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God's Will, not Ours

Joseph Alleine was an altogether remarkable man in an age of remarkable godliness. Born in Devizes in 1633, he was just 10 when his diligence in private prayer was noticed; from then on he lived an exceptionally godly life. At Oxford University, he gave himself with characteristic earnestness to his studies; indeed it would seem that his conscientiousness had a serious effect on his health by the time he was in his thirties.

In 1655 Alleine became assistant minister to George Newton in the Somerset town of Taunton. There he continued to be an earnest student, but he also gave himself wholeheartedly to preaching and visitation. He is best known for his often-reprinted *An Alarm to the Unconverted* (still in print, under the alternative title of *A Sure Guide to Heaven*).

With the Restoration of 1660, when Charles II came to the throne, the outlook for faithful preachers became decidedly bleak. And in 1662 around 2000 English ministers gave up their churches and stipends rather than submit to the Act of Uniformity, which demanded that they gave "their unfeigned consent and assent" to everything in the Book of Common Prayer. In spite of the threat of imprisonment, Alleine was convinced it was his duty to continue preaching. Realising that his time was short, he now gave to the work of spreading the gospel much of the time he would otherwise have spent in studying. His wife Theodosia wrote of that period: "I know that he hath preached 14 times in eight days, and 10 often, and six or seven ordinarily in these months . . . besides his frequent converse with souls".

He was often threatened, but the authorities did not take to do with him further for a full nine months after the Act came into effect. He was arrested on a Saturday but succeeded in postponing his imprisonment till the Monday, and used the Sabbath to teach his people, and take his farewell. Theodosia recorded how "he pitied the condition of his enemies, requesting for them, as the martyr Stephen did for those that stoned him, that God would not lay this sin of theirs to their charge. The greatest harm that he did wish to any of them was that they might thoroughly be converted and sanctified and that their souls might be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus."

In July, Alleine was brought to court but the prosecution was unsuccessful. In such a situation it was normal for the prisoner to be released, but Alleine was kept in custody. Remarkably, he and other imprisoned ministers were able to preach in the jail. During this time the judges threatened him and his brother-in-law with banishment or close imprisonment on an island if they kept on proclaiming the truth. Yet Theodosia records: “The Lord preserved them by His power and thus ordered it that their imprisonment was a great furtherance to the gospel and brought much glory to Him, both by their preaching and conversing with souls, in which they had great success through His blessing on their labours”. For some time, while the chaplain was unable, through sickness, to carry out his duties, Alleine was able to proclaim the gospel to the criminals in the jail.

After his release he continued his work among the people, but his opportunities for doing good did not last. After little more than three months he took seriously ill. He did recover somewhat and suffered further imprisonment. For some time after his release, he was completely paralysed. Although he made a partial recovery, he suffered much and was removed to a better world in 1668, at the age of only 34.

One of Alleine’s more remarkable statements expressed his reaction to his continued imprisonment. He told some friends: “Let us bless God that His will is done, and not the will of such worms as we”.¹ Alleine was not without human feelings, but he obviously had a most unusual sense of the goodness and wisdom of God, and an outstanding degree of submission to His will. It is all too easy for us to map out the future, convinced that we know what is best for us and what is most likely to bring us happiness. But how often we are wrong! We do not know the future; we do not know the consequences which would flow from what we desire to happen. But God does. He understands not only the significance of everything that will take place; He understands the significance of all possible events which will not occur. And out of the myriad of possible courses of events which might befall His children, God has in His wisdom chosen those which will be most for their good, and for His glory.

This is what Alleine grasped as he viewed the Most High’s dealings with him – and he grasped these facts far more clearly than is normal among the children of God. He trusted God in the light of what is revealed of His goodness in the Scriptures. If the Lord is good – if He is willing to bless His children in all His dealings with them – then they should believe that God is acting towards them in a loving way in all their circumstances, no matter

¹*The Life and Letters of Joseph Alleine*, p 74. This book was very positively reviewed in the October 2005 issue of this Magazine.

what appearances might suggest. Alleine would no doubt have recognised that imprisonment, besides bringing hardship, was likely to bring his usefulness to an end, but he knew that God understood the end from the beginning. And so, had he never been able to preach again, Alleine would have seen that as part of God's good providence, ordered in His wisdom. In fact, events turned out otherwise. But, however events may turn out, we should never lose sight of the truth that God orders everything that happens, and that He does so in His wisdom, and with an eye to the good of His children.

Alleine went to prison confident in the fulfilment of Christ's promise in the Sermon on the Mount: "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for My sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you." And, by God's grace, he did rejoice, for he looked beyond what is seen and temporal to what is unseen and eternal – to God's wise ordering of all events.

Even in the midst of the fiery trial he had to pass through, Job had something of that sense of God's goodness to him. That was why, in strong faith, he could declare: "He knoweth the way that I take: when He hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold" (Job 23:10). There was much that Job could not see in his troubles – for instance, the purpose of God to demonstrate that, though Satan could go far in his attempts to damage Job, yet the Lord's power was supreme. Yet Job could understand, at least some of the time, that God intended to do him good in the end.

Job spoke unwisely on occasion but, having been tried, he was brought forth as gold. The Lord, in His goodness, brought him to the end of the journey, when, in the words of the Shorter Catechism, his soul was "made perfectly blessed in the full enjoying of God". No doubt Alleine also spoke unwisely from time to time; presumably he did not always have the same sense of God's wisdom and goodness. But he too has been brought forth as gold and is now enjoying fully the perfect blessedness of heaven in the immediate presence of God.

It was with such thoughts in mind that Theodosia concluded her account of her husband's life: "His whole life was a continual sermon, holding forth evidently the doctrines he preached; humility, self-denial, patience, meekness, contentment, faith and holy confidence shining in him, with most dear love to God and His Church and people. And where he longed and panted to be he is now shining, in heaven, singing praises to God and to the Lamb, which work he much delighted in whilst here on earth." He ran the race set which was set before him, and he endured because he was looking unto Jesus. Let us seek grace to run the same race, in the same way.

The Danger of Neglecting Salvation (1)¹

A Sermon by *Thomas Pitcairn*

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

This is the language in which the Prophet represents the Jews as speaking of their woeful condition at the time the Lord was visiting them with His grievous, yet righteous, judgements. They had been trusting to Egypt for help against their enemies, who were now pressing hard upon them and threatening their destruction. Their expected allies, however, had not made their appearance, and the present miserable condition of the Israelites was rendered more desperate now that the season was past in which they could reasonably look for assistance to be given effectively, or given at all. The harvest and summer were over, and the winter was approaching, in which they knew that nothing could be done. In this sad and melancholy condition they exclaim in the bitterness of their hearts: “The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved”.

The language of the Israelites on this occasion may with propriety be viewed as describing the state of a soul not yet delivered from the bondage of sin and Satan, and the feelings of that soul when awakened to a sense of its condition. In humble dependence on divine assistance, I shall speak, *first*, of the particular state of soul which the language of the text describes; *second*, of the particular guilt and danger connected with such a state; and *third*, of the bitterness of spirit experienced by those who have been brought to know and to feel that this is their own condition. And may the Spirit direct us into the truth and enable us to receive it and to profit by it.

1. The particular state of soul which the language of the text describes.

(1) It is a soul *not saved* – not yet delivered out of its naturally-ruined and lost estate, not yet delivered from guilt and wrath, not yet delivered from the slavery of sin. It is a soul not yet plucked as a brand from the burning, but still in danger of the everlasting fire, a soul not yet ransomed from the power of the evil one but still led captive by him at his will, a soul which has neither part nor lot in the salvation which Christ has purchased and which is the only salvation whereby any child of fallen Adam can be made free from the guilt and bondage of his natural condition. A soul “not saved” is, in other words, a soul still lost – lost to the grand end of its existence, unable to glorify God, and having no relish for such an activity. It is quite unfit too for holding any fellowship with Him, having no title to His favour and no disposition what-

¹The first part of a sermon, “preached after the celebration of the Lord’s Supper” – taken from *The Free Church Pulpit*, vol 2, with slight editing. Pitcairn was minister in Bonnyrigg, south of Edinburgh, and one of the first clerks of the Free Church General Assembly.

ever to partake of it – morally incapable of serving and enjoying God either in this world or in that which is to come. More than this, it is liable to His displeasure throughout all eternity, exposed to everlasting destruction from His presence and glory.

To a mind duly impressed with divine things, nothing can be more moving than the condition of a soul made to glorify and enjoy its Creator, yet lying under the everlasting displeasure of its sovereign Lord. How deeply pained was the pious Psalmist when he said, “I beheld transgressors and was grieved”; “Rivers of waters run down mine eyes, because they keep not thy law”. How grieved was the great Apostle of the Gentiles when, in his Epistle to the Philippians, he refers to the case of those who proved themselves to be the enemies of the truth! “Many walk of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.”

Only they who have been awakened to a sense of their natural condition, and who know something experimentally of the great salvation, can rightly understand what it is for a soul not to be saved. It is peculiarly sad that the great majority of men have no just apprehension of their condition – their souls are lost, but they do not know it; at least the knowledge of it does not at all affect them. It may be so with not a few of those whom I now address – it must be said of your precious, immortal souls that they are “not saved”, yet you do not rightly apprehend your condition. The God of this world has so blinded your eyes and hardened your hearts that you neither understand the state in which you are placed, nor are at all affected by its misery. It may be that you are flattering yourselves that all is well, while in reality you are on the very brink of destruction. O that He, whose power neither earth or hell can withstand, would dispel the mists of self-delusion and give you to see your lost and ruined condition so clearly, and to feel it so deeply, that you may be led without delay to flee from the wrath to come!

(2) The text implies that the soul remains in the condition of “not saved” *although it has enjoyed opportunities of salvation*. There was a season in which the Israelites might have had deliverance. The harvest and summer presented a favourable opportunity for obtaining the assistance which they needed; but deliverance had not come – they were still unsaved. Now, the state of soul of which we are here reminded is very different from the perishing heathen – although they experience God’s long-suffering patience, they do not have the means of salvation within their reach. This is the case of one whose soul is “not saved” although a way of deliverance has been plainly set before him.

He has not been left in ignorance about his condition; he has not been left without a ray of light shining about God and eternal things. He has had plainly set before him, and earnestly and repeatedly pressed on his attention, his lost and ruined condition – his miserable and dangerous condition. He has been told of a way whereby he might escape the righteous wrath and curse of an offended God. He has been told also of the blood which has been shed for the remission of sins, of the righteousness which has been provided so that sinners may be accepted, of the Spirit who is able to cleanse him from all his pollution.

More than this, the sinner has had all these blessings pressed upon his acceptance. He has been invited to partake; he has been asked to do so without money and without price. He has been earnestly entreated and solicited – as he would regard the glory of God and his own personal safety – not to put away from him the offers of a salvation so full and so free. He has had every possible encouragement presented to him to induce him to comply. He has been fully warned of the danger of turning a deaf ear to the voice of mercy. He has, in short, enjoyed the most precious opportunities – he has not only had the word of truth in his possession, but he has been privileged to wait on the preaching of the gospel and other means of spiritual improvement. And yet, after all, his soul is “not saved”.

Now, this is precisely the case with all of you who are yet unconverted. You are not in the condition of the heathen, who have never heard of a way of salvation. You cannot plead ignorance of a provided Saviour. You must confess that the offers of reconciliation have been addressed to you. Your souls are still in a lost condition, although a way of safety has been plainly set before you, although you have had the most ample opportunities of learning about the sufficiency and willingness of a Saviour, although Sabbath after Sabbath you have listened to the glad tidings of peace, and although you have been again and again entreated to come to Christ for life. You have had the light shining around you, but you have preferred the darkness. You have had life offered to you, but you have chosen death – spiritual and everlasting death. You have enjoyed the harvest and summer of privilege but have reaped no benefit.

This is true of all of you who are yet unsaved. And if it is an affecting thing to contemplate a soul unjustified, unsanctified, unsaved – in whatever circumstances that soul may be placed – it is still more affecting when we consider a soul remaining in this condition, notwithstanding repeated overtures of safety and earnest entreaties to close with them. How sad to behold an individual, whose life is in danger, not only refusing to avail himself of offered safety, but willingly rushing into the arms of death! But so it is with

you, and with all who live in the enjoyment of gospel privileges and are yet unsaved. And your case is all the more sad than that to which I have referred, in that the life which you despise, and the death which you prefer, do not affect the body so much as the soul; they are not temporal but spiritual and everlasting.

Another idea is suggested in the text: the favourable opportunities which the soul has failed to improve have passed away never to return. This harvest and summer, in which the Israelites expected deliverance but did not obtain it, were past and ended – for ever. So we are led to view the soul “not saved”, at the close of seasons of grace and opportunities of salvation, as lost for ever.

(3) Let us now therefore take this view of the state of souls yet unsaved and speak of some of those precious opportunities after which it may be said that “the harvest is past and the summer is ended”.

At the close of every unimproved Sabbath, it may be said of those whose souls are still unsaved that the harvest is past and the summer is ended. The Sabbath is a precious opportunity for learning about God and hearing of the things that concern the soul. Then especially is the sinner called, in the preaching of the Word, to accept the offered salvation. But Sabbaths pass away, no more to return. And if, at the close of the day of holy rest – which is pre-eminent for the enjoyment of gospel privileges – the soul is still unsaved, a precious opportunity is for ever lost. There is no possibility of retrieving it; it is another day of grace gone, another day of offered mercy slighted, no more to return.

O how little do careless sinners think of this. They go to their homes from the house of God, altogether unimpressed by the truths which have been delivered to them, and they lie down on their beds at night without considering for a moment the awfully solemn circumstances in which they are placed: that the precious season which they have failed to improve is never again to return, that they are no more to hear the particular entreaties to which they have listened, and that they are entirely dependent on the forbearance of Him whom they have provoked as to whether they shall see another Sabbath or ever again be permitted to listen to the glad tidings of salvation.

At the close of a sacramental season, it may be said of those whose souls are still unsaved that the harvest is past and the summer ended. Such a season we are not only to look upon as very precious for the edification of Christ’s people, but as affording specially-favourable opportunities for the salvation of sinners. Not only is the love of Christ and the efficacy of His death visibly set forth to the eye of the beholder in the ordinance of the Supper, but at such a season there is usually a plentiful supply of gospel preaching, in which the truth is variously exhibited and pressed on the heart and conscience. It is, in

every respect, a precious time, a season in which God may be said in a special manner to wait to be gracious, dealing with the utmost kindness and compassion towards sinners, as well as in great love to His people. And therefore those whose souls are still unsaved may well say at the close of it that the harvest is past and the summer ended.

We have lately been enjoying such a precious season. Can any of you say that, in consequence of what you heard or witnessed at that time, you were brought under serious impressions, awakened to a sense of sin, and led to cry out, "What must we do to be saved?" Can any of you say, on comparing your state now with what it was only a short time ago, that a great change has taken place – that whereas you were then in darkness, your eyes have now been opened to behold the marvellous light of the gospel? If not, this precious season has been lost; God has been waiting to be gracious to you, but you have refused to listen. Christ has been offering to you life, but you have refused to come to Him for it. And the season is gone, no more to return; you shall not hear of it again until, at the great day, it is enquired of you what truths were then addressed to you and what reception you gave to the gospel message.

Again, at the close of a season of a special revival of God's work, it may be said of those whose souls are unsaved that the harvest is past and the summer ended. God's Word never fails in accomplishing its purposes and, when faithfully, believingly and prayerfully declared, it will always be instrumental in producing some good results, in the case both of saints and sinners, although these results may not come within the sphere of our observation. Again and again, however, in this and the other portions of the visible Church, there occur seasons of special revival, times in which the preaching of the Word is more remarkably blessed in the edification of Christ's people, and particularly in the conversion of sinners.

Now, such seasons are particularly precious; they may be said to present a summer and harvest of no ordinary promise. The power of the truth is more openly and extensively manifested, its peace-giving and sanctifying influence more strikingly displayed. God is, as it were, more urgent with sinners and, if I may so speak, the door appears to be set wider open. And if, at the close of such a season as this, the soul of the sinner is yet unsaved, well may it be said of those who have not improved the opportunity, that the harvest is past and the summer ended and – still more melancholy thought! – perhaps never again in their experience to return in any form. The time of God's special visitation has passed away, and the soul continues as distant from Him as before, quite unimpressed by the gracious and wondrous doings of the Lord. Not only is this particular season for ever gone, but such a season may never

again be witnessed; such a precious opportunity may never again be enjoyed, such a plentiful communication of the Spirit may not again be bestowed.

When nature begins to fail, may it not also be said that, for those who are not saved, the harvest is past and the summer ended? The season for attending to the soul's everlasting concerns is surely when all the bodily and mental faculties are in vigorous exercise, when we are able to attend the means of grace, when our eyes permit us to peruse God's Word, when we have ears to hear the glad tidings of salvation, when our mental powers are unimpaired, before we have become incapable of reflection on spiritual things. As respects the salvation of the soul, this is surely the time of summer and harvest. But when nature begins to fail – when, to employ the language of Solomon, the day comes that the keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men bow themselves, and those that look out at the windows be darkened, and the doors are shut in the streets, and when the powers of the mind lose their vigour and decay – what can we say, but that the harvest is past and the summer is ended? The season for attending to eternal things has gone by and, although the individual may not be beyond the reach of divine grace, yet the season in which God is usually pleased to bestow it is past for ever.

I speak to some who are advancing in years and whose souls may yet be unsaved, notwithstanding the privileges they have enjoyed. Remember, my friends, that your day of opportunity is drawing rapidly to a close. Even although you may be spared a little longer in the world, you may not be spared long in the enjoyment of those powers and faculties which are necessary in order to give heed to eternal things. From inability to attend on the means of grace, from lack of sight or hearing, from decay of mental vigour, your day of grace may very soon come to an end. Give all diligence now in the matters of your soul's salvation, so that if such a season should overtake you, there may not then be occasion for applying to your case the words of the text: The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and *you* are not saved.

But we have yet to contemplate a still more affecting close of the harvest and summer of gospel light and privilege, for at the end of life and in the immediate prospect of death, it may especially be said of those who are not saved that the harvest is past and the summer is ended. Life – the short and uncertain period of human life on earth – is the only season given to man for obtaining the salvation of the soul. After death, nothing more can be done. “To him that is joined to all the living”, said the wise man, “there is hope. For the living know that they shall die; but the dead know not anything, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy is now perished; neither have they any more a portion for ever in anything that is done under the sun” (Ecc

9:4). And it was doubtless under a deep impression of the same truth that he pressed the earnest exhortation contained in the tenth verse: "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave whither thou goest".

And may it not be said when the life of the poor careless sinner comes to a close – when he is stretched on his deathbed and about to pass into eternity – that the harvest is past and the summer is ended? He is no more to hear the gospel's glad tidings; he is no more to be invited to come to Christ; he is, at least, to have no more the opportunity of waiting on the outward and ordinary means of grace. His state is perhaps such that he cannot listen to any kind of counsel which may yet be addressed to him by a bystander. The end of all things has come, and he passes into eternity without a single ray of hope, with no other prospect than the blackness of darkness for ever. Think of this, you who have no interest in the great salvation. Thus it has been with many before you, and thus it may be with you. Thus it may be with you very speedily unless divine mercy interpose. It may be that you shudder at the very thought of death coming upon you before your souls are prepared for eternity. Make haste then; delay not. Flee to the provided refuge; lay hold of the Saviour who is now offered to your acceptance, and take Him as your only sure and satisfying portion.

Christ in the Psalms¹

3. Which Psalms Are Messianic?

Rev Roderick MacLeod

On the basis of what we have suggested, we can speak of five classes of what may broadly be called Messianic Psalms. We will mention only a few examples for each class.

1. Psalms where Christ is speaking the thoughts of His heart. Here is the voice of the Beloved, sacrificed for sinners: "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken me? Why art Thou so far from helping Me, and from the words of My roaring?" (Ps 22:1). Here is the voice of the Lord calling out with strong crying and tears: "O My God, I cry in the daytime, but Thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent" (Ps 22:2). Here is the voice of the holy, harmless and undefiled Redeemer, the Servant of Jehovah, paying the price of redemption, worshipping and adoring God, acquiescing in the

¹The final section of an address given at a Day Conference of the Trinitarian Bible Society in Glasgow in September 2005. The previous part, last month, discussed "the legitimate bounds of Messianic interpretation".

cost and consenting to it: "But Thou art holy, O Thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel" (Ps 22:3). And what do we hear in Psalm 69 but many more strong cryings and tears from the Man of Sorrows?

We hear the voice of the eternal Son consenting to the terms of the everlasting covenant, giving vent to His strong and vehement love to His Father and to His people, pledging to become the Servant of the Lord, and interceding for those embraced in the love of the Father, that they should be made His: "The Lord is the portion of Mine inheritance and of My cup: Thou maintainest My lot. The lines are fallen unto Me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage" (Ps 16:5,6). There is the voice of the Lord Jesus, the fountain of life speaking in faith and love about His death and resurrection, in the same Psalm (vv 10,11): "For Thou wilt not leave My soul in hell; neither wilt Thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou wilt shew Me the path of life: in Thy presence is fullness of joy; at Thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore."

2. Psalms where Christ is spoken about or to. How glorious is what is said in Psalm 2 about the eternal decree that the Son of God should become man, as the King of kings and the Lord of lords, so that He is over all things to the Church! What shall we say of the terms of the covenant laid upon Christ that He would do everything in the strength of the Lord for the salvation of His people, followed immediately by a divine pledge of success and victory in His work: "He shall drink of the brook in the way: therefore shall He lift up the head" (Ps 110:7)? What of the triumphant ascension of the Lord? "Thou hast ascended on high, Thou hast led captivity captive: Thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them" (Ps 68:18)?

Again what glimpses we get in Psalm 24 of the glory that should follow the sufferings of Christ! "Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O ye gates; even lift them up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord of hosts, He is the King of glory. Selah" (vv 7-10).

We get a glimpse of the eternal glory vested in the resurrected Lord Jesus, referred to also in Psalm 110. Our great High Priest is set a priest upon His throne, invited by a solemn formal investiture to sit on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens: "The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit Thou at My right hand, until I make Thine enemies Thy footstool". In mysterious spiritual language Jehovah speaks to Him in Psalm 110:3-5: "Thy people shall be willing in the day of Thy power, in the beauties of holiness

from the womb of the morning: Thou hast the dew of Thy youth. The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek. The Lord at Thy right hand shall strike through kings in the day of His wrath.”

God assured the Church that He laid on Christ, in their room and place, all conditions by way of payment, labours, obligations and debts: “Then Thou spakest in vision to Thy holy one, and saidst, I have laid help upon one that is mighty; I have exalted one chosen out of the people” (Ps 89:19). Christ is spoken of in Psalm 45 as the incomparably beautiful, strong, mighty, fragrant King and Bridegroom, whose spiritual beauty exceeds that of men, in whose lips there is great grace, who is the most mighty, whose throne is for ever and ever, who is anointed with the oil of gladness above His fellows. Is not a greater than Solomon here, addressed and adored as a divine person in the glory that belongs to God alone?

3. Psalms where David, or some other Old Testament figure is a type of Christ. We will mention a few examples.

What is Psalm 133 to us if it speaks only of the anointing oil running down the beard of Aaron and to the skirts of his garments? What if we are not directed thereby to our great high Priest, and His holy unction flowing down to His people? What if we are not to think of believers as like the woman with the issue of blood, around His garments, speaking the language of faith and love and drawing virtue from Him?

It is of comparatively small value today to read Psalm 89 and think only of the sad decline of the royal house of David and the apparent decline of the royal covenant which God made with him. But it is of great use to us to look at the “Man of rest” promised to David – the “Prince of peace” who was to sit upon his throne.

4. Psalms which refer to a divine relation, metaphor or other figure which is fulfilled only in the mediatorial office of Christ. I need mention only one or two examples and the principle of interpretation referred to will become clear.

Can we look, for example, at Psalm 23 and not think of the Good Shepherd meeting every spiritual need, giving rest and refreshment, leading and restoring the soul, and so on? Can we read of the reign, the throne, the majesty of God and not think of the royal appointment of the Messiah. What happens when we in this way interpret, for example, Psalm 93:1-4: “The Lord reigneth, He is clothed with majesty; the Lord is clothed with strength, wherewith He hath girded Himself . . .”? Is not Christ clothed with true spiritual glory and majesty wherever faith finds Him: in the manger, when the wise men sought the King? Is He not clothed with august royal authority in stilling the storm on the sea of Galilee, in casting out devils, in healing infirmities, in command-

ing death and the grave to release its prey, in regenerating and sanctifying and preserving His people? Is He not clothed with majesty when by death He conquered death; when He, the Prince of life, entered the field against the powers of darkness and conquered?

Can we read of the rock of David's defence, his hiding place, his sanctuary, his pavilion, and not think of Christ, who is made "all things" unto His people for their salvation? "But of Him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption" (1 Cor 1:30).

5. Psalms which we can read and sing knowing that Christ – the Brother born for the day of our adversity, our great Head and Example – thought about them, sang them and used them before we did. It is true that Christ could not plead for the forgiveness of personal sins, as David did in the penitential Psalms. But did not the plaintive cries of sinners, such as He came to save, penetrate deeply into His hearty compassion as He read them in the Psalms? Must we not say that the Lord Jesus Christ found in the sacred Songs of Zion what was most useful to Him for the work He had to perform – expressions which suited the experiences and feelings of the human nature which He had assumed. Do we find as many of Christ's inner thoughts anywhere else in the oracles of God?

Think of a godly young man or woman today approaching the public ordinances of the house of God, meditating prayerfully on such things as you find, for example, in Psalm 96: "Honour and majesty are before Him: strength and beauty are in His sanctuary. Give unto the Lord, O ye kindreds of the people, give unto the Lord glory and strength. Give unto the Lord the glory due unto His name: bring an offering, and come into His courts. O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness: fear before Him, all the earth." Are we not right to believe that Christ, in both His private years and public ministry, would do the same?

The Psalms then have a sacred fragrance, when we know that they were in the hands, on the lips and in the heart of the Lord. This one consideration makes them precious to everyone who loves the Lord Jesus. It makes the Psalms a holy arbour where Christ and His bride meet in devout union and communion; it makes the Book of Psalms entirely evangelical – one might say entirely Messianic. We are persuaded then that Christ in His mediatorial Person, natures, offices, states, compassion, and all His perfections and relations, is the sweet spiritual fragrance of the Psalms.

Humility is like the lead to the net which keeps the soul down when it is rising through passion; and contentment is like the cork which keeps the heart up when it is sinking through discouragement.

Thomas Watson

Jonathan Edwards¹

4. “A Considerable Work of God”

Notwithstanding the work of the Spirit in Northampton and elsewhere in New England in 1735, Samuel Blair of New Londonderry was not alone in bemoaning the dismal state of religion in early 1740: it “lay as it were a-dying and ready to expire its last breath of life in this part of the visible Church”.² Yet even in the first half of that year, some ministers were again more conscious of the Lord’s presence in their congregations. Among them was Edwards. He was aware of the decline in religion since 1735, describing it as “a very lamentable decay”. Yet all the progress of that year was not, by any means, lost. In the spring of 1740 he was again conscious of a greater seriousness, especially among young people, and their conversation far more often was about religion. Many of them were now coming to speak to their minister about their souls.

That October, George Whitefield arrived in Northampton on a Saturday. He reported of that day’s service: “I began with fear and trembling, but God assisted me. Few eyes were dry in the assembly.”³ Edwards gives a similar account of the services of the Sabbath, also conducted by Whitefield, and noted further that they “were suitable to the circumstances of the town”. Whitefield’s preaching had a beneficial effect, and by the middle of December “a considerable work of God” was taking place, even among the very young. And Edwards was able to tell Whitefield that he believed that some of his own children had been “savingly brought home to Christ”.

By the spring of 1741, young people and children were showing a marked seriousness in religion. This revival was to continue in Northampton throughout that year. At a sermon Edwards preached in a private house in May, one or two church members had such a sense of the greatness and glory of divine things that it had a very obvious effect on their bodies. Those physical effects were to be the occasion of considerable opposition among a significant proportion of the clergy in various other parts of New England.

After the usual services one Sabbath, Edwards held a meeting with the under-seventeens to emphasise again what he had said in his preaching. Many of them were very much moved by what they heard in this extra address. In many cases, the effect did not last, but in others Edwards believed that the gospel had a truly saving effect. Almost all who seemed to have been converted that year, Edwards noted, had been too young during the previous revival

¹Last month’s article focused on the awakening under Edwards in Northampton in 1735.

²Quoted in Iain H Murray, *Jonathan Edwards, A New Biography*, p 159.

³Quoted in Murray, *Edwards*, p 161.

to profit by what they heard. He also noted the effects of the revival on those who were already converted. They had “much deeper convictions of their sins of both nature and practice than ever before . . . and the kingdom of heaven suffered violence from some of them in a far more remarkable manner than before . . . and after . . . agonising with God they had Christ discovered to them anew as an all-sufficient Saviour, and in the glories of His grace, and in a far more clear manner than before; and with greater humility, self-emptiness and brokenness of heart, and a purer, a higher joy, and greater desires after holiness of life; but with greater self-diffidence and distrust of their treacherous hearts”.⁴

In the middle of March 1742 Edwards called a day of fasting and prayer, when the congregation of Northampton signed a solemn covenant with the Most High. They acknowledged God’s goodness in the revival and promised in all their dealings with each other to have a strict regard to honesty, justice and uprightness; they promised to avoid backbiting, revenge, enmity and everything that would stir up lust; they promised to perform their duties to each other within their families; and particularly, “depending on divine grace and assistance, solemnly to devote our whole lives, to be laboriously spent in the business of religion . . . that we will not abuse a hope or opinion that any of us may have of our being interested in Christ to indulge ourselves in sloth . . . but will run with perseverance the race that is set before us and work out our own salvation with fear and trembling.”⁵

In the first part of this revival, during 1740 and 1741, Edwards believed that it was purer than in 1735 – that the people had learned more of their own hearts, that there was a greater humility and more striving after holy living. But he blamed outside influences for a change which occurred in 1742. Those subject to these influences had great zeal and even raptures of joy, and people assumed that these were the result of greater grace.

Reviewing the events of this period, Edwards concluded “that the degree of grace is by no means to be judged of by the degree of joy or the degree of zeal, and that indeed we cannot at all determine by these things who are gracious and who are not, and that it is not the degree of religious affections but the nature of them that is chiefly to be looked at. Some that have had very great raptures of joy and have been extraordinarily filled (as the vulgar phrase is) and have had their bodies overcome . . . very often have manifested far less of the temper of Christians in their conduct since than some others that have been still and have made no great outward show.”⁶ Yet he regarded

⁴Quoted in Sereno E Dwight, *Memoirs of Jonathan Edwards*, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol 1, p lix.

⁵Quoted in Dwight, *Memoirs*, p lix.

⁶Dwight, *Memoirs*, p lxi.

others who experienced extraordinary joys as eminent, humble Christians – and they included Edwards’ wife Sarah, who recorded at length her altogether remarkable experiences of this time.⁷ While regretting the “corrupt mixtures” that had influenced the revival, he was glad to note the extent to which the party spirit had disappeared which had affected the town during the previous three or four years.

In these days of the outpouring of the Spirit, Edwards and some of his brethren went on occasional preaching tours through the surrounding districts. July 8 saw him in the village of Enfield, where as yet the effects of the awakening had not appeared. When he entered the meeting house, as another minister Eleazer Wheelock later recalled, the congregation were “thoughtless and vain” and “hardly conducted themselves with common decency”. Edwards was by no means a dramatic preacher; one of his hearers described his delivery as “easy, natural and very solemn. He had not a strong, loud voice, but appeared with such gravity and solemnity and spoke with such distinctness, clearness and precision; his words were so full of ideas, set in such a plain and striking light, that few speakers have been so able to demand the attention of an audience as he.”⁸ Edwards was held to have “the most universal character of a good preacher of almost any minister in America”. A former student gave three reasons for this excellence: “(1) the great care he took in composing his sermons, (2) his great acquaintance with divinity and knowledge of the Bible, (3) his spiritual experience; he well knew what was in man, both the saint and the sinner”.⁹

That day in Enfield, Edwards preached on Deuteronomy 32:35: “Their foot shall slide in due time”. Edwards’ theme was: “There is nothing that keeps wicked men at any one moment out of hell but the mere pleasure of God” – “His sovereign pleasure . . . restrained by no obligation, hindered by no manner of difficulty”. He made the following points: “There is no want of power in God to cast men into hell at any moment”; “They deserve to be cast into hell”; “They are already under the sentence of condemnation to hell”; “They are now the objects of that very same anger and work of God that is expressed in the torments of hell”; “The devil stands ready to fall upon them and seize them as his own, at what moment God shall permit him”; and five further, equally-solemn points.

Edwards then turned to his application, which was much the longer part of the sermon. His purpose, he stated, was “for awakening unconverted persons in this congregation”. He continued to emphasise the awfulness of

⁷See Dwight, *Memoirs*, p lxii-lxviii.

⁸Quoted in George M Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards, A Life*, p 220.

⁹Quoted in Murray, *Jonathan Edwards*, p 191.

the wrath of God but he pointed his hearers also to God's long-suffering. "There is no other reason to be given", the sermon went on, "why you have not dropped into hell since you arose in the morning but that God's hand has held you up. . . . You hang by a slender thread, with the claims of divine wrath flashing about it, and ready every moment to singe it, and burn it asunder; and you have no interest in any Mediator and nothing to lay hold of to save yourself, nothing to keep off the claims of wrath, nothing of your own, nothing that you ever have done, nothing that you can do, to induce God to spare you one moment."

Though the emphasis was almost entirely on the *danger* of the unconverted, yet the gospel was not altogether left to one side: "Now you have an extraordinary opportunity, a day wherein Christ has thrown the door of mercy wide open, and stands in calling and crying with a loud voice to poor sinners; a day wherein many are flocking to Him and pressing into the kingdom of God".¹⁰ And the tremendous impact of such preaching, as applied by the Holy Spirit, is clear from the remark of a youth in 1739: that "he fully supposed that as soon as Mr Edwards should close his discourse, the Judge would descend and the final separation [of the Day of Judgement] take place".

Stephen Williams, a cousin of Edwards and himself a minister, recorded in his diary the effects on the Enfield congregation of what they were hearing: "Before sermon was done, there was a great moaning and crying out through the whole house: What shall I do to be saved? O I am going to hell. O what shall I do for Christ?" The preacher could no longer make himself heard; he had to ask for silence. But he was not able to finish the sermon. Williams continued: "After some time of waiting, the congregation were still, so that a prayer was made by Mr Wheelock, and after that we descended from the pulpit and discoursed with the people – some in one place and some in another. And amazing and astonishing the power of God was seen, and several souls were hopefully wrought upon that night. And O the cheerfulness and pleasantness of their countenances that received comfort. O that God would strengthen and confirm!"¹¹ Edwards' delivered the whole of this sermon on other occasions, and *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God* has become the best known of all his discourses.

However, there was significant opposition to the revival, led by Charles Chauncy of Boston, who at that time might, not unfairly, be compared to one of the Moderate clergy in Scotland, but more especially so in the later, more liberal period of his life. Offence was taken when men like Gilbert Tennant and George Whitefield questioned the spiritual standing of many of the New

¹⁰The whole sermon can be found in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol 2, pp 5-12.

¹¹Quoted in Murray, *Jonathan Edwards*, p 169.

England ministers. The opponents of the revival made great play of “extravagances” and “enthusiasm” – what would today be called fanaticism. But enthusiasm ought in many cases to be understood as lively spiritual life, while, on the other hand, it has to be admitted that there were extravagances, though scarcely on the scale that was alleged. The excesses of James Davenport in particular caused serious damage. This minister had no doubt whatever that he could accurately determine which ministers were without grace and he made sure that everyone knew his conclusions; eventually he took to proclaiming the imminent end of the world. But he afterwards expressed repentance for his actions and carried out the duties of the ministry in an orderly way.

The Uses of the Moral Law¹

3. To the Regenerate

John Colquhoun

The moral law is of special use to regenerate persons, or true believers, both as a covenant of works and as a rule of duty. In its covenant form, it serves to show them what Christ, the second Adam, did and suffered in their stead. By requiring from all who are under it – as the conditions of eternal life – perfect holiness of nature and perfect obedience of life, with complete satisfaction for sin, it teaches believers what the Lord Jesus, in the greatness of His astonishing love, condescended to become, to do and to suffer for them. They may see in it as in a glass that He did infinitely more for them than any mere man or angel could ever have done (Rom 8:3-4, Phil 2:8, Gal 3:13-14). Thus the law, in subservience to the gospel, teaches believers indirectly what the gospel teaches them in direct terms.

It is of use also to show them what infinite obligations they lie under to the Lord Jesus for having fulfilled all the righteousness of it in their stead, Though they are not under the law in its covenant form to be either justified or condemned by it, yet it is of special use to them to teach them how much they are bound to love and serve Christ who, by obeying its precepts and enduring its penalties in their stead, has brought in everlasting righteousness for their justification. And so it is a means of exciting their gratitude to Christ, and also to God, who so loved them as to send Him to answer all its demands for them (2 Cor 9:15, Col 1:12-14).

¹This, the final article in the series, is taken, with slight editing, from *A Treatise on the Law and the Gospel*. The previous article, printed in July, dealt with the use of the law to the unregenerate.

The law as a rule of life is also of great use to believers. For although, as I already observed, they are not under it as a covenant of works, either to be justified by it for their obedience or to be condemned by it for their disobedience, yet they are under it as the rule of their new obedience, and they count it their exalted privilege and pleasure to be so (1 Cor 9:21).

1. In this point of view, it serves, under the illuminating influences of the Holy Spirit, to show them how far they are from perfection of holiness. In order to render them more humble and contrite, to cause them to renounce, in a higher degree, all confidence in their own wisdom, righteousness and strength and to trust constantly and only in the Lord Jesus for all their salvation, the law shows them the sin that dwells in them and that cleaves to all their thoughts, words and actions. It is of great use to teach them their need to be more humble, penitent and holy. And so it serves, in a high degree, to promote their sanctification and their desire to attain perfection of holiness (Phil 3:10-14, Rom 7:22-24). As it requires them to be perfectly holy (Matt 5:48), it shows them that their lack of perfect conformity to it is, every moment, their sin, and that they ought continually to press on toward perfection and long for heaven, where their holiness and happiness will be perfect (2 Cor 5:2-4, Phil 1:23).

2. It serves, under the witnessing of the Spirit, to evidence to their consciences the reality of their sanctification. The holy law serves as a touchstone by which believers may try, and so discover, their begun conformity to the image of the Son of God, the firstborn among many brethren. Comparing their hearts and lives with that standard, they sometimes perceive that, though they are far from having a perfection of the degrees of sanctification, yet they have a perfection of its parts. And so the law as a rule tends, in the hand of the Holy Spirit, to promote their comfort as well as their holiness. "Our rejoicing is this," says an apostle, "the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world" (2 Cor 1:12).

As a covenant of works, the law is the instrument of the Spirit, as a spirit of bondage, for convincing and alarming secure sinners; but as a rule of life in the hand of the blessed Mediator, it is a means employed by the Spirit, as a Spirit of adoption, for comforting and encouraging true saints. Their habitual desire and endeavour, from faith and love and for the glory of God, to keep all its commandments, are a good evidence to them that they are the children of God and are conformed to the image of His Son.

3. It is of great use to show believers what duty they owe to their God and Redeemer, and to direct them how to perform it. Christ, whom the Father has given for a leader and commander to the people, gives to believers that law

to be the rule of their obedience, to inform them what grateful service and what holy obedience they owe to Him, and to God in Him, and to direct them in the course of their obedience. Accordingly the holy Psalmist says, "Through Thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way. Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (Ps 119:104-105). The law as a rule directs them how to express their gratitude to the Lord Jesus for fulfilling it for them in its covenant form (Rom 8:3-5). It enjoins them to show their love and thankfulness to Him by a growing conformity of heart and life to it as the rule of their obedience (John 14:15, 1 Tim 1:5, Rom 12:1-2).

While it shows them what is good and what is evil, what they ought to do and what they ought to forbear, it guides them in the exercise of their graces and in the performance of their duties. No sooner does the law as a covenant urge men to Christ, for deliverance from the dominion of it in that form, than Christ leads them back to the law as a rule for the regulation of their heart and conduct, in order that they may, by their sincere obedience to it as a rule, express their gratitude to Him for His perfect obedience to it as a covenant in their stead (John 14:15).

4. Finally, it serves the highly important purpose of obliging the saints to all their various duties. The law as a rule of life to believers comes invested with infinite authority and therefore lays them under infinite obligations, even to perfect obedience. Seeing they do not cease to be creatures by becoming new creatures, they are, and ever will be, obliged to yield personal obedience to the moral law as a rule of life – by the sovereign authority of their Creator: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. But this divine authority, as was hinted above, issues to them from the Lord Jesus, the great Mediator, who has created and redeemed them and who has all the fullness of the Godhead dwelling in Him bodily. They therefore receive the law at His mouth.

And surely the law can lose nothing of its original authority by being conveyed to them in such a glorious channel as the hand of Christ, for not only is He God over all, but all the sovereignty and authority of the infinitely glorious Godhead are in Him as Mediator (Ex 23:21). The Lord Jesus therefore, instead of dissolving, or in the smallest degree weakening, the moral law, does greatly strengthen its original obligation (*Westminster Confession of Faith* 19:5). Indeed, it is only to God as in Christ – only according to the law as in the hand of Christ – and only by a real believer in Christ, that the smallest acceptable obedience can be performed. The law as a rule in the hand of Christ is, then, of special utility to believers inasmuch as it shows them how high are their obligations to the love and practice of holiness. And thus it eminently subserves the gospel, that "doctrine which is according to godliness".

A Plea to the Children of Israel (1)¹

To the Children of Israel in all the lands of their dispersion, the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland sendeth peace.

Men and brethren, beloved for the fathers' sake, the God of glory appeared to Abraham, when he dwelt in Ur of the Chaldees, and promised to make of him a great nation, and that in him all the families of the earth should be blessed. This promise, which was again and again renewed to him, was confirmed to Isaac and to Jacob (Gen 12:1-3,7; 13:14-17; 15; 17; 21:12; 22:15-18; 26:2-5,24; 27:26-29; 28:10-15; 32:24-30; 35:9-12; 46:2-4). As it is also said in the Psalm 105, "He hath remembered His covenant for ever, the word He commanded to a thousand generations; which He made with Abraham, and His oath unto Isaac; and confirmed the same unto Jacob for a law, to Israel for an everlasting covenant".

Within the ample bosom of this covenant, the glorious charter of all the blessings which, as a nation, you have ever possessed, or yet hope to receive, we, sinners of the Gentiles, as well as you, the men of Israel, find ourselves embraced; for so it is written: "In thee, and in thy seed, shall all the families of the earth be blessed" (Gen 28:14). Of this promise we, in this distant island of the sea, and after the lapse of almost 4000 years, can attest the truth. In Abraham and his seed we have been blessed. In Him who was to be the Desire of all nations (Hag 2:7), our souls have found a secure refuge. Through Him have we been brought to the knowledge of that God whom your fathers worshipped. In Him have we found peace to our consciences, hope and joy to our hearts; even in the Man who, as the prophet foretold, would be an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, and as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land (Is 32:2).

Men and brethren, having thus obtained mercy ourselves, how can we but

¹This is the first part of an "Address to the Children of Israel from the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland" in 1841, reprinted as an appendix in Robert Wodrow's *The Past History and Future Destiny of Israel* (Glasgow, 1844) pp 231-240. It was "originally suggested by Robert Wodrow, an esteemed Christian merchant of Glasgow, whose enlightened zeal for the conversion of Israel had burned like a flame for many years. It was drawn up by him at the request of the [Jewish] Committee, and after being approved by them, and thereafter by the General Assembly in May 1841, was published, and not only circulated extensively through all English-speaking countries, but translated into nearly all the Continental, and some of the oriental, languages. For scriptural character, elevated biblical strain and unction, it has probably never been surpassed by any human composition" (David Brown, *The Life of Rabbi Duncan*, Free Presbyterian Publications, 1986) pp 295-6. Robert Wodrow (1793-1843) was a descendant of the church historian of the same name.

be deeply moved by the unhappy condition of those from whose stock has sprung that branch of the Lord, beautiful and glorious? (Is 4:2); under whose wide-spreading shadow we have been made to sit with great delight (Song 2:3)? How can we but desire that they too might come and find rest from their weary wanderings under the shelter of that wonderful name, the Lord our Righteousness (Jer 23:6)? How can we but seek the good of that people, by whose means, at first, our fathers were turned from dumb idols to serve the living and true God, and from whom we have received those oracles of truth which everywhere testify of His Anointed?

Moved by these considerations, our Church, as many of you know, sent forth, two years ago, four of its ministers² to seek the welfare of the children of Israel. These brethren, full of love to your nation, traversed many lands and brought us word again. They have been at Jerusalem and have seen the Jew at his mournful devotions beside its ruined wall. They have been through the land once flowing with milk and honey, and have seen the thorns and the briars which now cover it (Is 32:13). They have seen your holy cities a wilderness, Zion a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation (Is 64:10). They have been in your synagogues; they have visited your families; they have observed your religious services; they have conversed with your people; and, grateful as they have felt for the kindness received, they have been pained, though not surprised, to witness your wide departure from the ordinances of God, and the ignorance which prevails of His life-giving Word (Deut 8:3).

Knowing, as we do, that the Lord, in His sovereign grace, has persuaded us, the sons of Japhet, and caused us to dwell in the tents of Shem (Gen 9:27) – enjoying, as we do, the fulness of the provision of our Father’s house – we would seek, in our turn, to persuade you, saying to you, as Moses to his father-in-law, “Come . . . with us, and we will do you good” (Num 10:29). We cannot think of possessing alone the privileges and honours of adopted children, while you, the natural heirs, are outcast and destitute. We feel it to be a reproach to us that it should be written, “This is Zion whom no man seeketh after” (Jer 30:17). We would rather desire to be employed, under the Shepherd of Israel, in seeking out His sheep, and delivering them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day (Ezek 34:12). We have therefore thought of sending you this letter. May the Lord incline your hearts to receive it from our hands, and lead many among you soon to call to mind the blessing and the curse among the nations whither the Lord your God hath driven you (Deut 30:1).

And because we know that the very name of Christian is oftentimes regarded by the Jews with aversion, from the idea that those who bear it are

²Robert Murray M’Cheyne, Andrew Bonar, Alexander Keith and Alexander Black.

the adherents of a false religion, and have been the authors of the calamities they endure, we consider it needful, at the outset, to declare that, in our opinion, none who call themselves Christian deserve that name whose religion is not founded on the Word of God.

We are well aware what a stumbling-block it has been to the Jewish mind to observe the idolatry and other corruptions which prevail in many countries which profess the religion of Jesus. But we wish you to understand that such things are forbidden by the precepts of the gospel as much as by the commandment of the law. Those who worship saints or angels, or bow down before graven images, show themselves to be, not Christian, but anti-Christian; belonging, not to Jesus, but to that great apostasy from the faith, which both the Old and New Testament declared would take place in the latter days (Dan 9:36-39).

Nor are the cruelties and oppressions to which you have been so often and so grievously subjected less repugnant to our holy religion, which teaches us to do to others as we would have others to do to us. We lament to think that in England itself you have at times suffered so much from grasping avarice and bitter animosity; but we bid you remember that these things were done during the reign of that iron superstition which persecuted the true followers of Jesus Christ as well as the Jews (Dan 7:8,20,21,24,25).

And now, men and brethren, permit us to inquire whether every visible mark, which the Scripture gives of the advent of the Messiah, may not be seen in connection with Jesus of Nazareth? Your father Jacob foretold: "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come, and unto Him shall the gathering of the people be" (Gen 49:10). The sceptre did depart when Jesus appeared, and to Him the Gentiles have come. You have, therefore, here a double mark that Jesus is the Christ. Again, the Prophet Haggai, when the second temple was a-building, foretold, in the Lord's name: "I will shake all nations, and the Desire of all nations shall come, and I will fill this house with glory" (Hag 2:7). All nations were shaken: the Persians gave place to the Greeks, and the Greeks to the Romans. The second temple is no more, having been destroyed not long after Jesus came to it. You have again, therefore, a double mark that Jesus is the Christ.

Isaiah foretold that Messiah would be rejected by the Jews, but believed on by the Gentiles – as may be seen from his Book of Prophecy (42:1-12,22-25; 49:1-6; 52:13-15; 53; 54:1-3; 55:1-5; 65:1,2). This has been largely fulfilled in reference to Jesus of Nazareth, and furnishes another proof again that He is the Christ.

Daniel, one of the greatest benefactors of your race, who, like another Jacob, had power with God and with man, to procure their release from

Babylonish and Persian thraldom (Dan 9:1-3,20,23; 10:1-3,10-14,19,20; 11:1), foretold that, in a given time, the Messiah the Prince would appear and be cut off, though not for Himself; and that afterwards the city and the sanctuary would be destroyed by war; the sacrifice and oblation would cease; and a flood of desolations would continue till an appointed period (Dan 9:24-27). All this has been accomplished in connection with Jesus of Nazareth. Seventy prophetic weeks, or 490 years, elapsed from the time when Ezra restored the law (Ezra 7) to the time when your fathers put Jesus to death. Not long after, as you know, Jerusalem was destroyed, and you have remained ever since, as another prophet declares, without a king and without a prince and without a sacrifice (Hos 3:4), your land left desolate, yourselves aliens in a strange land, and everywhere pursued by the manifest tokens of the divine displeasure. You have therefore here manifold proofs that Jesus is the Christ.

Jesus Christ— God and Man¹

J C Ryle

This union of two natures in Christ's one Person is doubtless one of the greatest mysteries of the Christian religion. It needs to be carefully stated. It is just one of those great truths which are not meant to be curiously pried into, but to be reverently believed. Nowhere perhaps shall we find a more wise and judicious statement than in the second article of the Church of England: "The Son, which is the Word of the Father, begotten from everlasting of the Father, the very and eternal God, and of one substance with the Father, took man's nature in the womb of the blessed Virgin, of her substance; so that two whole and perfect natures – that is to say, the Godhead and the manhood – were joined together in one Person, never to be divided, whereof is one Christ, very God and very man". This is a most valuable declaration. This is "sound speech, which cannot be condemned".

But while we do not pretend to explain the union of two natures in our Lord Jesus Christ's Person, we must not hesitate to fence the subject with well-defined cautions. While we state most carefully what we *do* believe, we must not shrink from declaring boldly what we *do not* believe. We must never forget that, though our Lord was God and man at the same time, the divine and human natures in Him were never confounded. One nature did

¹An extract, slightly edited, from *Expository Thoughts on John*, vol 1. Ryle is here commenting on John 1:14. All his seven volumes on the Gospels are available from the Free Presbyterian Bookroom.

not swallow up the other. The two natures remained perfect and distinct. The divinity of Christ was never for a moment laid aside, although veiled. During His lifetime, the manhood of Christ was never for a moment unlike our own, though greatly dignified by union with the Godhead. Though perfect God, Christ has always been perfect man from the first moment of His incarnation.

He that is gone into heaven, and is sitting at the Father's right hand to intercede for sinners, is man as well as God. Though perfect man, Christ never ceased to be perfect God. He that suffered for sin on the cross, and was made sin for us, was "God manifest in the flesh". The blood with which the Church was purchased, is called the blood "of God" (Acts 20:28). Though He became "flesh" in the fullest sense, when He was born of the Virgin Mary, He never at any period ceased to be the eternal Word. To say that He constantly manifested His divine nature during His earthly ministry, would, of course, be contrary to plain facts. To attempt to explain why, while He was on earth, His Godhead was sometimes veiled and at other times unveiled would be venturing on ground which we had better leave alone. But it is nothing less than heresy to say that, at any instant of His earthly ministry, He was not fully and entirely God.

The cautions just given may seem at first sight needless, wearisome and hair-splitting. It is precisely the neglect of such cautions which ruins many souls. This constant undivided union of two perfect natures in Christ's Person is exactly that which gives infinite value to His mediation and qualifies Him to be the very Mediator that sinners need. Our Mediator is One who can sympathize with us, because He is very man. And yet, at the same time, He is One who can deal with the Father for us on equal terms, because He is very God.

It is the same union which gives infinite value to His righteousness when imputed to believers. It is the righteousness of One who was God as well as man. It is the same union which gives infinite value to the atoning blood which He shed for sinners on the cross. It is the blood of One who was God as well as man. It is the same union which gives infinite value to His resurrection. When He rose again, as the Head of the body of believers, He rose not as a mere man, but as God. Let these things sink deeply into our hearts. The second Adam is far greater than the first Adam was. The first Adam was only man, and he fell. The second Adam was God as well as man, and so He completely conquered. Let us leave the subject with feelings of deep gratitude and thankfulness. It is full of abounding consolation for all who know Christ by faith, and believe on Him.

Did the Word become flesh? Then He is One who can be touched with the feeling of His people's infirmities, because He has suffered Himself being

tempted. He is almighty because He is God, and yet He can feel with us because He is man.

Did the Word become flesh? Then He can supply us with a perfect pattern and example for our daily life. Had He walked among us as an angel or a spirit, we could never have copied Him. But having dwelt among us as a man, we know that the true standard of holiness is to “walk even as He walked” (1 John 2:6). He is a perfect pattern because He is God. But He is also a pattern exactly suited to our needs because He is man.

Finally, did the Word become flesh? Then let us see in our mortal bodies a real, true dignity and not defile them by sin. Vile and weak as our body may seem, it is a body which the Eternal Son of God was not ashamed to take upon Himself and to take up to heaven. That simple fact is a pledge that He will raise His people’s bodies at the last day, and glorify them together with His own.

Protestant View

Bible Knowledge in Europe

There are now many more Bibles in circulation in European countries than was once the case, but they do not seem to be much used on the whole. Thus knowledge of the Scriptures and of their teachings is poor. A professor from a University in Rome has conducted a survey of around 650 Roman Catholics in Spain, France and Italy which showed that, in his own words, “religious knowledge is weak or non-existent”. However the figures were calculated, it is significant that only 30% of Italian Roman Catholics demonstrated basic knowledge of the Bible, with 22% in Spain and 21% in France. A sample question in the survey asked respondents to identify writers of the Gospels and, amazingly, 32% named Peter, and 49% Paul.

It is good to see the Word of God spreading farther than ever before but, whatever the possibilities for the future, it is doing little good at present if very few are reading it. Yet Roman Catholics are at a particular disadvantage in approaching the Bible because they are taught not to see it as *distinctively* the Word of God. Indeed they are told (in their official *Catechism*, para 95) that “sacred Tradition, Sacred Scripture, and the Magisterium of the Church [its teaching function] are so connected and associated that one of them cannot stand without the others”. And if ordinary Roman Catholics are taught that the Bible cannot function apart from the Church’s teaching, which often contradicts it, no one should be surprised that they pay so little attention to it. What they need is to forsake the doctrines of Rome and

“receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls” (Jas 1:21).

Notes and Comments

Spirituality Without God

Edinburgh's *Evening News* has highlighted what it rather inaccurately describes as “multi-faith religious services” planned for the city. They will cater mainly for “people who believe in God but have become disillusioned with existing religions” – people “who have a sense of spirituality” but do not accept the exclusive claims of any one religion. “They feel there is one truth, one love, one God – but many parts. So they don't feel comfortable devoting themselves to one part”. “Rather than being based around stories about Jesus Christ, Muhammed or Buddha, the sermons will focus on universal themes such as love, how people can conduct their lives in a peaceful manner, support one another and respect the planet”. The “ministers” of this latest “religion”, who come from various religious backgrounds and who have previously operated mainly in England, are educated at an “Interfaith Seminary” in London which is about to establish a branch in Perth.

John Blanchard, in *Does God Believe in Atheists?*, quotes from an article by sociologist Tony Walter: “A new stage has been reached; people do not choose between different religions, they choose their own religion from the elements they like in all the others. . . . Orthodox, institutionalised religion is out, but home-made, make-it-up-as-you-go-along spirituality is in.” This seems to describe accurately what these “multi-faith services” are intended to encourage. For many years now, as Blanchard himself comments, there have been those who “made a determined effort to discover a common essence in all religions”. These services are just the logical conclusion of the inter-faith movement which, in Blanchard's words, sees the various religions “as so many different paths traversing a mountain in a variety of ways but all eventually reaching the summit of God's presence”.

It is not that there is much logic about those professing Christianity (or any other religion, for that matter) and yet promoting pluralism, or about those who have moved through theoretically accepting the equal validity of all religions to practically rejecting them all and formulating one of their own which “works for them”. What they are really doing, in common with all religions other than that revealed by God, is making a god (if they believe in a god) in their own image and catering for their own feelings. Such theology as they have is not formulated by revelation but by their own “spirituality”,

which is nothing other than their own consciousness of, and reaction to, their own experience. This account of “spirituality” explains why many who do not believe in God profess to believe in “soul” and in “spirituality”.

The Church’s response must be to continue to publicise and press the exclusive claims of Christianity as the revelation of God, of what God requires and of what God has provided. She must also demonstrate in word and deed the efficacy of this revelation to transform the life and to engage the mind and heart, when it is received not “in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance” (1 Thess 1:5). HMC

Thousands of Christians Killed

Professor Thomas Schirrmacher, director of the Religious Liberty Commission of the German Evangelical Alliance, has stated that persecution of Christians in various parts of the world is on the increase. He told a gathering of the Protestant Association of the Christian Democratic Union in Dresden in June that at least 55 000 Christians (presumably used in the widest sense of the term) are killed each year for religious reasons, and that Christians in India, Indonesia and Pakistan run the highest risk of losing their lives. He also made the point that politicians have been reluctant to condemn predominantly-Islamic countries, where persecution is the most prevalent.

China is another country where persecution of Christians is rising. The China Aid Association, headed by a Pastor Fu Xiqu, has recently published *Report on Persecution of Chinese House Churches by Province*. It states that 1958 Christians, including numerous pastors, were arrested during the last 12 months and that many of those arrested were abused and tortured during their time in jail.

It appears that the undying hatred of the world, and of the followers of false religions, against Christianity is reaching new heights. The ungodly, when faced with Christianity and challenged by it, regard it as a hateful religion and the Bible as hate literature. Therefore, as Christ Himself said, His followers will be reviled and persecuted for His sake. Let us heed the Apostle Paul’s injunction: “Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body” (Heb 13:3). NMR

Creationism and Fundamentalist Atheists

The doctrine of Creation is as old as world itself, but the word *Creationist* dates back only to 1859, the year in which Darwin’s *Origin of Species* was published. For a short while thereafter the Creationists held their own against the rapidly-spreading evolutionary theory, but by the beginning of the twenti-

eth century the Evolutionists had prevailed, or so it seemed. Since that time the schools, universities, newspapers, radio, television, and even theological colleges have been largely under their control.

It was a big surprise, therefore, in January of this year when an Ipsos MORI poll of 2112 adults in Britain found that 48% believed in evolution, 22% in creation, 17% in intelligent design, and 12% “didn’t know”.¹ The supposed “fact” of evolution has been taught for over a hundred years but more than half the people in the country are unconvinced. It is sad that the still-widespread belief in a Creator does not translate into more church attendance, but one is glad to learn that in so many cases there is at least some point of religious contact. Particularly surprising is the fact that over 450 of the interviewees were sympathetic to the idea of a “young earth”, notwithstanding the indoctrination to the contrary which reaches even to public notices in beauty spots.

The turn of the tide against Evolutionism dates, as far as the present writer can discover, to the publication of *The Genesis Flood* by John Whitcomb and Henry Morris in 1961. This book gave an impetus and an intellectual backbone to the creationist movement, and various creationist societies and magazines sprang up in the next few years. More recently the rapid progress in biochemistry has favoured the creationist cause. In 1996 the publication of *Darwin’s Black Box* by the biochemist Michael Behe marked a milestone in the debate. Behe introduced the idea of “irreducible complexity”, giving as his principal example the mouse-trap, and then providing various biochemical examples. Evolutionists responded by hunting for flaws in Behe’s examples and by designing ingenious “reducibly complex” mouse-traps. Behe and his friends have defended their position and the intellectual debate rages on, but the onlooker cannot help suspecting from the angry tones of the Evolutionists that they must be getting the worst of it.

Further evidence that Evolutionists are starting to feel the pressure is the formation of a strange atheist society, originating in California, called “Brights” or “The Constituency of Brights”. Its most prominent member in Britain is the evolutionist Richard Dawkins. A “bright” is someone who belongs to this society, the necessary qualification being “a naturalistic world-

¹The responses were to the following question: “I am going to read out three different theories or explanations about the origin and development of life on earth. Can you tell me which of the following theories best describes your view: (a) The “evolution theory” says that humankind has developed over millions of years from less advanced forms of life. God had no part in this process. (b) The “creationism theory” says that God created humankind pretty much in his/her present form at one time within the last 10 000 years. (c) The “intelligent design theory” says that certain features of living things are best explained by the intervention of a supernatural being, for example God?”

view, free of supernatural and mystical elements". One of the declared goals of the society is to start a campaign against religions, along the lines of the anti-racism and anti-sexism campaigns, by representing irreligious people as oppressed by a newly-defined evil called "faithism".

Evolutionists like to pose as neutral: they come to the facts with an unbiased mind, whereas Creationists are prejudiced by their desire to defend their religious beliefs. Christians have always known, however, that evolution is as much a spiritual as a scientific issue. Evolutionists do have religious beliefs or disbeliefs, and they are just as strongly influenced by these, whether they recognise it or not. There is a quotation from Thomas Huxley to the effect that Darwin's theory of evolution provided atheists with an intellectual respectability that they had lacked: up to that time they had no adequate reply to the question, "Where did plants and animals come from?" It is interesting to see Richard Dawkins openly committing himself to a "fundamentalist atheist" position by joining the Brights. He has not proved that the supernatural does not exist, but in the absence of proof he has taken the "leap of faith" to that position. How this is more neutral and scientific than the Christian committing his spirit into the hands of his crucified and risen Redeemer does not appear. The Christian at least has the evidence of the Bible.

"Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools" (Rom 1:22), and it is sad to see great talents perverted to a foolish and harmful use. We pray that the retreat of Evolution would continue and that the Lord would hasten that time when many former Evolutionists will say with the Psalmist, when he contemplated creation: "O Lord, how manifold are Thy works! In wisdom hast Thou made them all: the earth is full of Thy riches" (Ps 104: 24). "The sons also of them that afflicted thee shall come bending unto thee; and all they that despised thee shall bow themselves down at the soles of thy feet; and they shall call thee the city of the Lord, The Zion of the Holy One of Israel" (Is 60:14). *DWBS*

Record Levels of Alcohol-related Illness

NHS statistics for England show that more people than ever are being admitted to hospital as a result of misusing alcohol. Hospital admissions for alcoholic liver disease more than doubled in a decade, reaching 35 400 in 2004-5. And death rates linked to alcoholic liver disease increased by 37% between 1999 and 2004 to just over 4000. These are just two of the statistics released recently by the Information Centre for Health and Social Care, and Scottish figures are not likely to be drastically different.

No wonder Professor Ian Gilmore of the Royal College of Physicians

described the figures as “shocking”. He pointed out that alcohol is too cheap and too readily available. An Opposition politician rightly complained also about the Government’s 24-hour licensing policy. How many more lives will be lost and how many other lives ruined by irresponsible drinking before the problem is tackled effectively?

We live in a society where most people lack a solid foundation for their lifestyle. What need there is for a return to the Bible! There we are told, with divine authority: “Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise” (Prov 20:1). While government regulation of alcohol – including taxation – has a useful part to play in restraining alcohol abuse, it would be far more significant for society as a whole to take the Bible once more as a lamp unto their feet and a light unto their path.

Church Information

Eastern Europe

The following paragraph was omitted in error from the report last month, by Rev D A Ross, on a trip to Odessa:

“The aid to the Children’s Hospital in Odessa is much appreciated. A quantity of Ukrainian Bibles and Gospels of John in Russian are also on the truck. Some will be used in the hospital but most of them will be passed on to Mr Igor Zadoroshniy, who distributes our Bibles and literature. We ask that you would remember our men at the throne of grace as they travel to and from Odessa and that the work they engage in would be accompanied with the blessing of the Most High.”

The men, Mr Edward Ross and Mr Christopher Lamont, have now returned safely to the UK. During their time in Odessa, the foundation of the new mission building was laid and work on it is continuing.

Theological Conference

This year’s Theological Conference will be held, God willing, in St Jude’s Free Presbyterian Church, Glasgow, on Tuesday and Wednesday, December 5 and 6. It is expected that the following papers will be read, with the final one in public:

Robert Bruce on the Lord’s Supper	<i>Rev David Campbell</i>
Law and Gospel	<i>Rev J R Tallach</i>
The Divine Decrees	<i>Rev H M Cartwright</i>
Richard Baxter	<i>Rev K D Macleod</i>
The Covenanters	<i>Rev Roderick MacLeod</i>

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

Committee Meetings

These Synod committees will meet, DV, in Inverness Free Presbyterian Church as follows on Tuesday, October 3:

- 9.30 - 11.00 Training of the Ministry Committee
- 11.00 - 12.00 Magazines Committee
- 12.00 - 1.00 Sabbath Observance Committee
- 2.00 - 5.00 Finance Committee
- 2.00 - 3.00 Outreach Committee
- 3.00 - 4.00 Religion and Morals Committee
- 6.00 - 7.30 Publications and Bookroom Committee
- 7.30 - 8.30 Welfare of Youth Committee
- 8.30 - 9.30 Dominions and Overseas Committee

(Rev) *John MacLeod*, Clerk of Synod

Urgent Need for Teachers At Ingwenya

There has been no response to the previous appeal for teachers for the John Tallach Secondary School at Ingwenya. Mr James Macleod returns to the UK this month and Miss Eleanor Wylie by the end of the year, and this leaves vacancies at the beginning of the next session in January 2007. The Jewish and Foreign Mission Committee would be glad to hear from any suitably qualified teacher with a mind to help the Cause on our Mission in Zimbabwe. Enquiries should be made in the first instance to Rev J R Tallach, F P Manse, Raasay, Kyle, IV40 8PB. Tel: 01478 660216. E-mail: james.tallach@homecall.co.uk.

(Rev) *James R Tallach*, Clerk of the Jewish and Foreign Mission Committee

[Readers who contact Dr Tallach by e-mail should note his new address.]

Dominions and Overseas Fund

By appointment of Synod, the special collection on behalf of the Dominions and Overseas Fund is due to be taken in congregations during September.

R A Campbell, General Treasurer

Acknowledgement of Donations

The General Treasurer acknowledges with sincere thanks the following donations:

Eastern Europe Fund: Anon, for work in Ukraine, £30.

Jewish & Foreign Missions Fund: DJP, £50; Anon, for Israel Mission, £30.

Congregational Treasurers acknowledge with sincere thanks the following donations:

Edinburgh: *Congregational Funds*: Anon, £1000 per Rev HMC; Anon, £50; Anon, £20. *Jewish & Foreign Missions Fund*: Anon, £45. *Sustentation Fund*: Anon, £100.

North Harris: *Congregational Funds*: Anon, "Where most needed", £2000.

Raasay: *Congregational Funds*: Anon, "In loving memory", £100; Bracadale/Strath Deacons' Court, for ramp at church, £1000.

Staffin: *Congregational Funds*: Duirinish congregation, £2000; Bracadale/Strath Deacons' Court, £1000. *Door Collection*: CM, Staffin House, £50. *Sustentation Fund*: Friend, £200.