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## What Will not Save

**I**t was the third day after Jesus was crucified. As the women went early that morning to anoint the Saviour's body, they were asking: "Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre?" They need not have worried, for an angel had already descended from heaven to roll the stone away. But, though they did not know it, there was another difficulty in their way. The chief priests and Pharisees had gone to Pilate professing concern over Christ's prophecy that He would rise from the dead on the third day. They expressed their fears that the disciples would come by night to remove the body. So it was arranged that around the grave would be placed a guard, who "made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch". But the angel's "countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow" and, as a result of that supernatural glory, the watchmen were afraid – "for fear of him keepers did shake, and became as dead men".

The circumstances were such that you might expect any group of sinners, no matter how hardened, at once to repent and turn to Christ. But the outcome was altogether different, as is clear from the subsequent actions of the guards. They accepted a large sum of money from the chief priests, to spread a false story to this effect: Christ's "disciples came by night, and stole Him away while we slept". Clearly, however great the glory of the angel and its effects on the men who formed the guard at the grave, it made no spiritual impression on them whatever.

It was similar in the garden of Gethsemane, when Jesus asked those who came to arrest Him, "Whom seek ye?" They told Him: "Jesus of Nazareth". And He replied, "I am He". Immediately "they went backward, and fell to the ground". But again there was no saving effect, in spite of the tremendous power of Jesus' words. These were not saving words, and they were not intended to be. The men quickly recovered, and the Saviour allowed them to lead Him away. This once more illustrates the point that no event, however unusual, or even miraculous, can have the least spiritual influence on sinners, for they are *dead* in trespasses and sins. This was true of most of the Jews while the Saviour was on earth; John commented: "Though He had done

so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on Him". And we need not be surprised when sinners continue spiritually unmoved by such events as a prolonged illness, a serious accident, or the death of someone close to them – what we might expect to bring them under genuine concern of soul. It ought to be clear that no influence, however severe, will do spiritual good to a sinner unless it is accompanied by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Pharaoh was often moved to make promises to Moses and Aaron when the Lord sent plagues against Egypt. For instance: "Intreat the Lord that He may take away the frogs from me, and from my people; and *I will let the people go*". But the narrative goes on: "When Pharaoh saw that there was respite, he hardened his heart, and hearkened not unto them". He was prepared to make promises when he was experiencing the effects of the plagues. The situation may then have looked hopeful to the Israelites, but God, in His sovereignty, was not accompanying these influences with the saving power of the Holy Spirit. Pharaoh was left in his sins; he was allowed to harden his heart – with the result that, when other plagues came, he was all the more resistant to God's voice in connection with these judgements.

There has often been a similar response when sinners have been touched in their consciences as a result of some difficult event in providence, or by a powerful sermon. They accept that they are sinners; they can see that God is displeased with them; they know that they are under condemnation and will perish for ever unless they repent. But they resist these convictions; they are unwilling to submit to God's authority; they want to go on in their sins. And God leaves them to hardness of heart. It is highly dangerous to *assume* that those who have undergone some spiritual experience have been savingly changed. It is indeed the Spirit's work to bring about conviction in a soul, but conviction is not conversion. Not every religious experience can be described as effectual calling.

On the other hand, after Paul and Silas had been imprisoned in Philippi, the jailer not only had a striking experience, but the Holy Spirit made him a new creature in Christ. It was not the great earthquake – which shook the foundations of the prison so powerfully that all the doors were opened – that had a permanent influence on the jailer. At this point he was about to commit suicide and needed to be told, "Do thyself no harm". But, through the Holy Spirit working powerfully in his heart – though no doubt in connection with the earthquake and the events which followed – he was brought to ask, "What must I do to be saved?" The response was: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house".

Paul and Silas were giving the outward call of the gospel without knowing whether it would prove successful or not. And the jailer did believe, as did

his household, though we must bear in mind the further teaching, from the Word of God, which Paul and Silas gave them. Yet, while the earthquake was no doubt a significant factor in what happened, it was not the critical factor. What was critical was the fact that the jailer and his household were called effectually by the Holy Spirit. The *Shorter Catechism* defines effectual calling as “the work of God’s Spirit, whereby, convincing us of our sin and misery, enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and renewing our wills, He doth persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ, freely offered to us in the gospel”. It is only when the free offer of the gospel is made effective by the Holy Spirit that the sinner is safe for eternity. So it was with Lydia; the Lord opened her heart – in circumstances where, as far as we know, there was nothing outward of an extraordinary character.

Though earthquakes and other unusual events have been used as subsidiary means in the conversion of individuals, they are most certainly not essential. In particular, as we have seen, supernatural appearances will not bring about a saving change. When the rich man, already in a lost eternity, asked Abraham to send Lazarus “to my father’s house: for I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment”, it was made clear to him that *this* was not a means which God had appointed for salvation. We are told that Abraham said to the rich man: “They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them”. Moses and the prophets – the Old Testament scriptures – were the ordinary means, and they were perfectly sufficient. Matthew Henry notes that “a messenger from the dead could say no more than what is said in the Scriptures, nor say it with more authority”.

In response to the repeated request of the rich man, Abraham again insisted: “If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead”. So today, the whole Word of God – Old Testament and New – and the proclamation of its message in public preaching, are the means which God has appointed for the salvation of sinners. Matthew Henry comments further that “Scripture is now the ordinary way of God’s making known His mind to us, and it is sufficient. It is presumption for us to prescribe any other way.” We are not to look for miracles of any kind – though the saving work of the Holy Spirit is most certainly supernatural, for He is a divine Person. But even if such miracles were possible, the account of the rich man in hell should convince us that miracles, including the return of someone like Lazarus from the dead, would be totally ineffective in bringing even one sinner into the kingdom of God.

In the Bible we have the gospel of God, which speaks of a glorious Saviour who died and rose again. When applied by the Holy Spirit, it is a sure salvation, making heaven certain for the believer. Nothing else is needed.

## The Danger of Neglecting Salvation (2)<sup>1</sup>

A Sermon by *Thomas Pitcairn*

Jeremiah 8:20. *The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved.*

**2.** **The particular guilt and danger connected with this state.** Wherever, and in whatever circumstances, there exists an unsaved soul, there is guilt and consequently danger. Sin on the part of every child of fallen Adam is heinous in the sight of God; it involves the sinner in guilt and necessarily exposes him to punishment. Even the heathen are guilty and condemned before God; we are expressly assured that they are without excuse in remaining in their present state of darkness, because His eternal power and Godhead are clearly seen from the things that are made.

And if this be the case with the heathen, how much more aggravated is the guilt and how awful the condemnation of those who have enjoyed the light of the gospel but refused to walk in it, who have had overtures of mercy made to them but declined to accept them. It is very clearly the doctrine of Scripture that much shall be required of them to whom much is given – that great talents involve corresponding responsibility. Mark the Saviour’s language in addressing the cities wherein most of His mighty works had been done: “Woe unto thee, Chorazin! Woe unto thee, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works which have been done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon, and for Sodom and Gomorrah at the day of judgement, than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgement, than for thee” (Matt 11:21-24).

To a similar effect are Paul’s words to the Hebrews: “If the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard Him; God also bearing them witness, with signs and wonders, and divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to His will?” (2:2-4). It is thus clearly written in the Word that, according to the privileges enjoyed, so is the responsibility of those who enjoy them and that therefore, in proportion to opportunities neglected and misused, so is the

<sup>1</sup>The first head of this sermon, “preached after the celebration of the Lord’s Supper”, appeared last month, and dealt with the particular state of the soul which the text describes. The remainder of the sermon is printed here.

degree of guilt contracted and the consequent condemnation. There must accordingly be particular guilt and danger connected with the state of a soul in the circumstances which have now been referred to.

Yes, let the sinner recollect that the close of seasons of grace finds him in a very different state from what he was when they began. If still unsaved, he has the less excuse; he has more guilt on his head if he has failed to profit from the time of his visitation. For example, if this sacramental occasion, during which you were favoured with the faithful preaching of the Word, has passed away without any good impression being made upon your minds – without any saving acquaintance with Christ, without any desires after His salvation – you are now in a very different state from what you would have been if you had enjoyed no such opportunities of hearing the Word. To former guilt you have added that of slighting and obstinately refusing the salvation which has been urged upon your acceptance.

And recollect, in regard to the services even of an ordinary Sabbath, that when the day closes, you are in a different state from that in which you were when it began. If this day you shall again leave the house of God without any saving interest in Christ, you must go with increased guilt, for leaving in such a state implies that you have continued to lend a deaf ear to the solicitations of mercy, and have remained unimpressed by all the truths which have been addressed to you. In these circumstances, the Word will only prove the savour of death unto death; it will only be instrumental in ministering to that condemnation which, if grace prevent not, will at last be assigned to you as your everlasting portion.

So too in regard to failing to profit from seasons of revival. Indeed special guilt is contracted by those who experience such seasons but allow them to pass away without any saving benefit to their souls. And why so? Because at these times God may be said to speak with sinners more earnestly and to entreat them more urgently. It is then also made more evident what divine grace can accomplish, and at such seasons the Spirit gives more ample demonstration of the power of the truth. For sinners to resist all the evidences thus afforded, to shut the eyes against all the Lord's doings of mercy and of grace, and to close the ears against the Saviour's voice – then more than usually beseeching – is to contract special guilt and to heap to themselves wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgement of God.

Such things may also be said of those whose souls are still unsaved when nature begins to fail and when the end of life appears close at hand. We have seen how it may be said of such that the harvest is past and the summer is ended. And if it has been a summer of privilege, and a harvest in which fruit was to be expected – if they have lived under gospel light, where there was

a plentiful provision of the means of grace – great guilt and danger must have been incurred. Indeed it is quite impossible to form any estimate of the guilt of that man who has lived all his days in a land of gospel light, who in early life received the instruction of godly parents, who was long privileged with the faithful preaching of the Word, who associated with those who feared the Lord, and had the opportunity of witnessing in them the sanctifying influence of the truth, and who has reached old age – or is about to close his earthly career – with a soul still estranged from God and utterly unprepared for eternity. As it is impossible to value the privileges which that man has enjoyed, so we cannot calculate the amount of guilt he has contracted by failing to make good use of them.

Think of these things, you who still have no interest in the great salvation. Life must close sooner or later. At no distant period, death must come to all of you; and, every day that you continue unconcerned about your soul, you are becoming less prepared for the last enemy's approach. And you are adding to the weight of that vengeance which, unless you turn unto the Lord, you must assuredly share with all those who know not God and who obey not the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

**3. The bitterness of spirit experienced by the sinner when he is awakened** to see that his condition is as has now been described. The words of the text are supposed to be uttered by the Israelites themselves, and bitter must have been their disappointment and grief when they were forced to exclaim, "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved". Now, while others may mourn over the situation of those who have sinned away their day of grace – whose summer and harvest are past – these feelings are not to be compared with the feelings of those who have to say for themselves: "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved".

Here I would appeal in the first instance to you who have already been brought from darkness unto light and from Satan unto God. When first awakened to know your lost and ruined condition, were you not filled with fear and trembling? And was it not a principal source of your mental anguish that you had neglected so many precious opportunities for spiritual profit – that you had abused so many valuable privileges; that you had turned a deaf ear to so many gracious invitations; that, when God had spoken to you, you had so often refused; and that, when He had stretched forth His hand, you had so often disregarded? Was it not the case that the thought of misspent Sabbaths, and misused seasons of spiritual instruction, stung you with the deepest remorse and filled you with a sense of your exceeding vileness?

So long as a sinner remains unconcerned about his soul, he can think of all his abused privileges without the least emotion; but when awakened by the

Spirit of God, he is filled with grief and sorrow of heart. His sins against light and conscience, against invitations and warnings, promises and threatenings, are all presented to his view. They become the occasion of an anguish which none but those who have been similarly awakened have ever experienced, and from which he can get no relief until that same Spirit who has aroused him will lead him by faith to the peace-speaking blood of the Lamb.

But how seldom are they ever awakened at all who continue to old age, and to the close of a long life, in neglect of privileges and ignorant of the great salvation. The harvest passes and the summer closes, and they are not in the least concerned about it. The evening of their days is passed just like the morning and the noon – generally indeed in a more hardened state. This is just the melancholy effect of a continued abuse of privileges and the resistance to offered mercy. The conscience becomes deadened, seared as with a red-hot iron, incapable of being in any way impressed.

But when in such cases there is any awakening, a view of the past gives rise to just the same bitterness of heart – and, blessed be God, He sometimes brings sinners to Himself at the eleventh hour, to the praise and glory of His grace, when a sickbed, or increasing infirmities, are made instrumental in arousing them to serious thought. They think of the opportunities which have been enjoyed but abused, of the many invitations which have been slighted and warnings which have been despised; they remember too that precious opportunities are now lost and gone for ever. In regard to means long enjoyed, it may truly be said that the harvest is past and the summer is ended. The soul that is awakened in such circumstances is filled with the deepest sorrow and penetrated with the bitterest anguish.

Well indeed is it when the sorrow is of a godly sort, working repentance unto salvation not to be repented of, when the anguish of soul occasioned by the Spirit of God lays the sinner low in the depths of his misery, before placing his feet on the Rock of Ages. We have heard again and again of those who have, in their latter end, been awakened to a view of their condition, but apparently only that they might have some foretaste of the misery awaiting them in an eternal world. O how indescribably awful must the condition of that man be who has sinned away the day of grace, and who in his latter end is awakened by his natural conscience to some knowledge of his state as a sinner, but without having a single ray of hope imparted to his soul! How dreadful his agony when forced to say, “The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and I am not saved”!

He looks back on the past, the many opportunities which he has despised, the many counsels which he has set at nought, the many warnings which he has slighted, the many daring acts of rebellion he has committed against a

compassionate God. He looks forward to the future and he beholds an undone eternity; he sees the blackness of darkness for ever, the worm that dieth not and the fire that never shall be quenched. And with such a retrospect and such a prospect, his conscience too charges him with the folly and the wickedness of having permitted himself to be placed in such a condition as this. Who can describe, who can form any idea of, the anguish which must fill his breast when about to leave the land of the living and the place of hope, as he exclaims, "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and I am not saved"?

Now, in conclusion, I would press upon all the duty of improving present opportunities. Although much precious time has been misspent and many valuable privileges despised, yet the summer and harvest are not altogether past. Privileges have not yet been entirely removed; it is still the season in which we may look for showers of the Spirit to refresh the thirsty ground and to cause the seed which has been sown to grow. But the season is precarious; it may close very soon and very suddenly. Before we are aware, our privileges may be removed from us, or we from them. Improve then your present opportunities. "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." "Seek ye the Lord while He may be found; call ye upon Him while He is near." He is still near, and still to be found, in the preaching of the gospel and all appointed ordinances. O listen then, and comply now with the gracious invitation addressed to you by a beseeching God: "Incline your ear and come unto Me; hear and your soul shall live, and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David".

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

*Rev Neil M Ross*

"I believe in the forgiveness of sins." This statement from the Apostles' Creed was quoted to Martin Luther when he was burdened by guilt and in dread of God's wrath due to him for his sins. It encouraged him to begin to hope that he might receive forgiveness for himself. And, before Luther's time and since, this has been a comforting truth to many: that there is forgiveness with God, although He would be just in marking iniquity.

We shall touch on a few points in three main areas of the doctrine of forgiveness. **First**, there is God's *judicial* (sometimes called *legal*) forgiveness. This aspect of forgiveness demands most of our attention, as it is the first of the two great blessings listed in our credal statements about justification –

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<sup>1</sup>This paper, somewhat extended for publication, was given at the Theological Conference of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland in December 2005.



justification itself being, as John Calvin wrote, “the principal ground on which religion must be supported”.<sup>2</sup> **Second**, we will look briefly at God’s *fatherly* forgiveness, (in continuing to forgive the justified and pardoned sinner); and **third**, the *duty of forgiving one another* according to the Scripture injunction, “And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you” (Eph 4:32).

### 1. God’s Judicial Forgiveness

**(1) The guilt of sin.** The term forgiveness (and its synonyms *pardon* and *remission*) imply guilt. Although we often think of guilt in terms of feeling guilty or having a troubled conscience, the term *guilt* essentially means *liability to punishment*. The sinner, by his sins, has contracted guilt – that is, he has become liable to punishment. He is under God’s condemnation and is therefore under the curse of God. “Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them” (Gal 3:10). The guilty sinner has the glittering sword of divine justice hanging over him; he is in a most perilous situation; he is in pressing need of God’s forgiveness.

When a sinner is convicted of his sins and knows that God is *bound* to punish him for his sin, he cannot but wonder how God can possibly forgive him. Vindictory justice (also known as punitive justice) is a divine attribute, and consequently the guilty sinner must suffer the just punishment due to him from God. The Apostle Paul asked, “Is God unrighteous who taketh vengeance? (I speak as a man) God forbid: for then how shall God judge the world?” (Rom 3:5,6). John Owen says, “Vindictory justice is so natural to God that, sin being supposed, He cannot, according to the rule of His right, wisdom and truth, but punish it”.<sup>3</sup> J H Thornwell likewise states that “the glory of God, especially the integrity of His moral character, indispensably demands that sin be punished”.<sup>4</sup>

**(2) Forgiveness with God.** It is also true, however, as Psalms 86:5 and 130:4 show, that there is forgiveness with God. When He forgives the sins of the sinner, He puts those sins away (so that the sinner is no longer exposed to punishment). The idea of *putting away* is at the very heart of the Biblical words *forgive*, *pardon* and *remit*, which in most instances are from either the Hebrew *nasa* “to take away”, or the Greek *aphiemi*, “to send away”. Forgiveness, then, is the removal of the sinner’s guilt – that is, of his liability to punishment. Thomas Boston defines pardon as “the taking away of this guilt, this dreadful obligation to punishment. While the criminal stands bound with the cords of guilt, [awaiting] execution, a pardoning God says, ‘Deliver his

<sup>2</sup>*Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Edinburgh, 1879 edition, bk 3, 11:1.

<sup>3</sup>*The Works of John Owen*, Edinburgh, 1862 edition, vol 10, pp 499-500.

<sup>4</sup>*The Collected Writings of James Henley Thornwell*, Edinburgh, 1986 reprint, vol 3, p 213.

soul from going down to the pit, I have found a ransom' (Job 33:24). Pardon cuts the knot – whereby guilt ties sin and wrath together – cancels the bond obliging the sinner to pay his debt, reverses the sentence of condemnation, and puts him out of the law's reach."<sup>5</sup>

Since it is true that God is bound to punish sin, how is it possible for Him to forgive the sins of a human being in a way consistent with His justice? The condemned sinner, do what he may, cannot purchase the priceless blessings of forgiveness and peace with God. It is impossible for him to satisfy divine justice for even the least of his sins – one sin alone merits eternal punishment. Nor is it possible for him, as an innately sinful creature, to give the personal, perfect and perpetual obedience required by the moral law. Well might he echo the question in the Book of Job, "How then can man be justified with God?" (Job 25:4).

**(3) *Forgiveness procured by Christ.*** The amazing answer to that age-old question is that Jesus Christ, the Son of God in human nature, rendered full satisfaction to divine justice for the elect by taking their law place, and acting as both their substitute and surety. As their representative, He completely fulfilled the law both in its precepts and its penal sanctions. Those penal sanctions He endured particularly by His unspeakable sufferings unto death upon the cross. There the sword of divine justice smote Him. There, in the place of His people, He was bruised for their iniquities, and the chastisement of their peace was laid upon Him. There He made a full atonement for their sins. He cried, "It is finished!" and gave up the ghost.

It is the shedding of Christ's precious blood that has opened up the way for pardon to flow from God to guilty sinners. George Smeaton makes this point when he says that Christ "very emphatically, at the institution of the Supper, placed the pardon of sin in causal connection with His own atoning death, or with His blood shed for many (Matt 26:28)".<sup>6</sup> The same causal connection is seen in Romans 3:25, "Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His *blood*, to declare His righteousness for the *remission of sins* that are past, through the forbearance of God". It is therefore to Christ crucified that believers give praise as the procuring cause of their forgiveness: "In whom we have redemption through *His* blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of *His* grace" (Eph 1:7). "Unto *Him* that loved us, and washed us from our sins in *His* own blood" (Rev 1:5).

**(4) *Obtaining forgiveness.*** It is impossible for a sinner to obtain forgiveness apart from exercising *faith* in Christ. The solemn warning of Christ Himself

<sup>5</sup>*Commentary on the Shorter Catechism*, Edmonton, 1993 reprint, vol 1, p 586.

<sup>6</sup>*The Doctrine of the Atonement as Taught by Christ Himself*, Edinburgh, 1868, p 332. Matthew 26:28 reads: "For this is My blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins".

is: "If ye believe not that I am He, ye shall die in your sins" (John 8:24). And, the Apostle Peter declared, all the prophets gave witness to Christ "that through His name whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins" (Acts 10:43). It is Christ, as Paul wrote to the saints in Rome, "whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God" (Rom 3:25). *The Shorter Catechism* beautifully encapsulates the matter: "Justification is an act of God's free grace, wherein He pardoneth all our sins, and accepteth us as righteous in His sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone" (answer 33).

It is often said, "No remission of sin without *repentance for sin*". Scripture ties repentance and forgiveness together. Luke 24:47 says, "That repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem". It seems to some that Acts 3:19 ("Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out") makes repentance a procuring cause of forgiveness, but, as our Confession of Faith says, repentance is not to be rested in "as any satisfaction for sin, or any cause of the pardon thereof, which is the act of God's free grace in Christ" (15:3). David Clarkson emphasised the same point: "Think not your repentance is the cause of any blessing: it is neither the meritorious nor impulsive cause; it neither deserves any mercy, nor moves the Lord to bestow any."<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, as the Confession goes on to say, repentance "is of such necessity to all sinners, that none may expect pardon without it" (15:3).

Of course, there can be no evangelical, or gospel, repentance until pardon is actually bestowed. The repentance which precedes pardon is no more than legal repentance, with its ingredients of regret, remorse, a sense of danger and a dread of punishment. Gospel repentance flows from, and follows, forgiveness of sin. As John Colquhoun of Leith rightly says, "A spiritual apprehension of the pardoning mercy of God in Christ, is one of the springs of true repentance. Without . . . the apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ there may be a sense of sin, but not a true sense."<sup>8</sup> "There is a repentance preliminary to faith", says John Kennedy. "There is repentance implied in faith . . . There is a repentance occasioned by faith. It is to this that the words refer: 'they shall look to Him whom they have pierced, and shall mourn for Him'.<sup>9</sup>" In gospel repentance the sinner does certain remarkable things. As the Shorter Catechism states, the sinner "doth, with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God, with full purpose of, and endeavour after, new

<sup>7</sup>*Works of David Clarkson*, Edinburgh, 1988 reprint, vol 1, p 20.

<sup>8</sup>*Repentance*, London, 1965 reprint, p 18.

<sup>9</sup>*Expository Lectures*, Inverness, 1911, p 147.

obedience". How can he do such things before receiving pardon? James Thornwell puts it well: "Pardon is accordingly indispensable to repentance – the liability to punishment, or what Protestants denominate guilt, must be cancelled, before reformation is possible or holiness attainable".<sup>10</sup>

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

### 5. Analysing the Revival

At the Yale commencement in 1741 Edwards was the preacher and used the occasion to give a spirited defence of the revival, while acknowledging that there had been some excesses. He preached on 1 John 4:1: "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world". The discourse was published later that year with the title, *The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God*.<sup>2</sup> There was a substantial preface from William Cowper, a prominent Boston minister. For Scottish readers, John Willison of Dundee described the book as "most excellent, solid, judicious and scriptural".

The first section of the published work consisted of negative signs: no certain conclusions about the genuineness of a revival could, one way or the other, be drawn from any of the following: (1) that the work is carried on in an unusual or extraordinary way, (2) that there are bodily effects such as tears, trembling and groans, (3) that it results in a great deal of noise about religion, (4) that great impressions are made on the imaginations of those who are influenced by it, (5) that the example of others is a great means of bringing it about, (6) that the subjects of it are guilty of great irregularities in their conduct, (7) that there are many errors in judgement and even some delusions of Satan mixed up with the work, (8) that some who were thought to be converted should fall away into serious errors or sins, and finally (9) that it is promoted by ministers insisting very much on the terrors of God's law.

What then are "the sure, distinguishing Scripture evidences and marks of a work of the Spirit of God" which we may use to judge the genuineness of what appears to be a revival "without danger of being misled"? Edwards gives the following, on the basis of the chapter in 1 John from which he took his text: a revival is genuine (1) when the work is such as to raise the esteem of professed converts for Jesus and seems to establish their minds in the truth

<sup>10</sup>*Collected Writings*, vol 3, p 364.

<sup>1</sup>The previous article gave an account of the 1742 revival.

<sup>2</sup>Reprinted in *Select Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol 1, 1965 edition, pp 75-147, also in *Works*, vol 2, pp 257-277.

of the gospel testimony to Him as the Son of God and the Saviour of men, (2) when the spirit that is at work operates against the interests of Satan's kingdom, which lies in encouraging and establishing sin, (3) when this spirit operates to bring about a greater regard to the Scriptures and establishes them more in their truth and divine origin, (4) when that spirit operates as a spirit of truth, leading persons to the truth and convincing them of those things that are true, and lastly, (5) when that spirit operates as a spirit of love to God and man.

Edwards then turned to a series of "practical inferences". His first point was to insist that the recent revival, known to history as the Great Awakening – which had brought about such an unusual concern about the things of religion – was "undoubtedly, in general, from the Spirit of God". What were the facts? As Edwards saw them, and no doubt accurately, "the Spirit that is at work takes off persons' minds from the vanities of the world and engages them in a deep concern about eternal happiness and puts them upon earnestly seeking their salvation and convinces them of the dreadfulness of sin and of their own guilty and miserable state as they are by nature. It awakens men's consciences and makes them sensible of the dreadfulness of God's anger and causes in them a great desire and earnest care and endeavour to obtain His favour. It puts them upon a more diligent improvement of the means of grace which God has appointed, accompanied with a greater regard to the Word of God, a desire of hearing and reading it, and of being more conversant with it than they used to be."

Edwards had taken the opportunity, he told his readers, of comparing the effects of this revival with the experiences of those who had been brought into the kingdom of God in Solomon Stoddard's time, and it was evident to him that it was the same kind of work – that the hand of God was in it. Comparing the revivals of 1735 and 1741, Edwards maintained that the latter was "more purely spiritual"; there were fewer excesses, and the converts spoke about their experiences with greater reverence and humility.

The second point of application was a warning: not to oppose the work, not to do the least thing to hinder it, but rather to promote it as much as possible. Edwards drew a comparison between the low state of the Church of his time and the low state of the Jewish Church when Christ came into the world. It should be no wonder, he believed, that in 1741 Christ's "work should appear a strange work to most"; indeed, "it would be a wonder if it should be otherwise".

His third and final point was directed to the friends of the work. They were "to give diligent heed to themselves to avoid all errors and misconduct". They should expect that Satan, the great enemy, would do his utmost against

them. So “we had need to watch and pray, for we are but little children; this roaring lion is too strong for us, and this old serpent too subtle for us. Humility and self-diffidence and an entire dependence on our Lord Jesus Christ will be our best defence.” He warned against pride as “the worst viper in the heart . . . . It is ready to mix with everything; and nothing is so hateful to God, contrary to the spirit of the gospel, or of so dangerous consequence; and there is no one sin that does so much let in the devil into the hearts of the saints and expose them to his delusions.”

Edwards cautioned his readers against giving too much heed to strong impressions on their minds, for they approach too much to the nature of the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit which were granted to the early Church. Also, probably with an eye to Davenport’s<sup>3</sup> views, he warned against despising human learning. And so, he added, the means of obtaining it – study – must not be neglected. He went on to call for *method* in sermons, “which tends greatly to help the understanding and memory”. And he laid considerable stress on the danger of, in an unscriptural way, “passing censures upon other professing Christians as hypocrites and ignorant of real religion”; no one was to “to suppose that men have ability and right to determine the state of the souls of visible Christians and to make an open separation between saints and hypocrites”.

But Satan did get in and caused enormous damage. Edwards pointed to such factors as carnal fanaticism grieving away the Holy Spirit as the main causes for bringing the revival to an end. Whitefield too believed that a chill came over the work through the imprudence of some ministers. Edwards noted that, through inexperience, neither people nor ministers were able to distinguish properly between solid religion and its delusive counterfeits.

But he was to do all in his power to publish volumes which made these distinctions clear. In 1742 he wrote a significant work entitled *Some Thoughts Concerning the Present Revival of Religion in New England*. Edwards acknowledged that there were “a great many errors and sinful irregularities mixed with this work of God, arising from our weakness, darkness and corruption”, but it did “not hinder this work of God’s power and grace from being very glorious”. He noted from church history “that it has been a common device of the devil to upset a revival of religion when he finds he can keep men quiet and secure no longer; then he drives them to excesses and extravagances”.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, the devil will do his utmost to stir up the open enemies of religion against the revival, but he will exert his “main strength” to influence against it those who are truly religious.

<sup>3</sup>Itinerant minister, whose extreme opinions did considerable damage. (See part 4.)

<sup>4</sup>Quoted in Iain H Murray, *Jonathan Edwards, A New Biography*, p 235.

The best known of Edwards' works produced in the aftermath of these revivals is *The Religious Affections*, which arose out of a series of sermons preached in late 1742 and early 1743 on 1 Peter 1:8: "Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory". The book's focus on the affections is in contrast with Chauncy's emphasis on reason and judgement in religion. Indeed the heading of the first section of this book is: "True religion largely consists in holy affections". Edwards was anxious to answer the question: "What are the distinguishing qualifications of those that are in favour with God and entitled to His eternal rewards?" Or, as he rephrased his question: "What is the nature of true religion? And wherein do lie the distinguishing notes of that virtue and holiness that is acceptable in the sight of God?"<sup>5</sup>

By 1746 it was clear that by no means all who, a few years earlier, appeared to be converts had experienced a saving change; many even of those who had appeared to be "eminent saints" had fallen away from their profession. Edwards wrote: "It is with professors of religion, especially such as become so in a time of outpouring of the Spirit of God, as it is with blossoms in the spring; there are vast numbers of them upon the trees, which all look fair and promising; but yet many of them never come to anything. . . . It is the mature fruit which comes afterwards, and not the beautiful colours and smell of the blossoms, that we must judge by."<sup>6</sup>

It was no new thing, he pointed out. It had been so in Josiah's time, and under the preaching of the Saviour, and at the Reformation. So when, during the Great Awakening, Edwards saw multitudes whom the devil had deceived about the state of their souls, he felt it necessary to distinguish clearly between the common and the saving operations of the Holy Spirit. It ought to be borne in mind that during an outpouring of the Spirit the non-saving effects are likely also to be more remarkable than at other times.

Because religion so much moulds the affections for good or for ill, Edwards set himself to distinguish between those which were the result of the saving influences of the Spirit of God and those which were not necessarily so. The bulk of the book consists of two sections, actually parts 2 and 3 of the work. Part 2 sets out to show "what are no certain signs that religious affections are truly gracious or that they are not" – in other words, these are signs which do not tell one way or the other that the person who has them is gracious. They include the following: great effects on the body, fluency and fervour, coming with texts of Scripture, the appearance of love, joys following in a

<sup>5</sup>Jonathan Edwards, *The Religious Affections*, 1961 edition, p 15. Chauncy was a leading Boston minister who opposed the revivals (see part 4).

<sup>6</sup>Quoted in Murray, *Jonathan Edwards*, p 251.

certain order, much time and zeal in duty, much expression of praise, great confidence, and moving testimony. While, of course, they are all consistent with saving grace, none of them *proves* its presence.

Part 3, on the other hand, shows “what are distinguishing signs of truly gracious and holy affections”. Edwards’ headings are: (1) Gracious affections are from divine influence, (2) Their object is the excellence of divine things, (3) They are founded on the moral excellency of objects, (4) They arise from divine illumination, (5) They are attended with a conviction of certainty, (6) They are attended with evangelical humiliation, (7) They are attended with a change of nature, (8) They beget and promote the temper of Jesus, (9) They soften the heart, (10) They show beautiful symmetry and proportion, (11) False affections rest satisfied in themselves, (12) Religious affections have their fruit in Christian practice. And under this last heading Edwards indicates that Christian practice is the chief sign to ourselves and also to others, which corresponds with what he wrote for himself under the heading, “Directions for Judging of Persons’ Experiences”: “See to it that they long after holiness and that all their experiences increase their longing”.

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## A Plea to the Children of Israel (2)<sup>1</sup>

We wish we could persuade you to read and examine the New Testament for yourselves. You might then, by the teaching of God’s Spirit, discover that it is not the evil thing you have hitherto imagined, but is in truth the Word of God. You might find that it is no new revelation, but rests on your own beloved Scriptures, and is full of references to them. You might see that the doctrine of the Apostles is the same as that of the Prophets, and its system of morality nothing else than the Ten Commandments enlarged. You might find, with admiration and joy, that the long-promised Saviour has already come; the Rod from the stem of Jesse (Is 11:1); and yet David’s Lord (Ps 110:1); the Child born, the Son given, whose name is Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace (Is 9:6); whose birthplace should be Bethlehem Ephratah, yet whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting (Mic 5:2).

Surely you will allow that everything in your circumstances as a people calls for consideration. Is it not the case that, ever since the time when your fathers crucified Him who declared Himself to be the Messiah, sent of God,

<sup>1</sup>The second part of an “Address to the Children of Israel from the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland” in 1841, written by Robert Wodrow (1793-1843) and reprinted as an appendix to his *The Past History and Future Destiny of Israel*, 1844.



and rejected the salvation preached by His apostles, your nation has been under the perpetual rebuke of a frowning providence? Your civil and sacred institutions have been entirely broken up. The holy and beautiful house, where the Lord was praised, has been burnt up with fire and all your pleasant things laid waste (Is 64:11). Your cities have been wasted without inhabitant, and your houses without man, and the land made utterly desolate. And the Lord has removed you far away, and there has been a great forsaking in the midst of the land (Is 6:11,12). The Lord has scattered you among the heathen and dispersed you through the countries (Ezek 36:19). And among those nations you have found no ease; neither has the sole of your foot had rest; but the Lord has given you there a trembling heart and failing of eyes and sorrow of mind, and your life has hung in doubt before you, and you have had fear day and night and have had none assurance of your life (Deut 28:65,66).

We write not these things to add to your affliction, but from love to your souls. Surely you, as well as we, may put the question, "What meaneth the heat of this great anger?" (Deut 29:24). "How hath the Lord covered the daughter of Zion with a cloud . . . and cast down from heaven unto earth the beauty of Israel?" (Lam 2:1). It is not enough to say that you have sinned. Your fathers oftentimes sinned and were led into captivity by their enemies. But where, in all their history, will you find a captivity like this? Even when carried to Babylon, the desolations of Jerusalem lasted only 70 years (Dan 9:1).

But now, for 1800 years, the holy city has been trodden under foot and you banished from the land of your fathers. If it be alleged that the ten tribes have been longer in captivity than the Jews, and that they had no hand in putting Jesus to death, we answer that, seeing the Messiah was to spring from Judah (Gen 49:10), seeing that Jerusalem was the place which the Lord had chosen to put His name there (2 Chr 6:6), and seeing the temple which was there, with its priesthood and sacrifices, prefigured Him who was to come (Ps 110:4; 40:6-10; 51:7; 2 Chr 6:18; 7:12-16), it follows that the separation of the ten tribes from Judah, and the erection of another altar at Bethel (1 Ki 12:25-33), was nothing else than the rejection of the promised Messiah Himself. When Israel said, "We have neither portion in David, nor inheritance in the son of Jesse" (1 Ki 12:16), their words were at once expressive of their sin and prophetic of their doom. And hence the awful solemnity with which the sin of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, whereby he made Israel to sin, is again and again pointed to as the cause of the apostasy and overthrow of the kingdom of the ten tribes (1 Ki 14:16; 15:26,30; 16:19; etc).

If men be sinners, as the Word of God and our own consciences testify, and if Jesus Christ be the seed of the woman who was to bruise the head of

the serpent (Gen 3:15), then no sin can be so great or so provoking to God as the rejection of this great Deliverer. Ought you not then, you sons of Jacob, to inquire whether this be not the very sin lying upon you? Certain it is that, ever since you refused to own Jesus as your Saviour, the Lord has refused to own you as His people. You have often, it may be, said in your hearts: "Wherefore have we fasted and Thou seest not: Wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and Thou takest no knowledge?" (Is 58:3); Wherefore have we made many prayers, and still Thou wilt not hear? (Is 1:15). What if you should find that your hands are full of blood (Is 1:15); and that blood the blood not of a fellow-creature, but of the Man who is the fellow of the Almighty (Zec 13:7)? What if you should discover that your King hath already come, just, and having salvation (Zec 9:9), but that you would have none of Him – that the Messenger of the covenant, the Lord whom ye seek, has come to His temple (Mal 3:1), but that you despised Him and counted Him a liar?

It is the testimony of Scripture that "righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people" (Prov 14:34). Is it not remarkable then that, while the fall of Israel has been contemporaneous with their rejection of Jesus, the rise of the Gentiles has run parallel with their faith in His name? It was a wonderful sight, in the early age of the Church, to behold the gospel of Christ, wherever its power was felt, overturning the temples of the gods and raising men to the character of holy and devout worshippers of the Lord. The like effects have ever followed it, wherever it has been received, and just in proportion as it has been received in truth. We speak it to the praise of the Lord's grace that, through the knowledge of the Messiah, our own country has risen to the rank which she occupies among the nations. It is simply, we believe, because He has here ordained a lamp for His Anointed (Ps 132:17) that the King of nations (Jer 10:7) has rendered the name of Britain illustrious, her arms powerful, her arts flourishing, her people intelligent and free.

These advantages, however, are as nothing compared with those which the soul receives. There are indeed many among us who, like those spoken of, make mention of the God of Israel, but not in truth or righteousness (Is 48:1); and for them, if they repent not, Tophet is ordained of old (Is 30:33). But there are not a few of whom it can be said, "Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound; they shall walk, O Lord, in the light of Thy countenance" (Ps 89:15; Is 53:10).

In Scotland, the land of our birth, Messiah has had a seed to serve Him for generations past (Ps 22:30). This wild and barren land has heard the Redeemer's call: "Listen, O isles unto Me, and hearken, ye people, from far" (Is 49:1). She has heard His voice; and the wilderness and the solitary place has been gladdened by it; and the desert has rejoiced and blossomed like

the rose (Is 35:1). She has received the word of the Witness to the people, the Leader and Commander to the people (Is 55:4,11), and the promise has many a time been made good: "Ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace; the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the briar shall come up the myrtle tree: and it shall be to the Lord for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off" (Is 55:12,13).

The gospel of Jesus Christ, the proclamation of a free salvation through the death of Him who made His soul an offering for sin (Is 53:10; 55:1), has, in innumerable instances, proved itself to be the Word of God by changing, through the power of His Spirit, the heart of stone into a heart of flesh and causing men to walk in the Lord's statutes and to keep His judgements and do them (Ezek 36:25-27; Is 52:13-15). The power of that mysterious name, The Lord our Righteousness, by the knowledge of which we trust that Judah shall soon be saved and Israel dwell safely (Jer 23:6), has been felt in creating peace in the conscience which before was like the troubled sea (Is 57:19-21), and love in the heart which before was at enmity with God and with man. Ungodly sinners have been taught to fear that great and fearful name, the Lord our God (Deut 28:58). They have been made holy in their lives and their end has been peace (Ps 37:37).

Fruits like these are not produced by a false religion. They can only grow in the field which has been sown with the sacred seed of the divine Word (Ps 19:7-14). And so it is here. The Scriptures of truth, the Old as well as the New Testament, are highly prized by everyone who believes in Jesus Christ. They are his meditation every day: the books of Moses and the Prophets, no less than the Gospels and Epistles. The histories of the Old as well as the New Testament furnish him with instruction, reproof and comfort. The songs of Zion, the psalms of the sweet singer of Israel (2 Sam 23:1), are most precious to every soul among us that seeks after God. They are milk to our children and meat to our strong men. They are sung in the tabernacles of the righteous (Ps 118:15) by the families who call on the name of the Lord. They are sung in the assemblies of the upright (Ps 111:1), at the meetings of the saints (Ps 89:7), when they enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise (Ps 100:4).

It is impossible that these things could be, were we not worshippers of the God whom your fathers worshipped, and did we not expect to be saved as they were. Men and brethren, it is even so. Our faith is the same as that of Abel, who brought of the firstlings of the flock an offering to God (Gen 4:4); as that of Enoch, who walked with God (Gen 5:24); as that of Noah, who

found grace in the eyes of the Lord (Gen 6:8), and offered burnt offerings to Him on the altar which he built (Gen 8:20); as that of Abraham, with whom the covenant was made by sacrifice (Gen 15), and whose faith was counted for righteousness (Gen 15:6); as that of Jacob, who declared himself unworthy of the least of all God's mercies (Gen 32:10); and who, when dying, said he had waited for the salvation of God (Gen 49:18).

These, and all other true worshippers of the Lord, whose names are recorded in the Old Testament, had respect to the Redeemer who was to come; we have respect to the same Redeemer, now that He has come. It is by the faith of Him who was to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness (Dan 9:24), that we read those Scriptures, which you hold in your hands, with profit and delight. It is through Him that we see the glory and understand the meaning of the daily sacrifice and the passover, of the fast of atonement and the feast of tabernacles, of the year of release and the trumpet of jubilee, of the tabernacle in the wilderness and the temple at Jerusalem, with their sacred furniture and utensils – the candlestick, the altar of burnt-offering and the shewbread, the holy of holies, the ark of the covenant, the mercy seat and the altar of incense. It is in Him whose name is Immanuel (Is 7:14) that we discern the wisdom and the beauty of the laws of Moses; and not only so, but find in them that which gives life and salvation to our souls.

Come then, O house of Jacob, and let us walk together in the light of the Lord (Is 2:5). Why should you remain any longer in darkness and in sorrow? Century after century you have been looking for Messiah but have looked in vain. The time of His coming has been often fixed by your learned men, and every time their calculations have failed. Meanwhile, successive generations of your race have passed into eternity without knowing the answer to that all-important question, "How can man be justified with God, or how can he be clean that is born of a woman?" (Job 25:4) Why would you be stricken any more (Is 1:5)? Will it not suffice you that for 1800 years you have followed the traditions of your fathers and have found them like the friends of Job in his affliction – miserable comforters (Job 16:2)? What avail your talleth or tsitsith? To what purpose your tephillin or mezuzoth?<sup>2</sup> May it not truly be said of them: "The bed is shorter than that a man can stretch himself upon, and the covering narrower than that he can wrap himself in it" (Is 28:20)?

Would that you would listen to the Lord's own words: "Behold the days come that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah; not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers

<sup>2</sup>Talleth and Tsitsith – garments with fringes. Tephillin – small box worn at certain times containing verses of Scripture. Mezuzoth – verses of Scripture affixed to door posts.

in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt” (Jer 31:41). Would that you heard the voice of your redeeming God, saying, “Behold Me, behold Me” (Is 65:1); “Look unto Me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth” (Is 45:22). Would that the Lord Himself might be pleased to pour out upon you the spirit of grace and supplications promised; and then you would be made to look on Him whom you have pierced, and to mourn for Him (Zec 12:10). Then your eyes would be opened to see the fountain which has been opened for sin and uncleanness (Zec 13:1), and which flows from the pierced heart of Him on whom the Lord laid the iniquity of us all (Is 53:6).

Blessed will be the day when Jews and Gentiles together shall submit to Him who is to have dominion from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth (Ps 72:8). Then shall be fulfilled to their utmost extent the words of prophecy, “The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid . . . and the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice’ den. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea” (Is 11:6-9). Then shall Jerusalem be a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God (Is 62:3). To her light the Gentiles shall come, and kings to the brightness of her rising (Is 60:3). Then shall that song be sung in the land of Judah, and re-echoed from the ends of the earth: “We have a strong city; salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks” (Is 26:1). “O Lord, I will praise Thee; though Thou wast angry with me, Thine anger is turned away, and Thou comfortedst me. Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid; for The Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song; He also is become my salvation” (Is 12:1,2). May the Lord hasten it in His time (Is 60:22).

In name and by appointment of the General Assembly,  
Robert Gordon, Moderator.

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No mission to the Jews can have any vitality and permanence unless it is based on full and simple faith in the whole Word of God, from the first chapter of Genesis to the last of Revelation – in the Old Testament, which is Jewish and yet as cosmopolitan as the New; and the New, which, with all its universality, lays as much stress as the Old on the peculiar and never-changing position of Israel.

Live near to God, and so all things will appear to you little in comparison with eternal realities. When first you saw the Saviour, He said, “My blood is sufficient for thee”. And once you were justified, He said, “My grace is sufficient for thee”.

We have utterly failed in our preaching of Jesus if we have not set Him forth to you as “a feast of fat things, of wines on the lees well refined”. *R M M'Cheyne*

## Grace and Weakness<sup>1</sup>

*J C Ryle*

There is a grand simplicity about this passage, which is almost spoilt by any human exposition. To comment on it seems like gilding gold or painting lilies. Yet it throws much light on a subject which we can never understand too well: that is, the true character of Christ's people. The portraits of Christians in the Bible are faithful likenesses. They show us saints just as they are. We learn, firstly, what a strange mixture of grace and weakness is to be *found even in the hearts of true believers*. We see this strikingly illustrated in the language used by Martha and Mary. Both these holy women had faith enough to say, "Lord, if Thou hadst been here, my brother had not died".

Yet neither of them seems to have remembered that the death of Lazarus did not depend on Christ's absence and that, if our Lord had thought fit, He could have prevented his death with a word, without coming to Bethany. Martha had knowledge enough to say, "I know that, even now, whatsoever Thou wilt ask of God, God will give it Thee"; "I know that [my brother] shall rise again at the last day"; "I believe that Thou art the Christ, the Son of God". But even she could get no further. Her dim eyes and trembling hands could not grasp the grand truth that He who stood before her had the keys of life and death, and that in her Master dwelt "all the fulness of the Godhead bodily" (Col 2:9). She saw indeed, but through a glass darkly. She knew, but only in part. She believed, but her faith was mingled with much unbelief. Yet both Martha and Mary were genuine children of God and true Christians.

These things are graciously written for our learning. It is good to remember what true Christians really are. Many and great are the mistakes into which people fall by forming a false estimate of the Christian's character. Many are the bitter things which people write against themselves by expecting to find in their hearts what cannot be found on this side of heaven. Let us settle it in our minds that saints on earth are not perfect angels, but only converted sinners. They are sinners renewed, changed and sanctified, no doubt; but they are yet sinners, and will be till they die. Like Martha and Mary, their faith is often entangled with much unbelief, and their grace compassed round with much infirmity. Happy is that child of God who understands these things, and has learned to judge rightly both of himself and others. Rarely indeed shall we find the saint who does not often need that prayer: "Lord, I believe: help Thou mine unbelief" (Mark 9:24).

We learn, secondly, what need many believers have of *clear views of*

<sup>1</sup>Comments, slightly edited, on John 11:17-29, from *Expository Thoughts on John*, vol 2.

*Christ's person, office and power.* This is a point which is forcibly brought out in the well-known sentence which our Lord addressed to Martha. In reply to her vague and faltering expression of belief in the resurrection at the last day, He proclaims the glorious truth: "I am the resurrection and the life" – I, even I, thy Master, am He that has the keys of life and death in His hands. And then He presses on her once more that old lesson, which she had doubtless often heard, but never fully realized: "He that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die".

There is matter here which deserves the close consideration of all true Christians. Many of them complain of a lack of conscious comfort in their religion. They do not feel the inward peace which they desire. Let them know that vague and indefinite views of Christ are too often the cause of all their perplexities. They must try to see more clearly the great object on which their faith rests. They must grasp more firmly His love and power toward them that believe, and the riches He has laid up for them even now in this world. We are many of us sadly like Martha. A little general knowledge of Christ as the only Saviour is often all that we possess. But of the fulness that dwells in Him – of His resurrection, His priesthood, His intercession, His unflinching compassion – we have tasted little or nothing at all. They are things of which our Lord might well say to many, as He did to Martha: "Believest thou this?"

Let us take shame to ourselves that we have named the name of Christ so long, and yet know so little about Him. What right have we to wonder that we feel so little conscious comfort in our Christianity? Our slight and imperfect knowledge of Christ is the true reason for our discomfort. Let the time past suffice us to have been lazy students in Christ's school; let the time to come find us more diligent in trying to "know Him and the power of His resurrection" (Phil 3:10). If true Christians would only strive, as Paul says, to "comprehend what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge," they would be amazed at the discoveries they would make (Eph 3:18,19). They would soon find, like Hagar, that there are wells of water near them of which they had no knowledge. They would soon discover that there is more of heaven to be enjoyed on earth than they had ever thought possible.

The root of a happy religion is clear, distinct, well-defined knowledge of Jesus Christ. More knowledge would have saved Martha many sighs and tears. Knowledge alone, no doubt, if un sanctified, only "puffeth up" (1 Cor 8:1). Yet, without clear knowledge of Christ in all His offices, we cannot expect to be established in the faith, and be steady and unmoved in the time of need.

## Book Review

**Colossians**, An Exposition by John Davenant, published by the Banner of Truth Trust, hardback, 956 pages, £19.00, obtainable from the Free Presbyterian Bookroom.

This is the latest addition to the Banner of Truth's Geneva Series of commentaries. With nearly 1000 pages, it may be viewed as a particularly daunting challenge. This fact, together with the amount of profound learning in the footnotes, may discourage the Christian public from purchasing it. It is hoped that this review will avert that possibility for some.

Davenant (1576-1641) was awarded a DD at the age of 23 and was made Professor of Divinity at Cambridge University. He became Bishop of Salisbury in 1621. He is best remembered for his work at the famous Synod of Dort, which is detailed in an extensive and interesting biography in this volume by Josiah Allport, the editor, who translated the work (in 1831) and provided many illustrative and historical notes.

The commentary is divided into two volumes, now bound in one. Davenant provides a thorough exegesis of each verse but does not ostentatiously display his extensive learning. Indeed his work has been compared for thoroughness to John Owen's volumes on Hebrews. From its first appearance, it was regarded as the most exhaustive treatment of this short but full Epistle. For this reason it deserves the close attention of students of the Word, and will be a welcome addition to their libraries.

Throughout, Davenant writes on certain texts as an Anglican bishop. This detracts from its otherwise-excellent qualities. Commenting on Colossians 1:2, he describes the "saints in Christ" as "sanctified by the laver of baptism", called such "according to the rule of charity". While there may be elements of truth in this, the writer is at variance with the Reformed Church in Scotland when he claims that the saint "is in baptism cleansed from original corruption, and the imputation of all sins". Even if there is a sense in which baptised persons are "holy" in the external sanctity of the covenant (see 1 Cor 7:14), yet error here is most dangerous. Davenant's comments on Colossians 2:12 and elsewhere do admit the necessity of faith, but he does not properly discriminate between the sign in baptism and the grace signified. He also states, without giving any authority, that "in the ancient Church they not only sprinkled, but immersed in the water, those whom they baptised". This view is rightly disputed by others, equally learned and godly. Again his discussion of Colossians 3:3 is affected adversely by such expressions as: believers are "born again in baptism" (vol 2, p 17).

Davenant's Anglican weaknesses appear also in his discussion of



Colossians 2:16: "Let no man therefore judge you in meat or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: which are a shadow of things to come . . .". The author's difficulties result from the undue prominence given to abstinence from meats and the observance of holy days in the English Church. While he rightly condemns the "false Catholics of the present day" for "torturing of consciences" by imposing such things as meritorious and necessary, he defends the ceremonies of his Church. His plea for abstinence from meat rises no higher than this: "It is consistent either with public good, or reason, or the example of the saints" (vol 1, p 483).

In his defence of the Church celebrating holy days such as Easter and Christmas, he claims that they were "piously and prudently provided by the ancient fathers" (vol 1, p 485). The only attempt to provide Scripture proof for these ceremonies is his reference to the feasts of Purim (Est 9:27) and the Dedication (John 10:22) – both observed under the Old Testament dispensation. Yet Davenant sees it necessary to provide five "cautions" on the subject, perhaps indicating his own unease over their usefulness. Interestingly, his explanation of the term "will-worship" (Col 2:20) contains a very good statement of the regulative principle. Yet, in discussing "psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" (Col 3:16), he gives the Church licence to compose its own songs "under the impulse of the Holy Spirit". Scottish Presbyterians would prefer if he had agreed more heartily with Beza, whom he quotes on this verse, who explains that Paul here alluded to the three-fold division of the Psalms by the Hebrews.

The commentary is a plain exposition of the Word of God which yields much pleasure and profit to the reader. It is eminently useful for the spiritual and practical instruction drawn out of the Epistle. Application is direct and challenging. A few examples may be sufficient to whet appetites.

Writing on Colossians 2:14, where Christ is spoken of as "blotting out the hand-writing of ordinances", Davenant draws the following conclusion: "Since this handwriting of the law is abrogated and blotted out as to its condemnatory power, we infer that it yet retains its directing force. We may not, therefore, take from hence a licence of sinning, but alacrity in serving God; for we are delivered from all our sins . . . not that we may grow wanton in sin, but that we may serve God without fear in holiness and righteousness all our days (Luke 1:74,75)" (vol 1, p 467).

Discussing the duty of mortification, he defines "the old man" (in Col 3:9) thus: "The corruption inherent in our nature, the inclination of all our faculties to evil; and, moreover, that state of sinfulness which they acquired by the habit of sinning before their ingrafting into Christ". This leads him to define

the “new man” as designating “the renewing and fresh propensity of all our faculties to do good, infused into and impressed upon the faithful by the power of the Holy Spirit” (vol 2, pp 83,85).

The practical worth of the commentary comes out clearly in the handling of those parts of chapters 3 and 4 which address moral duties. A detailed discussion of the sin of lying is most profitable (3:9) and the relative duties of wives and husbands are explained with great wisdom and balance. Speaking of the duty of children to parents (3:20), Davenant says, “That filial obedience is perpetual, and is to be rendered even to the last breath of life . . . is manifest from the command itself, ‘Honour thy father . . . that thou mayest live long upon the earth’”.

The instruction derived from each verse is worthy of study. Much is discussed with a view to correcting the manifold errors of Romanism and the writer’s knowledge of its subtleties comes out clearly. For these reasons, and many others, we believe this commentary will be very profitable to the Church today, in spite of the weaknesses mentioned. (Rev) D Campbell

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## Notes and Comments

### *Church Survey: UK & Ireland*

A report published in 2005 with the above title, subtitled *Let the people speak and Help your church grow* has recently come to our attention.<sup>1</sup> Produced by an independent “Ecumenical Research Committee” drawn from various religious bodies, it is based on a survey of 14 000 individuals and groups between September 2003 and September 2004. The research arose from concern over the erosion of moral values and the decline in Church attendance in “mainstream” denominations. It set out to answer such questions as: What is causing this erosion of values? Why are people turning away from the Church? What can be done about it?

The survey was particularly interested in those who had once attended Church regularly but had become infrequent in attendance or had given up completely, though it also sought the opinions of regular attenders. It was motivated by the view that, “only when churches discover what ‘the people want’ and provide for these desires, will church attendance become appealing”. We do not endorse an approach which disregards the fundamental differences between denominations involved in the survey and embraces them all within the general idea of “the Church”. Neither do we endorse the view

<sup>1</sup>It may be downloaded free from [www.churchsurvey.co.uk](http://www.churchsurvey.co.uk) or obtained for £3.50 from The Ecumenical Research Committee, 19 Glenfield Road, Betchworth, Surrey, RH3 7HR.

that the Church's position should be determined by "what the people want" and that the provision of this will cause the Church to grow. The Church's position is to be determined by Scripture and it is dependent upon the work of God the Holy Spirit for its growth. However, the survey engaged the interest of many concerned persons and it came to some informative, if surprising, conclusions.

The main conclusions of the Survey are summarised in five propositions:

(1) "People want churches to emphasise the many reasons why believing in God and Christianity makes sense and to challenge a doubting society."

(2) "People want churches to give clear teaching on the nature of God's holiness and the implications this has for individuals and our two nations." A churchgoer in Surrey is said to have expressed the feeling of thousands when he wrote: "If the message presented in church is merely that 'God is love' without this being balanced by the fact that He is also infinitely holy and requires us to change, then He will be ignored".

(3) "People want churches to give priority to the ministry of worship, satisfying all the various aspects worship involves." Comments were made on the manner in which church services are conducted (so often far removed from "the notion that in an act of worship we are approaching a majestic and awesome God"), on the form of liturgy used and the sense of fellowship experienced – but it is particularly interesting that many called for sermons expository of the Bible. "Thousands of comments were made that sermons on relevant Biblical topics attract, while 'political and social sermons leave people dissatisfied'".

(4) "Many respondents want churches to respond to the needs of this frightened generation by adopting a '*visionary and prophetic role*'". The terms "visionary and prophetic" are generally used here in a sense peculiar to the Charismatic or Dispensational or Pre-millennial views of most of those who raised this issue. Also coming through, however, is the concern of many that the churches should boldly address the moral issues of the day: "Church ministers . . . have a vital role to play in reminding people of God's wrath against individual sin and warning that a corrupt society will not have God's blessing or protection from evil".

(5) "People want clergy to give greater priority to home visiting and pastoral care, in order to reflect God's love and concern for the individual."

Several of the other matters which emerged incidentally from the survey may be mentioned. (1) Many were concerned, especially those with a Church of England background, that the churches should "listen to those who held 'traditional beliefs and traditional moral values'". (2) While hundreds saw sport and trading on the Lord's Day as temptations which

drew people away from attending church, most of them regarded this as “a symptom of a deeper spiritual problem” and stated that, “if people really understood the character of God as revealed in the Bible and the demands He makes upon us, they would make attending church a priority”. (3) The lack of Christian teaching and regular Christian assemblies in schools was mentioned by 2400 as a contributory factor to the “misunderstanding of Christianity” and the hostility towards “the Church” on the part of some young people.

Several questions arise from this survey: How can churches which endeavour to proclaim the gospel that many of these people seem to want to hear, and to worship as they seem to want to worship, and to maintain the standards which they seem to want to maintain, communicate with them? Why are churches which endeavour to do these things having to complain of numerical decline very much as other churches are?

We bow before the divine sovereignty, gladly realising that “He doeth according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth” (Dan 4:34), and that “all that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me; and him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out” (John 6:37). We also recognise that there are generations of God’s wrath (Jer 7:29), times when He says: “Though Moses and Samuel stood before Me, yet My mind could not be toward this people: cast them out of My sight, and let them go forth” (Jer 15:1); or, “Though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they should deliver but their own souls by their righteousness, saith the Lord God” (Ezek 14:14). But do we not have to listen to the question which the prophet Oded put to Israel: “Are there not with you, even with you, sins against the Lord your God?” (2 Chr 28:10)? *HMC*

### **Disciplined Because of Moral Convictions**

Nine firefighters have been disciplined for refusing to hand out leaflets, containing advice on fire safety, to people attending a homosexual parade in Glasgow. A watch manager has been demoted; as a result his salary has been cut by £5000. The others were given a written warning.

A spokesman said that Strathclyde Fire and Rescue “has a responsibility to protect every one of the 2.3 million people it serves, irrespective of race, religion or sexuality”. But it should be obvious to everyone that no one is arguing that firefighters have the right to refuse to rescue human beings in danger, however sinful their beliefs or practices. That is not the point at issue here. Nor is the point at issue who should receive information on fire safety. The issue is attending an event organised to promote homosexuality and, in all probability, one where the fire service was anxious to show its presence

in these politically-correct times. When, one wonders, did Strathclyde Fire and Rescue last offer to distribute literature on fire safety to Free Presbyterians leaving a prayer meeting in Glasgow?

Now the nine firefighters are to undergo “diversity training”. This will presumably include teaching that what the Most High pronounces to be serious sin is perfectly acceptable and must not be opposed. Some of the men involved had argued that it would be embarrassing for them to turn up in uniform to the event, while others said it would contradict their moral beliefs. And these fears and beliefs should have been respected. Things have come to a sad pass in our society when those who have moral convictions are disciplined for keeping to them. So much for the tolerance with which this generation prides itself.

### **The Christian Institute and Christian Voice**

The Christian Institute is a pressure-group founded in 1990 and based in Newcastle-upon-Tyne. It “seeks to promote the Christian faith in the United Kingdom”, and it does so through publications, through conferences, by engaging with the media, by conducting campaigns against anti-scriptural legislation in the Westminster and Scottish Parliaments, and by helping people who are in legal difficulties on account of their Christianity. As well as alerting Christians to developments in Parliament, The Christian Institute helps by providing them with well-researched information on current trends and evil practices; by encouraging them to take up Christian issues with MPs, MSPs and local councillors; and by co-ordinating the Christian response on these issues. Such an organisation is very necessary at present because of the fragmentation of the Christian Church and the extreme spiritual weakness of the larger denominations.

Christian Voice has a similar aim but a more militant approach. It uses stronger language and more aggressive tactics, and is more ready to create a stir about particular incidents. It was founded in 1994 and its Director and most prominent figure is Stephen Green, currently on bail for handing out leaflets at a homosexual event in Cardiff. A spoof website called “True Vision”, ridiculing the police website on “homophobia”, has irritated the homosexual lobby in the police force and survived several legal attempts at closure. Christian Voice publishes a valuable monthly newsletter which is a mine of unusual and useful information.

We cannot endorse all that these bodies do. The Christian Institute is broadly Calvinistic, but it uses modern translations in its publications, and is weak on the Establishment Principle. It lacks the glorious vision of the Solemn League and Covenant. Christian Voice has clearer views on the King-

ship of Christ over nations and uses the Authorised Version in its publications (these things seem to go together), but its Director, Stephen Green, apparently has Pentecostal leanings, and says and does various things that one would not wish to defend.

Nevertheless we believe that both organisations deserve vigorous support. The work of enacting and preserving Christian laws in any land is a Christian duty. It does not convert people – that is the purpose of the gospel – but it secures an environment in which the gospel can be preached and in which Satan finds it more difficult to hold sinners in bondage and to destroy them through outward vices. The passing or rejecting of a law in a country can affect millions of people, and can do so for centuries, as is easily seen from history.

At the moment The Christian Institute and Christian Voice have a few successes – for instance, the defeat of the Religious Hatred Bill earlier this year. But generally the most they can do is to delay the progress of an evil Bill through Parliament or have some of its worst features modified. With more support, money and personnel they could take the initiative and campaign for the repeal of some of the vile laws of recent years. It is a day we long to see. “Asa did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord, as did David his father. And he took away the sodomites out of the land, and removed all the idols that his fathers had made” (1 Ki 15:11-12). *DWBS*

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## **Protestant View**

### **Pope’s Prayer to Mary**

The Roman Catholic Church teaches that the Virgin Mary is not worshipped by her people, only venerated. However, if prayer is worship, as it indeed is, then Romanists do worship Mary. Last month, the Pope prayed to Mary at the “Column of the Virgin” in the Marienplatz, Bavaria. After addressing her as “Holy Mother of the Lord”, he used such petitions as these: “Bless us, this city and this country! . . . Teach us – great and small alike . . . Help us to become patient and humble . . . Show us Jesus, the blessed fruit of your womb!”

How obviously he gives Mary a place that belongs only to God as the hearer of prayer – who alone is to be thus worshipped. In saying so, we simply give a reminder that the followers of Rome are guilty, in their Mariolatry, of idolatrous worship. On the island of Patmos, the holy angel, whom he was about to worship, warned John: “See thou do it not . . . worship God”. *NMR*

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## Church Information

### Induction of Rev John Goldby

At their meeting in May 2006, the Synod resolved “that when a minister of religion is appointed by the Jewish and Foreign Missions Committee to serve in an area where there is no constituted Presbytery, he will be ordained and inducted, if a probationer, and inducted, if an ordained minister, into that mission field by the Southern Presbytery, and shall have all the rights and privileges of a member of that court”. At their meeting on 14 June 2006 the Southern Presbytery had before them a letter from the Clerk to the Jewish and Foreign Mission Committee of the Synod informing the Presbytery that Rev J L Goldby had been appointed to work among the Jews in Israel by the Foreign Mission Committee and asking, on behalf of the Committee, that the Southern Presbytery induct Mr Goldby to this work in accordance with this decision of the 2006 Synod. The Southern Presbytery met in the Glasgow Church on 16 August 2006 for Mr Goldby’s Induction to this work.

Rev John MacLeod, London, presided on this occasion and preached from Romans 10:12,13: “For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon Him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” He dealt with the declaration made, the revelation given and the encouragement and responsibility consequent upon these. After satisfactorily answering the requisite Questions and signing the Formula, Rev J L Goldby was set apart to work among the Jews in Israel, the Moderator engaging in prayer and giving him the right hand of fellowship, in which he was followed by the other members of Presbytery. Rev N M Ross then addressed words of encouragement to Mr Goldby from Romans 10:13-15 and words of exhortation to the Church at large, calling upon all to take Paul as their pattern: “Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved”.

Rev D A Ross, Rev J R Tallach, Rev B G Whear and Rev D W B Somerset were associated with the Presbytery for the Induction and, when opportunity was given, Rev D A Ross and Rev J R Tallach conveyed the good wishes of the Western and Skye Presbyteries respectively. Messages of good will were read from Rev J A T van Dorp on behalf of the Australia and New Zealand Presbytery, from Rev K M Watkins on behalf of the Kenya Mission and from Rev J W Campbell of North Haven, Connecticut, an Orthodox Presbyterian minister with an interest in the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland and its gospel outreach to the Jewish people.

In his letter Mr van Dorp took the opportunity to remind Mr Goldby of

the words of the Apostle Paul in Romans 11:25b-27: "That blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: for this is My covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins." The prospect of the coming of the day when the Israel of God, gathered from among Jews and Gentiles, shall be complete, is one to enliven the hopes and encourage the prayers and Scriptural endeavours of God's people.

(Rev) Hugh M Cartwright, Presbytery Clerk

### Removed by Death

It is with sadness that we report the deaths of two elders during August: Mr Roderick Annand of Vatten, in Skye, and Mr Finlay Thomson of Ness, in Lewis. This is a powerful reminder of the need for the Lord's people to plead at the throne of grace for Him to raise up His own cause. We trust that obituaries of these men will appear in this Magazine in due course.

## Acknowledgement of Donations

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

*Jewish & Foreign Missions Fund:* Anon, for work in Israel, £200; Anon, Cymru, Rev 7:12, £100;

The estate of the late Miss Catherine M Leitch, Gairloch, £2000 per MacNeill & Critchley.

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**Stornoway:** *Communion Expenses:* Anon, £50, £50. *TBS:* Anon, £50, £25.

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