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## Safely to Heaven

Heaven is a place of complete holiness. So it should surprise no one to find it written: “There shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth” (Rev 21:27), which clearly indicates that no one with the least stain of sin can enter heaven, for sin is defiling. Obviously, no one who is still unconverted – still under the power of sin, still in rebellion against God, still refusing to submit to the authority of King Jesus – can enter paradise. Just as surely as Adam and Eve were kept out of the earthly paradise by the cherubim, and the flaming sword that turned every way, so every condemned sinner, content to go on with a sin-defiled heart, will be kept out of heaven. They are the servants, or slaves, of sin and could not possibly be happy in the pure, undefiled environment of heaven.

God’s children, on the other hand, are no longer the servants of sin, for, as Paul told the Romans, they “have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered” to them (6:17). They have believed the testimony brought to them in the Word of God, particularly concerning themselves as sinners and, beyond that, the truth concerning Christ as the Saviour who came into the world to give Himself a ransom for many. They have trusted in Him, which indicates the start of new life; they have begun to serve the living God.

But, though they are no longer the servants of sin, they are still defiled by it. Even David, when singing of the Lord as his Shepherd and expressing the assurance: “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever” (Ps 23:6), was still defiled by sin. And Mary of Bethany, sitting at the Saviour’s feet listening to all He had to say, and commended by Him as one who had chosen that good part which would never be taken from her, was by no means free from that defilement. Nor was Paul free from sin even when, on the very verge of glory, he was able to utter, in all humility, these memorable words: “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day” (2 Tim 4:7).

Paul could indeed say, “I delight in the law of God after the inward man” (Rom 7:22), and thereby make plain that he had passed from death unto life. But, because he was so conscious of the power of remaining sin, he had to add: “I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” Yet we have no reason to think that, when Paul wrote these words, he was guilty of some particularly heinous sin. Rather, he wrote as he did because, godly man that he was, he was conscious of how strong the principle of sin was in his heart; it was because of the extent to which the Holy Spirit had worked in his heart that he was so intensely conscious of that power of sin. Charles Hodge remarks: “The strength and extent of the corruption of our nature are seen from its influence over the best of men, and from its retaining more or less of its power, under all circumstances, to the end of life”.<sup>1</sup> And while sin retained that power, even Paul himself – and David and Mary likewise – were not fit for heaven.

Yet Paul was not in despair; he could thank God, through Jesus Christ – conscious, no doubt, of the power of the Holy Spirit to cleanse him finally and completely in the moment of death. It was in the same faith that David Dickson, best known today for his *Commentary on the Psalms*, told his friend John Livingstone: “I have taken all my good deeds and all my bad deeds and cast them through each other in a heap before the Lord, and fled from both and betaken myself to the Lord Jesus Christ, and in Him I have sweet peace”. And we can be certain that in David Dickson’s case, just as surely as in the Apostle Paul’s, every last stain of defilement was washed away by the time they were brought to glory. Just as certain is it that every other sinner, if only they are looking to Christ and delighting in the law of God after the inward man, will be brought safely to glory “without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but holy and without blemish” – perfectly so.

But there are further difficulties in the way of the children of God reaching heaven. There is the devil – that roaring lion who walks about, seeking whom he may devour. No one should underestimate the power of his temptations and his capacity to influence others to put stumbling blocks in the way of God’s children. And if any of these were totally successful, believers would be snatched out of the way that leads to everlasting life; they would never reach heaven. But that is to ignore a number of other aspects of God’s revelation in Scripture. First of all, there is Christ’s assurance: “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My

<sup>1</sup>*Commentary on Romans*, Banner of Truth 1983 ed, p 246.

hand” (John 10:27,28). This assurance is absolute; it is the promise of the Son of God, and therefore it cannot be broken. Not even the devil himself, powerful though he indeed is, is strong enough to snatch even the weakest or most immature of Christ’s sheep from His hand. They are therefore safe; there can be no doubt whatever but that, at last, when their time in this world comes to an end, they will be brought safely to heaven. No devil or human being can wrest them out of Christ’s graciously-powerful hand.

Think of the Children of Israel, brought by God’s Almighty power out of Egypt, out of the clutches of Pharaoh. Look at them on their way through the wilderness; they seem so vulnerable that one might well question if they will ever reach the land of Canaan. There are, on the one hand, numerous enemies who might swoop down and destroy them, besides all the other hazards of the wilderness; on the other hand, there is their own fickleness and unbelief, their proneness to idolatry and other sins. But in spite of all these things, and more, they are certain to reach the promised land; it is God who has promised. Indeed He has spoken by way of covenant – with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – and His covenant can never fail.

Now all this was written for our instruction; the Israelites were intended to picture to us the journey of God’s people through the wilderness of time. Believers have all been brought out of the kingdom of Satan in spite of his determined resistance. They make their way through life in the face of various spiritual enemies, all kinds of troubles and, within themselves, a sinful, unbelieving heart. Yet it is certain that they will at last reach their promised land – for eternal life in heaven has been promised to everyone who believes in Jesus. And that promise, along with a multitude of others, forms an integral part of the covenant of grace.

This is a covenant that can never be broken. It has Christ as its head; He has done all that was necessary, according to the terms of the covenant, for the salvation of each one whom the Father gave to Him. Therefore they can never perish. Although the work of sanctification is always incomplete in this world, Paul, with divine authority, assures every believer: “He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it” (Phil 1:6); He will bring it to completion. Although there are enemies, strong enemies, yet all of God’s children will be safe at last because they have an almighty King to fight for them who cannot fail; He has not lost a battle yet and He never will. Whatever the difficulties, their King has promised: “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee” (Heb 13:5). Let them therefore echo the Apostle’s words: “Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith” (Heb 12:1). It is the sure way to everlasting glory.

## The King's Highway Cleared (1)<sup>1</sup>

A Sermon by C H Spurgeon

Acts 16:31. *And they said. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.*

You will remember that, when the children of Israel were settled in Canaan, God ordained that they should set apart certain cities to be called the cities of refuge, so that the manslayer might flee to them for security. If he killed another unawares, and had no malice aforethought, he might flee at once to the City of Refuge; and if he could enter its gates before the avenger of blood should overtake him, he would be secure.

We are told by the rabbis that once in the year, or oftener, the magistrates of the district were accustomed to survey the high roads which led to these cities. They carefully gathered up all the stones and took the greatest possible precautions that there should be no stumbling blocks in the way which might cause the poor fugitive to fall, or might by any means impede him in his hasty course. We hear, moreover, and we believe the tradition to be grounded in fact, that all along the road there were hand-posts with the word *Refuge* written very legibly on them, so that when the fugitive came to a crossroads, he would not need to question for a single moment which was the way of escape. But, seeing the well-known word *Refuge*, he kept on his breathless and headlong course until he entered the suburb of the city of refuge, and he was then at once completely safe.

Now God has prepared for the sons of men a City of Refuge, and the way to it is by *faith in Christ Jesus*. It is necessary, however, that the ministers of Christ should very often survey this road, lest there should be any stumbling-blocks in the path of the poor sinner. I propose this morning to go along it and, by God's grace, to remove any impediment which Satan may have laid upon the path. And may God so help me that this survey may be of spiritual benefit to all your souls, that any of you who have been made to stumble in the path of faith may now pluck up courage and run joyfully forward, hoping yet to escape from the fierce avenger of your sins.

Well may the minister be careful to keep the road of faith clear for the seeking sinner; for surely the sinner has a heavy heart to carry, and we ought to make the road as clear and as smooth as we can. We should make straight paths for the feet of these poor benighted souls. It should be our endeavour to cast loads of promises into every slough which runs across the path, so that it may be a king's highway and may be safe and easy for travelling for

<sup>1</sup>The first part of a sermon reprinted, with slight editing, from *The New Park Street Pulpit*, vol 6. It also appears in *The King's Highway*, a small selection of Spurgeon's sermons.

those weary feet which have to carry such a heavy heart. Besides, we must remember that the sinner will make stumbling-blocks enough for himself, even with our greatest and most scrupulous care to remove any others that may naturally lie in his way. For this is one of the sad follies of the poor desponding soul – that it spoils its own road. You have sometimes seen, perhaps, the newly-invented engine in the streets, the locomotive that lays down its own pathway and then picks it up again. Now the sinner is the very reverse of that; he spoils his own road before himself and then carries behind him all the mire and dirt of his own mishaps. Poor soul, he flings stones before himself, cuts out valleys and casts up mountains in his own pathway. Well may ministers, then, be careful to keep this road clear.

And, let me add, there is another weighty reason. Behind him comes the furious avenger of blood. O how swift he is! There is Moses armed with all the wrath of God, and Death following hard after him – a mounted rider upon his pale horse. And after Death there comes hell with all the powers and legions of Satan, and all athirst for blood and swift to slay. Make straight the road, O ministers of Christ, level the mountains, fill up the valleys, for this is a desperate flight – this flight of the sinner from his ferocious enemies towards the one City of Refuge, the atonement of Jesus Christ.

I have thus given the reasons why I am compelled in spirit to make this survey this morning. Come, O Spirit, the Comforter, and help us now, that every stone may be cast out of the high road to heaven.

The road to heaven, my brethren, is *by faith in Christ Jesus*. It is not by well-doing that you can be saved, though it is by ill-doing that you will be damned if you do not trust in Christ. Nothing that you can do can save you. After you are saved it will be your delightful privilege to walk in the ways of God and to keep His commandments; yet all your own attempts to keep the commandments previous to faith will but sink you deeper into the mire and will by no means contribute to your salvation.

The one road to heaven is by faith in Christ. To make it plainer still, there are, as the countryman said, but two steps to heaven – out of self into Christ; and then out of Christ into heaven. Faith is simply explained as *trusting in Christ*. I find that Christ commands me to believe in Him, to trust Him. I feel that there is no reason in myself why I should be allowed to trust Him. But He *commands* me to do so. Therefore, altogether apart from my character or from any preparation that I feel in myself, I obey the command and, sink or swim, I trust Christ. Now, that is faith – when with the eye shut as to all evidence of hope in ourselves, we take a leap in the dark right into the arms of an omnipotent Redeemer.

Faith is sometimes spoken of in Scripture as being a leaning upon Christ,

a casting of oneself upon Him, or as the old Puritans used to put it (using a somewhat hard word) it is recumbency on Christ – the leaning of the whole weight upon His cross, ceasing to stand by the strength of one’s own power, and resting wholly upon the Rock of ages. To leave the soul in the hands of Jesus is the very essence of faith. Faith is receiving Christ into our emptiness. There is Christ, like the conduit in the marketplace. As the water flows from the pipes, so does grace continually flow from Him. By faith I bring my empty pitcher and hold it where the water flows, and receive from its fulness, grace for grace. It is not the beauty of my pitcher, it is not even its cleanness that quenches my thirst: it is simply holding that pitcher to the place where water flows. Even so I am but the vessel, and my faith is the hand which presents the empty vessel to the flowing stream. It is the grace, and not the qualification of the receiver, which saves the soul. And though I hold that pitcher with a trembling hand and much of what I seek may be lost through my weakness, yet if the soul be but held to the fountain and so much as a single drop trickle into it, my soul is saved.

Faith is receiving Christ with the understanding and with the will, submitting everything to Him, taking Him to be my all in all, and agreeing to be henceforth nothing at all. Faith is ceasing from the creature and coming to the Creator. It is looking out of self to Christ, turning the eye entirely from any good thing that is here within me, and looking for every blessing to those open veins, to that poor bleeding heart, to that thorn-crowned head of Him whom God hath set forth to be “the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world”. Well, having thus described the way, I now come to my real business of removing these stones.

1. A very common impediment in the pathway of the soul that desires to be saved is *the recollection of its past life*. “O,” says the sinner, “I dare not trust Christ, because my past sins have been of an unusually black dye. I have been no common sinner, but I have been one singled out from the herd, a very monster in sin. I have taken the highest degree in the devil’s college and have become a master of Belial. I have learned to sit in the seat of the scornful and have taught others to rebel against God.”

Ah soul, I know very well what this impediment is, for once it lay in my way and very sorely did it trouble me. Before I thought upon my soul’s salvation, I dreamed that my sins were very few. All my sins were dead, as I imagined, and buried in the graveyard of forgetfulness. But that trumpet of conviction which aroused my soul to think of eternal things, sounded a resurrection-note to all my sins, and O how they rose up in multitudes more countless than the sands of the sea! Now I saw that my very thoughts were enough to damn me, that my words would sink me lower than the lowest

hell. And as for my acts of sin, they now began to be a stench in my nostrils, so that I could not bear them. I recollect the time when I thought I had rather have been a frog or a toad than have been made a man, when I reckoned that the most defiled creature, the most loathsome and contemptible, was a better thing than myself, for I had so grossly and grievously sinned against Almighty God.

Ah my brethren, it may be that this morning your old oaths are echoing back from the walls of your memory. You recollect how you have cursed God and you say, "Can I, dare I, trust Him whom I have cursed?" And your old lusts are now rising before you; midnight sins stare you in the face, and snatches of the lascivious song are being yelled in the ear of your poor convinced conscience. And all your sins, as they rise up, cry, "Depart, accursed one. Depart; you have sinned yourself out of grace. You are a condemned one. Depart. There is no hope, there is no mercy for you!"

Now permit me in the strength of God, and in His name, to remove this stumbling-block out of your way. Sinner, I tell you that all your sins, be they never so many, cannot destroy you if you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. If now you cast yourself simply on the merits of Jesus, though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as wool. *Only believe*. Dare to believe that Christ is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him. Take Him at His word and trust Him. And you have a warrant for doing so; remember it is written, "The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth us from *all sin*". You are therefore commanded to believe, however black a sinner you are. The command is your warrant. O may God help you to obey the command!

Now, just as you are, cast yourself on Christ. It is not the greatness of the sin that is the difficulty; it is the hardness of the sinner's heart. If now you are conscious of the most awful guilt, your guilt becomes as nothing in the eye of God when once He sees the blood of Christ sprinkled upon you. I tell you more: If your sins were ten thousand times as many as they are, yet the blood of Christ is able to atone for them all. Only dare to believe that. Now, by a venturesome faith, trust yourself in Christ. If you are the most sick of all the wretches that ever this divine Physician offered to cure, so much the more glory to *Him*. When a physician cures a man of some little finger-ache or some little disease, what credit does he get? But when he heals a man who is diseased all over, who has become a putrid mass, then there is glory to the physician. And so will there be to Christ when He saves you.

But to put this stumbling-block out of the way once for all. Remember, sinner, that all the while you do not believe in Christ you are adding to your sin this great sin of *not believing*, which is the *greatest sin* in the world. But if you obey God in this matter of putting your trust in Christ, God's own

Word guarantees that your faith shall be rewarded, and you shall find that your sins which are many are all forgiven you. By the side of Saul of Tarsus, and of her out of whom were cast seven devils, you shall one day stand. With the thief you shall sing of love divine, and with Manasseh you shall rejoice in Him who can wash away the foulest crimes. I pray God there may be someone in this great crowd today who may be saying in his heart: "You have described *me*. I do feel that I am the blackest sinner anywhere, but I will put my trust in Christ and Christ alone". Ah soul, God bless you; you are an accepted one. If this morning you can do this, I will be God's hostage that He will be true to you and true to His Son, for no sinner ever perished yet that dared to trust the precious blood of Christ.

2. Now let me endeavour to lift up and remove another stumbling-block. Many an awakened sinner is troubled because of *the hardness of his heart and the lack of what he thinks to be true penitence*. "O," says he, "I can believe that, however great my sins are, they can be forgiven, but I do not feel the evil of my sins as I ought:

"My heart how dreadful hard it is; how heavy here it lies!

Heavy and cold within my breast, just like a rock of ice."

"I cannot feel," says one; "I cannot weep; I have heard of the repentance of others, but I seem to be just like a stone. My heart is petrified, it will not quake at all the thunders of the law, it will not melt before all the wooings of Christ's love." Ah poor heart, this is a common stumbling-block in the way of those who are really seeking Christ. But let me ask you one question. Do you read anywhere in the Word of God that those who have hard hearts are not commanded to believe? Because if you can find such a passage as that, I will be sorry enough to see it, but then I may excuse you for saying, "I cannot trust Christ because my heart is hard." Do you not know that the Scripture runs thus: "Whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life"? Now, though your heart be never so hard, your believing saves you if you believe. And what is more, your believing shall yet soften your heart. If you cannot feel the need of a Saviour as you would, remember that, when you have a Saviour, you will begin then to find out more and more how great was your need of Him.

Why, I believe that many persons find out their needs by receiving the supply. Have you never walked along the street and, looking in at a shop window, have seen an article and said, "Why, that is just what I want". How do you know that? Why, you saw the thing, and then you wanted it. And I believe there is many a sinner who, when he is hearing about Christ Jesus, is led to say, "That is just what I want". Did he not know it before? No, poor soul, not till he saw Christ. I find my sense of need of Christ is ten times



more acute now than it was before I found Christ. I *thought* I wanted Him for a good many things then, but now I *know* I want Him for everything. I thought there were some things which I could not do without Him; but *now* I find that, without Him, I can do nothing.

But you say, "I must repent before I come to Christ". Find such a passage in the Word if you can. Does the Word not say, "Him hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins"? These graces are not of nature's spinning. We cannot make these in the loom of the creature. If you would know your need of Christ, take Him now by faith, and feeling shall follow in the rear. Trust Him now for everything. Dare to trust Him. Hard as your heart is, say, "Just as I am, without a plea but that Thou commandest me to come, I come to Thee". Your heart shall be softened by the sight of Christ, and love divine shall so sweetly commend itself to you, that the heart which terrors could not move shall be dissolved by love.

Do understand me, my dear hearers. This morning I want to preach, in the broadest manner I possibly can, the doctrine that we are justified by faith alone, that man is commanded to believe, and that altogether apart from anything in man, he has a right to believe. Not from any preparation that he feels, not from anything good he discerns in himself, but he has a right to believe, simply because he is commanded to believe. And if, relying on the fact that he is commanded, God the Holy Spirit enables him to believe, that faith will surely save the soul, and deliver him from the wrath to come. Let me then take up that stumbling stone about hardness of heart. O soul, trust Christ and your heart shall be softened. May God the Holy Spirit enable you to trust Him, hard heart and all, and then your hard heart shall soon be turned into a heart of flesh, and you shall love Him who has loved you.

3. Now, for a third stumbling-block. "O," says some poor soul, "I do not know whether I believe or not. Sometimes I do believe; but *it is such little faith* I have that I cannot think Christ can save me." Ah, there you are again, you see, looking to yourself. This has made many trip and fall. I pray God I may put this out of your way. Poor sinner, remember it is not the *strength* of your faith that saves you, but the *reality* of your faith. What is more, it is not even the reality of your faith that saves you, it is the object of your faith. If your faith is fixed on Christ, though it seems to be in itself a line no thicker than a spider's cobweb, it will hold your soul throughout time and eternity. Remember, it is not the thickness of this cable of faith, it is the strength of the anchor, which imparts strength to the cable and so shall hold your ship in the midst of the most fearful storm.

The faith that saves a man is sometimes so small that the man himself can-

not see it. A grain of mustard seed is the smallest of all seeds, and yet if you have but that quantity of faith, you are a saved man. Remember what the poor woman did. She did not come and take hold of Christ's person with her hand; she did not throw her arms about His knees; but she stretched out her finger. Then she did not touch Christ's feet or even His dress; she touched but the fringe of His garment and she was made whole. If your faith is as little as that, seek to get more of it, but still remember that it will save you. Jesus Christ Himself compares Little-faith to a smoking flax. Does it burn? Is there any fire at all? No, there is nothing but a little smoke, and that is most offensive. "Yes," says Jesus, "but I will not quench it." Again, He compares it to a bruised reed. Of what service is it? It is broken; you cannot bring music from it; it is but a reed when it is whole, and now it is a bruised reed. Break it, snap it, throw it away? "No," he says; "I will not break the bruised reed." Now, if that is the faith you have, the faith of the smoking flax, the faith of the bruised reed, you are saved.

You will have many a trial and many a trouble in going to heaven with so little faith as that. When a boat has only a little wind, there must be much tugging at the oar; but still there will be enough wind to land you in glory if you simply trust Christ, be that trust never so feeble. Remember that a little child belongs to the human race as much as the greatest giant; and so a babe in grace is as truly a child of God as is Mr Great-heart, who can fight all the giants on the road. And you may be as much an heir of heaven in your minority, in the infancy of your grace, as you will be when you shall have expanded into the full-grown Christian and have become a perfect man in Christ Jesus. It is not, I tell you, the *strength* of your faith, but the *object* of your faith. It is the blood, not the hyssop – not the hand that smote the lintel but the blood – that secured the Israelite in the day when God's vengeance passed by. Let that stumbling-block be taken out of the way.

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It was a great relief to the wretched bosom of the Prodigal, and was all indeed that remained to keep him from the blackness of despair, to know that it was not his father who sent him forth into the condition of a swine herd and bade him satisfy his hunger on the husks on which they fed. . . . And can it be less comforting for the thoughtful mind, when awakening to the sad heritage of sin and death, under which humanity lies burdened, to know that this ascends no higher than the first parent of the human family and that, as originally settled by God, the condition of mankind was in all respects "very good".

It was doubtless through an infirmity, a defection from the gentle and forbearing spirit of the gospel, that Paul and Barnabas fell out between themselves, since in the matter of dispute no vital truth was at stake. But it was no infirmity, it was a noble proof and exhibition of love, when Paul withstood Peter to his face at Antioch for acting in a manner which tended to mislead the disciples.

*Patrick Fairbairn*

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

### 1. "A New Sort of Affection"

In the eyes of B B Warfield, "Jonathan Edwards stands out as the one figure of real greatness in the intellectual life of colonial America".<sup>2</sup> Most commentators would agree on the greatness of Edwards' contribution to America's intellectual life, but Warfield is more specific: "From the first he was recognised as a remarkable preacher, as arresting and awakening as he was instructive. Filled himself with the profoundest sense of the heinousness of sin, as an offence against the majesty of God and an outrage of His love, he set himself to arouse his hearers to some realisation of the horror of their condition as objects of the divine displeasure, and of the incredible goodness of God in intervening for their salvation. Side by side with the most moving portrayal of God's love in Christ and of the blessedness of communion with Him, he therefore set, with the most startling effect, equally vivid pictures of the dangers of unforgiven sin and the terrors of the lost estate. The effect of such preaching, delivered with the force of the sincerest conviction, was overwhelming."<sup>3</sup> It was such preaching that God was pleased to bless to the conversion of many souls in more than one revival of religion.

Jonathan was born on 5 October 1703, the one son among the 11 children who made up the family of Timothy Edwards, minister of East Windsor in the New England state of Connecticut. Jonathan grew up in an atmosphere of religious awakening; in later life he would note that there were at least four outpourings of the Holy Spirit during his father's ministry. During one of these awakenings, when he was perhaps just 7 or 8, he became very concerned for his soul. He experienced great delight in religion – what he later called "much self-righteous pleasure". With two of his schoolmates he built a booth in a swamp, in an out-of-the-way spot, where they could go to pray. Jonathan himself had secret places of his own in the woods where he used to go away by himself; he could even say, "I seemed to be in my element when I engaged in religious duties".<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>The first in a series of articles presenting the material from which were taken the papers presented to the Theological Conference of 2003 and the Youth Conference of 2005.

<sup>2</sup>*Studies in Theology*, Banner of Truth Trust reprint, 1988, p 515.

<sup>3</sup>*Studies in Theology*, pp 523,524.

<sup>4</sup>Sereno E Dwight, *Memoirs of Jonathan Edwards*, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, edited by Edward Hickman, Banner of Truth Trust reprint, 1974, vol 1, p xii. This set of two huge volumes contains a great deal of Edwards' writing but suffers from the smallness of the print. Yale University Press are in process of publishing an edition of Edwards' works in 27 volumes; these contain material which has never before seen the light of day, but will not contain all his writings, and are very expensive.

But his delight in religion did not last. In later years, he looked back to much of his youth as a time when holiness seemed “a melancholy, morose, sour and unpleasant thing”.<sup>5</sup> He commented on his time of great religious activity: “I am ready to think many are deceived with such affections and such a kind of delight as I then had in religion and mistake it for grace”. And his subsequent observations no doubt reinforced such an assessment.

During his time at college – at what was later to become Yale University – he was at times “very uneasy”, especially when he was ill with pleurisy, when God, as he expressed it, “brought me nigh to the grave and shook me over the pit of hell. And yet it was not long after my recovery before I fell again into my old ways of sin. But God would not suffer me to go on with any quietness. I had great and violent inward struggles.” Edwards spoke of his repeated resolutions to give up outward sin and to perform many religious duties seriously. But such striving after salvation in his own strength was doomed to failure. In the final year of his BA course and in the first year of the MA course which followed, he became more and more aware that he needed an inward change and a salvation which he could not bring about by his own efforts. “I was indeed brought”, he wrote, “to seek salvation in a manner that I never was before. I felt a spirit to part with all things in the world for an interest in Christ.”<sup>6</sup>

It was probably in the early summer of 1721, when he was still 17, that Edwards became conscious that the great change had taken place. He looked back on what he had experienced and said, “The first instance that I remember of that sort of inward sweet delight in God and divine things that I have lived much in since, was on reading those words: ‘Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen’ (1 Tim 1:17). As I read the words, there came into my soul, and was as it were diffused through it, a sense of the glory of the Divine Being; a new sense, quite different from anything I ever experienced before. Never any words of Scripture seemed to me as these words did. I thought with myself, how excellent a Being that was, and how happy I should be if I might enjoy that God, and be wrapped up in Him in heaven, and be as it were swallowed up in Him for ever! I kept saying, and as it were singing over, these words of Scripture to myself; and went to pray to God that I might enjoy Him, and prayed in a manner quite different from what I used to, with a new sort of affection.”<sup>7</sup>

Yet he did not at first realise that there was anything of a saving nature in

<sup>5</sup>George M Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards, A Life*, Yale University Press, 2003, p 36. This is the most recent biography of Edwards.

<sup>6</sup>Dwight, *Memoirs*, p xii.

<sup>7</sup>Dwight, *Memoirs*, p xiii.

his experience. But he went on: “From about that time, I began to have a new kind of apprehensions and ideas of Christ and the work of redemption and the glorious way of salvation by Him. An inward, sweet sense of these things at times came into my heart, and my soul was led away in pleasant views and contemplations of them. And my mind was greatly engaged to spend my time in reading and meditating on Christ, on the beauty and excellency of His Person and the lovely way of salvation by free grace in Him. I found no books so delightful to me as those that treated of these subjects.” And he made this fundamental distinction between his present enjoyment of the things of religion and what he had when he was younger: “Those former delights *never reached the heart*, and did not arise from any sight of the divine excellency of the things of God, or any taste of the soul-satisfying and life-giving good there is in them”.<sup>8</sup>

Not yet 19, Edwards decided to leave Yale without finishing his second degree and was licensed to preach the gospel. He was undoubtedly young – extraordinarily young – for the work of the ministry, but Samuel Miller, the Princeton professor, gave, in his *Life* of Edwards, this testimony to his suitability: “The character of his piety, from its very commencement, bears the stamp of unusual depth, fervour, clearness and governing power. . . . To some readers a portion of this language may appear to indicate an excited imagination and a state of feeling bordering on enthusiasm. . . . The truth is, he entered more heartily and thoroughly into the character of the great object of pious emotion than most Christians do, and no wonder that he spoke a corresponding language.”<sup>9</sup> In a very early sermon, perhaps his first, Edwards showed how heartily and thoroughly he had entered into the spirit of true religion: “When a man is enlightened savingly by Christ, he is, as it were, brought into a new world. . . . The excellency of religion and the glorious mysteries of the gospel seemed as a strange thing to him before, but now . . . he sees with his own eyes and admires and is astonished”.<sup>10</sup>

He began to preach to a small congregation of Scots-Irish Presbyterian

<sup>8</sup>Dwight, *Memoirs*, p xiii.

<sup>9</sup>Quoted in Iain H Murray, *Jonathan Edwards, A New Biography*, Banner of Truth Trust, 1987, p 45. This is undoubtedly the best biography to date, and Murray’s spiritual understanding of Edwards is an important factor in its success. Marsden (p xvii) describes it as “a well-documented updating of biographies in the honourable but uncritical tradition of Edwards’ earlier admirers”, which is no doubt a signal that his own work is sufficiently critical of its subject to be acceptable in the academic circles in which he himself moves. However, Marsden’s handling of Edwards is largely satisfactory and it does benefit from some more recent research. Stephen J Nicholls gives a useful introduction to Edwards’ life and writings in his *Jonathan Edwards: A Guided Tour to His Life and Thought, Presbyterian & Reformed*, 2001.

<sup>10</sup>Quoted in Murray, *Jonathan Edwards*, p 46.

settlers in New York in August 1722. From that period, 24 manuscript sermons survive, and one scholar has commented that the young preacher “manages to touch upon most of the issues and themes of his later writings”.<sup>11</sup> Clearly, not only his piety, but also his knowledge of spiritual things, bore the stamp of unusual depth at this early stage in his life.

After going to New York, he wrote in his *Personal Narrative*: “My longings after God and holiness were very much increased. Pure and humble, holy and heavenly Christianity appeared exceeding amiable to me. I felt a burning desire to be in everything a complete Christian, and conformed to the blessed image of Christ. . . . I had an eager thirsting after progress in these things. . . . It was my continual strife day and night, and constant inquiry, how I should be more holy, and live more holily, and more becoming a child of God and a disciple of Christ. . . . The heaven I desired was a heaven of holiness – to be with God and to spend my eternity in divine love and holy communion with Christ. My mind was very much taken up with contemplations on heaven and the enjoyment there, and living there in perfect holiness, humility and love; and it used at that time to appear a great part of the happiness of heaven that there the saints could express their love to Christ. It appeared to me a great clog and burden that what I felt within I could not express as I desired.”<sup>12</sup>

Clearly also the character of his piety was maturing rapidly. Yet there were days when he felt cold and downcast, probably arising, in part at least, from the unsettled state of the congregation. He was sometimes quite distressed when he thought about the sins of his past life and how much time he had allowed to go by before he “began to be truly religious” – in spite of the fact that he was noted for the orderliness of his life and that he was no more than a teenager when the great change took place.

During his time in New York, and for some months afterwards, he began to note down a series of 70 resolutions which were intended to guide him for the future. Among them were: (4) Never to do any manner of thing, whether in soul or body, less or more, but what tends to the glory of God . . . (5) Never to lose one moment of time, but to improve it in the most profitable way I possibly can. (7) Never to do anything which I should be afraid to do if it were the last hour of my life. (16) Never to speak evil of anyone, so that it shall tend to his dishonour, more or less, upon no account except for some real good. (28) To study the Scriptures so steadily, constantly and frequently, as that I may find, and plainly perceive, myself to grow in the knowledge of the same. (42) Frequently to renew the dedication of myself to God, which

<sup>11</sup>Wilson H Kinnach, quoted in Murray, *Jonathan Edwards*, p 46.

<sup>12</sup>Quoted in Dwight, *Memoirs*, p xiv.

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was made at my baptism, which I solemnly renewed when I was received into the communion of the Church . . . (53) To improve every opportunity, when I am in the best and happiest frame of mind, to cast and venture my soul on the Lord Jesus Christ, to trust and confide in Him and consecrate myself wholly to Him; that from this I may have assurance of my safety, knowing that I confide in my Redeemer. (62) Never to do anything but my duty, and then, according to Ephesians 6:6-8, to do it willingly and cheerfully, as unto the Lord and not to man: knowing that whatever good thing any man doth, the same shall he receive of the Lord. (70) Let there be something of benevolence in all that I speak.<sup>13</sup>

Yet he was learning “by experience that, let me make resolutions and do what I will, with never so many inventions, it is all nothing and to no purpose at all without the motions of the Spirit of God; for if the Spirit of God should be as much withdrawn from me always as for the week past, notwithstanding all I do, I should not grow, but should languish and miserably fade away. I perceive if God should withdraw His Spirit a little more, I should not hesitate to break my resolutions and should soon arrive at my old state.”<sup>14</sup>

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## The Eternal Sonship of Christ<sup>1</sup>

### 4. Application to the Life of the Church

*Rev J R Tallach*

The teaching of the eternal Sonship gives us a measure of the condescension of Christ. He who made the world, and was in a peculiarly close and beloved relationship to the Father, took to Himself a true body and a reasonable soul and was born, lived and died so that His people – sinners as they were – might live eternally. The spirit of humility is required of us in these very terms: “Let this mind be in you which was also in Jesus Christ” (Phil 2:5).

The love of the Father in giving His Son is especially commended to us in the Word: “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life”. The thought here is well expressed by Charnock: this gift “cannot be transcended with a choicer; He is, as it were, come to the last mite of His treasure. And though He could create millions of worlds for us, He cannot give a greater Son to us. He could abound in the expressions of His power

<sup>13</sup>Dwight, *Memoirs*, pp xx-xxii.

<sup>14</sup>Dwight, *Memoirs*, p xxiv.

<sup>1</sup>This is the final part of a paper at the Theological Conference in December 2004.

in new creations of worlds which have not yet been seen, and in the lustre of His wisdom in more stately structures; but if He could frame as many worlds as there are mites of dust and matter in this, and make every one of them as bright and glorious as the sun, yet He hath not a choicer gift to bless those brighter worlds withal than He hath conferred upon this. Had the Father given Himself in person, He had given one first in order but not greater in essence and glorious perfections.”<sup>2</sup>

This doctrine gives us a sure and certain foundation for preaching the gospel. Sinners are dead in trespasses and in sins, and the valley is full of bones which are very dry; but we preach One whose life is the life of God. His generation is from eternity and “because He continueth ever . . . He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them” (Heb 7:24,25). We may commend this Saviour unreservedly. We may fill our hands with His service and do the duty of each day with the utmost confidence. His Word will not return unto Him void.

Belief in Jesus as the eternal Son of God is one of the great marks of spiritual life. Peter, speaking for those who were determined not to go away from the Lord, said, “To whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that Thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God” (John 6:68,69). Again, “He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself” (1 John 5:10). The man born blind knew Jesus after the flesh and had experienced His power and compassion, yet did not know Him savingly. Jesus finds him and uses the arrow of this truth to bring him to Himself: “Dost thou believe on the Son of God?” (John 9:35).

This doctrine gives the security of sonship to all His people. Since the generation of Christ was from eternity, He can say, “Thou lovedst Me before the foundation of the world” (John 17:24). He came to save His people from their sins. “When the fullness of time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that are under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying Abba Father” (Gal 4:4-6). Since the love between the Father and the elder Brother is from eternity, so it is said to all His brethren, the adopted sons of God, “I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee” (Jer 31:3). And David says “All my springs are in Thee” (Ps 87:7).

In conclusion, the doctrine of the eternal Sonship of Jesus Christ is fundamental to the health of the Church of God, both doctrinally and experimentally. Belief in this revelation, and faith in the eternal Son, is the rock against

<sup>2</sup>*The Divine Attributes*, London, 1842 ed, p 573.



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which the gates of hell shall not prevail. The implication of the Saviour's words to Peter is that the gates of hell would seek to prevail against this foundational truth, and the history of the Church provides many instances of powerful, subtle attacks on this doctrine, sometimes from the most surprising quarters. These attacks continue in our own day, and it is our wisdom, as well as our privilege, faithfully to defend the truth as it is in Jesus. But if it is a time to speak, it is also a time to be silent before this profound mystery. As Isaac Ambrose says, "Here voice is silent, the mind fails, not only mine, but the angels".

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## Dying in the Lord<sup>1</sup>

*John Flavel*

What would you be the better if your coffin were made of beaten gold, or your gravestone set thick with glittering diamonds? But if you die in the Lord – that is, are interested in and united to the Lord – you shall carry six grounds of comfort with you to your graves, the least of which is not to be purchased with the wealth of both the Indies.

1. The covenant of God holds firmly with His very dust, all the days of its appointed time in the grave. So much Christ tells us: "I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob: God is not the God of the dead, but of the living" (Matt 22:32) – which is to say: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are naturally dead, but inasmuch as God, long after their deaths, proclaimed Himself their God still, therefore they are all alive, federally alive to God. They live – that is, their covenant-relation still lives. "Whether we live . . . or die," says the apostle, "we are the Lord's" (Rom 14:8). Now, what an encouragement is here! I am as much the Lord's in the state of the dead as I was in the state of the living; death puts an end to all other relations and bonds, but the bond of the covenant rots not in the grave; that dust is still the Lord's.

2. As God's covenant with our very bodies is indissolvable, so God's love to our very dust is inseparable. "I am the God of Abraham." God looks down from heaven into the graves of His saints with delight and looks with complacency on that pile of dust which those that once loved it cannot now behold without loathing. The apostle states explicitly that death does not separate the believer from the love of God (Rom 8:33). As at first it was not our natural comeliness or beauty that drew, or engaged, His love to us; so neither

<sup>1</sup>Taken, with slight editing, from a sermon on John 19:41,42 in *The Works of John Flavel*, vol 1. Flavel (1628-91), minister of Dartmouth, was one of the best-known of the Puritans.

will He cease to love us when that beauty is gone and we become objects of loathing to all flesh. When a husband cannot endure to see a wife, or a wife her husband, but says of them that were once dear and pleasant, as Abraham of his beloved Sarah: "Bury my dead out of my sight"; yet then the Lord delights in it as much as ever. The goldsmith does not value the dust of his gold as God values the dust of His saints, for all these precious particles are united to Christ.

3. As God's love will be with you in the grave, so God's providence shall take order about your graves, when they shall be dug for you. And be sure He will not dig your graves till you are fit to be put into them; He will bring you thither in the best time; "Thou shalt come to thy grave as a shock of corn in its season" (Job 5:26). You shall be ripe and ready before God will house you there. It is said of David that "after he had served his generation by the will of God, he fell asleep" (Acts 13:36). O how holy and wise is that will of God that so orders our death! And how right it is that our will should be bound by it!

4. If you are in Christ, as God's covenant holds with you in the grave, His love is inseparable from your dust. As His providence shall give order when the grave shall be dug for you, so His pardons have loosed all the bonds of guilt from you before you lie down in the grave, so that you shall not die in your sins. Ah friends, what a comfort it is that you are the Lord's freemen in the grave! Sin is a bad bed-fellow and a worse grave-fellow. It is a grievous threatening: "Ye shall die in your sins" (John 8:24). Better be cast alive into a pit among dragons and serpents than dead in your graves among your sins. O what a terrible word is that: "His bones are full of the sins of his youth, which shall lie down with him in the dust" (Job 20:11). But all the saints are delivered from the company of sin in the grave. God's full, free and final pardons have shut guilt out of your graves.

5. Whenever you come to your graves, you shall find the enmity of the grave slain by Christ; it is no enemy. Nay, you will find it a friendly, privileged place to you; it will be as sweet to you that are in Christ as a soft bed in a still, quiet chamber to one that is weary and sleepy. Therefore it is said: "Death is yours" (1 Cor 3:21,22) – yours as a privilege, your friend. There you shall find sweet rest in Jesus; you shall be hurried, pained, troubled no more.

6. If you are in Christ, know this for your comfort: that your own Lord Jesus Christ keeps the keys of all the chambers of death. As He unlocks the door of death, when He lets you in, so He will open it again for you when you awake, to let you out. And from the time He opens to let you in till the time He opens to let you out, He Himself is awake and watches by you while you sleep there. He says, "I . . . have the keys of . . . death" (Rev 1:18).

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O then, as you expect peace or rest in the chambers of death, get union with Christ. A grave with Christ is a comfortable place.

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## The Old Landmark<sup>1</sup>

A Sermon Outline by *John Kennedy*

Proverbs 23:10a. *Remove not the old landmark.*

**T**his verse calls attention to the old landmark and the command regarding it, to the field of the fatherless and the command regarding it.

***The landmark between godliness and the form of it.***

This landmark may be removed by unwatchful living.  
To walk in the fear of the Lord is to keep up the fence.  
Landmarks are of no use to the blind, they do not see them.  
They accept substitutes for true godliness.

***The landmark between true and false doctrine.***

This landmark is drawn in the Word of God.  
The blind claim liberty to think and proclaim as they choose.  
This is the beginning of infidelity in the Churches.  
This, if not repented of, will lead to judicial blindness.

***The landmark between the scriptural and the unscriptural.***

A question as to this is now raised in regard to instrumental music.  
This is new in connection with Presbyterian worship in Scotland.  
This arises from a desire after fashion and worldly society.  
New Testament praise is “the fruit of our lips” (Heb 13:15).

***The landmark between Church and State.***

This is an alliance which leaves the Church free to obey Christ.  
Any other alliance is slavery to the world.  
The resources are helpful in doing the work of Christ.  
The alliance is a guarantee for the Churches’ liberty.

***The duty to hold fast.***

“Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown” (Rev 3:11).  
How sad to see men attempting to deprive the Church of her crown.  
The only crown for such heads is that of shame.  
Already they have shorn the Church of much of her strength.

***Application.***

Beware of taking part in the removal of the landmarks.  
Beware of removing any of the old landmarks of truth to the saints.  
“Their Redeemer is mighty. He will plead their cause with thee.”

<sup>1</sup>Preached in Inverness on 2 July 1882.

# The Uses of the Moral Law<sup>1</sup>

## 1. To Mankind in General

*John Colquhoun*

1. The law is of use to show sinners the holy nature and will of God, or to show them the infinite holiness and rectitude of His nature and will. Jehovah said to the Israelites in the wilderness: "I am the Lord your God; ye shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and ye shall be holy; for I am holy" (Lev 11:44). "The law is holy," says the Apostle Paul, "and the commandment holy, and just, and good" (Rom 7:12).

2. It serves to inform them of their duty to God, to themselves, and to others around them; and to oblige them, by His sovereign authority, to perform it. "He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" (Mic 6:8).

3. It is of use likewise to restrain men from much sin. By its peremptory commands and awful threatenings, it serves in some measure to keep them in awe, and to frighten them from committing many external acts of sin in which they otherwise would freely indulge themselves. It is of use, by its terrible denunciations, to curb those who, destitute of every good principle, would rush forward to all manner of sin, and to deter them, through fear of punishment, from many gross enormities. In this view, it serves as a curb to hold sinners within the limits of external decency, and to prevent the world from becoming a scene of robbery and blood. Accordingly Paul says that "the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers, and murderers of mothers" (1 Tim 1:9-10).

4. The law tends also to excite and encourage sinners to the practice of virtue, from the consideration that even the external resemblance of true virtue will often be rewarded with exemption from many outward calamities, and with the possession of many outward advantages (Is 1:19). Nay, it tends to impel sinners to virtuous actions, even from the consideration that, in the event of performing them and afterward dying in an unregenerate state, their punishment in hell will be more tolerable than if they had not performed them. Although sinners cannot, by their obedience to the law, procure for themselves a title to heaven – yea, though they should never be driven by the law from themselves to Christ for righteousness and salvation but should die

<sup>1</sup>Reprinted, with slight editing, from *A Treatise on the Law and the Gospel*. Colquhoun (1748-1827) was minister of Leith and one of the best writers of his time in Scotland. His volume on *Saving Faith* is due to be reprinted soon by Free Presbyterian Publications, DV.

under condemnation – yet the more external obedience they yield to the law, the lighter will their punishment be (Luke 12:47-48). They cannot, by their obedience to the law, merit even the lowest place in heaven; but they can by it obtain for themselves an exemption from the lowest place in hell.

5. Moreover, it is of special use to convince sinners of their sinfulness and misery, and also of their utter inability, by any righteousness and strength of their own, to recover themselves from their state of sin and misery. “What things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law; that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore, by the works of the law, there shall no flesh be justified in His sight; for by the law is the knowledge of sin” (Rom 3:19-20). And again, “But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful” (Rom 7:13). The precepts of the law serve to convince men of their sins of omission, and the prohibitions of it serve to convince them of their sins of commission. There are various evils which men would never have known to be sins unless the holy law of God had shown the sinfulness of them. Accordingly Paul says, “I had not known sin but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet” (Rom 7:7).

While the precepts of the law are of use to convince sinners of the reality and sinfulness of their sins, the threatenings of it are employed to show them the tremendous wrath and curse of God due to them for their transgressions (Gal 3:10). And by disclosing to them the deep depravity of their nature, the precepts and threatenings of the law serve, in the hand of the Spirit, to convince them of their utter inability to recover themselves, and so to humble them under a painful sense of their sinfulness and misery (Rom 3:9).

6. Last, the law serves to show them their extreme need of Christ, and of His righteousness and salvation. “Wherefore then serveth the law?” asks the Apostle. “It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made” (Gal 3:19). It awakens their consciences to a conviction of their guilt, and to a dread of everlasting punishment; and so discovers to them their absolute need of Christ and His perfect righteousness for their justification in the sight of God (Gal 3:24, Rom 10:4).

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Praise is a setting forth of God’s honour, a lifting up of His name, a displaying of the trophy of His goodness, a proclaiming of His excellence, a spreading of His renown, a breaking open of the box of ointment, whereby the sweet savour of God’s name is sent abroad into the world.

Wicked men are bound to praise God, but they are not fit to praise Him. None but a living Christian can tune God’s praise. Wicked men are dead in sin. How can they who are dead lift up God’s praises?

*Thomas Watson*

## The Accepted Offering<sup>1</sup>

Henry Law

Leviticus 9: 24. *There came a fire out from before the Lord, and consumed upon the altar the burnt-offering and the fat.*

A train of solemn rites preceded the priests' admission to their functions. The entrance path was long and holy. None might draw near uncalled, uncleansed, without atonement made through blood, without the sprinklings of anointing oil (Lev 8:24,30). Through a whole week the victims died and consecrating services flowed on. During these days the sacred tent enclosed the devoted band. They might not pass its separating gate. The world was left. A barrier parted them from common life. They dwelt shut out from man – shut in with God (Lev 8:33).

Here is a teaching voice for all who boast that they are Christ's. The priestly office shadows out their calling. They have a high employ. Their rank is "royal priesthood" (1 Pet 2:9). They have new natures and they do new work. All in God's household minister.

Reader, have you approached by rightful steps the servant's place? The path is here marked out. Is the blood used as your atoning plea? Is there the Spirit's inward witness of adoption to the family of grace? Is the world shunned as mire? Is life regarded as a dedicated walk? They who are truly called pass this admission-gate. In heaven a perfect priesthood serves in perfect praise. But consecration here is prelude to that bliss. Say, have you more than empty name? God's service is reality. Is your heart really His? Perhaps you doubt. O then, awake and strive to enter by the only door. Space is yet yours. But death is on the wing. It may be almost sped. Alas the woe if it shall find you not a priest of Christ! Are your signs clear? All who serve Him wear livery – washed in His blood, bright in world-shunning grace.

The seven days of dedication passed. The eighth dawn saw the services complete (Lev 9:1). There is no more delay. The holy office is assumed. The life is now one cloud of incense to the Lord. From morn to night, the willing priests discharge foreshadowing forms.

Ministers of Christ, your work may differ, but should your zeal be less? Altars no more are raised. All vanished in the cross. Victims no longer die. No lights are lit, and no incense burns. The Sun of Righteousness is risen. Twilight ordinances fled from its glorious orb. But still wide fields of labour open. Your life is to proclaim the Lamb of God, the blood once and for ever shed. Souls are undone because they know not Christ, the true end of rites.

<sup>1</sup>Taken, with slight editing, from Law's *The Gospel in Leviticus*.

Your voice must never cease the cry: Behold the truth; bathe in this stream; trust in this death; plead this atoning cross. Shame would it be if legal priests relaxed not typifying work, and your hands wearied in uplifting the grand substance – Christ.

In this first day of priestly work a striking circumstance occurs. When all the offerings had been duly made, Moses and Aaron seek the holy tent (Lev 9: 23). For a short season they retire. They leave the busy scene. It is their wish in stillness to seek God's clearer face. He was before them in the public rite. But calm retreat would give more calm approach.

The true believer labours in the open day. In busy haunts of busy men he strains the toiling nerve. The world is the wide field. There are the precious souls which need the wholesome warning and the faithful word. There sin abounds and misery dwells and ignorance spreads its blinding veil. There Satan rules with deathful sway. In this wild waste, the good seed must be cast. In graceless crowds, grace must be manfully displayed. But private hours gain strength for public zeal. When all is still, the opening heavens pour down their dew.

In quietude the soul draws nearer to Christ's arms. Then tender whispers testify of love. Then truth unfolds the wondrous page, and promises assume substantial form, and distant prospects brighten to view. It is apart from men that grace takes deeper root, temptations wither, the world's false glitter fades, the inner man is strengthened to resist, and loins are girded for the battlefield. The soldier of the cross goes forth from solitude to fight his fight. He who seeks God alone has God in public by his side.

Moses and Aaron soon return. But they come not with empty hands; they are enriched with the best gifts. Here is sweet evidence of gainful commerce with the Lord. Laden with good, they haste to scatter good around. Their souls are redolent of heaven. "They blessed the people" (Lev 9:23). The blessed of the Lord bless earth. And they are the most blessed who most throng the mercy seat. The wise, the rich, the learned and the strong are tools employed by God to move the world's machine. But it is piety which strews real weal on men. They who descend from Zion's heights are as the clouds which drop refreshing rain.

And now a sudden marvel fills all minds with awe. While blessings fall from blessing saints, heaven brightens with resplendent signs. Glory shines round. Fire is sent forth. But wherefore? Is it to seize the guilty sons of men? Is it to hurl on them deserved wrath? Far otherwise. It comes with olive branch of peace. It seals with heaven's own seal the atoning rites. It settles on the altar. It feeds on the victim as its feast. Thus it brings evidence of God's delight. Thus it fills hearts with tranquil peace. The flame with blazing

tongue proclaims: Here is the sacrifice which God selects, approves, calls men to bring, and never will refuse.

Reader, this is the fact which now addresses you. The altar victims were the shadow of Christ. The attesting fire speaks God's acceptance of His dying Son. Faith therefore loves this scene. It is one of the wells from which it gladly draws new joy. It is one of the meadows of its richest food. But faith soon asks, What is the antitype of the descending flame? It opens the clear gospel page. There distinct testimonies answer to this approving sign. Let some now pass before delighted gaze.

The mighty God has scarcely taken human frame when heralds speed from the high courts. An angel's shout announces tidings of transcendent joy: a Saviour given, a Saviour born, a Saviour in man's home. The host of heaven take up the wondrous strain. The echoing skies cast back the chorus: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will towards men" (Luke 2:14). The sealing fire here falls. Can evidence be more complete? Here is the assurance that the Infant lives, sent by the Father to save souls. It must be so, or wherefore do those joyful wings expand? It must be so; that messenger cannot mislead. Then venture on the incarnate God. Commit your soul to Him. You may appeal to God: I take Him, because Thy signet stamps Him as Thy chosen Lamb.

The day arrives when Christ must be distinctly shown. As surety of His flock, He must fulfil each righteous ordinance. Therefore He hastens to the baptismal stream. Let all eyes now behold. While He uplifts His soul in prayer, the heavens above cast back their gates. The Spirit, like a dove, flies to the lowly suppliant, and the Father's sovereign voice is heard: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Luke 3:21,22). The fire again descends. O precious token! The Father and the Spirit join to seal and to anoint our Lord. Rich is the mercy of this pledge. The thought will sometimes rise: Is Christ indeed sufficient? Sins are a mighty load; can He sustain them? The claims of justice are a long roll; can He pay all? The Father's voice decides. It leaves no spot on which a tottering doubt can rest. He cries, "Well pleased".

Reader, will not you respond, "Well pleased"? Receive Him with adoring love. Cling to Him with most holy rapture. In Him you cannot fail. In Him you must prevail. He is Salvation by the Father's will, the Father's word. Cleaving to Him, you cannot be cast out. He is the Father's chiefest joy. And, seen in Him, the Father loves you as He loves His Son. As time rolls on, select disciples view a wondrous sight. Jesus withdraws the veil which hides His glory. He stands before them in more than brightness of the midday sun. His visage and His robes outvie all light. Here is



full proof that deity is His right – Jesus transfigured must be very God.

But now a superadded testimony sounds. The fire again descends. The Father again speaks. The note is still the same: “This is My beloved Son”. My soul, here is another call to you. Take Christ as your beloved one. Haste to respond: Great Lord, each inmost fibre is pure love to Thee. Each pulse is an adoring throb. The voice follows: “Hear Him”. Heed the wise counsel. He, whom the Father thus attests, is worthy of all notice of all ears. Happy, thrice happy, he who can reply: I hear the Good Shepherd’s voice; I gladly follow. He leads me to His wounds, and I am clean. He calls me to His side and whispers peace. He bids me climb a heavenward path. He soon will seat me by His side.

Reader, approach the bitter garden-scene. Here all the waves of anguish beat on the Redeemer’s soul. His every look and every cry make known that He is wrestling with extremest pangs. Each pore weeps blood. But whence this overwhelming grief? The hour is still. The place is deep retreat. No hostile bands appear. None but His loved ones are in view.

It is an unseen arm which now arrests Him. The sword of hidden wrath now really pierces to the quick. The fire from God’s right hand now truly falls and fiercely deals with the self-offered Lamb. Each inward travail shows that God is now exacting debts from Him, until the boundless price is paid. My soul intently gaze. You see wrath visibly outpoured on Christ. Then be content; the cup is drained. No drop remains for you who believe.

Another scene is near. The death is died. The grave contains its precious captive. The stone is rolled. The seal is fixed. The guard is set. The hand of justice has borne Jesus off. The prison gates are closed. Where are our hopes? Are claims all satisfied? Will God declare that He demands no more? Will there be manifested proof that all His people are redeemed?

Draw near and witness. The grave restores the mighty dead. Jesus appears released – alive. Here the fire of satisfaction falls. The topstone of acceptance is brought forth. The pyramid of God’s approval is complete. Christ is accredited as the full Saviour of the fully saved. When Israel’s host beheld the fire from God, what was their feeling? “They shouted and fell on their faces” (Lev 9: 24). Sweet joy was theirs. Deep adoration warmed each heart. Exulting praise burst forth. Profoundest worship was their instant act.

Believer, do the like. God sends His Son to seek, to save. He lays on Him your every sin. He gives you every pledge that He approves, attests, receives and delights in the accepted Offering. Witness after witness from His courts assures that pardon, acquittal, release from every woe, and admission to the home of heaven, are yours. O then let every breath praise God! Let every hour of every day be inward worship!

## Book Review

***Majesty in Misery***, vol 3, *Calvary's Mournful Mountain*, by C H Spurgeon, published by the Banner of Truth Trust, hardback, 392 pages, £14.50, obtainable from the Free Presbyterian Bookroom.

This volume consists of 25 sermons dealing with the experience of our Lord from when Pilate delivered Him to be crucified until His burial. Preached by Spurgeon (1834-1892) between 1856 and 1890, at least 16 of them date from the 80s and 90s. They focus particularly upon the sufferings of Christ and conform to the preacher's observation: "Holy Scripture, by its example, teaches us great reticence about the sufferings of Jesus" (p 29).

Spurgeon needs no introduction to Free Presbyterian readers. He was respected by the conservative element in the old Free Church, as was shown by John Kennedy having him preach at the opening of the new Free Church in Dingwall in 1870, after hearing him several times while convalescing in London. He was regarded as an ally in the battle against the theological "down-grade movement" in late-nineteenth-century Scotland as is demonstrated in the reproduction, in 1897, at the time of the Dods and Bruce controversy, in the *Free Presbyterian Magazine* (vol 2, p 197), of part of an article from *The Sword and Trowel* in which he wrote: "The question in debate at the Disruption was secondary compared with that now at issue. It is Bible or no Bible, Atonement or no Atonement, which we have now to settle".

Not all his interpretations or expressions may be endorsed by us. As is true of his preaching generally, some of these sermons are more strictly expository of their texts than others. Some are topical, based on ideas suggested by their texts. In his *Lectures to my Students*, Spurgeon laid out his principle that the "matter must be congruous to the text. The discourse should spring out of the text as a rule, and the more evidently it does so the better; but at all times, to say the least, it should have a very close relationship thereto." We found those sermons most powerful which are among the more expository – such as the two on Matthew 27:46.

Even in their written form, these sermons explain something of the natural impression made on their hearers. The language is clear and fresh. They popularise biblical doctrine without cheapening it, and distil the theology of Reformers and Puritans. They combine concern for the glory of God and concern for the souls of sinners. They linger over each facet of a subject long enough to let it sink into the hearer's mind, yet move on rapidly so as to keep interest alive.

Spurgeon's sermons conform to the apostolic pattern of determining to

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know nothing but Jesus Christ and Him crucified. In one of his early sermons (no 242) Spurgeon quoted approvingly the advice given by an old minister to a young man whose well prepared and presented sermon he described as poor because Christ was not in it. When the young preacher defended himself by saying that Christ was not in the text, the old minister told him that, as from every little hamlet in England there was a road to London, “so from every text in Scripture there is a road to the metropolis of the Scriptures, that is Christ. And, my dear brother, your business is, when you get to a text, to say, ‘Now what is the road to Christ?’ and then preach a sermon running along the road towards the great metropolis – Christ. And I have never yet found a text that had not got a road to Christ in it, and if I ever do find one that has not a road to Christ in it I will make one.” Sermons truly expository of a text will lead to Christ along the road intended by the Holy Spirit without requiring artificial road-making such as the old minister, no doubt using poetic licence, suggested he would adopt.

Arnold Dallimore in his *Spurgeon* tells of a group of American ministers who visited London in the 1880s and set out to hear some of the celebrated preachers of England. One Sabbath morning they came away from Parker’s City Temple saying, “What a wonderful preacher is Joseph Parker!” In the evening they came out of Spurgeon’s Metropolitan Tabernacle – where the building was larger, the congregation twice as numerous and the preacher’s oratorical powers superior even to those of Parker – saying, “What a wonderful Saviour is Jesus Christ!” That would have pleased Spurgeon more than personal plaudits. And that will be the effect of these sermons on readers to whom they are blessed by the Spirit of God, though the preacher’s voice is heard no more.

(Rev) H M Cartwright

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## Notes and Comments

### Morality and Politics

The recent Press exposure of the adultery and marital infidelity of the Deputy Prime Minister has drawn attention anew to a sad fact: those in authority over us seem to pay scant regard to the claims of God’s moral law. Not so long ago a cabinet minister would have immediately resigned on being found guilty of the sin of adultery, but this man was left in office, with the salary and all the perks which go with it safeguarded; his demotion consisted of his being relieved of some of his previous responsibilities.

There are still, we believe, a substantial number of morally-upright men occupying seats in the Westminster Parliament who will view the Prime

Minister's handling of the matter as outrageous. Their voices, however, seem to be very muted. The word *sin* seems to have dropped out of their vocabulary and we hear no mention of man's accountability to the living and true God, who is no respecter of persons. How true in this man's case that "pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall"! Not so long ago, when still able to hide his own sin, he loudly berated political opponents whose sins had been exposed, accusing them of having only one standard of morality and that was "not to be found out". The fact is that scarcely any political party at Westminster can afford to throw stones at any other. How fearful and deplorable is our state now!

"Righteousness," the Bible tells us, "exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people." Charles Bridges commented on this verse, in his exposition of *Proverbs*, over a century and a half ago: "Beloved Britain, nation highest in the profession of *righteousness*! For thee we 'rejoice with trembling'. The combined effort of a little band to promote the honour of the Sabbath, to resist the encroachments of Popery, to enlarge the usefulness and efficiency of the Church, to train the young in the sound principles of the gospel, to circulate the word and preaching of the gospel to the ends of the earth – this is thy *national exaltation*. But the evil example among the heathen; the accredited influence of Romish heresy; the flood of infidelity, lawlessness and ungodliness; the want of a full recognition of God in thy public acts – this is thy *reproach*. Let the little remnant in the midst of thee remember their high responsibility (Matt 5:15). Let them take care that their personal and relative profession add to the *righteousness*, not to the *sin*, of the nation. Let them plead for their country's true prosperity with humiliation, faith and constancy. Let them labour for her exaltation with more entire union of heart." How much greater is the need now! JM

### What Is Truth?

When, as Scripture records, Pilate addressed to Jesus the question, "What is truth?" it is significant that he did not wait for an answer. "And when he had said this, he went out again unto the Jews, and saith unto them, I find in Him no fault at all" (John 18:38). He obviously treated the idea of truth with indifference or contempt, and the claim of his Prisoner to bear witness to the truth as a foible rather than a fault. That he had no absolute standard of truth is evident from the fact that he condemned his Prisoner to death in spite of his openly-avowed persuasion of His innocence. The absence of a standard of absolute truth adversely affected his administration of justice. His personal morality affected his public office. In his attitude he was thoroughly modern or, more accurately, he demonstrated the fact that the moderns are really primitive.

Scepticism assumes different guises in different ages and locations but is essentially the same everywhere, always. The first step towards the fall of man was the whispering of a doubt concerning what actually was true: “Yea, hath God said . . . ?” (Gen 3:1). This was followed by a denial of the truth of what God had said: “Ye shall not surely die” (Gen 3:4). This led to an acceptance as true of what was false, on the basis that it appeared good and pleasant and desirable to oneself (Gen 3:6). The concept of truth and morality as relative – the denial of absolute and universal criteria for belief and behaviour, and acting on utilitarian principles – dominates much political, social and personal life today in Great Britain. It is as ancient as the Garden of Eden and the fall of man, and as disastrous – both temporally and eternally – for individuals and societies adopting it.

If there is no absolute standard of truth and morality, there can be no such thing as heresy or error or immorality. But, of course, individuals and societies could not exist or coexist without devising their own “truth” and “morality”. The problem is that, being false, they result in conditions inimical to true well-being and freedom under the law of God and eventually in a strange combination of lawlessness and totalitarianism. Relativism and permissiveness produce chaos and intolerance.

These thoughts are suggested by the renewed sad spectacle at the time of writing of the national Government (and Opposition also) taking an attitude to the confessed immoralities of Government ministers which manifests blatant disregard for the law of God, as is the case with legislation promoted on matters related to religion and morality. At the same time the Government is frantically promoting legislation which is either increasingly intrusive and restrictive or else attempts to contain or remedy unacceptable situations which result from the abandonment of the absolute standards of God’s Word.

In his *Church and State in the New Millennium* (2000) David Holloway, an Anglican minister, traces the current outlook of the Government back to the Wolfenden Report of 1957, which affirmed that “unless a deliberate attempt is to be made by society, acting through the agency of the law, to equate the sphere of crime with that of sin, there must remain a realm of private morality which is, in brief and crude terms, not the law’s business. To say this is not to condone or encourage private immorality.” Mr Holloway observes that “the result of Wolfenden has not been a separating of law from morality and of the criminal from the sinful. Rather, the Committee’s proposals have led to Parliament legislating for a *new* morality and for a *new* political correctness which has generated a *new* set of sins.”

If man is his own standard and if laws are based on what is claimed to be the consensus of a democracy, not only will the state of society move further

away from what truth produces but it will become even more divided and chaotic as different groups within society seek to assert their own “rights” and secure what they perceive to be their own interests. Democratic societies can only truly prosper when they take the question seriously: “What is truth?” and bring it to the One who said, “For this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth” (John 18:37), and wait to hear His answer, which He makes so clear in His Word. *HMC*

### **Another Attack on the Sabbath**

It was a sad day when, on 28 August 1994, thousands of shops throughout England and Wales opened legally for the first time on the Sabbath, as the result of the passing of the Sunday Trading Act. Under the Act, supermarkets and other large stores have to close down on Saturday night and cannot open again before 10 am on Sabbath, and then for no more than six hours. However, an independent report commissioned by the Department of Trade and Industry and published last month has concluded that ending the six-hour restriction would bring huge benefits to the economy as a whole. We fear that the Government will amend the law accordingly.

Organisations such as the Forum of Private Business and the retail union USDAW have expressed concerns about small shops, if restrictions are removed, and that staff in supermarkets and other retail outlets will come under increased pressure to work on the Sabbath – with a devastating impact on their family lives. But our principal concern is the further erosion of the Lord’s Day, with a consequent increase in other sins, and that this will further incur the displeasure of the Divine Lawgiver.

It is galling that both the Government and the retail industry as a whole will not rest until they have this last restriction removed. “He that is greedy of gain troubleth his own house” (Prov 15:27). We pray that the Lord of the Sabbath will prevent the measure being enacted. We hope too that the objections which have been lodged during the consultation process will have some impeding effect and that the many Labour backbenchers who still object to a relaxation of the rules will so make their opposition felt that the change will not be implemented. *NMR*

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## **Protestant View**

### **The Blairs and Rome**

On April 28 Mrs Blair, the British Prime Minister’s wife, had a private audience with the Pope. Her visit has fuelled speculation, says *The Times*, “that the Prime Minister will take the final steps towards becoming a Roman

Catholic”. *The Times* also reports the widespread belief that the Franciscan friar, Father Michael Seed, who conducts services at No 10, “will be the person who helps Tony Blair to complete a journey of faith that he appears to have begun years ago”.

It seems that Seed has been visiting Downing Street regularly for five years to celebrate mass for the Blairs. “He declined to comment on the Prime Minister’s future religious plans,” says another report, “but confirmed for the first time that the Downing Street services do take place.”

We need not be surprised at this when we remember that in February 2003 the last pope celebrated a special private mass for Mr Blair and his family in the Vatican, the first time a serving British prime minister attended a private mass with the Pope. It is disgraceful that the Prime Minister of a Protestant nation should have this blasphemous rite observed in his official residence. It is disgraceful, in any event, that he should be present at mass – and have taken part in it “from time to time”, in the words of a spokesman, as reported in July 1996.

Such conduct is undoubtedly subversive of the Protestant constitution of the nation. We must therefore plead with the Lord to preserve our Protestant heritage, which has been handed on to us at so great a cost. “Strengthen, O God, that which Thou hast wrought for us” (Ps 68:28). NMR

### **Making Saints “Infallibly”**

When the Pope decrees someone a saint, he is also declaring that this person is in heaven. The Roman Catholic handbook, *The Externals of the Catholic Church*, asks, “Is the Pope infallible in issuing a decree of canonisation?” And it answers, “When the Sovereign Pontiff declares that a certain person is in heaven, he is preserved by the Holy Ghost from the possibility of error.”

One would therefore think that, when the papacy has “infallibly” decreed certain men and women to be saints, no pope would change his mind about any of them. Yet in 2001 the last pope struck several saints from the then-approved list of 6538 saints. He himself made 482 saints during his papacy – more than the total number canonised by all of his predecessors during the last 500 years. But the present pope has recently ordered the papal department for Saints’ Causes to be more selective and more rigorous in choosing candidates for sainthood, which seems to imply that he is not satisfied about some of the saints canonised by his “infallible” predecessors.

This all highlights the erroneousness and absurdity of Rome’s supposedly-infallible saint-making, and shows how wilfully ignorant she is of the truth that every believer is a saint, and that every saint arrives in heaven at the moment of death. *The Shorter Catechism* beautifully states: “The souls of

believers are at their death made perfect in holiness, and do immediately pass into glory; and their bodies, being still united to Christ, do rest in their graves till the resurrection".

NMR

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## Church Information

### Resignation of Rev Fraser Macdonald.

It was with a genuine sense of sorrow that the Skye Presbytery, meeting on Tuesday, 11 April 2006, accepted the resignation of Rev Fraser Macdonald. Mr Macdonald was ordained to the gospel ministry in North Tolsta on 27 August 1952 and was inducted to the Portree congregation on 21 June 1966. His resignation took effect from 30 April 2006.

In all of these years his life and work has been bound up with the study and preaching of the Word. Such a preoccupation carries with it a reward of its own. The ox which laboriously trod out the corn for its master was allowed to satisfy itself from that same corn (1 Cor 9:9). But the Apostle also speaks of his joy over those to whom his ministry was blessed – they were his crown – and we know that Mr Macdonald's ministry has been blessed to many over the years and throughout the Church.

Our hope is that, though pastoral work has had honourably to be set aside, Mr Macdonald will continue to feed the flock of God by the preaching of His Word, as strength and opportunity allow. "He that winneth souls is wise" (Prov 11:30).

(Rev) J R Tallach, Clerk of Presbytery

### College and Library Fund

By appointment of Synod, the first of this year's two collections on behalf of the College and Library Fund is due to be taken in congregations during June.

R A Campbell, General Treasurer

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## Acknowledgement of Donations

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

*College & Library Fund:* Anon, "In memory of Mrs MacAngus", £100 per Rev RML.

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

**Bracadale:** *Communion Expenses:* Anon, £50 per RAC.

**Larne:** *Communion Expenses:* Anon, £50 per RAC.

**Lochbroom:** *Where Most Needed:* Friend, £50.

**Portree:** *Communion Expenses:* DRM & AM, £75. TBS: Friend, £50.

**Raasay:** *Car Fund:* Friend, £50. *General Building Fund:* Anon, £20.

**Staffin:** *Congregational Funds:* Friends of the Cause, Portree, £20 per Rev WAW. *Sustentation Fund:* Anon, £40.

**Texas:** *Church & Manse Fund:* Scottish Friend, \$101.

**Zimbabwe:** *John Tallach Secondary School:* Friends, £100, £100, £100, £100, per EW.