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“Be Importunate”

As we look around the Western world today, there is very little to encourage anyone on the moral or spiritual level. Iniquity no longer hides its face for shame; immorality is assumed to be normal; violent crime is increasing. The Churches generally are becoming weaker, many of them no longer prepared to make any stand against sin, unless perhaps on the basis of some political philosophy; so serious is the situation that some sections of the Anglican Church are prepared to promote openly-homosexual men to high office. Particularly in mainline denominations, there seems to be no concern to maintain doctrinal purity – indeed there is often no concern to prevent the propagation even of serious heresy.

Yet in various places of worship, the Word of God is read and proclaimed. And the truths contained in that Word are being blessed to the good of some souls – God’s children, in particular, receiving spiritual nourishment. What ought, however, to be a matter of great concern is that comparatively few individuals are being awakened to see the seriousness of their sins and then being brought to look to Christ Jesus alone for salvation, being renewed in their hearts and lives by the power of the Holy Spirit.

This means that the proportion of the population of Britain, for example, who are true believers is very significantly smaller than it once was. It means that, the Lord’s people, “the salt of the earth”, have less and less influence in restraining corruption in society generally. It means too that there are fewer “living epistles” which the ungodly have the opportunity to read; many today, even in professedly-Christian countries, have never had the opportunity of living or working beside anyone who has been genuinely converted and so they have never seen the reality of true godliness. And it means that there is a disturbing absence of people with a genuine concern for the moral and spiritual well-being of their nation. So there are few who come to the throne of grace to plead earnestly with God that, for the sake of Christ, He would pour out His Spirit on the whole world and so bring multitudes of sinners into His kingdom.

To the unbelieving eye, it might well seem that, in many parts of the world,

true Christianity is in its death throes. And to the sceptical mind, which is becoming increasingly prevalent in Western culture, it might appear that all forms of the Christian religion will disappear before many more generations have passed. But, in spite of appearances, the believing soul will grasp the sure word of divine revelation and say with confidence: "Thou remainest" (Heb 1:11). Changes there will be, in society at large and within the Church; one generation of God's people will pass on to glory, and another – perhaps smaller and less spiritually alive – will come in its place. But the great God of eternity remains absolutely unchanged, and He is ruling over all.

Jeremiah lived through tremendous disasters. His country was invaded and completely overrun by enemy armies. His people were sent away into captivity, and he could not but recognise this as the judgement of God. Most distressing of all, no doubt, was the destruction of the temple and, as a consequence, the end of the public worship of God for the time being, and of the sacrifices through which sins were forgiven. Yet after all the sadness that he poured from his weary heart into his Lamentations, he could state with true faith: "Thou, O Lord, remainest for ever; Thy throne from generation to generation" (5:19). However disturbing his situation, Jeremiah was supported by the fact that God had not abandoned the world; He was still in control; He was still ruling over everything.

And so today. God is still on the throne; He is still in control of everything. Whatever happens, God allows it for wise purposes (though it should go without saying that He is not to be held responsible for the sin of the actions which He has foreordained). It may yet be made abundantly clear why He has allowed the devil's kingdom to become so powerful and His own kingdom to become so weak. But, although we as yet may understand nothing about His purposes in these matters, we are to go on believingly – in the absolute certainty that God is ruling, and that He is ruling wisely.

Because God is ruling, it makes sense to pray to Him – to bring before Him everything that concerns us about, in particular, the moral and spiritual state of the Church and of the nations of the world. And surely God's children can expect an answer when they do so. Yet let them always remember, not only God's sovereignty in how and when He answers prayer, but also that His blessing may be kept back by the sins of believers and of the Church – even while, on the whole, they are seeking to be faithful to Him and His Word. David had to acknowledge: "O God, Thou hast cast us off, Thou hast scattered us, Thou hast been displeased" (Ps 60:1). And so may we acknowledge. Yet we are not to despair; we are not unbelievably to imagine that God has lost the power to act – to bless His Word on a large scale, to purify His Church and to cause iniquity once more to hide its face

for shame. How relevant then the petition with which David continued his prayer: “O turn Thyself to us again”!

It is of the utmost importance to remember the grounds on which we can expect an answer to our prayers. It is through the work of Christ, the “one Mediator between God and men”, that prayer can be heard. It is not through the individual believer’s faithfulness or holiness; it is not through the faithfulness or holiness of the Church as a whole or any part of it – though these things are vitally important, and in the absence of such faithfulness and holiness we need not be surprised when God holds back His blessing.

In the mid-seventeenth century, as Joseph Alleine brought towards a conclusion a letter “to an intimate friend”, he quoted the words of a martyr: “Pray, pray, pray”. Then he went on: “I know you do, but be importunate. I know you are, but continue to be.”¹ There is no doubt that prayer for the Church of God and for the nations of the world is an absolute duty. It is a duty which all the people of God will, more or less, engage in. But the question remains: Is that prayer importunate? And, further, is it continuously importunate? If Alleine’s friend needed to be exhorted to continue importunate in prayer, how much more necessary today is the exhortation to pray earnestly and without ceasing! Indeed must we not conclude that, when the situation in Britain and elsewhere is – morally and spiritually – as desperate as it now is, there can be very little importunate prayer ascending from the hearts of God’s people?

Yet such prayer is clearly of great importance. Christ told the parable of the widow who would not give up seeking justice from an unjust judge; because of “her continual coming”, he gave her what she asked for. So the Saviour asked, “Shall not God avenge His own elect, which cry day and night unto Him, though He bear long with them?” (Luke 18:7).

Certainly we ought to bear in mind that prayer, like every other grace, is a gift from God. It is the work of the Holy Spirit, as the Spirit of prayer, to create sincere spiritual earnestness in the hearts of God’s children, which results in living desires being sent up to heaven. Obviously, when the spiritual situation around us is as dire as it is, there is a particular need for earnest prayer. Let God’s children seek, in the name of Christ, grace to engage in this essential duty. There is every reason to do so. Nothing is too hard for the Lord, and He has promised to do wonderful things for His Church.

Christ Himself promised: “If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him?” (Matt 7:11). Here is solid encouragement, in spite of so much pointing in the opposite direction.

¹*Life and Letters of Joseph Alleine*, page 283.

The Fourth Commandment¹

A Sermon by Rev K D Macleod

Exodus 20:8-11. *Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it.*

This is one of the commandments God gave to Israel just after they came out of Egypt. They were given in the light of the words: “I am the Lord thy God which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage”. God made a covenant with Israel on Mount Sinai, and the Ten Commandments were central to that covenant. They were to be received by the Israelites as what God expected of them.

But these commandments, and this Fourth Commandment in particular, were not then given for the first time; a commandment could not be introduced with the word *remember* unless people were already familiar with it. And this Fourth Commandment still applies today; God has never taken back any of His commands. It would be strange indeed if it was discovered well over a thousand years later that one of the Ten Commandments should be dropped, that only the other nine were now to be kept. Of course people today want to drop various other commandments too. They do not want to be prevented from taking the name of the Lord in vain; they do not want to feel that the commandment against adultery has any authority over them – though it may be another matter if their own wife or husband has committed adultery.

Keeping to this Commandment, there are two matters I would like, with the Lord’s help, to speak about particularly. The first is what it says about human duty, and the second is God’s authority behind it.

1. What the Fourth Commandment says about human duty. It begins: “Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy”. But when the Ten Commandments are repeated in the book of Deuteronomy, the first word is different: *Keep* – yet pointing in much the same direction. It is: “Keep the Sabbath day to *sanctify* it”. In fact, though the first words are different in Hebrew, it is only in the translation that there is a difference between *keeping holy* and *sanctifying*. But by thinking of the word *sanctified*, we get the idea of setting this day apart for holy things. The tabernacle was sanctified and, later on, the

¹Preached in Leverburgh, Isle of Harris, on 28 March 2006, a day set apart for prayer, by the Outer Isles Presbytery, in view of threats to Sabbath observance in the islands.

temple was sanctified – the idea being that they were set apart for holy purposes, set apart for the worship of God. Now what we have here is one day in seven set apart for holy activities.

There is a contrast. “Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work; but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work” – any unnecessary work. There is no encouragement to idleness; to work for six days is part of the Fourth Commandment. If we are in employment, or even if our activities are now confined to our own home, six days are given us for our work, which is 86% of the week. That large proportion has been given us for ourselves – not that we are to forget God on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday or any other day, but that is not the point here. We have these days for whatever we need to do in the world; but every seventh day, one day in seven, is to be reserved for spiritual activities.

You might wonder why I chose Psalm 92 to sing from this evening. The answer is simple. If you look at the heading, you will see it described as “a Psalm or Song for the Sabbath day”. This Psalm is particularly appropriate for the Sabbath. Now without going through the Psalm – you can follow it through yourselves – notice how it begins: “It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord”. That is a good and profitable activity for a Sabbath. “To sing praises unto Thy name, O Most High; to show forth Thy loving kindness in the morning, and Thy faithfulness every night.” And so it goes on, but you can see that these are spiritual activities, suitable for the morning and the night of a Sabbath. This is no prescription for considering the loving kindness of God in the morning and His faithfulness at night; it just shows how we can divide up what is revealed about God – to give God thanks particularly for some things in the morning, and give thanks for other things in the evening.

I am beginning with spiritual activities rather than the negative side of things because we should view the Sabbath as something positive. I am quite sure that most people who come to this island, and others who live here and are uncomfortable with Sabbath keeping, think of it as a very negative thing. They think of the Sabbath as full of restrictions and assume that the whole purpose of Sabbath observance is to stop them from doing things. That is not so. It is the positive duties of a Sabbath that are particularly important. Of course, those who do not like the Sabbath will not be at home with positive duties. They do not want to worship God. They do not like the Sabbath because they do not like God. And whatever may be the extent to which people wriggle out of the restrictions the Bible imposes on their Sabbath activities, what they are fundamentally uncomfortable with is God Himself.

The Sabbath then is a time for spiritual activities. We might go through quite a list of them but we will restrain ourselves to just a few broad areas.

We have already noticed giving thanks in the light of Psalm 92. But take something else: “Search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and these are they that testify of Me”. Now we may search the Scriptures every day, and no day should pass when we do not read more or less of the Bible. But on these six days which are to be devoted to our ordinary work, that work normally gets in the way of spiritual activity. People have their responsibilities, and these responsibilities will keep them from spending as much time in spiritual things on weekdays as they may want. But the Sabbath is different for most people. Leaving aside the subject of works of necessity and mercy for the moment, the Sabbath is an opportunity – that is how we should look at it – to spend time on our souls. It is an opportunity to spend time on spiritual things – in particular, to spend time searching the Scriptures, and to find Christ in the Scriptures.

Again the Sabbath is an opportunity for prayer. Of course, there will be prayer on other days, but many people may not have so much time to spend in prayer on weekdays – although, generally speaking, people do have much more leisure than they once did. But most people will have significantly more time to spend in prayer on a Sabbath; they are free from the labour of the six days. This is a day for God and for their souls. It is a day for communion with God. It is a day to bring the needs of their souls before God. They have an opportunity to spend more time in prayer on a Sabbath and, in particular, to pray for the Church. See how strongly this is expressed in the prophecy of Isaiah: “Give [God] no rest, until He establish, until He make Jerusalem a praise in the earth”. And, of course, the New Testament application of the idea of Jerusalem is the Church of God; for Jerusalem was where the temple was, where the worship of God was centred.

We are to give God no rest until He richly blesses His Church. Do we know anything of that? One of the sad things even about the Lord’s people today is that they give the Lord a great deal of rest. Of course, this is to speak in human terms, but they are directed to give the Lord *no* rest until He establish His Cause, until He fix it firmly in the earth against all opposition. Time is to be given to that. And today has been set aside by this part of the Church to pray for the future of the Sabbath in these islands, to plead with God to restrain those who would weaken that degree of Sabbath-keeping which still exists here.

We should realise that lying behind these efforts is a weakening in religion generally. If spiritual religion was stronger, as it once was here, nobody would think of making such attempts. But times have changed. The Lord has been grieved away; the Lord’s hand, to use the Psalmist’s expression, is in His bosom. “Pluck [Thy hand] out of Thy bosom”, was his petition – in other

words, Begin to work, as in the days of old. And that is a suitable petition for us to use, to plead with the Lord that He would work: by convincing sinners of sin, bringing them to Christ, causing them to follow Him sincerely. And Sabbath-keeping is a particular aspect of following Christ. Well, a Sabbath is a special opportunity to pray.

One further example: when people are working, as more or less they are on the six days of the week, it is not normally possible to gather on week-days for public worship. And as this country becomes more secular, people are losing the opportunity to attend public worship at all. Yet, whatever may be the quality of public worship in many churches in this country, at least those who attend them come into contact with the Bible. Now, if people were thinking properly, they would refuse to take part in unnecessary work on Sabbaths. But increasing secularisation is leading to the breakdown of Sabbath observance, and it has rippling effects all along the line.

We have the example of Paul in Troas; he preached on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread. It is significant that you do not hear of Paul preaching on any other day of the week – except that he went on the Jewish Sabbath to the synagogue, when the Jews would gather there to worship. But these two ordinances – the Lord's Supper and preaching – were observed on the Christian Sabbath, on the first day of the week. Towns like Troas did not have the privilege of the Lord's Day being set apart by common consent for spiritual activity. That is the privilege we have on these islands, or at least we had – *had* is certainly the appropriate word to use for the nation as a whole. It is through God's kindness that we have, in any degree the Sabbath and its blessings – public worship in particular.

We should be concerned when things start to disintegrate. The danger is that they will disintegrate more and more. Is God going to take all these blessings from us before long? That is a valid concern. I am no prophet and I am not trying to prophesy, but these things are within the bounds of possibility. If we do not value our Sabbaths, will we continue to have public worship? Will we continue to have the gospel? I leave them with you as questions, but if we take these things to heart, we will surely be more earnest in prayer. And may the Lord give us grace to pray!

That is the positive side; there are these benefits. And to these duties suited to a Sabbath we might add two things: one, profitable spiritual conversation; and the other, reading good scriptural books. On the negative side, if we are to have these benefits, there are things we must refuse to do. If we are to remember the Sabbath Day and set it apart to holy duties, the labour of the six days should as far as possible be confined to them.

The Sabbath institution did not begin with the Ten Commandments. Of

course, none of these commandments were new; they were just a particular formulation of God's law – for the Israelites in the first place. It was not new that they were to have only one God, that they were not to kill, that they were not to bear false witness. These things were as old as creation; so is the Sabbath. But God's provision of the manna was a reminder to the Israelites about the Sabbath. They had just come out of Egypt; they needed food; and, in the way God made provision for them, He reminded them that the Sabbath was a distinctive day. That was before they reached Mount Sinai, before they got the Ten Commandments.

Moses told them to gather manna on the six weekdays, but on the seventh day, the Sabbath, there was none. And when some of the people ignored what he had said at God's command, treating the Sabbath as if it was just like any other day, the Lord asked Moses, "How long refuse ye to keep My commandments and My laws?" The people were to learn that the work of the six days is not, if at all possible, to intrude on the Sabbath. God was showing them that there were better things to do on a Sabbath than to gather manna, although it was suitable work for the other six days. On the day before the Sabbath they were to gather two lots of manna – what would do them for two days. Here was God teaching them – and us – the difference between the day appointed especially for God's worship and the other six days.

Later on in Israel's history, after the Jews had returned from the captivity, Nehemiah was governor in Jerusalem. He became disturbed about Sabbath-breaking when he saw some people treading winepresses on that day, others bringing in sheaves, and buying and selling. What was Nehemiah's response to them? It was: "What evil thing is this that ye do, and profane the Sabbath day? Did not your fathers thus, and did not our God bring all this evil upon us, and upon this city? Yet ye bring more wrath upon Israel by profaning the Sabbath." Their profaning of the Sabbath, after all, was one of the great sins which had led to the captivity, that great punishment from God. So Nehemiah closed the gates on the Sabbath to prevent any further trading. This reminds us of the God-appointed distinction between the Sabbath and other days, so that we should keep the Sabbath for spiritual things. And if we love God, we will consider this a privilege.

Let us now notice the further requirements in the Commandment: "Thou shalt not do any work" on the Sabbath, "thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter," (the family), nor "thy manservant nor thy maidservant," (the people one employs), "nor thy cattle", (they are not to be involved in work on that day, whether it be oxen ploughing fields, or whatever), "nor the stranger that is within thy gates", (for we have a responsibility for the Sabbath-keeping of all who are in our homes).

The instruction, “Thou shalt do no work in it”, is not intended to be absolute. It is assumed that people will use their common sense to understand such expressions, and we are to apply to them the light of other parts of Scripture. The Saviour rebuked one of the Jews who objected when He healed somebody on a Sabbath: “Thou hypocrite, doth not each one of you on the Sabbath loose his ox or his ass from the stall, and lead him away to watering? And ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day?” Without going into details, the matter can be summed thus: No work except on the grounds of necessity and mercy. We are to ask two simple questions before we agree that something, apart from spiritual duties, is legitimate on a Sabbath. First, Is it necessary to do it, truly necessary? And second, Is it a work of mercy? To take an obvious example, it is necessary to eat. And if someone falls ill on a Sabbath, we should get them to hospital as quickly as possible; it is a work of mercy. Also many people in the caring professions will have to work on Sabbaths, but such work is the exception.

We will consider one further point under this heading, and that is: What is the Sabbath leading up to? As a day for spiritual duties, it is a day of preparation for heaven; it teaches us something about how people will live in heaven. We are told in Hebrews: “There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God”. The point is that the Greek word used there is *sabbatismos* – what we could call a Sabbatism, a Sabbath-keeping. So there remains a Sabbath-keeping for the people of God in heaven at last; they will feel at home there. But they begin preparing for it in this world; they feel at home on a well-kept Sabbath, filled with spiritual duties. They do not say: When will the Sabbath be gone, so that we can get on with real work, with what we really want to do? No, they say, a Sabbath filled with spiritual duties is the way we want it; this is what we are at home with; these are the activities we want to engage in. And that indicates a preparation for heaven.

2. God’s authority. The authority is shown here: “In six days *the Lord* made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it”. God rested. In other words, He ceased from His creation activity. He ceased from the six days of that particular labour. The Sabbath is not a day for doing nothing; as is indicated by the phrase in the Shorter Catechism: “profaning the day by idleness”. It is a day for spiritual activities, although the body is very likely to get a rest. This change of activity is illustrated by God’s rest. God blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it – He sanctified it; He set it apart to holy things. We have God’s example, which is a picture for us. God spent six days creating the earth and everything else listed here, and on the seventh

day He rested. We are to follow that pattern too, a pattern God has given us for our good, particularly for our spiritual good.

As we read what is said about the Sabbath in Genesis 2, we may notice a degree of repetition, which should impress us forcefully. The ideas being repeated are those we need to remember: God rested, God blessed the Sabbath day, God hallowed it. That is the authority lying behind the Commandment. One can note how that there is a particular responsibility on *everyone* to keep the Sabbath. Everyone should acknowledge God and should acknowledge His Sabbath, even if they call themselves atheists or agnostics, or if they say, I follow some other faith. But there is a God who created us and who gave us the Sabbath, for our good.

There was a special obligation on the Israelites to keep Sabbath the because they were, outwardly at least, the people of God. He said, "I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage". It is as if there is a *therefore* before all the commandments: Therefore thou shalt have no other God's before Me; therefore remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy; and so on. The Israelites were delivered from bondage; they are a type of the people of God in every generation. Believers, delivered from bondage to sin and Satan, are told: *Therefore* remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Let them make full use of the privilege; let them show the best of examples to their families, their neighbours and all who come in contact with them. Let them show how much they appreciate the Sabbath.

But it is an obligation on everyone. This is expressed in Deuteronomy 5: "Remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that the Lord thy God brought thee out thence through a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm: therefore the Lord thy God commanded thee to keep the Sabbath day". So those who have been blessed by God are under a particular obligation to value the Sabbath and to make good use of it. And who has not received blessings from God? But how much we all need to commit ourselves to the Lord for grace to keep the Sabbath – so that, for instance, our minds would not wander off to worldly things. To think about the ordinary work of the six days, or whatever else attracts our attention, is to break the Sabbath just as surely as when someone goes out to dig his garden or goes out to his normal work of building houses. There are degrees of sin, of course, but these are all breaches of the same commandment.

How impressively the women kept the Sabbath after Christ was buried! They wanted to preserve His body. Surely a work of necessity (though, in fact, His body could not see corruption)! But after they had returned from the burial and prepared spices, they rested on the Sabbath day, according to the commandment. They recognised God's authority in the matter. And they

were right, for this was not something they needed to do *on that day*. It was a holy work indeed, but it was a work for the six days. And the example of these godly women is recorded in Scripture for all generations.

Just as the Lord blessed the Sabbath, there is a blessing for those who keep it. “Blessed is the man that . . . keepeth the Sabbath from polluting it and keepeth his hand from doing any evil”. If, recognising God’s authority, he keeps his hand from the ordinary work of the six days, as far as that is possible, the Lord will not forget him. It is not that we *earn* blessings from heaven, but when the Lord gives grace to people to do His will, a blessing follows.

We have the Sabbath in its New Testament form, on the first day of the week. And we have God’s authority for that. The change from the seventh day of the week may not be put down in so many words, yet it was very possibly something the Saviour taught His disciples before His ascension. But we are told enough to make it clear that the first day of the week, the Lord’s day, is the day for Christian worship. You will remember the reference already made to Paul preaching in Troas on the first day of the week. There is another highly significant verse in 1 Corinthians where Paul is speaking about making a collection for the poor Christians in Jerusalem: “As I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye upon the first day of the week”. That was the day when they would be gathering for worship.

What were the Old Testament saints looking back to? The creation, God’s great work in creating the world. And what are the New Testament saints to be looking back to? The great work of God in raising Christ from the dead. Every Sabbath we are to remember the resurrection of Christ; that is to be part of our spiritual activity. We are to remember the work of Christ, who described Himself as Lord of the Sabbath. The Sabbath was made for man, for his good, not man for the Sabbath – as some of the Jews were in effect saying. But the Son of man has authority over the Sabbath and therefore the Sabbath is a day for the New Testament too. The day of the week has changed, for the Son of Man is Lord over such things.

Surely we should not be slack in making use of the Sabbath and, in particular, of the ordinances of God’s house on the Sabbath. There we may hear of Christ and salvation through Him; there we may hear the call of the gospel; there we may be called to believe and repent, to turn from our own ways to serve the living God. And these are matters to be specially studied on the Sabbath, and to be specially prayed over on the Sabbath.

But what is particularly before us just now is the Sabbath as a privilege and the duty laid on us by God – who as Creator, is *our* God – to observe it. He has given us the Sabbath, He has given it to us as a privilege, He has given it for our good, and we are to remember it to keep it holy.

The Doctrine of Forgiveness (2)¹

Rev Neil M Ross

(5) *Forgiveness and acceptance by God.* The satisfaction which Christ rendered to divine justice is the procuring cause, not only of the forgiveness of believing sinners, but also of God “accounting and accepting their persons as righteous”.² Pardon and acceptance by God are inseparably connected. As Robert Shaw explains, “the pardon of sin alone would only restore the believer to such a state of probation as that from which Adam fell; he [the believer] would be under no legal charge of guilt, but still he would have no legal title to eternal life. But when God justifies a sinner, He does not merely absolve him from guilt, or from a liableness to eternal death; He also pronounces him righteous, and, as such, entitled to eternal life.”³

Why, we may ask, did the Westminster divines mention pardon before acceptance in the Confession and Catechisms? “Because,” says James Fisher, “till the sentence of the broken law be dissolved by pardon, it is impossible that our persons can be accepted, or any blessing of the covenant conferred upon us, [see] Heb 8:10-13, where, after a great many other promised blessings, it is added in verse 12, ‘For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more,’ intimating that the pardon of sin led the way to other covenant blessings.”⁴

Scripture itself sometimes so emphasises remission of sin that it appears to constitute the whole of justification. In Romans 4:6-8 we read, “Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.” It is this very passage which, as R L Dabney notes, the Arminian uses to present justification as “nothing but simple forgiveness, asserting that, as absence of life is death, and cessation of motion is rest, so absence of guilt is justification”.⁵ It is, however, the experience of the pardoned sinner himself, as John Murray notes in an article on justification, “that forgiveness may loom so high in his perspective that justification is to a large extent construed in terms of remission. It is the burden of sin’s guilt that occupies his consciousness, and remission of sin so fills him with

¹This second part continues to deal with God’s judicial forgiveness.

²*Westminster Confession of Faith* 11:1.

³*The Reformed Faith – An Exposition of the Westminster Confession of Faith*, Inverness, 1973 reprint, p 126.

⁴*Exposition of the Westminster Shorter Catechism*, pp 177-8.

⁵*Systematic Theology*, Edinburgh, 1985 reprint, p 624.

gratitude that everything else comprised in justification suffers eclipse by way of comparison.”⁶

At the same time, care must be taken not to place so much emphasis on the doctrine of forgiveness that we forget the doctrine of the acceptance of the sinner and the doctrine of justification as a whole. It is true that some of the Reformers speak of justification as if forgiveness was the principal, or even the only, element in it. But when Calvin, for example, did so, it was because, as A A Hodge points out, “he was arguing with Romanists who taught that ‘justification consists in remission of sins and infusion of grace’. Calvin argued in opposition that justification consists in the former but does not include the latter”;⁷ consequently the former is heavily emphasised.

(6) *The greatness of forgiveness.* However, while seeking to give due place to each of the components of justification, we also wish to highlight something of the greatness of forgiveness itself. The greatness of God’s forgiveness of sin is indicated by *the several terms which describe it*.

It is set forth in Scripture as His lifting it up, putting it away, taking it away, removing it, as is implicit in the words *forgiveness, pardon* and *remission*, and explicit in Psalm 103:12, “As far as the east is from the west, so far hath He *removed* our transgressions from us”. Forgiveness of sin is also to *cover* it, (“Blessed is he whose sin is covered” (Ps 32:1)); to *cast it away*, (“Thou hast cast all my sins behind Thy back” (Is 38:17), and, “Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea” (Mic 7:19)); to *pass it by*, (“Who passeth by the transgression of the remnant of His heritage” (Mic 7:18)); to *blot it out*, (“I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions” (Is 43:25)); to *cleanse* it or *wash it away*, (“The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin” (1 Jn 1:7)); *not to impute* it; (“Blessed is the man to whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity” (Ps 32:2)); and *not to remember* it; (“Their iniquities will I remember no more” (Heb 8:12)). Great indeed must be the forgiveness which is set forth under such striking descriptions, all of which show, as Thomas Adams said, that “sins are so remitted as if they had never been committed”.

The greatness of forgiveness is also brought before us by the words which indicate *the variety of the sins* forgiven. From the Hebrew we have the words: *transgression* (which basically indicates rebellion), *iniquity* (that is, perversity and depravity, or wickedness and vanity), *trespasses* (which speaks of wrongdoing and treacherous acts), and the term *sin* itself which has the basic nuance of missing the mark. In the New Testament, the same words: *transgression, iniquity* and *trespass* convey respectively the further ideas of “turning aside”,

⁶*Collected Writings of John Murray*, Edinburgh, 1977, vol 2, p 218.

⁷*Outlines of Theology*, London, 1972 reprint, p 507.

“lawlessness”, and “falling away”. Sin is also presented in Scripture by such words and phrases as *uncleanness, abomination, works of darkness, works of the devil, works of the flesh, rebellion, wickedness and evil*. What makes sin especially evil is that it is directed against the very being of God. How great then is the pardon which covers all manner of sin!

Some convicted sinners fear that they have committed *the unpardonable sin* – what John Owen calls that “remediless sin” – and that there is therefore no forgiveness for them. The Saviour speaks of it thus: “Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men (Matt 12:31). Matthew Poole comments that this verse and the one which follows have “very much exercised great divines, and much more perplexed poor Christians in their fits of melancholy and under temptations”. It cannot be a sin that is committed ignorantly, he says, but must be one knowingly committed against the operations of the Holy Ghost; it must contain the ingredients of apostasy (Heb 6:6), of wilfulness in sinning after receiving the knowledge of the truth (Heb 10:26), and of impenitence – because what sins we truly repent of will be forgiven (1 Jn 1:9). Poole thinks that persecution is also an ingredient in it, in view of the connection between the malice of the Pharisees and this solemn statement of the Saviour.⁸ In any case, we believe, as has often been noted, no one has committed this sin who is concerned about having committed it and still makes use of the means of grace.

We again see that forgiveness is exceedingly great because it covers *the complete total of the sins* of the believer. How vast is their number! They are spoken of in Scripture as “manifold transgressions” (Amos 5:12); multiplied before God (Is 59:12); and more than the hairs of one’s head (Ps 40:12). But in forgiveness, the guilt of every sin is removed. Psalm 103 says, “Who forgiveth *all* thine iniquities” (v 3), and Colossians 2:13, “having forgiven you *all* trespasses”. “In our judicial pardon,” says John Brown, “all our sins, past, present, or future, are forgiven, in so far as they are, in any sense, transgressions of God’s law as a covenant of works.”⁹ Thus past sins are remitted and future sins will not be imputed (they will not make the believer liable to eternal punishment).

Boston’s view is similar: “All the man’s sins are pardoned together. God gives no half-pardons; it suits not either the riches of His grace, nor the sinner’s necessity. For one leak will sink the ship, and so will one unpardoned sin damn the soul.”¹⁰ John Kennedy thus describes the sinner’s justification:

⁸*Matthew Poole’s Commentary*, Edinburgh, 1974 reprint, vol 3, p 57.

⁹*The Systematic Theology of John Brown of Haddington*, Fearn, 2002 reprint, p 362.

¹⁰*Commentary on the Shorter Catechism*, Edmonton, 1993 reprint, vol 1, p 587.

“It must secure a free, full and final remission of all his guilt – a perfect removal of all that could make him liable to death. This pardon must avail for the removal of all liability to death on account of all the sins which, in relation to the moment in which it is granted, are past, present and future All the sin which exposed him to death, or could do so at any stage of his life, must have been regarded as utterly removed ere a right to eternal life could be given. He could not be accepted unless to this extent forgiven.”¹¹

Above everything, pardon is immeasurably great as the *deliverance* of the soul *from guilt* – from being due to suffer the just wrath and curse of God for ever. It is a great deliverance to be rescued from the power and pollution of sin, but a greater (if we may so say) to be saved from its guilt. “The revealed doctrine of pardon cannot be understood,” says James Buchanan, “unless we distinguish the guilt and demerit of sin from its dominion and defilement. The guilt of sin remains after the act of sin is past and gone; and it is ‘marked’, or ‘retained’, against us, until it is ‘blotted out’, or ‘remitted’. The fact of sin remains a fact for ever, and can never be undone; it will be true to all eternity that we contracted guilt and deserved punishment. Pardon presupposes both its reality and its demerit, and frees us from the charge of guilt and the sentence of condemnation, without impairing our sense of either. On the contrary, as it proceeds from the cross of Christ and is proclaimed in His gospel, it deepens our deepest convictions of sin, so that we can never open our mouths any more on account of our shame, when God is pacified towards us for all that we have done.”¹²

Pastoral Concerns¹

A Letter by *Joseph Alleine*

To my most dearly beloved, my Christian Friends in Taunton, salvation. Most loving brethren, I shall never forget your old kindnesses, and the entire affections that you have shed upon me, not by drops, but by floods. Would I never so much desire to forget them, yet I could not; they are so continually renewed; for there is never a day but I hear of them; nay, more than hear of them, I feel and taste them. The God that hath promised a prophet’s reward to them that give to a prophet though but a cup of cold water, He will recompense your labour of love, your fervent prayers and constant cries,

¹¹*Man’s Relations to God*, 1995 reprint, p 66.

¹²*The Doctrine of Justification*, London, 1961 reprint, p 272.

¹This is Letter 3 in *The Life and Letters of Joseph Alleine*, slightly edited. It was sent on 13 June 1663 from “the common gaol at Ilchester”, where he was confined for Christ’s sake.

your care for my welfare, your bountiful supplies – who have given me, not a cup of cold water, but that wine of your loves, with the sense and tidings whereof I am continually refreshed. I must, I do and will bless the Lord as long as I live that He hath cast my lot in so fair a place, to dwell in your communion; and especially to go in and out before you, and to be the messenger of the Lord of Hosts to you, to proclaim His law and to preach His excellences, to be His spokesman to you and to woo you for Him and to espouse you to one husband and to present you as a chaste virgin unto Christ.

Lord, how unworthy am I, everlastingly unworthy, of this glorious dignity which I do verily believe the brightest angels in heaven would be glad of, if the Lord saw it fit to employ them in this work! Well, I do not, I cannot repent, notwithstanding all the difficulties and inconveniencies that do attend His despised servants and hated ways – and that are like to attend them, for we have but sipped yet of the cup. But I have set my hand to His plough; my ministry I took up with you, and my testimony I finished with you, though I thought I had espoused you till death. And when I was entered into that sacred office, which through rich grace I was employed in, I told you, in the close of what I spoke before the laying of the holy hands upon me: “Most gladly do I take up this office with all the persecution, affliction, difficulties, tribulation and inconveniencies that do and may attend it”.

And, blessed be God, I am, through His goodness, of the same mind still, and my tribulations for Christ do (to Him be glory, for to me belongs nothing but shame and confusion of face) confirm my choice and my resolution to serve Him with much more than my labours. Verily, brethren, it is a good choice that I have commended to you: O that there might not be one found among you that hath not made Mary’s choice – I mean of that good part which shall never be taken away from you. Brethren, let them take up with the world that have no better portion: be content that they should have the first place and bear away the riches and preferments and glory and splendour of the world. Alas, you have no reason to envy them; verily they have a lie in their right hand. Ah, how soon will their hopes fail them! How soon will the crackling blast² be out and leave them in eternal darkness! They shall go to the generation of their fathers; they shall never see light; like sheep they shall be laid in their graves, and the upright shall have dominion over them in the morning.

But for my brethren I am jealous that none of you should come short of the glory of God. I am ambitious for you that you should be all the heirs of an endless life, the living hope of the saints, the inheritance incorruptible, undefiled and that fades not away. Ah, my brethren, why should not you be

²The meaning of this phrase is unclear, but the point of the sentence needs no explanation.

all happy? I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy lest, a promise being left you of entering into His rest, any of you should come short of it. O look diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God. Alas, how it pities me to see this rest neglected! How it grieves me that any of you should fall short of mercy at last, that any of that flock should perish over which the Holy Ghost hath made me in part overseer, when Christ hath done so much for you, and when His under-officers (through His grace, for we are not sufficient of ourselves) have done somewhat to recover and save them!

Ah dear brethren, I was in great earnest with you when I besought you out of the pulpit, many a time, to give a bill of divorce to your sins, and to accept of the match and the mercy that in the name of God Almighty I did there offer to you. Alas, how it pited me to look over so great a congregation, and to think that I could not – for my life I could not – persuade them, one quarter of them in likelihood, to be saved! How it moved me to see your diligence in flocking, not only to the stated exercises, but to the repetitions, and to most hazardous opportunities – for which you are greatly to be commended, since the law forbade my public preaching – and yet to think that many of you that went so far were like to perish for ever for want of going further! I must praise your diligent attendance on all opportunities. Blessed be God that made a willing ministry and a willing people! How I went with the multitude to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with the multitude that kept holy days.

The remembrance of this moves my soul; but, O my flock, my most dear flock, how fain would I carry you farther than the external and outward profession! O how loath am I to leave you there! How troubled to think that any of you should go far and hazard much for religion and yet miscarry for ever by the hand of some unmortified lust – as secret pride or untamed passion or an unbridled tongue or, which I fear most of all, a predominant love of the world in your hearts. Alas, must it be so, and is there no remedy but I must carry you to heaven's gate and leave you there? O that I should leave the work of your souls but half done, and bring you no farther than the almost of Christianity!

Hear, O my people, hear, although I may command you, upon your utmost peril, in the name of the Lord Jesus, that shall shortly judge you, I warn you as a father doth his children to look to the settling and securing of your everlasting condition, and for life take heed of resting in the outer part of religion. But I beseech you to be restless till you find the thorough change of regeneration within, so that you are quite new in the frame and bent of your hearts; for here is the main part of religion, in the hidden man of the heart. For Christ's sake, for your souls' sake, look to it that you build upon the rock,

that you be sure in the foundation work, that you do unfeignedly deliver yourselves over to the Lord to be under His command and at His disposal in all things. See that you make no exceptions, no reserve, that you cast overboard all your worldly hopes and count upon parting with all for Christ, that you take Him alone for your whole happiness. Wonder not that I so often inculcate this: if it be well here, it is well all; if unsound here, the error is in the foundation, and you are undone.

Brethren, I see great trials coming on, when we shall see professors fall like leaves in the autumn, unless they be well settled. Therefore it is that I would fain have you look to your standing, and to secure the main matter. And for you whose souls are soundly wrought upon, O make sure of it whatever you do; get and keep your evidences clear! How dreadful would your temptations be if you should be called to part with all for Christ and not be sure of Him neither. Get a right and clear understanding of the terms of life, which I have set before you in that form of covenanting with God in Christ which I commended to you! I would that none of you should be without a copy of it. Be much in observing your own hearts, both in duties and crying out mightily to God for assurance. If you cannot discern your state yourselves, go to somebody that is able and faithful, and fully open your case, your evidences and doubts, and be extraordinarily strict and watchful in your whole course, and I doubt not but you will quickly grow up to assurance.

I cannot tell how to make an end, methinks I could write all the day to you, but my straits of time are great, and my letter already too long. Yet I cannot conclude till I have given you my unfeigned thanks for your most kind and gracious letter. Surely it shall be in store with me and laid up among my treasures. That God is pleased so to unite your hearts to me, and to make use of me for your edification, is matter of highest joy unto me; as also to see your steadfastness in Christ, your unshaken resolutions notwithstanding all the tempter's wiles. Go on, my dearly beloved, and the Lord strengthen your hands and your hearts, and lift you up above the fears of men. My most dear brother Norman salutes you with manifold loves and respects, earnestly wishing that you may wear the crown of perseverance, as also brother Turner. The Lord strengthen, establish, settle you and, after you have suffered a while, make you perfect. I leave my brethren in the everlasting arms, and rest,
Your ambassador in bonds,
Joseph Alleine.

To be in Christ is heaven begun. To be with Christ and like Christ is heaven completed. His mercies are shoreless, fathomless, eternal and unchangeable. He has helped millions to glory who were as weak, as unworthy, as desponding as any of us.

W S Plumer

The Gospel in Aberdeen

From the Reformation Until 1900

Rev D W B Somerset

The earliest trace of Protestantism in Aberdeen seems to have been in about 1521. In that year there was a dispute between the Town Council and the Master of the Aberdeen Grammar School, John Marshall, over whether he had received his appointment from the Town Council or from the Court of Rome, but it is unclear if anything of a spiritual nature was at stake. By 1525, however, there were sufficiently many Protestant sympathisers in the Diocese of Aberdeen for James V to direct the Sheriff of Aberdeen to confiscate books being smuggled into the Diocese by “sundry strangers and others” who favoured the errors and false opinions of “that heretic Luther”.

The first Protestant minister to be settled in Aberdeen was appointed on 19 July 1560. He was Adam Heriot (c1514-1574), described on his tombstone as “the first minister of the true word of God in Aberdeen”, and on his wife’s tombstone as “a preacher of the merits of Jesus Christ at Aberdeen”. Spottiswood says that Heriot “was nominated for the city of Aberdeen (in which there lived divers addicted to the Roman profession), as one that was learned in scholastic divinity, and for his moderation apt to reclaim men from their errors. Neither did he fail the hope conceived of him, for by his diligence in teaching both in the schools and church he did gain all that people to the profession of the truth.”

Heriot was succeeded as minister by the celebrated Reformer John Craig (c1512-1600), who was minister in Aberdeen from 1573 to 1579. He wrote two catechisms, the larger of which was dedicated to his former congregation, “The Professors of Christ’s Evangel at New Aberdeen”. Other eminent ministers in Aberdeen at this time were Alexander Arbuthnot (1538-1583), Principal of King’s College, who was regarded by James Melville as one of the most learned men in Europe, and James Lawson (1538-1584), Sub-Principal of King’s College, who was chosen by John Knox to be his successor as minister of St Giles in Edinburgh.

The gospel continued to flourish in Aberdeen until the time of the General Assembly there on 2 July 1605. This Assembly was held contrary to the wishes of James VI, and those who attended it and continued to maintain its lawfulness were punished. Of the 14 Aberdeenshire ministers who attended the Assembly, eight were induced to declare the Assembly unlawful; one, for some reason, was unmolested; and five were banished. John Forbes (c1568-1634) of Alford was exiled from Scotland, and the other four were ordered to

repair to Arran, Bute, Orkney, and Shetland respectively. Five ministers from other parts of Scotland were also exiled abroad for attending the Assembly, the most famous of whom was John Welsh of Ayr. The unfaithfulness of the conforming ministers is the most likely explanation for the spiritual decline which blighted most of Aberdeenshire for the next 35 years.

In 1622 David Dickson was banished to Turriff, and in 1636 Samuel Rutherford was banished to Aberdeen. In 1638 Aberdeen was the only major town in Scotland which rejected the National Covenant. Nevertheless the Covenant was taken by “the most part” of the Presbyteries of Alford and Deer, which are both in Aberdeenshire. These were the two Presbyteries in which the intrepid Covenanter Andrew Cant (c1584-1663) had his first charges. In 1641 he became minister of Aberdeen, where he laboured amidst considerable difficulties for 20 years.

The lukewarmness in Aberdeen continued throughout the Covenanting period, and there was only one martyr, James Skene, the brother of the Laird of Skene, who was executed in Edinburgh in 1680. Another Covenanting martyr with an Aberdeen connection was Donald Cargill, who was born near Rattray, but was educated at Aberdeen Grammar School. He was executed in Edinburgh in 1681. Two other notable Covenanters, Thomas Hog of Kiltearn and James Fraser of Brea, were both students at Marischal College in Andrew Cant’s day, and James Fraser’s conversion occurred during his time at university.

After the Revolution, James Osburne, who had been a preacher at conventicles during the Covenanting period, became Professor of Divinity at Marischal College from 1697 to 1711. The Church of Scotland at this time was settling down into the dead legalism, almost hyper-Calvinism, which then degenerated into the Moderatism of the eighteenth century. Osburne used to recommend *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*, beloved by Thomas Boston, to his students as “proper to fix them in true notions of the fundamental truths of the gospel”. One of these students, Robert Willock (1683-1763), became minister of Echt, outside Aberdeen, and was one of only four ministers to oppose the condemnation of *The Marrow* at the 1720 General Assembly.

The Moderates and their successors have had a grip in Old Aberdeen from the eighteenth century down to the present day, but New Aberdeen was favoured in the eighteenth century with two long evangelical ministries. The two men were colleagues at St Nicholas, the parish church, but were far from unanimous in their opinions. John Bissett (c1692-1756) supported the Seceders in 1733, but never quite joined them. He was “a warm declaimer against Popery, Prelacy, Whitefieldism, and Jacobism”. James Ogilvie (c1694-1776), on the other hand, was “a sweet-blooded man” with a “very taking

gift", and was a great supporter of George Whitefield. In 1794 James Kidd was appointed Professor of Oriental Languages at Marischal College. He came to a city sunk in Moderatism after the deaths of Bissett and Ogilvie, but he left it at his own death in 1834 a city in which the Evangelical party outnumbered the Moderates. The Church of Scotland experienced a spiritual awakening from about 1810 onwards and, one after another, the pulpits in Aberdeen were occupied by godly men. Kidd's congregation at Gilcomston was one of the largest in Scotland.

In no city in Scotland did the Evangelicals gain a greater ascendancy than they did in Aberdeen and, at the Disruption in 1843, it is said that 70% of the population of Aberdeen supported the Free Church. Seventeen ministers, including all of those in New Aberdeen, joined the Free Church. Among these were Gavin Parker (1780-1845), who had been Rabbi Duncan's minister when he was a young man in Aberdeen; James Stewart (1813-1846), whose life resembled that of M'Cheyne; and Alexander Dyce Davidson (1807-1872), who more than any other man was responsible for the change of public opinion in Aberdeen. During this period dozens who were to become eminent Highland ministers attended university in Aberdeen, amongst whom were Lachlan Mackenzie, Lochcarron, (1754-1819); John Kennedy, Redcastle, (1772-1841); John Macdonald, Ferintosh, (1779-1849); Roderick Macleod, Snizort, (1795-1868); John Macdonald, Calcutta, (1807-1847); Gustavus Aird, Creich, (1813-1898); Alexander MacColl, Lochalsh, (1815-1889); John Kennedy, Dingwall, (1819-1884). To this illustrious company one might add Hugh Martin (1822-1885) who, like Rabbi Duncan (c1796-1870), was a native of Aberdeen and a graduate of Marischal College.

After the Disruption there was a rapid decline in true religion in Aberdeen, as in the rest of the Free Church outside the Highlands. The leading conservative ministers in Aberdeen were Walter M'Gilvray (1807-1880) of Gilcomston and Alexander Bannatyne (1817-1899). Bannatyne resigned from the Free Church in 1890, and nearly joined the Free Presbyterian Church in 1893, taking Free Presbyterian services in Oban in 1894. One member of his Aberdeen congregation, Miss Ann Mackay (1837-1913), moved to Glasgow after 1893 in order to join the Free Presbyterian Church. Meanwhile Jonathan Ranken Anderson had conducted services in Aberdeen from 1852 to 1858, staying with Mrs Susan Parker, Gavin Parker's widow. Her son John (1836-1920) was an advocate in Aberdeen, and became a communicant member in the Free Presbyterian John Knox congregation in Glasgow in 1896, although continuing to live in Aberdeen.

The first Free Presbyterian services in Aberdeen seem to have been those held for two Sabbaths in 1900 by Rev J R Mackay. These services were

intended for the Highland fishermen, and similar services were conducted in Peterhead and Fraserburgh in 1900 by Revs George Mackay and Neil Macintyre, and John Cameron, the Tomatin missionary.

“We Would See Jesus”¹

J C Ryle

There is more going on in some people’s minds than we are aware of. The case of the Greeks before us is a remarkable proof of this. Who would have thought, when Christ was on earth, that foreigners from a distant land would have come forward in Jerusalem, and said, “Sir, we would see Jesus”? Who these Greeks were, what they meant, why they desired to see Jesus, what their inward motives were – all these are questions we cannot answer. Like Zacchaeus, they may have been influenced by curiosity. Like the wise men from the East, they may have surmised that Jesus was the promised King of the Jews, whom all the Eastern world was expecting. Enough for us to know that they showed more interest in Christ than Caiaphas and all his companions. Enough to know that they drew from our Lord’s lips sayings which are still read in 150 languages, from one end of the world to the other.

We learn, for one thing, from our Lord’s words in this passage, that death is the way to spiritual life and glory. “Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.” This sentence was primarily meant to teach the wondering Greeks the true nature of Messiah’s kingdom. If they thought to see a King like the kings of this world, they were greatly mistaken. Our Lord would have them know that He came to carry a cross, and not to wear a crown. He came, not to live a life of honour, ease and magnificence, but to die a shameful and dishonoured death. The kingdom He came to set up was to begin with a crucifixion, not with a coronation. Its glory was to take its rise, not from victories won by the sword and from accumulated treasures of gold and silver, but from the death of its King.

But this sentence was also meant to teach a wider and broader lesson still. It revealed, under a striking figure, the mighty foundation truth, that Christ’s death was to be the source of spiritual life to the world. From His cross and passion was to spring up a mighty harvest of benefit to all mankind. His death, like a grain of seed-corn, was to be the root of blessings and mercies to countless millions of immortal souls. In short, the great principle of the gospel was once more exhibited – that Christ’s vicarious death was to bring

¹An extract, slightly edited, from *Expository Thoughts on John*, vol 2. Ryle is here commenting on John 12:20-26.

forth fruit to the praise of God and to provide redemption for a lost world.

This deep and mighty sentence was followed by a practical application, which closely concerns ourselves: “He that hateth his life shall keep it”. He that would be saved must be ready to give up life itself, if necessary, in order to obtain salvation. He must bury his love of the world, with its riches, honours, pleasures and rewards, fully believing that in so doing he will reap a better harvest, both here and hereafter. He who loves the present life so much that he cannot deny himself anything for the sake of his soul will find at length that he has lost everything. He, on the contrary, who is ready to cast away everything most dear to him in this life, if it stands in the way of his soul, and to crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts, will find at length that he is no loser. In a word, his losses will prove nothing in comparison to his gains.

Truths such as these should sink deeply into our hearts and stir up self-inquiry. It is as true of Christians, as it was of Christ, that there can be no life without death, there can be no sweet without bitter, there can be no crown without a cross. Without Christ’s death there would have been no life for the world. Unless we are willing to die to sin and crucify all that is most dear to flesh and blood, we cannot expect any benefit from Christ’s death. Let us remember these things, and take up our cross daily, like men. Let us, for the joy set before us, endure the cross and despise the shame, and in the end we shall sit down with our Master at God’s right hand. The way of self-crucifixion and sanctification may seem foolishness and waste to the world, just as burying good seed-corn seems waste to the child and the fool. But there never lived the man who did not find that, by sowing to the Spirit, he reaped life everlasting (Gal 6:8).

We learn, for another thing, from our Lord’s words that, if we profess to serve Christ, we must follow Him. “If any man serve Me,” He is saying, “let him follow Me.” That word *follow* is one of wide signification, and brings before our minds many familiar ideas. As the soldier follows his general, as the servant follows his master, as the scholar follows his teacher, as the sheep follows its shepherd, just so ought the professing Christian to follow Christ. Faith and obedience are the leading marks of real followers and will always be seen in true believing Christians. Their knowledge may be very small and their infirmities very great, their grace very weak and their hope very dim. But they believe what Christ says and strive to do what Christ commands. And of such Christ declares, They serve Me; they are Mine.

Christianity like this receives little praise from man. It is too thorough, too decided, too strong, too real. To serve Christ in name and form is easy work and satisfies most people, but to follow Him in faith and life demands more

trouble than the generality of men will take about their souls. Laughter, ridicule, opposition, persecution are often the only reward which Christ's followers get from the world. Their religion is one "whose praise is not of men but of God" (Rom 2:29).

Yet to him that follows, let us never forget, the Lord Jesus holds out abundant encouragement. "Where I am," He declares, "there also shall My servant be: if any man serve Me, him will My Father honour." Let us lay to heart these comforting promises and go forward in the narrow way without fear. The world may cast out our name as evil and turn us out of its society, but when we dwell with Christ in glory, we shall have a home from which we can never be ejected. The world may pour contempt on our religion and laugh us and our Christianity to scorn, but when the Father honours us at the last day, before the assembly of angels and men, we shall find that His praise makes amends for all.

Obituary

Mr Roddy Annand

Roddy Annand was born in 1930 and brought up in Fort William as a Roman Catholic. He came to Skye in 1958 and worked first as a joiner and latterly as a building contractor. It is not clear when he passed from spiritual death to spiritual life but he used to recall one incident which was spiritually significant, if not pivotal. He was in the habit of taking his aged father-in-law to church and leaving him there. On one such occasion he had to assist him into the church in Portree and down to his place at the front. He decided to remain in the church instead of going off to his own church. The missionary John MacLean was taking the service and, after hearing his address, Roddy never attended mass again and broke his association entirely with the Roman Catholic Church.

He became a member in the Portree congregation and, following marriage and setting up home in Harlosh, he was inducted in 1969 as an elder in the Vatten/Glendale congregation in the time of the late Rev J Colquhoun. Roddy served, under successive ministries, on the Kirk Session, Presbytery, and Synod. There was no minister in Glendale/Vatten after the retirement of the Rev D Nicolson in 1992, and Roddy kept the door open in both Glendale and Vatten, with fortnightly services in Waternish, for all of these years. He was missionary, elder, and father figure to the Church in the area. It is a sad reflection of the decline in true godliness in our day that his passing leaves the congregation with no male member.

On 17 August 2006 Roddy Annand passed from time to eternity, from the Church militant to the Church triumphant, from the wilderness of this world to the Canaan above.

Roddy often referred to the history of Ruth at Question Meetings and from the lectern. He felt that he also had been delivered from idolatry and was able to profess a heart affection for the people of God. We are sure that Ruth's desire to be with the Lord's people in death as in life, and to die where they die, was answered in Roddy's case. "Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord."

To the grieving widow, son, and other close family, we extend our deep sympathy and say, "Whose faith follow". (Rev) J R Tallach

Book Reviews¹

The Ministry, by Charles J Brown, published by the Banner of Truth Trust, paperback, 128 pages, £5.50.

The author was a well-known minister of the Disruption Free Church in Edinburgh. Some readers will be familiar with his excellent little book: *The Divine Glory of Christ*. Now a further little volume has been reprinted consisting, for the main part, of fairly-informal addresses originally given to students of divinity.

Brown begins with "The Connection Between Godliness and the Christian Ministry". He emphasises that ministers' reading should include books on experience (among his examples are Owen on *Indwelling Sin* and Rutherford's *Letters*); that they should be much in secret prayer; that they should prize their Sabbaths "as the miser his gold, for converse with God, eternity, heaven", and "dwell ever among the green pastures of the Word of God". Other addresses deal with public prayer and preaching.

The main points made in an address on "Elements of Pulpit Power" are: (1) the importance of the personal character of the minister; (2) the prayers offered in the pulpit ought to be like those of Robert Bruce of Edinburgh, which, it was said, were like "bolts sent up to heaven"; (3) the minister must aim "consciously and deliberately at the right ends", in his preparation as well as in his preaching; (4) he must understand that the strength through which sinners are to be saved is divine; (5) there should be much prayer about his preparation for the pulpit; (6) he ought to have a thorough knowledge of the actual words of Scripture.

The book begins with a useful biographical introduction by Rev Iain H Murray and concludes with an example of Brown's own preaching, on

¹The books reviewed here are obtainable from the Free Presbyterian Bookroom.

Genesis 3:24, entitled “The Expulsion from Eden – its character and lessons”. It is taken from the volume of his sermons: *The Word of Life*.

By virtue of its size, this volume cannot be expected to have the same depth and force of teaching as, say, that by Charles Bridges. However, in brief and easily-read form, this little work provides a solid stimulus to today’s preachers to go on in total dependence upon the God of all grace.

Getting the Gospel Right, Assessing the Reformation and New Perspectives on Paul, by Cornelis P Venema, published by the Banner of Truth Trust, paperback, 102 pages, £5.50.

For those who need to know what is happening in other parts of the religious world and, in particular, current threats to the gospel, this little book may prove very useful. It is, in fact, a condensed version of a much longer book by the same author, to be published also by the Banner of Truth.

The author, president of a theological seminary in America, is reacting to attacks on the Scripture doctrine of justification which go under the title of “the new perspectives on Paul”. Prof Venema begins with a description of what he calls “the Reformation perspective on Paul”, emphasising that justification is by grace alone and through faith alone, in opposition to what one might call the Roman Catholic perspective.

He goes on to discuss the teaching of some of the main representatives of “the new perspective”, including the present Bishop of Durham, N T Wright. These men claim “that the Reformation view of justification was built upon the foundation of a false picture of Judaism at the time of the writing of Paul’s epistles” and that “the language of ‘justification’ in Paul’s epistles does not primarily refer to the way guilty sinners find acceptance with God but to the identification of who belongs to the covenant people of God”. This, of course, perverts some of the most basic teachings of Scripture. Prof Venema points to an even more fundamental problem in the Bishop’s views on the atonement: “One point that emerges clearly in his limited treatment of this subject is that he has little sympathy for the historic view that Christ’s death involved His suffering the penalty and curse of the law on behalf of His sinful people”, and this is a man who makes some claim to be an Evangelical. The book concludes with some critical analysis, on the basis of Scripture.

The words of John Owen, however, are relevant: “Were men acquainted with the Scriptures as they ought to be . . . did they ponder and believe on what they read, or had they any tenderness in their consciences as to that reverence, obedience and subjection of soul which God requires unto His Word, it were utterly impossible that their faith in this matter should ever in the least be shaken by a few lewd [presumably in the now-obsolete sense of *unlearned*] sophisms or loud clamours of men destitute of the truth and of

the spirit of it” (*Works*, vol 2, pp 386-7). The Prince of Puritan writers was here making a strong attack on those who denied the doctrine of the Trinity. And we, in the light of Owen’s words, should feel our obligation to have a clear understanding of what the Scriptures teach on the vital doctrine of justification. If we do so, we are unlikely to be troubled in our own minds by such serious deviations from the truth today as come from the direction of “the new perspectives”.

Yet assaults on the truth keep coming, and these assaults must be resisted. This Prof Venema has successfully done. It is regrettable that he has not chosen to use the Authorised Version.

Evangelistic Calvinism, Why the Doctrines of Grace Are Good News, by John Benton, published by the Banner of Truth Trust, booklet, 31 pages, £1.50.

The questions this booklet addresses are: Does Calvinistic preaching – that is, true scriptural preaching – hinder the proclamation of the love of Christ to a dying world? Is it a stumbling block that prevents sinners being saved? The author answers these questions in terms of the Five Points of Calvinism – the response of the Synod of Dort to the Arminian errors which caused such division in the Dutch Church of the early seventeenth century.

Accordingly he deals in turn with Total Depravity, Unconditional Election, Limited Atonement, Irresistible Grace, and Final Perseverance. For instance, Dr Benton lays stress on the *unconditional* nature of election and points out how it answers the objection of the careless individual who responds to the gospel with: “Sorry, but I’m not that type”. The gospel is not for any particular type; it is without conditions; it is for sinners of every conceivable type.

He comes to the conclusion that (1) “the Five Points of Calvinism are full of cogent and loving evangelistic arguments which persuade sinners to come to Christ” and (2) “the doctrines of grace are full of pastoral encouragement and consolation and, when carefully explained, will surely promote healthy Christian growth and living in our churches”.

This booklet contains much excellent teaching. The only major complaint is the Bible version used.

Notes and Comments

The After-Effects of Abortion

A pro-life charity placed adverts in six women’s magazines earlier this year, inviting readers to tell about their abortion experiences. Out of 248 responses, only 26 said they had a few or no regrets about their abortions. But the vast majority, 204 out of the 248, deeply regretted what they had done. Of the 96

who answered the question: “If you had known what the effects might be, would you have gone through with the abortion?” 64 answered, “No” – some very emphatically.

Many had suffered severe post-abortion symptoms. 14 had seriously contemplated or attempted suicide, 15 had become alcoholics, three reported eating disorders, five resorted to drugs, several simply said they went off the rails. Four quickly had what were described as “atonement” babies. Many reported the pain of anniversaries – of the abortions, or the birthdays that never were. They described the bleak atmosphere of waiting rooms and abortion clinics, and how they were often crying when they came round from the anaesthetic. Even a 61-year-old who had her abortion in 1970 still feels “very guilty and sad” – just one example of the long-term effects of abortion.

Of course, our fundamental objection to abortion is that it is a breach of the Six Commandment; the unborn child is being murdered. But, even although it is likely that those most motivated to reply to these adverts would have had particularly distressing experiences, it is clear that abortion is damaging the lives of a significant number of women. And as the charity states, these responses “refute the repeated claims of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists and the Department of Health that post-abortion syndrome is a myth”.

The Faith of an Atheist

One of the factors which distinguish human beings from other living creatures on earth is their involuntary capacity for self-consciousness and for critical self reflection – however defective its exercise may be on account of sinful human nature. Paul speaks of “their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another” (Rom 2:15).

Self-consciousness is something which evolutionists cannot account for, though they are slow to admit that. Richard Dawkins of Oxford University is one of their leading advocates and a most militantly-atheistic writer (“The Sceptics’ Chaplain . . . a Fountainhead of Scepticism”, one admirer describes him). He acknowledges what he calls “the philosophical problems raised by consciousness” but he brushes these aside and takes it for granted that this is somehow a part of the evolutionary process which is still inexplicable. Yet he has the unblushing audacity to describe religious faith as “blind trust, in the absence of evidence, even in the teeth of evidence . . . a state of mind that leads people to believe something – it does not matter what – in the total absence of supporting evidence”. He even says that “faith seems to me to

qualify as a kind of mental illness” (Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*). One of his admirers, Steven Pinker of Harvard University, admits that “we have no reason to believe that genes have conscious experience, but a dirty secret of modern science is that we have no way of explaining the fact that *humans* have conscious experience either” (*Richard Dawkins: How a scientist changed the way we think*, eds Alan Grafen and Mark Ridley).

Paul Riddell, a self-proclaimed “fan” of previous books written by Richard Dawkins, commences a review of his most recent work, *The God Delusion*, with the comment that “reading his new book could seriously damage your faith, not so much in God as in the great man himself” (*The Scotsman*, 7 October 2006). He describes it as a book “badly written, erratic and confusing”, and alleges “a logical howler in the superfluous second half of the book that would make an undergraduate philosophy student blush”, and “this from an intellectual who says he is determined to expose the faulty logic behind religion”. He complains of its “hectoring tone”, which he assumes arises from its being aimed at “fundamentalist Christians”, and says that “at times I felt as if I was being bludgeoned into accepting assertion rather than being invited to exercise reason”. He alleges that in this book “deism, which has not yet been seen off by science, is dismissed with a rhetorical flourish”, that “Dawkins brushes aside claims of God’s existence” and that, “in a similar vein, he disposes of challenges to evolution”. “He fails to answer the question: Why, if there is no God, does four-fifths of the world’s population believe in one?”

Professor John Haldane of St Andrew’s University (in *An Intelligent Person’s Guide to Religion*), comments on Richard Dawkins’ presentation of evolutionary ideas: “By his own lights, and those of many others, he is a spokesman on behalf of unprejudiced reason and sound understanding. According to another perspective, however, Dawkins represents the arrogance and intellectual imperialism of a world-view that would reduce all reality to aggregates of particles or packages of energy.” Dawkins believes that human beings are “incredibly complex, multi-functioning systems with properties we barely begin to understand Nonetheless Dawkins does believe that we are material beings in a wholly material universe.”

When some scientists advocate evolution rather than God as the reason for the existence of things as they are, and particularly as the explanation for human consciousness and for religion, they are not speaking as scientists but as persons controlled by that “enmity against God” which is the reaction to the consciousness of God, and to the revelation of God, which characterises the fallen human race. They are indeed displaying “blind trust, in the absence of evidence, even in the teeth of evidence”. They are governed by irrational

prejudice not rooted in the facts of science but in the blindness of unbelief which has no place for the most fundamental fact of all – the fact of God. Do they consider even the possibility that “the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse” (Rom 1:21)? Do they consider even the possibility that in the widespread belief in God, however perverted, and in the exercise of conscience, human beings “show the work of the law written in their hearts” (Rom 2:15), rather than the result of mere indoctrination?

Faith in divine revelation provides us with the key to true rational thinking. “Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear” (Heb 11:3). Which faith fits in with all the known facts and is calculated to appeal to unprejudiced reason? *HMC*

Corporal and Capital Punishment

Corporal punishment has the same place in the discipline of children as capital punishment has in the judicial system of a nation – it is the ultimate deterrent. A child who is sufficiently naughty should be smacked, and a man sufficiently criminal should be executed. In both cases there is a divine warrant in the Word of God, and in both cases there is an assurance of divine approval when a faithful effort is made to administer discipline or justice. For smacking, the warrant and the promise are found, for instance, in Proverbs 23:13-14: “Withhold not correction from the child: for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell.”

For execution, a New Testament warrant is given in Romans 13:4: the ruler “beareth not the sword in vain”. The sword here is that of judicial execution, the human analogue of the sword of divine justice by which Christ was put to death: “Awake, O sword, against My shepherd” (Zec 13:7). An assurance of divine approval can be drawn from the provision mentioned in Deuteronomy 21 by which a heifer was to be slain if a murder was committed but the murderer remained undiscovered. The elders of the city were to affirm before God that they did not know who the murderer was and were to pray that God would not lay “innocent blood unto Thy people of Israel’s charge” (v 8). If God was satisfied with this, how much more is He satisfied with a sincere attempt to execute justice when the murderer can be caught.

In the absence of an ultimate deterrent, the judicial system of a country falls into disarray. If a murderer is only to be imprisoned rather than executed,

then a lesser criminal must receive a still milder sentence, and so on, all down the line. The state becomes progressively enfeebled in dealing with crime, and criminals become correspondingly bolder. At the same time, God's blessing is forfeited and the blood of the murdered victims cries out to God for vengeance, both against the murderers and against the country that has set so little store by their lives. A further consequence, as we have seen in Ulster and are now seeing in some parts of our large cities, is that gangsters and terrorists become more feared than the forces of law and order. They can inflict death, which the state is not prepared to do, and they are therefore more to be dreaded and obeyed than the state is.

A similar disorder is introduced into the domestic circle when corporal punishment is prohibited, or is given up under the influence of unbiblical principles. Children soon realise that they have little to fear from their parents' displeasure and, thereafter, time is wasted cajoling them with bribes and inducements in circumstances when they should simply be compelled, if need be, to obey. The excessive "power" thus given to children does not lead to their happiness, and it serves to confuse their natural sense of right and wrong. A child who has been justly smacked is much happier, almost immediately, than one who is allowed to carry on behaving outrageously while its parents vainly threaten and remonstrate. Smacking is God's appointed way for "clearing the air" and restoring harmony in the family. It is one means by which children learn wisdom: "Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him" (Prov 22:15).

The opposition to smacking, from organisations such as Barnardo's and Save the Children, is opposition to God, in several respects. It is an express rejection of His commandment and a denial of His Word: "He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes" (Prov 13:24, 19:18). It involves deliberate and persistent misrepresentation of smacking – continually asserting, in the face of all argument and evidence, that it is indistinguishable from the assault of a child by an adult. And it calls into question God's own dealings with His children in the way of chastisement. He says: "Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth". It is in love that God inflicts chastisement upon His people, so that they "might be partakers of His holiness"; and likewise it is in love that ordinary parents chastise their children.

The fruit of the present campaign against the disciplining of children is seen all around us, and many a mother now bears witness to the truth of God's word: "The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame" (Prov 29:15). *DWBS*

Church Information

Day of Humiliation and Prayer

The Synod decided that "Wednesday, 13 December 2006, be held throughout the Church as a day of humiliation and prayer, so that we may humble ourselves before God, seeking that He would arise and have mercy upon our nation and that He would pour upon us the Spirit of grace and supplications so that we would repent of our iniquities and return to Him".

(Rev) J MacLeod, Clerk of Synod

Meetings of Presbytery (DV)

Northern: At Dingwall, on Monday, November 27, at 2 pm.

Southern: At Glasgow, on Tuesday, November 28, at 3 pm.

Outer Isles: At Tarbert, on Wednesday, December 27, at 12 noon.

Australia & New Zealand: At Auckland, Friday, January 26, at 2.30 pm.

Skye: At Portree, on Tuesday, February 6, at 11 am.

Outreach Fund

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

R A Campbell, General Treasurer

Acknowledgement of Donations

The General Treasurer acknowledges with sincere thanks the following donations:

College & Library Fund: Friend, Newcastle, Jer 17:14, £40; Friend, Newcastle, Ps 27:14, £40.

Jewish & Foreign Missions Fund: US friend, for Kenya Mission, \$3137.72.

Congregational Treasurers acknowledge with sincere thanks the following donations:

Ballifeary Home: The estate of the late Miss Henrietta MacLennan, £5000.

Bracadale: *Congregational Funds:* Friends, Inverness, £200.

Breasclete: *Communion Expenses:* SMK, £100; Anon, £7, £7, £6.

Dingwall: *Congregational Funds:* North Uist Friend, £25 per Rev NMR.

Duirinish: *Communion Expenses (Vatten):* CM, Staffin House, £100 per JC.

Glasgow: *Bus Fund:* Anon, £10, £10, £10, £20, £20, £20. *Congregational Funds:* Anon, for Communion expenses, £50; Anon, £50. *Eastern Europe Fund:* Anon, £60, £60, £50, £40, £40, £40, £40, £40, £40, £40, £35, £30. *Jewish & Foreign Missions Fund:* Anon, £200, £200; KMS, £450; AML, £300; Anon, for Israel Mission, £10, £40.

Greenock: *Congregational Funds:* Anon, where needed, £40. *Eastern Europe Fund:* Anon, £20, £20, £20. *Jewish & Foreign Missions Fund:* Anon, £20. *TBS:* Anon £15, £20, £20, £20.

Lochbroom: *Where Most Needed:* Friend, £60.

North Harris: *Communion Expenses:* Anon, £20; DJG, £60 per Rev JBJ. *Congregational Funds:* Anon, "In memory of Mr John MacInnes, Kyles", £200. *Sabbath School Expenses:* Anon, £20. *Where Most Needed:* JNL, £80; CML, £20 per Rev JBJ.

Portree: *Bus Fund:* Anon, £30, £10. *Communion Expenses:* DRM, £75. *Sustentation Fund:* Anon, £5.

Uig: *Communion Expenses:* Anon, £40, £20, £20, IML, £120. *Where Most Needed:* Skye Friends, £70; Friend, £40; Prof & Mrs Webster, £50; J Webster, £100.