great for God to give, so there is no mercy too little for us to crave.”

“The temple of the Lord, without communion with the Lord of the temple, will not satisfy David’s soul.”

We today would do well to learn from such masters of Christian experience as Thomas Brooks. *The Privy Key to Heaven*, its original title, is also available as part of volume 2 of the author’s *Works*. This edition has been lightly edited, which has given rise to the occasional difficulty of the Most High being addressed as “you”. This apart, this reprint is highly recommended.

***Free Grace and Dying Love, Morning Devotions* by Susannah Spurgeon, with *The Life of Susannah Spurgeon* by Charles Ray, published by the Banner of Truth Trust, paperback, 256 pages, £7.00.**

The first part of his book, originally published as *A Carillon of Bells*, consists of brief meditations by the wife of the noted nineteenth-century preacher Charles Spurgeon. The complaint made in the previous review is greatly magnified here, as these meditations are for the most part addressed to the Lord, and this reviewer found the constant repetition of *you* and *your* in this connection decidedly off-putting. Though these little pieces are perfectly scriptural, many other books of daily readings are more satisfying.

However, Mrs Spurgeon’s life is told in an interesting and attractive way. Dogged by ill health for much of her life, she succeeded in running a book fund with the aim of providing sound literature for impoverished pastors – and in her time some of them were very poor indeed. In 1883, the high point of activity, 11 351 books were sent out without charge, and a similar number of her husband’s sermons. Ray concludes with the comment: “If greatness depends upon the amount of good which one does in the world . . . then Mrs C H Spurgeon will go down to posterity as one of the greatest women of her time”. And surely he was right.

## Notes and Comments

### “They Shall Reap the Whirlwind”

“Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap” (Gal 6:7). This principle is also worked out in this world on the wider scale of visible churches and nations. It is put graphically in Hosea 8:7 regarding Israel: “For they have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind: it hath no stalk: the bud shall yield no meal: if so be it yield, the strangers shall swallow it up”. This is in accordance with divine justice: “I have written to him the great things of my law, but they were counted as a strange thing” (Hos 8:12).

We see on all hands the moral and social devastation threatening our nation as a result of her determined departure, through her legislators and political and religious leaders, from the Christian and Protestant principles of her constitution. While those promoting agendas for change may not be working in co-operation, and may even be antagonistic to each other, those who view matters from a Biblical perspective can recognise a co-ordinated effort being made to undermine fatally the Biblical foundations of what has made the United Kingdom distinctive among the nations. “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Eph 6:12).

Led ever more deeply into European integration by the intrigues of successive governments, and with the prospect of being broken up internally on account of varying political and religious motivations, the identity of the United Kingdom as a Protestant nation is endangered, together with the Protestant constitution which binds its various parts together. Given that the monarch, even if largely as a figurehead, embodies the principles of that constitution, it is only with foreboding that we can contemplate the possibility of the present heir to the throne being crowned King and achieving his aim of having himself declared Defender of “Faith” rather than of “*the* Faith” and having his coronation ceremonies formally recognise religions other than that of the one living and true God.

The craze for a multi-faith and multi-culture Britain, promoted by leading churchmen and politicians, has brought us to the situation where people are afraid to voice any criticism of Islam for fear of reprisals. Muslims are consulted on almost every aspect of British life, and some of the more radical and perhaps less discreet members of that community make no attempt to hide their ambition to have the United Kingdom governed by Islamic law and, in the meantime, to have their own adherents treated differently from

the rest of British society. “A Muslim teaching assistant who refused to remove her veil during lessons said yesterday that minorities were treated as ‘outcasts’ in Britain, after her claims of discrimination and harassment were dismissed” (*The Scotsman*, 20 October 2006). We were glad to learn of an editorial in *The Daily Telegraph* (21 October, 2006), which stated that “radical Muslims in Britain are quick to explore legal avenues that are not open to Christians in the countries they admire. . . . As a nation we feel that our tolerance is being stretched to the limit.”

Laws passed in favour of non-discrimination and equality of opportunity, together with laws legalising the abominations of Sodom, are being used by minority groups to silence opposition and to discriminate in favour of those advocating unholy and unnatural practices. Persons engaged in public services, including some police officers, have been improperly using their position to promote such activities, and others, such as the Strathclyde firemen, have been discriminated against and put on “development” courses to disabuse them of their prejudices, because they would not consent to be involved with such activities, however indirectly.

The sad fact is that these and many other alarming developments are taking place in a society which has lost its moorings and in which there is a spiritual and moral vacuum. In a recent broadcast conversation, a radio presenter, who was interviewing religious leaders with the professed desire to get help in believing in the existence of God in the face of all the dreadful things which occur in the world, consulted the Archbishop of Canterbury as “the leader of the Christian faith in England”. Dr Williams referred once in passing to “Jesus” but did not once refer to Him as God manifest in the flesh or to the Fall of man and the existence of sin. Listeners were left with the impression that he equated God with something vague called “the power of love”, which one just has to take on trust. His interviewer obviously felt that nothing had been said to encourage him to believe. “If the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle? (1 Cor 15:8). *HMC*

### **The Pleasures of the World**

It is sad to see an increasing tendency in Scotland for professing Christians to mix with the world in “pleasures” such as dancing at weddings and ceilidhs, drinking in clubs and public houses, and attending the Mod. Not a few ministers of the gospel can now be found who claim to be Evangelical and yet defend such things, and even practise them themselves. We believe that the following extract from one of M<sup>c</sup>Cheyne’s *New Testament Sermons* (pp 87-8) puts such conduct in a Biblical light.

Preaching on the text: “And when He was come near, He beheld the city,

and wept over it” (Luke 19:41), he closes with the exhortation: “Let believers learn to weep over perishing souls. . . . And do not join the world in its mirth, were it for no other reason but this. Would you deceive their souls? If you were to mingle with poor unconverted souls in their God-forgetting companies, where they dance, drink, are gay and merry, singing their own songs, and enjoying themselves in their accustomed manner, what could you expect to do for their conversion?”

“You should weep over them, and seek their salvation, rather than let down your Christianity and join them in their worldliness, forgetfulness of God, carnal mirth and giddy folly. If you would do them good, you must seek God’s Holy Spirit to give you a heart to weep for them, rather than join with them in their melancholy ways of forgetting their guilt and danger.

“Only think of the Saviour’s tears when He looked down upon the perishing, and surely that will scare you from ever again forgetting your place and relationship to Him, and that will make you cherish for poor unconverted souls the bleeding heart and weeping eye. And never more go along with them in their soul-intoxicating mirth and hell-forgetting pleasures. ‘Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God’ (Ps 51:14)”. *DWBS*

### **Truth in Science**

The battle between creationists and evolutionists shows no signs of abating. In September a new anti-evolutionist organisation called Truth in Science was formed, with the purpose of promoting “good science education in the UK”. Several leading British Creationists are involved. A resource pack was sent to all teachers in charge of science departments in UK secondary schools, and the majority of the responses so far have been favourable.

Meanwhile an organisation to oppose Truth in Science was hastily formed, called The British Centre for Science Education (BCSE). This title is a “mutation” of the influential American anti-creationist organisation, The National Center for Science Education. At the beginning of October the BCSE persuaded MP Graham Stringer to table an Early Day Motion in the House of Commons “sharing the concern of the BCSE” that the Truth in Science literature was “full of scientific mistakes” and urging all schools to treat it “with extreme caution”. This motion has now been signed by 46 MPs.

Since then it has transpired that the BCSE contacted the MPs with the statement about “scientific mistakes” before any member of BCSE had even seen the Truth in Science material. A website called “British Centre for Science Education: Revealed” exposes the BCSE as a tiny organisation – consisting of about ten people who have no teaching experience, and very few scientific qualifications either.

One MP has now apparently withdrawn his signature from the Early Day Motion and it will be interesting to see if others follow. *DWBS*

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## **Protestant View**

### **Fast Track to Sainthood?**

The Roman Catholic Archbishop of Salerno has claimed the recovery of a lung-cancer victim as a miracle. After he was diagnosed in 2005, his wife asked the late Pope John Paul II to pray for her husband to be healed. She claims the Pope appeared to her in a dream assuring her that her husband would recover. A few days later, it seems, doctors noted a marked improvement in his condition and, within a few weeks, the cancer had disappeared. It is emphasised that the cure cannot be explained medically – although it must be said that there is much that medicine cannot explain, even today.

This is reported in the context of the present Pope's decision to put his predecessor on a fast track to being proclaimed a saint, in spite of Vatican rules requiring a five-year interval before beginning the process that leads to a formal declaration of sainthood. If this healing is counted as a miracle, it could lead to John Paul II being beatified – declared “blessed” – a step on the way to sainthood, for which a second miracle would be required. But not a shred of scriptural support can be found for any of this.

There can be no communication between human beings on earth and human beings in heaven. We should rather pray God to make us the kind of saints who are produced by the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit – who demonstrate by the way they live in this world that they have holy hearts.

One who is suspicious of the politics behind the possible sainthood for the last Pope is Professor Richard McBrien, a theologian at the University of Notre Dame in the USA. He claims that “those who want John Paul II placed on a fast track to canonization are interested in solidifying his conservative agenda as pope”. This may well be true, as Pope John XXIII, who headed the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s has not yet been made a saint, decades after consideration of his case began.

It is reported that a miracle attributed to the late Pontiff's “intervention” would be seen as testimony from God that his soul is in heaven. Presumably he is otherwise still in purgatory, and all the masses said on his behalf have not been sufficient to bring him out of the suffering he must endure to satisfy for his sins. It is extraordinary that there is such hesitation about the state of the late leader of the Roman Church, when priests are so ready to claim that others – some murder victims, for instance – have gone straight to heaven.

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## Church Information

### Visits Abroad

From last August to January of next year several ministers will, God willing, have visited congregations abroad endeavouring to preach the everlasting gospel. With the fewness of ministers in Britain and the great need to help overseas, we are often reminded of the Saviour's exhortation: "The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that He would send forth labourers into His harvest" (Luke 10:2).

In August Rev Donald Ross visited Italy for a few days and preached on a number of occasions to the friends in Fornaci di Barga as well as in Casella. Mr Lucio Strata, who is an able interpreter, accompanied him.

In October Rev George Hutton, the Interim Moderator for Chesley, spent two Sabbaths there, when the Lord's Supper was observed. Rev Neil Ross, Interim Moderator of the congregation in Texas, is to spend two Sabbaths there in November. Mr Alasdair MacPherson, elder, is also to be there for the communion season. Rev Lyle Smith is to supply in Texas for three months, and is to assist at the communion. We are thankful that the death of Christ continues to be remembered in these congregations.

Rev Bruce Jardine is to be in New Zealand, Australia and Singapore for seven weeks, returning to Scotland towards the end of December. It is hoped he will be able to preach in all the congregations there. Then, for three Sabbaths in January 2007 the Rev David Campbell will be in New Zealand. It is intended that both these ministers will assist Rev J van Dorp at communion seasons. And, finally, in January 2007 Rev Donald Ross, along with two elders, Mr Kenneth MacLeod and Mr Edward Ross, will be in Odessa for two Sabbaths, when it is intended that the Lord's Supper will be dispensed.

A great deal of travel, no doubt, but only to support the gospel in these places. There is not, we are sure, a more honourable work than to be "ambassadors for Christ" (2 Cor 5:20). How our prayers should follow all these gospel activities past, present and future, as our ministers cast forth the good seed of the gospel, because this sowing will only prosper if God graciously gives the increase.

*(Rev) D A Ross, Convener, Dominions and Overseas Committee*

### Theological Conference

In view of the proposed pro re nata of Synod this month, this year's Theological Conference has been cancelled.

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

### Western Presbytery Decision

At its last meeting, the Presbytery agreed that its decision at a former meeting

be published in this Magazine: “that no collections be taken at funerals, as collections are the business of the Deacons’ Courts of the Church”.

### College & Library Fund

By appointment of Synod, the second of the year’s two special collections for the College and Library Fund is due to be taken in congregations during December.  
*R A Campbell, General Treasurer*

### Notice to Congregational Treasurers

Congregational Treasurers are requested to send their final remittances for 2006 to the General Treasurer, to reach him not later than December 28, so that they may be lodged in the bank by December 29. All payments received later will be deemed to be for 2007.  
*R A Campbell, General Treasurer*

### Magazine Prices

As a result of increasing costs, the price of *The Free Presbyterian Magazine* for 2007 is being increased to £1.50 per issue, the annual subscription for *The Free Presbyterian Magazine* alone to £19.50 and for both magazines to £28.50.

## Acknowledgement of Donations

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

*College & Library Fund:* A Friend, Newcastle, Ps 65:11, £40.

*Dominions & Overseas Fund (Italian Mission):* L & LM, Italy, €100; E & S C, Italy, €1650; AS, Italy, €50 per Rev DAR.

*Eastern Europe Fund:* E & S C, Italy, €1650; AS, Italy, €50 per Rev DAR.

*Jewish & Foreign Missions Fund:* Anon, for Mission to the Jews, £200 per JF, St Jude’s, Glasgow; Anon, for Mbuma Mission Hospital, £50; Anon, Western Isles, £180.

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

**Edinburgh:** *Communion Expenses:* DM & AM, £50 per Rev HMC. *Congregational Funds:* NP, Wales, £100 per Rev HMC. *Sustentation Fund:* Anon, £100.

**Inverness:** *Bus Fund:* Anon, £60, £20, £20; CMD, £20; Mrs C MacDonald, £20. *Congregational Funds:* Anon, £30, £30, £60, £30, £35, £30; Friend, £10; Estate of the late Miss Henrietta MacLennan, £1000 per R & R Urquhart, Solicitors. *Eastern Europe Fund:* Anon, £50. *Jewish & Foreign Missions Fund:* Anon, for Mbuma Mission Hospital, £71.

**Laide:** *Eastern Europe Fund:* EM, £100 per ADR; Friend, Shildaig, £25; Mrs K M, Gairloch, £20; Anon, Fearn, £100; Friends, Applecross, £100; Friends, Edinburgh, £100; A Ploeg, Holland, £50; Isle View Residents, £5; Anon, £500; Anon, Laide, £50 per Rev DAR; CM, Gairloch, £20; Friend, Edinburgh, £25 per CR; Isle View Residents, for Bibles, £10. *Odessa Church Building Fund:* Friend, Inverness, £40; MG, Aultbea, £20, £30 per CR; Friend, Vancouver, “The Lord graciously provides for the work”, £475; Anon, Laide, £20; Mrs KM, £30 per Rev DAR.

**Larne:** *Communion Expenses:* Miss I MacKenzie, Gairloch, £50 per LF. *Jewish & Foreign Missions Fund:* Anon, for Ingwenya Mission, £100 per GW.

**North Uist:** *Sustentation Fund:* Anon, family of the late Mr Archie MacVicar, £40 per Rev DMD.

**Perth:** *Congregational Funds:* Anon, £25 per RAC. *Eastern Europe Fund:* *Odessa Church Building:* Anon, £200, £100, £50, £10, £10.

# **The Free Presbyterian Magazine**

**2006**

**Volume 111**

Editor:  
Rev Kenneth D Macleod

*Thou hast given a banner to them that fear thee,  
that it may be displayed because of the truth (Psalm 60:4)*

**Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland**



Accepted Offering, The <i>Henry Law</i>	182	2. The Legitimate Bounds of Messianic Interpretation	241
Acknowledgements of Donations	32,64, 96,160,192,224,256,288,320,352,380	3. Which Psalms Are Messianic? <i>Rev Roderick MacLeod</i>	266
<b>Benefiting from Affliction:</b>		Church Information	32,63,96,128,159, 192,224,255,287,319,352,379
6. A Preparation for Death <i>James Buchanan</i>	21	Congregational Contributions for 2005	88
<b>Book Reviews:</b>		Doctrine of Forgiveness, The <i>Rev Neil M Ross</i>	296,332,362
<i>All-Sufficient God, The</i> D Martyn Lloyd-Jones	216	Dying in the Lord <i>John Flavel</i>	177
<i>Banner of Truth Magazine, The</i> Issues 1-16	151	Eastern Europe Mission News <i>Rev D A Ross</i>	81,369
<i>Colossians</i> John Davenant	312	<b>Editorials:</b>	
<i>Evangelistic Calvinism</i> John Benton	347	“Be Importunate”	321
<i>Faith and Experience,</i> <i>Works of Thomas Halyburton, vol 4</i>	26	Eternal Punishment	225
<i>Free Grace and Dying Love</i> Susannah Spurgeon	374	God’s Will, not Ours	257
<i>Getting the Gospel Right</i> Cornelis P Venema	346	Paradise of Perfect Love, A	193
<i>History of the English Calvinistic Baptists</i> R W Oliver	371	Proclaiming the Saviour	33
<i>Jerusalem Sinner Saved, The</i> John Bunyan	86	Relevance in Preaching	353
<i>Life of John Brown, The</i> edited by William Brown	84	Safely to Heaven	161
<i>Majesty in Misery, vol 3</i> C H Spurgeon	186	Testimony from Heaven	97
<i>Manual of Christian Doctrine</i> Louis Berkhof	58	“Thy God Reigneth”	129
<i>Masters of the English Reformation</i> Sir Marcus Loane	123	“To Provide for Another Life”	1
<i>Ministry, The</i> Charles J Brown	345	Unanswerable Questions?	65
<i>Secret Key to Heaven, The</i> Thomas Brooks	373	What Will not Save	289
<i>Summary of Christian Doctrine, A</i> Louis Berkhof	247	<b>Eternal Sonship of Christ, The:</b>	
<i>William Carey and the Missionary Vision</i> Daniel Webber	247	1. Divine Testimony	45
<i>Worship</i> J C Ryle	216	2. Further Testimony from Scripture	105
<b>Christ in the Psalms:</b>		3. Answering Some Errors	141
1. General Considerations	207	4. Application to the Life of the Church	175
		<i>Rev J R Tallach</i>	
		George Campbell <i>Rev J S Sinclair</i>	243
		Gospel in Aberdeen, The <i>Rev D W B Somerset</i>	339
		Grace and Weakness <i>J C Ryle</i>	310
		Holiness <i>Henry Law</i>	114
		Jesus Christ— God and Man <i>J C Ryle</i>	280
		<b>Jonathan Edwards:</b>	
		1. “A New Sort of Affection”	171
		2. “Eager Pursuits After Holiness”	202

3. A Time of Surprising Conversions	236	<b>Sermon Outlines:</b>	
4. "A Considerable Work of God"	270	Old Landmark, The	
5. Analysing the Revival	300	<i>John Kennedy</i>	179
6. Division in Northampton	366	"Their Redeemer is Mighty"	
Mbuma Zending Meeting 2006		<i>John Kennedy</i>	215
<i>Rev D A Ross</i>	211	<b>Sermons:</b>	
Meditation on the Dawn		Danger of Neglecting Salvation, The	
<i>Thomas Halyburton</i>	24	<i>Thomas Pitcairn</i>	260,292
Notes and Comments	30,58,90,154, 124,187,218,249,283,314,347,375	Fourth Commandment, The	
<b>Obituary:</b>		<i>Rev K D Macleod</i>	324
Mr Roddy Annand	344	Justifying Righteousness	
Our Gospel Work in Africa and Israel		<i>Angus M M Gillivray</i>	4
<i>Rev Neil M Ross</i>	120	King's Highway Cleared, The	
Pastoral Concerns		<i>C H Spurgeon</i>	164,196
A Letter by <i>Joseph Alleine</i>	335	Philippian Jailer, The	
Plea to the Children of Israel, A	277,304	<i>Rev D A Macfarlane</i>	356
Protestant View	28,61,90,128,152, 190,217,248,282,318,378	Returning to Our First Love	
Purpose of the Gospel, The		<i>Archibald Alexander</i>	37
<i>John Colquhoun</i>	137	Soul Sorrow of Jesus, The	
<b>Reformed Doctrine of Inspiration, The:</b>		<i>John Macnaughtan</i>	68
4. The Relevance of the Doctrine		Universal Calls of the Gospel, The	
for Today	12	<i>John Bonar</i>	100,132
<i>Rev H M Cartwright</i>		Steady Perseverance	
"Rest to the People of God, A"	150	<i>J C Ryle</i>	25
<b>Review Article:</b>		<b>Synod Sermon:</b>	
<i>Dutch Annotations, The</i>		"Your Labour Is not in Vain"	
<i>Rev D W B Somerset</i>	54	<i>Rev Neil M Ross</i>	228
<b>Separatism in the North of Scotland:</b>		Unprofitable Servant, The	
1. Its Rise	16	<i>Matthew Poole</i>	118
2. Peter Stuart	49	<b>Uses of the Moral Law, The:</b>	
3. John Grant	76	1. To Mankind in General	180
4. Joseph Mackay	108	2. To Unregenerate Sinners	205
5. Alexander Gair	143	3. To the Regenerate	274
<i>Rev D W B Somerset</i>		<i>John Colquhoun</i>	
		"We Would See Jesus"	
		<i>J C Ryle</i>	342