

The Free Presbyterian Magazine

Vol 111

January 2006

No 1

“To Provide for Another Life”

Perhaps the Puritan John Preston could see the setting sun through a window of the church when he warned the congregation: “Plainly we may see . . . mankind hurried along to the west of his days . . . our fathers have gone before, and we are passing, and our children shall follow at our heels, that as you see the billows of the sea, one tumble on the neck of another, and in the end all are dashed upon the shore; so all generations and ages in the end are spilt on the banks of death, and thus is the condition of every man. Is it not our wisdom then to provide for another life?” The passing of another year and the start of 2006 is a further reminder, if that was needed, that time is passing quickly and that, at the longest, we must soon begin another life in eternity.

In the Book of Proverbs our attention is drawn to the ant, “which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest” (6:7,8). This little creature, in common with many another, provides for a time of scarcity, when the growing season is over. Such pictures are set before us so that we may learn lessons which should influence the whole of our lives. The sluggard particularly – the one afflicted with spiritual laziness – is to learn lessons that ought to rouse him from the drowsiness of soul from which he is liable never to awake until he too is spilt upon the shore of a lost eternity. “Go to the ant,” he is told; “consider her ways, and be wise . . . How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? When wilt thou arise out of thy sleep?” (6:6,9).

After graduating from Cambridge University, Preston was intensely ambitious for advancement in his academic career. But he might have gone on to the end of his days as a spiritual sluggard, careless about his soul and making no provision for another life, if he had not come under the ministry of John Cotton, later an eminent minister in New England. We are told that “the word of God made so deep an impression on [Preston’s] mind as at once cured him of thirsting after preferment. From this time he became remarkable for true Christian piety”. He himself became another noted Puritan minister. Later in life, he might easily have been appointed Bishop of Gloucester but

he preferred to be a preacher in Cambridge, where he had “the prospect of extensive usefulness to souls”; his ambition now was to be the means of doing good to souls. Because he had, as it was said, “found the treasure hid in a field, he wisely relinquished everything” else so that he could have treasure in heaven.¹

Such is the Saviour’s counsel: “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Matt 6:19-21). We need to consider seriously the fact that, when we are hurried along “to the west of our days”, we must leave behind whatever earthly treasure we have accumulated. Only spiritual blessings – that treasure which, more than any other, has its source in heaven – will remain in our possession. How necessary then to set ourselves to seek in real earnest, before it is too late, these spiritual blessings – the treasure which we can never lose!

What a precious part of that treasure is the forgiveness of sins! The price paid for it was truly infinite – “the precious blood of Christ”, when He gave Himself, in the place of sinners, to the cursed death of the cross. We can never add to the price that was paid; it is utter folly to try. Indeed it is a complete insult to the great God of eternity to attempt to bring good works as a price in our hands, which will inevitably be altogether defective because all our best works are fatally flawed by sin; so they only add to the guilt which we are attempting to have removed. We must commit ourselves by faith to the One who came in God’s great name to save, who gave Himself a ransom for many, and who is now “exalted a Prince and a Saviour, for to give . . . forgiveness of sins” (Acts 5:31). We are to hear Him calling to us individually: “Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matt 11:28). It is a call we dare not disobey.

The rest which the Saviour speaks of includes the peace of conscience that comes with the forgiveness of sins. It is all part of the complete salvation that Christ has provided for all who will believe in Him. And that complete salvation is rich treasure indeed. Though those who have this treasure must, like all others in every generation, be swept onto “the banks of death”, they will never lose the least part of the treasure which is theirs for the sake of Christ. And beyond death they will have the rest of an eternal Sabbath.

We not only need our sins to be forgiven; we need to have sin subdued; we need new hearts. That is brought about through the work of the Holy

¹For the biographical details, see the account in Benjamin Brook, *The Lives of the Puritans*, vol 2, p 352ff.

Spirit, for the sake of Christ. Regeneration – the implanting of a new heart and the removal of the stony heart, on which no impression can ever be made by the word of God – is the beginning of the divine work in the soul. And that work of the Holy Spirit will go on; where He begins the good work, He will continue it until it is completed, until the soul is perfectly fit to enter into another life in heaven.

The treasure which God gives to needy sinners when they look to the Saviour can never be taken away; it can never be corrupted by moths or by rust; it is beyond the reach of the most resourceful thief. Not even the devil himself can lay hands on their spiritual treasure, whatever temporary damage he may cause to them. The treasure is committed to believers in an everlasting covenant which can never be broken. The covenant is as certain as its Surety, Christ Himself, is unchangeable. It was with a sense of the sureness of the divine covenant that David could look towards death with confidence, recognising that it is “ordered in all things and sure”. He was therefore safe even in the face of that last great enemy, death. He had, through grace, treasure in heaven which he could never lose.

At the age of only 40, in 1628, Preston succumbed to consumption and passed into another world. He had, in good time, prepared for that other life which then began, on the far side of death. He too could be assured of the certainty of covenant mercies – that he would never lose those spiritual blessings, that incorruptible treasure, which he had found in Christ and had so often proclaimed to others.

But each of us is in danger of glibly assuming that we will pass many more years here before we are swept into eternity. Certainly, in an age of antibiotics and a multitude of sophisticated treatments, most people do indeed live considerably longer than was the case in Preston’s time. But let us never forget that life is uncertain and, whether we live for a longer or shorter time, we must at last pass into eternity. And we may be called away far sooner than we expect. Is it not then our wisdom – urgently, immediately – to provide for another life? The Lord still calls, with all the authority of His infinite majesty: “Forsake the foolish and live”. We are to forsake a life of sin and believe in the Saviour, who is so freely offered to us in the gospel – the message of reconciliation, which declares to us that “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners”.

Let us, before it is too late, heed that other call which comes also from the God of infinite majesty: “Seek ye the Lord while He may be found, call ye upon Him while He is near: let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon” (Is 55:6,7).

Justifying Righteousness¹

A Sermon by Angus M M'Gillivray

Romans 3:21-22. *But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ, unto all and upon all them that believe; for there is no difference.*

No question is so important as this: How can man be just with God? Yet there is none about which man is so easily deluded. Conscience tells the man that he has sinned and warns of coming retribution; yet, when the question is pressed on him: How do you expect to obtain future happiness? he either evades the question or shelters in some refuge of lies. The reason is obvious: the man is utterly blind to his true condition; he does not know the malignity of the disease, and he therefore cannot apprehend the remedy.

Before a sinner can even understand the gospel, he must first see his true position under God's government, and he can learn this only from the Word of God. We are there informed that the God with whom we have to do is infinitely holy, His government is unchangeably pure, He cannot tolerate disobedience, and in every case the wages of sin is death – everlasting death. The Scriptures also teach us plainly that man was placed under a covenant, in which life (confirmed happiness throughout eternity) was promised as the reward of perfect obedience to the law during a time of probation. "For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law that the man that doeth these things shall live by them."

Since these are man's relations to the government of God and he is confessedly a sinner, his position is plainly this: He has failed to obey the law and he has no title to life; he has transgressed the law, and he lies under sentence of death. How then can a creature occupying such a position be restored to God's favour? How can God's government remain unchanged while this creature is saved? How shall the law be magnified so that it shall open heaven to the sinner? How shall justice be vindicated so that it shall cease to curse him? You have the answer to these questions in the text.

I observe that the sinner is saved by means of a *righteousness*. This appears plainly from the text and from the nature of the case. It was righteousness that God required of man at first; it was by failing to yield it that he lost his title to life and brought on himself a sentence of condemnation. And, as the character of God is unchangeable, he can be restored to favour only when he can plead a righteousness as ample as the demands of the law.

¹Reprinted, with some editing, from *The Free Church Pulpit*, vol 2. A native of Sutherland, M'Gillivray's first charge was Strathy. He was later minister of Dairsie, in Fife.

1. This righteousness is not the sinner's own, but that of another. This is plainly intimated in the text, where the Apostle speaks of the righteousness of God without the law, and it is also the subject of his previous reasoning. Having announced as the grand characteristic of the gospel that "therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith" (1:17), he proceeds to demonstrate the necessity of this righteousness. He declares the perfection of that obedience which it requires in every case: "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness" (1:18). Having then shown that Jews and Gentiles were under this law but had not obeyed it – nay more, that they were wholly corrupt and could not by any possibility obey it – he, in the verse before our text, draws the conclusion: "Therefore, by the deeds of the law [that is, by man's own obedience to the law] shall no flesh be justified".

Yet what multitudes vainly seek to enter heaven by a door which their own sins have for ever closed against them! Ask that man whose heart is absorbed with the world what is the foundation of his hope for eternity? His answer is that he has never yet been guilty of open, flagrant sin. Ask that sensualist how he expects to escape the wrath to come, and he answers that he trusts his charitable deeds will atone for these infirmities. Ask that professor of religion, who goes the round of all its duties but detests spiritual piety, how he expects to be saved, and he answers that he sincerely does the best he can and trusts God to take the will for the deed and pardon him at the last.

But you who thus desire to be under the law, "do ye not hear the law"? You who would be justified by your obedience to the law, have you really considered what the law requires of you? It demands perfect obedience in heart and life before it will admit you to God's favour; it pronounces the sentence of eternal death on the least transgression. Have you such a righteousness as this to meet its demands? Does conscience not tell you that you have broken God's law times without number? Are your hearts not alienated from God and incapable of loving Him? Is it not then as clear as the sun that, if the law ever relaxes its hold of you, it cannot be because of your righteousness but because of the righteousness of another.

2. This righteousness can only be known by revelation. The reason is that, as it is a righteousness provided by God, none but He can reveal its existence to sinners. The Scriptures inform us that, even when God's immutable perfections called for our punishment, He resolved to glorify His mercy by saving an elect world from sin and wrath, making them partakers of an eternal inheritance. In order to this, it was absolutely necessary to provide a righteousness – one by which it would be manifest that God is just and holy and true when He pardons the sinner and admits him to favour.

As this righteousness is revealed in the Bible alone, you read that “the righteousness of God [is] revealed from faith to faith”. You read in the text that it is “witnessed by the law and the prophets”. It was revealed first in the Garden of Eden as the ground of the sinner’s hope; the whole Jewish ritual was a continued revelation of it; the prophets bore testimony to it, speaking of Him who would magnify the law and make it honourable; and the whole New Testament reveals the precious truth that God Himself has provided a righteousness, through which He can be just when He justifies the ungodly.

When a sinner finds this righteousness and rests his eternity on it, he receives it as pure revelation. An awakened conscience tells him of condemnation; a sense of depravity convinces him that he has no resources with which to meet the demands of a violated law. If he looks around and puts the question to all creation, How can God be righteous and I be saved? creation remains silent. But a voice from the Bible saves him from despair; he raises the eye of faith to see a righteousness provided by Jehovah Himself, and “the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above); or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead). But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith which we preach; that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved” (Rom 10:6-9).

3. This righteousness was wrought out in human nature. You accordingly read that it is a “righteousness which is by faith of Jesus Christ”. The circumstances of the case rendered this absolutely necessary. It was on earth that God was dishonoured, and therefore He must be glorified on earth. “The children [those to be saved] are partakers of flesh and blood”, and their Redeemer therefore “must take part of the same”. The first revelation of this righteousness was accordingly made in the promise that there should come of the seed of the woman One who should bruise the serpent’s head. In due time, this promise was fulfilled in the stable at Bethlehem – a virgin brought forth her firstborn Son, and called His name Jesus, because He was to save His people from their sins. He became the second Adam and stood in the room of His people as their representative. You accordingly read: “As by one man’s disobedience [the] many were made sinners; so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous” (Rom 5:19).

In a word, this Apostle tells us that He who was thus born of a woman was “made *under* the law”; that is to say, He met the law as His people’s surety, and fulfilled to the uttermost all its demands against them. In this character, He obeyed the law. View Him coming into the world in obedience to the

Father's command; contemplate the zeal for His Father's glory which marks His whole ministry, and view Him as the Father's servant exclaiming in the midst of His sufferings, "Nevertheless, not My will, but Thine be done", and you there see the Redeemer obeying the first and great commandment, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart". View Him going about doing good, healing the diseased, preaching the gospel to the poor, praying for His enemies and at last dying for them, and you there see the command gloriously fulfilled, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself".

If suffering and trial are the proof of obedience, never was obedience so glorious. Devils put forth their highest efforts to move Him from His steadfastness, and men, guided by devils, obstructed Him at every step. Yet, instead of tarnishing His purity, this added to its lustre. But Christ had to meet the law in another form and for another purpose. He had not only to obey its precept but also to endure its penalty. His people were condemned and, to redeem them from the curse of the law, He was made a curse for them. From the night He was born in Bethlehem till He said on the cross, "It is finished", He had to bear the wrath due to His people's transgressions; the Scriptures therefore call Him the Man of Sorrows. His sufferings indeed became more overwhelming as they approached their close, but from the cradle to the grave they were of a penal character. As the sufferings of the substitute, they had the same nature as what the sinner deserved to endure, as far as this was consistent with the perfect purity of His person.

Are the trials which man endures at the hands of his fellow creatures part of the penalty due to sin? Christ had to suffer this, for He bore the contradiction of sinners against Himself. Are Satan's temptations part of sin's punishment? Christ endured this, for He suffered being tempted. Is the wrath of God part of what the sinner deserves? Christ had to bear this, for you hear Him exclaiming, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" But must He drink the cup to the dregs? Shall His life not be spared? No, for the wages of sin is death, and Christ is therefore obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Here then is the righteousness spoken of in the text – the righteousness of the second Adam, which He thus refers to: "I have glorified Thee on the earth; I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do". It answers all the demands of a violated law: it obeys its precepts; it endures its penalty. It is therefore written: "The Lord is well pleased for His righteousness sake; He will magnify the law and make it honourable". But the question arises: How can this obedience and these sufferings, the righteousness of but *one* person, obtain eternal life for unnumbered millions?

4. This is the righteousness of God. True, the Redeemer was a man; and as the Man of Sorrows, He was often so poor that He had not where to lay His

head. But under that veil of humanity, faith beholds the everlasting Jehovah. He had to make atonement for their sin, to enter as their substitute the furnace of His Father's wrath, which would have consumed in a moment the highest created beings. Otherwise the salvation of His people was impossible; a creature's righteousness would have been utterly insufficient.

Take the highest seraph and let him in human nature obey the law and suffer and die. What satisfaction is there to the majesty of heaven? As a creature, he already owes to God all the obedience he can yield, and he therefore cannot redeem his brother. To accept any created being as the substitute of the sinner would be to overturn the government of God and hold forth to creation an encouragement to rebel. No righteousness can, in fact, be accepted unless it shall show the unchangeable glory of the law and God's determination to vindicate it. The righteousness therefore through which the sinner is justified is that of a divine person. You accordingly read that Jehovah our Righteousness is the name whereby He shall be called, and that God purchased His people with His own blood.

He was God in the manger; He was God on the cross; He is God now at the right hand of the Father; His righteousness therefore is the righteousness of God. It is not the essential holiness of the Godhead, for that cannot be communicated to the creature; neither is it the righteousness of the man Jesus, for, as man, Christ never had a personality distinct from the Godhead. But it is the righteousness of the Mediator, of God manifest in the flesh, who is God and man in two distinct natures and one person. As such it answers – yea, more than answers – all the demands of a violated law. It magnifies the law and renders it glorious in the view of intelligent creation, for what higher honour can the law receive than for God Himself to obey all its commands? It magnifies the justice of God and shows it to be inflexible, for when sin is imputed to God's own Son, He must drink the cup to the dregs. In a word, it establishes the government of God, shows its purity and rectitude, as it makes an end of sin, by demonstrating to the universe that, though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not pass unpunished.

Here is the righteousness which the Bible reveals as the ground of hope for a sinner – the foundation stone which God has laid in Zion. It was wrought out in human nature, but it is the righteousness of Him who is God as well as man. But here the question may arise: How does the sinner obtain an interest in this righteousness? How does it become his so that he may plead it as the ground of his acceptance? He is a rebel, destitute of all righteousness; what title has he to plead the righteousness of Christ?

5. This righteousness is “unto all”. Christ wrought out this righteousness for those who were given Him in covenant; He gave His life for the sheep.

His finished work not merely makes it possible that they may be saved; it infallibly saves them. As revealed in the gospel, this righteousness is the free gift of God. It is placed so completely within the sinner's reach, for his acceptance, that he cannot perish if he once hears of it unless he rejects it.

The Bible abounds with illustrations of this truth. The brazen serpent, set up within the camp of Israel, was God's free gift to them all. All were commanded to look to it; and just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so has the Son of Man been lifted up, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have eternal life. The manna, which came down from heaven to support the Israelites in their journey, was given to them all and was free to them all. Christ accordingly says to a multitude, most of whom were rebels at the time: "My Father giveth you the true bread from heaven". The cities of refuge were open to every manslayer in the land. And so it is with the righteousness of Christ; every sinner who hears of it is invited and commanded to flee for refuge and lay hold of the hope set before him.

It is like the sun in the sky, whose light is free to all of every nation. The blind cannot, indeed, rejoice in its light, but that arises from no defect in the sun – its beams shine forth alike for the rich and the poor, the just and the unjust. So it is with the righteousness of Christ. It says to every sinner who hears the gospel: "Be thou reconciled unto God, for He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin". This is the special glory of Immanuel's righteousness – it is unto all, and it utterly repudiates any limitations of its grace. It does not ask the sinner if he has any righteousness, for it knows him to be dead in sin; it does not ask whether his sins are few or many – whether he has just entered on a career of vice, or is already a white-haired profligate. Putting all on a level as condemned rebels, it tells them all: "Come now and let us reason together, saith the Lord, though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool".

But are all men saved by this righteousness? Do all to whom it comes in the gospel obtain eternal life? No. There must be an acceptance of this righteousness before we are justified through it.

6. This righteousness is upon all that believe. An individual sinner has been living, perhaps, in a land of gospel light and yet, though he has been again and again urged to receive the righteousness of Christ, he has hitherto rejected it. The truth is, he knows not the God with whom he has to do, nor his obligations to Him as His creature. His heart is set on worldly and forbidden objects; and though uneasy reflections may at times intrude on him, he contrives to banish them, saying, "Peace, peace, while there is no peace". But this peace is at length disturbed; the Spirit of God breathes on his soul, and the Word of God comes home to his conscience with a

light and an authority he cannot resist and tells him that he is perishing.

The man now becomes earnest about his soul; his great question is, How can I escape the wrath to come? He very soon discovers that he must have a righteousness before he can be saved. He sees that God is a holy God who requires the obedience of His creatures and that it is utterly inconsistent with His glory to save them without a righteousness. Thus the man labours hard to work out a righteousness for himself: he forsakes sin, he performs commanded duty, he labours in the very fire. His great question is, Have I yet brought myself into a state in which God shall pardon and accept me? But the Spirit proceeds to show him, on the one hand, the obedience which God requires and, on the other, the nature of that obedience which he is yielding. He sees that the law is spiritual, calling for the obedience of the heart and demanding perfection. And when he attempts to meet this demand, sin revives, the blasphemy and enmity of the heart are discovered, and he sees that his past obedience has not only been imperfect but it was the constrained obedience of a slave and an enemy.

Yet the sinner makes one more effort to build on the old foundation. He hears of faith as the grand means of saving the soul; he attempts to believe and persuades himself that he does so; and he then pleads his faith as the ground of his acceptance. But the Spirit in mercy sweeps this away also – the utter hypocrisy of his faith is made known to him, he sees that he does not and cannot believe the gospel, and yet that this is his highest guilt, arising as it does from the pride and enmity of his heart. Now the man feels himself to be wholly lost; he sees that, instead of being able to yield perfect obedience, he is dead in sin, utterly corrupt, and is on this account most justly condemned. Now at last the Spirit shows him that the very thing he needs has been already provided. He sees that Jesus has brought in an everlasting righteousness; he sees that this righteousness is unto all, and unto him; he hears the Redeemer saying to him: “Turn thou unto the stronghold, thou prisoner of hope”. And, believing this call, as a lost sinner he receives Christ, resting his eternity on the finished work of Immanuel.

The consequence is that this righteousness, which was formerly *unto* him, comes now to be *on* him – he is covered with it. Being one with Christ by faith, Christ’s righteousness is his own. God deals with him as one who obeyed when Christ obeyed, as one who suffered when Christ suffered, as one who is therefore accounted as righteous as Christ; “for He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made *the righteousness of God in Him*”. There is instantly a most glorious change in the man’s state and character. All his iniquities are pardoned, for Christ has atoned for them; his title to heaven is as complete as it shall ever be, for this righteous-

ness is complete. His character also is changed. The image of God is stamped on his soul, because this righteousness has purchased life for him.

True, this life is still weak, and there is still in him a mass of corruption which has to be destroyed. But he is complete in Christ his head, and the sin within him has been condemned and crucified. The Spirit of Christ in him will continue to strengthen the life and to destroy the corruption, till he is made perfect in holiness. "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son, in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit."

Application. 1. Let true believers live, by faith, on this righteousness alone. Your spiritual comfort, brethren, depends on this. If you look to anything in yourselves as the foundation of your hopes, an element of distrust is introduced into the soul, which, if cherished, will necessarily destroy your peace. Look away from everything in yourselves to the finished work of Jesus. Say with the Church: "Surely in the Lord have I righteousness", and you will have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Your usefulness also is connected with simple dependence on this righteousness. Just in the degree in which you look to anything in yourselves as the foundation of your hopes will a spirit of bondage prevail which will unfit you for duty and render God's work a burden. But by faith contemplate the perfection and suitableness of this righteousness. Above all, realise the glory and love of Him who still continues to plead it before His Father's throne, and then you will say with the Psalmist: "I will go in the strength of the Lord God; I will make mention of Thy righteousness, even of Thine only".

2. Let sinners come to Christ and receive this righteousness. There are gospel hearers whose hope for eternity appears to be that, because God is merciful and Christ died for sinners, they shall somehow be saved. But I beseech you to consider that while this righteousness is "unto all", it saves only those who receive it. It was not enough that the brazen serpent was lifted up, the Israelite must look to it in order to be healed. So, before you can be justified through His righteousness, you must come to Christ for yourself, just as if there were no other sinner who needed Him. Do not evade the call by asking: Did Christ die for you in particular? You have nothing to do with that question; you have to do with the glorious truth that Christ, who wrought out a righteousness which infallibly saves every sinner who receives it, at this moment offers Himself freely to you. "This is [God's] commandment that you believe on Him whom He hath sent." Therefore we beseech you "in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God". Flee from the wrath to come. Flee for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before you.

The Reformed Doctrine of Inspiration¹

4. The Relevance of the Doctrine for Today

Rev H M Cartwright

Many professing to be Christians and leaders in the Christian Church would regard this discussion as completely irrelevant. They have no place in their thinking or in their lives for an infallible revelation communicated to us by God. The doctrine of the divine inspiration of infallible Scripture has repercussions in every area, and no doubt that is why the ungodly and lawless spirit of man rebels against it. Rejection of the divine inspiration of Scripture removes from Scripture its unquestioned authority over the faith and life of man. Rejection of the divine inspiration of Scripture leaves us with a fallible and erring Bible and with a fallible and erring Christ, if any Christ at all.

The fundamental significance of the doctrine of the divine, full, verbal inspiration of the Scriptures today, as in every age, is that *it makes all the difference between a Bible which is inerrant and authoritative on every matter with which it deals and a Bible which is subject to the judgement of man and leaves man as the infallible authority*. Either man is to sit in judgement on the Bible and accept its teachings, not because they are given by the Word of God, but to the extent that they fit in with his own view of things; or man is to sit before the Word of God and bow to the authority of God who speaks there – his belief and experience and action being determined by the revelation given by God.

The Reformed and Biblical doctrine of Inspiration means that *we must be dependent upon, and submissive to, the Bible in its entirety as God's Word and as our only "rule of faith and life"*.² As soon as it is clear what the Word of God says, we must concur with it in our thinking and practice, "casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor 10:5). An inspired Bible is the last word on every subject with which it deals, the last court of appeal in every controversy.

The inspiration of the Bible is of fundamental relevance to the principles applied in the translation of the Scriptures from the languages in which they were originally given. It is also of fundamental relevance to the choice that is made of a version of Scripture. Scripture ought to be translated to give, not only the thought, but also the very words of God. We should be concerned

¹The final article in the series.

²*Westminster Confession* 1:2.

to have a version of Scripture which we can depend upon as an accurate translation of God's words – a translation which reproduces as closely as possible the grammatical and idiomatic forms of the original text, a translation based upon the principles of formal equivalence rather than dynamic equivalence. This we have in the Authorised Version.

The continuance of the Reformed, Protestant Church depends upon the maintenance of the Reformed doctrine of Inspiration and upon the maintenance of such theology and preaching and practice and discipline as depends upon the Word of God for its authority. Romanism is bolstered by tradition and by the authority of the Church itself. Liberalism puts the self-proclaimed scholar in place of the priest. Large sections of the professedly-Evangelical Church have been carried away either with pluralism or mysticism. The Reformed, Protestant Church was built upon the supreme, sole and sufficient authority of the inspired Word of God, and when it loses that it loses the reason for its existence and loses its divine strength.

Indeed, *the continuance of Christianity as we have known it depends upon acceptance of the divine inspiration of the Bible.* When men move away from submission to the authority of the Divine Word, whether they replace it with the dogmas of an infallible Church or the theorising of scholars or the human consciousness of men, they lose the doctrine and the life of Christianity. A trustworthy Bible provides us with a definite system of theology. Take away confidence in the Scriptures as the infallible and unerring Word of God, and there is no basis for asserting the truthfulness of the Christian religion. Men left to themselves will come up with a gospel very different from that proclaimed in the Bible. In the nineteenth century, professedly Evangelical and Calvinistic churchmen thought that they could undermine the inspiration and authority of the Word of God and yet retain their gospel. History has shown the folly of that notion. If men do not accept what the Bible says about itself, why should they accept what it says on any subject?

What is Christianity? It makes all the difference whether one seeks the answer to that question from an inspired, infallible Bible or somewhere – anywhere – else. The Christianity which obtains when the Bible is supreme is very different from the Christianity so-called which will prevail when anything else takes that place and subjects the Bible to it. The one is genuine and the other is false, even if they happen to correspond in some of their ideas.

The effectiveness of the Church in the world as an instrument for the accomplishment of God's purposes of grace depends upon her possession and use of an inspired Bible. On what other basis can the Church demand the attention of men for what those in a state of nature regard as foolishness or find to be a stumbling block? The inspired Word of God determines the

message of the Church to the surrounding world. It determines the methods which the Church is to use in her attempts to make that message known.

It is itself the great instrument which the Church is to use; she is to spread the Word of God and preach that Word faithfully. The possession of the inspired, infallible Word of God is a large part of the strength which the Church possesses in her endeavour to fulfil her mission. Her mission is, in essence, to bring the Word of God to bear upon men, to summon men to hear the Word of God and to submit soul and mind and morals to it. Her preachers have much encouragement to proclaim the message of the Bible accurately and faithfully in the assurance that it is divine truth itself, and that the conviction of this is wrought in the souls of sinners by the power of the Holy Ghost. We can see the effects today on her message, of the professing Church departing from the inspired and infallible Word of God, and also on her methods and her warrant for demanding the attention of men. And even where the truth is maintained in these areas, the Church may suffer a crisis of confidence because she is not living as she should in the realisation of the significance of having in her possession the inspired, infallible Word of God. We do not have to apologise for the inspired Word of God but only publish and preach it.

As far as *our approach to those who do not bow to the authority of Scripture* is concerned, the doctrine of Inspiration suggests that we should not deal with them in such a way that they are made to feel that they have the capacity or the right to judge the credentials of the Word of God. While we should endeavour to remove any doubts, more or less honestly held, which are capable of being removed by human testimony or evidence, we should begin with them from the assumption that God is and that God has spoken. We should encourage them to read the Bible for themselves. D A Carson wrote in 1996: “Two years ago I gave a series of evangelistic talks to a small group of scientists near Chicago, all with earned doctorates. From previous experience, I went in expecting that two-thirds would not even know that the Bible has two Testaments. I discovered that my estimate was a trifle low.” He suggests that “surely part of the effort to find out what Scripture *is* requires that we read Scripture and see what it says of itself”.³

On the personal level, the doctrine of inspiration provides us in the Word of God with *a divine foundation for our faith* and with *a divine authority for our lives*. It gives us direct access to what God has spoken. It brings the Word of God directly to bear upon us. It searches us to the depth of our being. It provides us with a basis for the most sure hope. It makes it possible for us to have fellowship not only with the writers of Scripture in their beliefs and experiences and way of life but also “with the Father, and with

³*The Gagging of God*, pp 42,162.

His Son Jesus Christ” (1 Jn 1:3). It is the means of making possible in this twenty-first century a personal religion that is identical in every essential aspect with that of the first disciples of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and all those down through the preceding centuries who were looking for His appearing. True personal religion in all its aspects is a response to the Word of God – faith, repentance, love, obedience, hope and every other Christian grace is wrought in the regenerate soul by the Holy Spirit through the instrumentality of His Word.

The relevance of this doctrine to us will manifest itself supremely in our own attitude to the Scriptures. As we seek to contend for the doctrine of inspiration, “we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard Him; God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders and with divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to His own will?” (Heb 2:1-4). “Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently; being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever. For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: but the Word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the Word which by the gospel is preached unto you” (1 Pet 1:22-25). “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, 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).

God, having most certainly decreed everything, executes everything irresistibly – not in an unnatural, compulsory manner, but in harmony with the nature of His creatures. Keep yourself from using unlawful means, for then you are losing sight of God’s decree, thus expecting it from the means. Use lawful means, and use them with the desire that God’s counsel be accomplished rather than having the intent to change it. Let there be no anxiety concerning the outcome of the matter, knowing that the outcome will be such as God in His counsel has decreed to be to your benefit. If this may be your practice, you will avoid or overcome many temptations and preserve a quiet inner disposition.

Wilhelmus à Brakel

Separatism in the North of Scotland¹

1. Its Rise

Rev D W B Somerset

During the fifty or so years before the Disruption a number of the godly people in the Highlands stopped attending the Church of Scotland. They started to hold their own meetings, but they nevertheless regarded themselves as still belonging to the Established Church. Such people were called "Separatists".² In some places, such as Arran, Creich, Harris, and Kinlochbervie, the separation was simply the consequence of an unwelcome ministry, and it came to an end when the people could call the minister of their choice.³ In other cases, however, the Separatists were in protest not only against Moderatism and patronage but against most of the Evangelical ministers of the Church of Scotland as well. This, especially, was the position of the four leaders: Peter Stuart, John Grant, Joseph Mackay and Alexander Gair. Generally they and their followers would be present at communion seasons, particularly at the Friday Fellowship meeting, but they would seldom or never take communion. For baptism, they would go to one of the very few ministers whom they regarded as faithful. The Separatist movement was strong in certain parishes in Sutherland, Caithness and Inverness-shire, but was otherwise negligible.

Various factors combined to give rise to Separatism. The first of these was the widespread revival of religion in the Highlands in the eighteenth century, a revival which affected the people more than the ministers. Many of the Lord's people found themselves under an unconverted ministry, and it was common for people to travel to neighbouring parishes on Sabbaths to hear more acceptable preaching. A second factor was the size of the Highland parishes. For many people it was impracticable to attend the parish church, which probably was too small to accommodate them all anyway. Thus, whether the minister was Evangelical or not, there would be a need for other

¹The main interest in the Separatist movement is that its leaders, such as Peter Stuart, John Grant, Joseph Mackay and Alexander Gair, were among the very foremost "Men" of the North. In this series of articles we give a brief account of the rise of Separatism and of the lives of these four leaders. Our aim is more to gather the scattered historical facts than to relate the anecdotes, although we do give quite a number of these.

²The principal source of information on Separatism is the pamphlet, *The North Country Separatists*, by Principal John Macleod, Inverness, 1930. Most of this was republished in *By-Paths of Highland Church History*, Edinburgh, 1965, pp 78-162.

³In Arran the separation lasted from 1813 until 1821. In Creich, Harris and Kinlochbervie the separation lasted respectively from 1813, from about 1823, and from 1834, respectively until the Disruption.

meetings in a parish, and the people were quite used to attending such meetings. A third factor was that, with the limited educational opportunities in the Highlands, some of the Men conducting these auxiliary meetings, though comparatively uneducated, had great natural talents, far outstripping those of the minister. Given the choice, the people went, naturally enough, to hear the best speaker.

A fourth factor was the longstanding strife over the communion season. For many of the Lord's people, the vast gatherings at communions were occasions of spiritual blessing, and perhaps for some these were their only opportunities of hearing evangelical preaching. For others, however, the communion was an occasion of drunkenness and scandal, and there was a widespread desire, particularly among the Moderate ministers in the North, to have the communion seasons severely curtailed or even suppressed. Several Evangelical ministers supported the Moderates in this. In the Synod of Sutherland and Caithness there was a struggle in the Church courts which lasted from 1737 until 1758, and which was resumed in the 1780s.⁴ This dispute had left a suspicion among the people, even towards many of the Evangelical ministers. Perhaps the surprising thing, given all these circumstances, is that the Separatist movement began as late as it did.

One parish which illustrates these various factors is that of Loth, in the Presbytery of Dornoch in Sutherland. None of the Loth ministers during the first half of the eighteenth century has left a name as being Evangelical, and the minister from 1756 to 1800, George MacCulloch, was an extreme and aggressive Arminian. According to Donald Sage, "no friend, lay or clerical, who might casually visit him, could remain for two hours under his roof without being dragged into the "Arminian controversy"".⁵

The parish of Loth, which was small by Highland standards, was 11 miles in length, with the church situated about seven miles from the northern end. The neighbouring parish of Kildonan had had several Evangelical ministers, one of whom was Alexander Sage (1753-1824), who was settled there in 1787. There were many godly people in Kildonan and evidently quite a number in Loth. With the lack of Evangelical ministers, Alexander Sage often had to invite George MacCulloch to assist at communions, and on one occasion the Men of Kildonan, headed by John Grant, challenged MacCulloch for his heterodoxy as he was riding home. "Mr MacCulloch was as bold as a lion, but his antagonists were more than a match for him; they had better

⁴Donald Beaton, "Fast Day and Friday Fellowship Meeting Controversy in the Synod of Sutherland and Caithness 1737-1758", *Transactions of the Inverness Gaelic Society*, 1917, pp 159-182.

⁵Donald Sage, *Memorabilia Domestica*, second ed, Wick, 1899, p 55.

Gaelic and a more accurate knowledge of their Bibles than he had, and he was at length but too happy to make his escape from them as fast as his horse could carry him.”⁶ In these circumstances it is no surprise to find MacCulloch giving the following account of the Men in about 1792. After mentioning that there were no denominations in the parish of Loth other than the Established Church, he says:

“However, though there be no open schism to divide them in public worship, they have their lay-leaders, some of the boldest and most conceited speakers at fellowship meetings, whom they implicitly believe, merely on account of their high pretensions and affected sanctity, by which they impose upon the people, and frequently mislead them. Of late they have begun to keep fellowship meetings amongst themselves, without the presence of a minister. To these meetings they convene at certain fixed periods from different parishes, propose questions in divinity, explain scriptures, and give a sanction to any doctrines or opinions that are considered as orthodox by the presiding saint. The evil consequence of these meetings on the heads and hearts of the people are begun to be too clearly seen by the clergy; but they have not been able as yet to devise a method of suppressing them. If they are allowed to proceed, it is not easy to say in what they will terminate at last.”⁷

The formal beginning of Separatism movement is said to have been the consequence of a communion in Kildonan in about 1797.⁸ Alexander Sage wished to have a communion without the large crowds of visitors who usually attended, and to achieve this he deliberately arranged a communion at short notice so that the people could not travel in time. On Sabbath, however, the congregation was still far too large for the church, but Sage stubbornly refused to hold the service in the open air. The result was that John Grant and a schoolmaster named Donald Macleod held their own open-air meeting a short distance from the church, with about 200 people in attendance.⁹ Sage was Evangelical but he was not a gifted preacher, and John Grant, who was one of his elders, had been opposed to his settlement in 1787 and to his ministry ever since.¹⁰

Once the Separatist movement had started, it soon spread through Sutherland, Caithness, Easter Ross, and parts of Inverness-shire and Nairn-

⁶*Memorabilia Domestica*, p 98.

⁷Sir John Sinclair (ed), *Statistical Account of Scotland*, Edinburgh, 1791-99, vol6, pp 319-320.

⁸*By-Paths*, p 81.

⁹Accounts of this communion are given in *Memorabilia Domestica*, p 98, and in Thomas Brown, *Annals of the Disruption*, Edinburgh, 1892, p 676.

¹⁰*Memorabilia Domestica*, pp 48-49.

shire. Through the influence of Alexander Gair, John Grant, Joseph Mackay and Peter Stuart, it became particularly strong in the parishes of Latheron and Reay in the north, and of Daviot, Duthil and Moy in Inverness-shire. About 1810 Norman Macleod led the separation of many of the parishioners in Assynt in Sutherland. In 1817 he and about 150 of his followers departed for Canada and they moved to Waipu in New Zealand in the 1850s.¹¹ The increasing strength of the Evangelical party in the Church of Scotland prior to the Disruption tended to reduce the support for Separatism, and it was said that by the time of the Disruption, “over the whole 200 parishes which constituted the Highlands, there were not so many as ten in which [the Separatists] had any real footing”.¹²

Given their opposition to most of the Evangelical ministers of the Church of Scotland, it is hardly surprising that the leading Separatists should have opposed first the Disruption, and then the Free Church, as well. John Grant and Peter Stuart were dead by 1843, but Alexander Gair and Joseph Mackay both held aloof from the Free Church, and were extreme in their criticism. Their position on the Disruption was interesting, although it does not seem very consistent for men who had themselves so largely separated from the Church of Scotland. They maintained that the Evangelical ministers should have remained in the Established Church and, like the Covenanters, should have disobeyed the civil authorities and have been prepared to suffer for doing so.

“In my boyhood,” wrote a man from Latheron, “and within three and a half miles from the spot where Alexander Gair lived and died, and at a time when his death was a recent event, his attitude towards the Disruption was discussed and also approved of by the people in general. The great idea among the people was that the Non-intrusion party ought to have carried on the agitation within the Church, even, if need be, in the face of persecution, and on no account to come out.”¹³ Joseph Mackay said that, in contrast to the Free Church ministers, “our worthy forefathers stood their ground valiantly – they did not turn their backs to their enemies, although they had to sacrifice their properties, and before yielding they sacrificed their worthy lives.”¹⁴

Once the Disruption had occurred, the Separatists spoke scathingly of the Free Church. Joseph Mackay maintained that the Free Church ministers

¹¹*By-Paths*, pp 136-161.

¹²*Annals of the Disruption*, p 677.

¹³George Sutherland, “Alexander Gair”, *John O’Groat Journal*, 20 and 27 October, 3 November 1933.

¹⁴*Letters by the Eminently Pious John Grant, Joseph M’Kay, and Alexander Gair*, np, nd, p 47.

“went out in their own hot spirits, and the Lord did not go with them.”¹⁵ While one would not wish to defend the language of the Separatists nor the indiscriminate nature of their condemnation, it has to be acknowledged that there were important elements of truth in what they were saying. Like Jonathan Ranken Anderson in the 1850s, they could see that there was a leaven at work in the Free Church which eventually led to its ruin.

One thing that they observed, for instance, was that the Free Church leaders were far removed in their outlook from the principles of the Solemn League and Covenant and the Second Reformation. Some of them had supported the Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829,¹⁶ and others such as Robert Candlish, Robert Buchanan and Thomas Guthrie proved quite ready in later years to relinquish the Establishment Principle if they could thereby secure union with the United Presbyterian Church. In 1845 Joseph Mackay wrote, “Few, very few, are savingly convinced of the evil of our day and generation, emancipating the abomination of Popery, breaking and disowning the Solemn League and Covenant of England, Scotland and Ireland, which was confirmed and sealed by our godly forefathers”.¹⁷

Another danger which the Separatists saw was the tendency in the Free Church to exalt human learning above spiritual experience; a tendency which by the 1880s had led to the appointment of heretics as Free Church professors. Joseph Mackay used to say that “in the times of prosperity of the Church, the Lord’s servants ploughed with four horses – faith, love, discernment and zeal; but as the Church declined, faith became lame, love got sick, discernment lost the sight of an eye, and zeal died, so that many do the work with the two horses of carnal reason and human learning”. When Alexander Auld was a divinity student at New College around 1850, Sandy Gair wrote warning him to beware of the “great pot” out of which the sons of the prophets got their pottage. There was death in it, which could only be cured by getting the handful of meal (2 Kings 4:40). “The pot is the College; the death in it is learning without grace, and the meal is the good food ground on Calvary between the millstones of law and justice, which can be gotten only by the hand of faith.”¹⁸

A third danger which the Separatists saw was the self-seeking spirit at work in the Free Church. The Free Church movement had become an idol

¹⁵Cameron Mackay (ed), *Letters and Sayings of Joseph Mackay, Reay, 1828-1848*, Kingussie, 1891.

¹⁶We hope to say more on this in the second article in this series (DV).

¹⁷*Letters by . . . John Grant, Joseph M’Kay, and Alexander Gair*, p 50.

¹⁸*Ministers and Men in the Far North*, Free Presbyterian Publications 1956 reprint, pp 125,137.

for some, and a struggle for supremacy within it was one of the bitter fruits. The eminent John Sutherland of Badbea, near Berriedale in Caithness, was not a Separatist, but in June 1855 he wrote, “Everything is out of order. We have seen how John Grant, Peter Stuart and Alexander Gair were telling of the judgements that came upon us as individuals and as Church and state for our apostasy. O, the jarring and contention of the FC – the Edinburgh and Glasgow Presbyteries fighting with that evil spirit; which of us will be the greatest. It is to be feared it will wither our Church at the root. I was ashamed reading the proceedings of the General Assembly of the Free Church. So much said in their long speeches disputing about the Sustentation Fund, how to increase their stipends, etc; no word spoken about their flock’s souls or bodies, or of the spiritual dearth or famine.”¹⁹

Joseph Mackay died in 1848 and Alexander Gair in 1854, and there was no one of their stature to succeed them. The Separatists continued to oppose the Free Church, particularly in Duthil, Moy and Latheron, but gradually they dwindled away. Principal John Macleod dates the end of the movement to about 1875, 80 years after its beginning, when the few remaining Separatists in the parish of Latheron were persuaded to lay down their opposition and to enter the Free Church.²⁰

Benefiting from Affliction¹

6. A Preparation for Death

James Buchanan

The day of adversity is a suitable *preparation for the hour of death*. That solemn hour must soon arrive. Much inward preparation of heart is needful if we would meet it with calmness, composure and fortitude. In the day of prosperity, that preparation *may* be made, if we can succeed in maintaining the ascendancy of divine truth in our minds; for it is the truth of God inwrought, as it were, into the frame and temper of our spirits, and not any merely external influence, which fits the believer for his last struggle. But during prosperity the mind is too prone to yield to worldly influences and is

¹⁹Letters of John Sutherland, Badbea, 25 June 1855. These letters were printed in the *John O’Groat Journal* between 18 February and 1 April, 1927.

²⁰*By-Paths*, p 162. George Sutherland, “Donald Grant”, *John O’Groat Journal*, 12, 19 February 1932.

¹Taken, slightly edited, from Buchanan’s book *The Improvement of Affliction*, a sequel to Buchanan’s *Comfort in Affliction*, which has been reprinted by Free Presbyterian Publications. This is the final article in the series; the previous piece appeared last month.

often reluctant to allow God's truth that full ascendancy which its importance demands and which is, in fact, essential to the believer's comfort in the prospect of death.

It is in breaking the power of worldly enchantments, in disengaging the mind from delusive expectations, and in directing it more earnestly and simply to the truths of God's Word, that adversity serves to prepare the soul for meeting death with fortitude. The sorrows of life may thus, without exciting one feeling of discontent or calling forth a single murmur, predispose the soul to quit without reluctance a scene of so much trial and to anticipate without alarm that solemn event which will bring all our earthly cares to an end and introduce us into a nobler and happier state of being. Prosperity is less suitable than adversity as a means of preparation for death, not because the latter possesses any charm by which the fear or the pain of death is allayed, but because it is in God's hand a powerful instrument in awakening our attention to the truths of religion and impressing them on our hearts.

It is not adversity in itself simply, but adversity duly considered and improved, that has this effect. Many a sorely tried and afflicted man is as reluctant to die as the most prosperous worldling; but the reason is that, in his case, adversity has failed to lead him to open his mind to the full influence of gospel truth; affliction, like other means of grace, may fail in its beneficial tendency. The genuine disciple is all the better prepared for his last hour by the many seasons of affliction through which he has passed, because, at every such season, his mind has been powerfully impressed, his contrition deepened, his faith strengthened, his communion with God restored, his love for the Saviour increased, his experience of the Spirit's supporting grace enlarged, and his hope of heaven revived. Thus enlightened, quickened and comforted by the truths of God being seasonably and powerfully applied to his heart by means of affliction, he is prepared to surrender himself into God's hands and to trust in His unfailing love and faithfulness at that last, solemn, awful hour when his soul must leave its earthly tabernacle and enter into the world of spirits.

The day of adversity is a means of *preparation for eternal glory*. "Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory". So says the Apostle in words which demonstrate the connection which subsists between the believer's sufferings on earth and his ultimate happiness in heaven. This connection is similar, in some respects, to that which subsisted between the humiliation and exaltation of the Saviour Himself; and because our present afflictions are working out for us so glorious a result, it may well serve at once to reconcile us to them and to impress us with a sense of the wisdom and love of God in imposing them.

Yet let us not imagine that they have this efficacy in themselves, as if they merited for us a future compensation or reward. Far from it. God does not visit us with afflictions beyond what we deserve, so as to make Himself our debtor. Neither does any amount of affliction make future glory sure to us, except in so far as it is made the means in God's hand of bringing the truth home to our hearts and inducing us to embrace it cordially and to improve it diligently. Hence the Apostle not only states the fact that affliction works out for God's people an exceeding weight of glory, but he points out the way in which it does so: "*while we look* not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal". It is by its influence in weaning our thoughts and affections from the world and directing them to spiritual and eternal things that adversity tends to prepare us for glory. We may suffer much and long, but not until the mind *looks* upward to God and forward to eternity – not till it cordially receives and embraces the truth of the gospel – is it thereby better prepared for glory, any more than are the fallen spirits who are kept in chains of darkness unto the day of judgement.

But as soon as it brings us to the knowledge and reception of the truth, it prepares us by the truth for glory. It then elevates our minds, and prepares and refines them, so as to make them meet for "the inheritance of the saints in light". This it does, partly by convincing us of the vanity of the world, so as to feel that God alone can be our satisfying and everlasting portion; partly by convincing us of the wretchedness of our condition as sinners, so as to feel that peace with God is essential to our happiness; partly by convincing us of the remaining corruptions that cleave to us, so as to feel that we must be made perfectly holy before we can expect exemption from trial; and still more by enabling us to experience the love of God, the pleasure of comfortable communion with Him, and the unspeakable blessedness of resting on Christ, so as to enjoy some foretaste of that higher and more perfect happiness which shall be enjoyed when we enter into His immediate presence. Accordingly, we read in the Scriptures that even the redeemed in heaven look back on their earthly trials with grateful ascription of praise to God for His wisdom and love in making them subservient to their present glory; and a venerable Christian emphatically observes, "I believe there are very few in heaven but owe their conversion or their continuance in that state to some stroke or other".

Such is a brief account of God's benevolent design in the afflictive dispensations of His providence. Their general end is the progressive sanctification and ultimate perfection of our natures. With this view, they are intended for our instruction, our reproof, our trial and our preparation for

glory. That such is their declared purpose and use may well serve to impress us with a sense of God's goodness, even when He chastens us; while their admirable fitness, as a means to so great an end, is illustrative of God's wisdom, which presides over the management of our affairs. And the serious consideration of the grand design, which they are so well fitted to accomplish, is not only useful in reconciling us to the patient endurance of our present discipline, but is also necessary to the right improvement of it – since if we be either ignorant or forgetful of God's design in them, it is not to be expected that we shall either bear them with patience, or steadily pursue those grand moral results to which they tend.

Meditation on the Dawn¹

Thomas Halyburton

What a different case am I now in, from what I was a little while ago! Then I was in a pleasant habitation, surrounded with wife, children, conveniences – in a habitation well illuminated with pleasant light, whereby I saw my enjoyments, discerned the pleasantness of them, and their suitability. I had necessaries, quiet of mind, and opportunity to retire to my closet to converse with God, wherewith I was refreshed.

But what a change do I now find! I am engaged in a journey; my way is dark; I find it cold. Now, when I turn thoughtful, I fear everywhere – fear where no fear is. Now, use and custom turn me secure, and I fear not where there is fear; I see no danger and begin to conclude there is none. Have I not here a view of man's state in innocency, and his state when fallen?

But what a change do I find! Light begins to appear. Had I never seen it, I should have had no notion of it. What a surprise is this! When did it begin? How did it grow? Where were my senses? Did I not look on? And yet I cannot see, and cannot tell how it began, nor whence. "So is everyone that is born of the Spirit."

But sure it is, one thing I know, whereas I saw nothing, "now I see". I see where I am, what is near about me; I see where there is hazard and where there is safety in the way I am in; but what is at a distance I yet perceive not. The first dawning of saving light is not perceivable in its rise, in its progress, but is unquestionable in its effects and gives a view of the state I am at present in.

But a new scene appears. Light grows; I see at a distance, but men appear

¹Reprinted from *The Works of Thomas Halyburton*, vol 4, pp 173-4; see the review on page 26 of this issue. Halyburton wrote this on a day when he had left home before sunrise.

“as trees”; pleasant trees, delightful fields, men suitable to me and friends appear as monsters, seen with an imperfect light – my fears are quickened. And is it not so with young converts?

Light still increases; it grows; every new degree is inconceivable, and we have no notion of the discovery it makes. What before was dark, was frightful, is now pleasant and agreeable. Imperfect views of the best things give but mis-shapen notions; light increasing satisfies as to them: “Eye hath not seen” (1 Cor 2:9).

“Truly light is sweet”, even before the sun is seen. Light is great, and is pleasant, makes the way pleasant and gives pleasant discoveries; but it cannot be . . . told or conceived what satisfactory discoveries, what quickening warmth the noonday’s sun affords.

Steady Perseverance¹

J C Ryle

These verses show us *the importance of steady perseverance in Christ’s service*. There were many, it seems, at this particular period who professed to believe on our Lord and expressed a desire to become His disciples. There is nothing to show that they had true faith. They appear to have acted under the influence of temporary excitement, without considering what they were doing. And to them our Lord addresses this instructive warning: “If ye continue in My word, then are ye My disciples indeed”.

This sentence contains a mine of wisdom. To make a beginning in religious life is comparatively easy. Not a few mixed motives assist us. The love of novelty, the praise of well-meaning but indiscreet professors, the secret self-satisfaction of feeling “how good I am”, the universal excitement attending a new position – all these things combine to aid the young beginner. Aided by them he begins to run the race that leads to heaven, lays aside many bad habits, takes up many good ones, has many comfortable frames and feelings and gets on swimmingly for a time. But when the newness of his position is past and gone, when the freshness of his feelings is rubbed off and lost, when the world and the devil begin to pull hard at him, when the weakness of his own heart begins to appear – then it is that he finds out the real difficulties of vital Christianity. Then it is that he discovers the deep wisdom of our Lord’s saying now before us. It is not beginning, but “continuing” a religious profession, that is the test of true grace.

We should remember these things in forming our estimate of other people’s

¹Taken, slightly edited, from Ryle’s *Expository Thoughts on John*, vol 2 (on John 8:31-36).

religion. No doubt we ought to be thankful when we see anyone ceasing to do evil and learning to do well. We must not “despise the day of small things” (Zec 4:10). But we must not forget that to begin is one thing and to go on is quite another. Patient continuance in well-doing is the only sure evidence of grace. Not he that runs fast and furiously at first, but he that keeps up his speed, is he that runs so as to obtain. By all means let us be hopeful when we see anything like conversion. But let us not be too sure that it is real conversion, until time has set its seal upon it. Time and wear test metals and prove whether they are solid or plated. Time and wear, in like manner, are the surest tests of a man’s religion. Where there is spiritual life, there will be continuance and steady perseverance. It is the man who goes on as well as he begins that is “the disciple indeed”.

Book Review

Faith and Experience, Works of Thomas Halyburton, vol 4, published by James Begg Society, hardback, 399 pages, £13.00, obtainable from the F P Bookroom.

This book completes the four-volume republication of Halyburton’s *Works* which the James Begg Society began in 2000. Volume 1 contained 10 sermons and valuable theological essays on Faith and Justification; volume 2 consisted of *The Great Concern of Salvation*; and volume 3 was his apologetic work against Deism entitled *Natural and Revealed Religion*. These volumes were reviewed in *The Free Presbyterian Magazine* in May 2001, December 2002 and May 2005 respectively. The present volume contains his famous *Memoirs*; it also includes two further sermons and a short “Discourse concerning the obligation of oaths on posterity” (none of which have previously been published), and an account of the death of Lady Elcho.

Halyburton’s *Works* were collected once before, by Robert Burns of Glasgow in 1833, but that edition is scarce and is less complete and less accurate than the present one. Burns introduced innumerable changes to Halyburton’s style, and many of his emendations are now more antiquated than the homely Scottish expressions that they replaced. Halyburton’s original language is partly restored in this edition, and it is to be hoped that a subsequent edition might complete the process. The present edition also includes a subject index and a Scripture index. The first volume had a peculiar picture of a rusting girder on the front (apparently a passing whim of the member of the James Begg Society overseeing the production of that volume) but the subsequent volumes have more normal cover illustrations.

Thomas Halyburton was born in 1674, and died in 1712 at the early age

of 37. His father was minister of Aberdalgie and Dupplin in Perthshire; ejected in 1662, he died in 1682. His wife and surviving children took refuge in Holland until the Revolution of 1689. On his return, Thomas studied at Edinburgh University, and was ordained minister of Ceres in Fife in 1700. In 1710 he became Professor of Divinity at St Andrews, but he died two years later after a prolonged illness.

Halyburton has long been regarded as one of Scotland's foremost theologians and most profound experimental writers. His sermons are beautifully concise, scriptural and illuminating, while his *Memoirs* rank alongside Augustine's *Confessions* and Bunyan's *Grace Abounding* in their careful tracing of the Lord's dealings with his soul. They abound in unusual thoughts and observations (see, for example, his "Meditation on Dawn" on page 24). His "Discourse concerning the obligation of oaths on posterity" was written in 1705 and was "particularly designed with an eye" to the Solemn League and Covenant. Like Boston, Willison, the Erskines, and indeed all the notable Scottish divines of the eighteenth century, he maintains the continuing obligation of the Covenants.

For at least 60 years now, it has been a debated point in Reformed circles whether God can be said to "desire" the salvation of all men. Those that oppose the idea of "desire" will be gratified to have the support of Halyburton in this present volume. One of the newly-printed sermons is on Deuteronomy 5:29, a verse that features in the debate, "O that there were such a heart in them, that they would fear Me and keep all My commandments always!"

Halyburton comments as follows: "We have the way wherein God takes notice of this, 'O that there were in them!' or, as it is in the Hebrew, 'Who shall give them to have such a heart?' God condescends to speak after the manner of men that we may understand Him, and here we are not to think that God wants [lacks] anything needful to Him – He is God blessed for ever – or that He labours under any defect of power that He cannot accomplish what He would have, nor that He is capable of any uneasiness or desire of what He has not. To admit of any of those, which commonly are found in men when they wish, were to blaspheme the Lord. What meaneth then this wish, will ye say? I answer: (1.) It speaks the want [absence] of that which is wished for. (2.) God's knowledge of this defect, which others could not discern. (3.) The acceptableness of such a heart to him. (4.) The necessity of it in order to the performance of these engagements. (5.) His real kindness to the people" (p 288).¹

Halyburton died about seven in the morning on 23 September 1712, and was buried in the corner of the St Andrews Cathedral graveyard reserved

¹Thomas Boston has a similar comment on this verse in his *Complete Works* (reprinted recently by Tentmaker Publications), vol 10, p 57.

for divinity professors, next to Samuel Rutherford, Thomas Forrester and Principal John Anderson. On the day before he died, about noon, he uttered the famous words: "I was just thinking on the pleasant spot of earth that I'll get to lie in, beside Mr Rutherford, Mr Forrester, Principal Anderson, etc. And I'll come in as the little one among them, and I'll get my pleasant George [one of his children who had died a few months earlier] in my hand, and O we'll be a knot of bonny dust" (p 256).

The James Begg Society is to be commended for making Halyburton's *Works* available once again. We hope that they will have a wide circulation and be a means of blessing to many.

(Rev) D W B Somerset

Protestant View

Rome's True View of Scripture

Last month, the Pope commended regular reading of the Bible and said that the Vatican II Council document of 1965, *Dei Verbum* [the Word of God] on Scripture and tradition, was one of the Council's pillars. One clear benefit, he said, is the revival among "Catholics" of the habit of daily Bible reading, which will hasten "a new spiritual springtime" for Roman Catholicism. But, of course, the Pope has not abandoned the dogma that tradition is a pillar equal to Scripture.

A few weeks earlier, as was noted in this Magazine in November, the Roman hierarchy in Britain issued a pamphlet, *The Gift of Scripture*, claiming that "not all of the Bible is true", and, "you should not expect total accuracy in the Scriptures. . . . We should not expect to find in Scripture full scientific accuracy or complete historical precision in secular matters. . . . Genesis chapters 1 to 11 are not to be taken literally, though they may contain historical traces," and so on.

These mixed messages from the Pope and the Roman hierarchy in Britain echo Rome's low view of Scripture and high view of tradition (as expressed in numerous papal pronouncements). *Dei Verbum* itself says that "it is not from Sacred Scripture alone that the Church draws her certainty about everything which has been revealed. Therefore both sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture are to be accepted and venerated with the same sense of loyalty and reverence." The Pope went on to say, "It is this tradition that makes the entire canon of Holy Books known, rendering them correctly understandable and effective" – teaching that the interpretation of Scripture relies on tradition, and that one is dependent on Rome for light!

May the day soon come, as it surely will, when Roman Catholics, by reading the Scriptures – and taught by the Holy Spirit of truth – will join Luther in saying: "Unless I am convicted by Scripture and plain reason – I do not accept the authorities of popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other; my

conscience is captive to the Word of God". As Herbert Carson observes in his *The Faith of the Vatican*, "This refusal to accept any other authority above or alongside Scripture was to become the driving force of the Reformation". Let us pray that the increased reading of the Bible among Roman Catholics will lead to a reformation which will be "a spiritual springtime" for them, and be the demise of Roman Catholicism. *NMR*

Limbo

Probably few who speak of something being "in limbo" think of the religious connotations of the term. These have been brought before the public with the announcement that the Pope is likely to endorse proposals to abandon the view voiced by a predecessor in 1905, and commonly believed for centuries previously. It is that "children who die without baptism go into limbo, where they do not enjoy God, but they do not suffer either, because having original sin, and only that, they do not deserve paradise, but neither hell nor purgatory".

Limbo was originally invented as a temporary abode for Old Testament believers who died before Christ came (known in that case as the *Limbus Patrum*). It was claimed that they were all released and taken to heaven after Christ's death. The *Limbus Infantum* was also recognised by the Council of Florence in 1439 as another potential state beyond death, along with heaven, hell and purgatory. There is, of course, no biblical basis for the concept of a border land which is neither heaven nor hell, though that in itself would scarcely weigh with Roman theologians. More likely, in this age of the friendly face of Rome, the idea has become an embarrassment. The last pope expressed the hope that there was a way of salvation for children who died without baptism and the present pope has in the past described limbo as only "a theological hypothesis".

One problem for Rome is the traditional belief (embedded in the Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent, with an anathema on anyone who denies it) that it is in baptism, by the grace of Christ, infants are born again and the guilt of original sin is remitted, so that they "are made innocent, immaculate, pure, harmless, and beloved of God" (session 5, section 5). An endeavour to avoid the harsh implications of this belief, if baptism by a Roman priest were to be held absolutely necessary to keep an infant from hell, accounted for the readiness to recognise baptism in the name of the triune God virtually wherever and by whomsoever administered and for the invention of limbo. It will be interesting to see how Rome resolves this problem. No doubt it will come up with something which will not diminish the place of "the Church" but will foster the illusion promoted by Vatican II (1962-65) that everyone is embraced within the circle of salvation other than those who consciously and determinedly refuse to believe in God against their better judgement.

Rome continues to repudiate the doctrines of grace and salvation, the truth concerning eternal destiny and biblical views of the sacraments, and so con-

tinues to imperil the souls of those who follow her guidance. It is sad that so much nominal Protestantism is also astray from the truth and is deluding its followers. On the particular subject matter of this note, nothing can better the wise and reverent statement of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* in its chapter on Effectual Calling: “Elect infants, dying in infancy, are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit, who worketh when, and where, and how He pleaseth”. HMC

Notes and Comments

Banning the Bible

“Student leaders” in Edinburgh University were recently the latest to appeal for Bibles placed in University halls of residence to be removed by the authorities as they could be offensive to students professing religions other than Christianity. The students’ president is quoted as saying that “the Student Association strongly believes in the importance of ensuring that students of all faiths feel at home in their university accommodation”, claiming that they were not attacking Christianity but respecting diversity. No doubt the same excuse is offered for removing prayer in the name of Jesus Christ from so many formal University events.

Just as this note was about to be written, the December Newsletter of the Christian Institute arrived; it includes the following item: “The University of Leicester NHS Trust considered banning Bibles from its bedside lockers in order to avoid offending other faiths. This move was opposed by Leicestershire’s Federation of Muslim Organisations and the Sikh chairman of the Council of Faiths. The Trust backed down after being attacked in the press.” This illustrates what we suspect is true: that generally the urge to ban the Bible from hospitals, prisons and halls of residence in case of offending those of non-Christian religions is a cover for the vocal campaigning minority’s own antagonism to a Book which probably most of them have not read but which is to them an emblem of a Christianity and Theism which they despise in their hearts.

Those who want the Bible kept out of sight are unwittingly pawns in the hands of “the god of this world” who “hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them” (2 Corinthians 4:4). He knows that “the word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12), and it suits him to have it kept in its scabbard.

Time was when one might expect students at a Scottish University, whatever

their spiritual state or religious background, to have the mental capacity to recognise the significance of the Bible, even in the intellectual, literary and social development of the nation and to take its presence in their lodgings in their stride – and perhaps even to read it occasionally! Those of non-Christian religions who come here to study should recognise that it is our Christian heritage which formed the character of this free and once-noble nation. Many of them are probably surprised to find so little evidence of that Christianity. One fears that the secular and amoral character of this constitutionally-Christian nation is much more offensive to people coming from other cultures than having a Bible in their room would be. *HMC*

Converted?

One of the most serious weaknesses in many Evangelical churches throughout the world has long been their willingness to accept people as converted who can by no stretch of the imagination be recognised as having undergone a saving change. Jim Elliff, president of an organisation called Christian Communicators Worldwide, has drawn attention to some disturbing statistics for Southern Baptists and other American churches. Out of the 16 million Southern Baptist members, he states, only about 6 million (37%) attend their main weekly service, and only about 2 million (12%) attend the other Sabbath service.

In the 1990s the Pentecostal denomination, the Assembly of God, held what they called a Decade of Harvest, during which 3.5 million people professed conversion. However, the increase in numbers attending their services was only 5% of this figure. Mr Elliff comments on the carelessness in receiving members and the failure to exercise church discipline.

These, of course, are matters on which the Free Presbyterian Church has warned for many years. But we are glad to see others reacting to what should be blatantly obvious. Mr Elliff calls for a number of specific responses. Among them are: to preach on the subject of “the unregenerate church member”; “address the issue of persistent sin among our members”; cease “receiving new members immediately after they ‘walk the aisle’” (when they come to the front in response to an Arminian-type invitation); “stop giving immediate verbal assurance to people who make professions of faith or who respond to our invitations”; and, finally, “restore sound doctrine”.

J C Ryle’s comments in the article on page 25 of this issue are highly relevant to the subject. Serious attention to Scripture teaching on such matters, and to literature on spiritual experience – including Ryle and Archibald Alexander, and going back to the rich heritage of Puritan writings – would, by the blessing of the Holy Spirit, be highly useful in helping individuals and members of church courts recognise what is genuine conversion and what is not. Granted, no one can see into anyone else’s heart, but people’s behaviour tells much. But, primarily, we have a responsibility to examine ourselves as to our spiritual state.

Church Information

Miss Peta van de Ridder

We report with great sadness the sudden death of Miss van de Ridder on Tuesday, November 29, in Kenya, as the result of an accident. For several years she was the Matron of the Omorembe Health Centre on our mission in Sengera, Kenya. We deeply sympathise with her family in Holland, and with her colleagues in Sengera, Kenya. We hope to have a fuller notice in a future issue, DV. NMR

Meetings of Presbytery

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

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

Outer Isles: At Stornoway, on Tuesday, February 14, at 1 pm.

Western: At Laide, on Tuesday, February 14, at 6 pm.

Southern: At Glasgow, on Wednesday, February 15, at 3 pm.

Northern: At Dingwall, on Tuesday, February 21, at 2 pm.

Zimbabwe: At Bulawayo, on Tuesday, March 14, at 11 am.

Post of General Treasurer

Applications are sought for the post of General Treasurer, in view of the impending retirement of Mr R A Campbell. Application should be made, in the first instance, to Rev K D Macleod, Convener, Finance Committee, Free Presbyterian Manse, Ferry Road, Leverburgh, Isle of Harris, HS5 3UA, enclosing a CV.

Giving under Gift Aid

The Finance Committee wishes to draw the benefits of the Gift Aid scheme to the attention of our people who pay income tax in the United Kingdom. For each £1 received, the Church is able to reclaim an additional 28p from the Government. A leaflet is to be circulated in congregations and may also be obtained from the General Treasurer.

Acknowledgement of Donations

The General Treasurer acknowledges with sincere thanks the following donations:

College & Library Fund: Anon, £60; A Friend, Newcastle, Ps 51:10, £40.

Eastern Europe Fund: Anon, towards building in Odessa, £5000.

Jewish & Foreign Missions Fund: Anon, England, £175.

Congregational Treasurers acknowledge with sincere thanks the following donations:

Dingwall: *Dominions & Overseas Fund:* KAML, "To help spread the Word of God abroad", £100 per Rev NMR.

Edinburgh: *Congregational Funds:* Mr N Pearce, £100; Mrs IM, North Tolsta, where most needed, £20 per Rev HMC.

North Harris: *Congregational Funds:* Anon, "In memory of our beloved aunt, Miss M Shaw", £200 per Rev JBJ; Anon, Stockinish, where most needed, £200.

Raasay: *Congregational Funds:* Anon, £200.

Staffin: *Door Collection:* CM, Staffin House, £50.