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Abel and His Sacrifice

Abel was the first of that “great cloud of witnesses” whose faith is set before us in Hebrews 11. Clearly all these witnesses were intended to be examples for every succeeding generation, ours included. Abel in particular was intended to be an example of strong faith for us today, for “he being dead yet speaketh”.

Abel’s was the first death in the world, the first instance of a soul being separated from the body – one aspect of the curse due to sin, about which God warned Adam his father: “In the day that thou eatest [of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil] thou shalt surely die” (Gen 2:17). Yet here was a man who was accepted by God; “the Lord had respect unto Abel” (Gen 4:4). So on the day of his death, Abel’s soul was safe; his was a living soul, for the Holy Spirit had breathed into his dead soul; he had been delivered from eternal death in hell.

The special exercise of faith on the part of Abel, which is drawn to our attention in Hebrews 11:4, had to do with the sacrifice he offered on that fatal day. Abel believed the testimony God had given him – testimony as to how he could be saved. He trusted the One who had made this revelation and acted accordingly; he offered to God the sacrifice that He had appointed, which is described as a “a more excellent sacrifice than Cain” offered. That is, Abel offered a sacrifice which met God’s requirements; Cain did not. Abel no doubt understood the significance of being a sinner; he knew that “the wages of sin is death”; so any offering intended to make atonement must involve the taking away of the life of a substitute.

Cain, on the other hand, had no appreciation of the sinfulness of sin or of the seriousness of the consequences which must fall on the sinner himself, apart from an atonement which God could accept. Abel “by faith” was willing to receive God’s testimony and act upon it, while Cain, continuing in unbelief and rejecting God’s testimony, acted according to his own ideas and offered what Paul describes as “will worship” – following out his own will rather than the will of God. In his *Commentary on Hebrews*, W S Plumer sums up the contrast: “The great difference between the two brothers was that

the elder was unbelieving, and so was self-willed, self-righteous, impenitent and unwilling to be guided by the law under which he worshipped; while the younger had faith, and so was conscious of his sins and penitent for them, cried for mercy, not justice, confessed his need of an atonement and obeyed the known will of God, which directed him to make an offering”.

But how did God reveal to Adam that animal sacrifice was the way by which he was to approach Him? We are not explicitly told, but when Adam and Eve sinned and realised they were naked, God provided animal skins to cover their nakedness. Clearly the animals whose skins were used had to die; they had to die because of human sin. And no doubt Adam and Eve understood what happened to these animals in the light of the first revelation of the gospel, through which they learned that the Seed of the woman would have His heel bruised when He would bruise the serpent’s head (Gen 3:15). Abel would have learned from his father that sacrifice was the way God had appointed so that sinners could approach Him. The institution of sacrifice was pointing forward to the perfect offering which was to be made in the fullness of time at Calvary.

Neither Abel’s sacrifice or any which multitudes of others offered – even when they did everything according to God’s revealed will – could actually take away sin. Yet God passed by the sins of Old Testament believers such as Abel in His forbearance. He did not punish them because He was to send Christ in their place in the fulness of time and He would suffer and die instead. Yet God was just in forgiving Abel’s sin, because of the absolute certainty that Christ would come and would then do absolutely all that was necessary to satisfy divine justice on behalf of Abel.

What then was the function of Abel’s sacrifice? It showed that sin could be taken away, by a God-appointed substitute. It points us forward to the Lord Jesus Christ, whom God the Father appointed and sent into the world as the substitute for sinners. He came because of God’s anger against sin – His settled purpose to punish sin. God set Him forth to be “a propitiation” (Rom 3:25) – a sacrifice to turn away the anger of God against sin. Christ turned away the anger that would have gone out against Abel apart from the divine forbearance; that is, He endured the punishment which had been postponed until He would come as Abel’s substitute. So Christ suffered and died instead of Abel and instead of all whom the Father gave to His Son in the everlasting covenant. And divine justice was satisfied for them all.

By faith in Christ’s blood – by faith in the Saviour who died – sinners are saved. God’s wrath is turned away from them and, for Christ’s sake, they are accepted as righteous. So “the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering”. In other words, God *looked on* Abel and his offering, with favour; He did not

turn away from him or turn against him in anger. Rather, in view of the propitiation which Christ was to make, and which Abel's sacrifice typified, all Abel's sins were forgiven and he was himself accepted. He was treated as if he had always kept God's law perfectly – but only because of the righteousness of Christ, even although that righteousness was not to be wrought out for around 4000 years. Yet it was imputed to him when he needed it, while he was still in this world, before he was swept violently into eternity.

Abel was justified freely on the grounds of what Christ was yet to do; he looked to the provision that God was to make and to nothing else. The classic definition in the Shorter Catechism brings this out: "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*". Abel did not earn salvation; that was completely beyond his power. What is more, he recognised this. And, from a heart renewed by the Holy Spirit, he was willing to receive salvation in the way that God had appointed – by faith *alone*.

Abel speaks to us today in many ways, not least on this vital matter that salvation is by faith alone, not by faith *and* works. This is an age when even Evangelicals can turn their backs on their Reformation heritage and blur the clear lines of division with Rome. The document *Evangelicals and Catholics Together*, for instance, declares that "we are justified by faith through grace because of Christ". True, but this is to omit the word *alone* although it is essential to focus on the fact that we are justified by faith *without* works. It is, Paul emphasises, "*not* by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy [God] saved us" (Titus 3:5). Our works make no contribution to our salvation; to look to them is to look away from Christ and so to make our salvation impossible. It is, of course, natural to fallen man to try to make a contribution, through his own works, to his salvation. What we need, and what Abel was given, is a new heart, so that we would willingly give up every degree of reliance on our own righteousness and go to Christ *alone* for salvation. It is one of the wonders of redeeming grace that everything, including a new heart, is provided for in the salvation God has devised. We are to receive that salvation freely, with no thought of bringing any payment to God, in counterfeit money, which is what our own works are.

Abel yet speaks. Through his obedience to God's revealed will, he shows us how the Most High is to be worshipped and how sinners are to be saved. He reminds us that God's grace is sufficient to carry us safely through life. Yes, Abel was killed through his brother's jealousy, but he was brought at once to glory. And for all these thousands of years since then, Abel has been enjoying the perfect blessedness of that state where there is no more curse.

Salvation for Walls and Bulwarks¹

A Sermon by Rev Roderick MacLeod

Isaiah 26:1. *In that day shall this song be sung in the land of Judah: We have a strong city; salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks.*

These words were spoken in prophecy. And they would have been very much on the minds of those who returned from Babylon and set up the altar again and built the walls of Jerusalem and of the temple. These words would also have been precious during the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the times of the apostles, on the day of Pentecost – and at many times since then. They were very suitable to describe periods when the Church experienced a revival of the truth.

In these words the Church of Christ is compared to a strong city where God will appoint salvation “for walls and bulwarks”. It is only when sinners believe the Word of God is true that they appreciate the strength of the city of God – the kingdom of Christ. God’s people lay hold by faith of the great doctrines of the covenant of grace in the Scriptures. Though weak in themselves, they will be able to say, “We have a strong city”, and their lives will be taken up, as much as possible, with maintaining the strength of the city, so that it will not decay.

God’s people are said to live by faith; “the just shall live by faith”. This shows that they are not strong in themselves, for the believer is ready to acknowledge his emptiness – that his stock of strength, and of life itself, lies outside of himself, in Jesus Christ. He esteems Christ very highly as the great storehouse of all spiritual life and strength. When we read that the just shall live by faith, we are to understand that he will not live by his own strength but by faith will find a way of drawing strength out of the fullness of grace in Christ. It also shows that the believer will come daily; his will be a life of returning for fresh supplies of grace and strength from Jesus Christ; his life is not in himself. When they who live by faith say, “We have a strong city”, they are looking outside of themselves unto the Lord Jesus Christ.

This figure of a city is used often in the Scriptures. To the Palestinian mind, when Isaiah was writing, a city without walls would be incongruous; a city must have walls. Cities had walls to defend them and they were very costly to the people; materials had to be gathered to build them and to repair them. There was much labour for the people in building these walls. Taxes would be raised by the city authorities to pay the labourers and perhaps also for materials. The wall was a very important part of the city. And when the Church is described as the city which has salvation appointed for walls and bulwarks,

¹Preached at Leverburgh on 14 August 2006, the Monday of a communion season.

what we are particularly to consider is that the Church will be strong, not weak, for the wall made the city strong. The inhabitants of a walled city were not nomads but were settled; they were not barbarians but civilised.

A city must have order and government; these and other things are taught in the figure of a city and its walls. There is order in the Church of God – it has a King; it has laws; it has government; it has courts; it has citizens. It is also a settled society, from generation to generation. This is true whether you view it as the visible Church, comprising all those who profess the true religion and make use of her ordinances, or whether you view it as the invisible Church, comprising all those who are savingly united to Jesus Christ at any one particular time, together with those who are already in heaven, and also those who are yet to be brought into that kingdom. So the prophet is speaking here of the Church in a figurative way, describing it as a city, settled, ordered and strong. And its strength lies in this: “Salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks”. There is a variety of views about the meaning of the term *bulwarks*; some think that outside the wall there was another wall, a smaller wall to deter those who would batter down the main wall with their weapons.

There are two things we would wish to consider particularly, and the *first* is that *the wall defines the city*. A city is defined by the wall that goes round it and so it is with the Church, for “salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks”. You cannot define the Church without referring to salvation; it is defined by salvation. In the *second* place we wish to consider that *the wall also defends the city*. So salvation is the defence of this spiritual city, the Church. Then in the *third* place we will make an *application* of the whole matter to ourselves.

1. The wall defines the city. We have referred already to the very useful distinction between the Church visible and the Church invisible, a distinction which has no doubt been explained many times in this pulpit. God’s people gather around visible ordinances and all those professing the true religion are within the visible Church. Now what we wish to consider particularly in connection with the visible Church is that she cannot be defined properly without referring to the doctrines that are preached in her pulpits. Once the leaven of error enters the preaching heard in the Church of God – within this spiritual city – it breaks down the walls; the definition of the city is blurred. Then, in practice, the world and worldliness follow error in doctrine into the Church, and the definition is lost. The Church is no longer strong; it has been weakened by the leaven of error.

But, in the visible Church as viewed here, there is this profession: “We have a strong city; salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks”. The

Church of God exists for this very reason: that sinners would be saved, that God would be glorified in the salvation of sinners. So any definition of the visible Church must include this: that God has appointed salvation for walls and bulwarks. Those who profess another religion or have no religion at all are outside this city; they have no part in its privileges and benefits. But those who are in it are under the teaching of the doctrines of truth. They are, to borrow an expression, but a day's sailing from the salvation that is offered to them there. Christ is freely offered there to sinners; there is a cup of salvation on the table of the gospel; a market is set up in this city. It is a market for sinners – for sinners within the pale of the visible Church.

That is what the gospel is. There is a call to sinners within the visible Church to receive Jesus Christ for the salvation of their souls – as a Prophet to instruct them in their ignorance, as a Priest to cleanse them from their filthiness, and as a King to subdue them in and from their rebelliousness. “Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.” God is setting up a market here where the wares are very expensive; they are very precious. They were purchased at great price but they are offered freely to sinners in the gospel market. When we say they are expensive, we mean that they were difficult to purchase. Nothing but the blood of Christ could purchase the wares in the market in the city of God.

Salvation is offered to every sinner within the pale of the visible Church, under the preaching of the Word of God. Within this city, God calls to everyone that passes by: “Ho” (Is 55:1). God calls out to sinners who are not making the use that they might of the provision within the city: Ho, sinner. God is calling to you: “Ho, everyone that thirsteth, come ye to the waters”. Here in this city is a well of the water of life; here are the wells of salvation. And sinners are called: “He that hath no money, come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine” to refresh you “and milk” to nourish you, “without money and without price”. You that came over the threshold of this church today asking: “Will I get anything for my soul today? Will I find Christ?” Well, here is the answer of God to you in His own Word: “Wherefore do you spend money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto Me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness.”

Then again the Apostle John at the close of the canon of Scripture showed the nature of the gospel market in the visible Church when he said, “The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.” It was on the Monday of a communion we hope we first got a view of the gospel, the way of salvation by the Burden-bearer, the Lord Jesus

Christ. The communion is not over, the harvest is not past, the summer is not ended. We are within the visible Church, a blessed and happy place to be.

And this is the great concern of God's people who sat at the Lord's Table: that the truth would be preserved, that the walls would be preserved, that she would continue to be a strong city. And though they themselves are weak, they wish to be able to say about Christ and His Church and the truth and ordinances of His house: "We have a strong city; salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks".

That is true of the visible Church. It is also true of the Church viewed as invisible. I may just say that the visible Church is so called because it can be seen; people are seen coming and going to visible ordinances. The invisible Church is made up of those people within the visible Church in whose souls a secret, inward spiritual change has been wrought that no one can see but God. It is in that respect invisible, but the fruit of that change is not invisible.

If the Church visible is a strong city, how much more may that be said of the Church invisible. That is how they are defined; they are saved with an everlasting salvation. The invisible Church is not only defended but also defined by salvation. The believer is someone who has salvation. That is the security he has. He is defined as someone who is justified and adopted, whose sins are pardoned, whose condemnation is removed. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus." Salvation defines the state that he is in. And he is defined in this way: he is born again; he has in his soul the life of God, the grace of Christ, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. He will be perfectly sanctified; not only has he a right to heaven in his justification, but he will have a meetness for heaven at last in his sanctification.

Now there are two companies here today and, though we all are members of the visible Church, there are some here this day who are members of the invisible Church, and others are outside it. Nicodemus was within the visible Church but he was not within the invisible Church until he was born again. It is a great matter to be born again, yet perhaps you put it far from you as something beyond your expectation. That is unbelief. It is nothing to Christ and the Spirit of Christ to regenerate a sinner, but it is a total impossibility to you and me. How it would please God to hear a poor sinner here asking how he can be born again – how this great, glorious saving work can be wrought in his soul – so that he or she would not only be a member of the visible Church, coming and going to the house of God, but a member of the invisible Church, truly united to Christ.

It is faith that unites us to Christ. Christ is a great fountain of spiritual life. Faith unites us to the life that is in Him; it unites us to the efficacy of the blood that He shed; it unites us to the righteousness which He wrought out

when He magnified the law and made it honourable. We are born again when the power of the Holy Spirit comes upon the soul by the Word, and the soul is made willing to have Christ. We don't recognise the power. Many people under the gospel have heard of divine power and they think that the power of God in regeneration is like the earthquake that awakened the jailer. Perhaps they can only think of power in a physical sense, but this is spiritual power.

Think of the tide when it is turning, the tremendous power in the unseen influence of the moon on the sea, drawing it back and bringing it forward, in its ebb and flow. There may be a storm when the tide is turning, but it is not the storm that turns the tide; it is the unseen silent power of the moon. It was not the earthquake that regenerated the Philippian jailer; the terrors of the law did not regenerate him. No, a power was exerted on his mind which was as silent as the power of the moon causing the tide to ebb and flow. It was the power of the Holy Ghost. The same power was used on the Philippian jailer as on Lydia. The same power was used on Zacchaeus as on Saul of Tarsus. Their experiences and their circumstances were different but the power that changed their hearts was the same in every one of them.

The power of God in regenerating the heart is exceedingly great, whether there be great terrors of the law or not. How silently the tide turns on a still summer's evening! This is what we need, that the Spirit of Jesus Christ in a day of power, riding in the chariot of the Word of God, would by His mighty power turn the tide in a sweet, beautiful, bright morning of regeneration in your soul and mine. Well, I hope that has taken place in my own soul. I would not be standing here, I trust, if I did not have that hope. That is what we need, every last one of us. Come then, my dear friend, to Jesus Christ.

2. The wall defends the city. We mentioned already that, while the truth is preached within the visible Church, she will be strong but, when error comes in, the walls will be broken down and her definition will be lost, so that the Church will become like the world. You perhaps remember the poem that speaks of the lily-white hand of the Church. She is persuaded by the subtleties of the world to put her lily-white hand in the hand of the world; then decay sets in more and more, and the Church becomes like the world. So it is when the Church is weakened by the leaven of error coming in.

But salvation is the defence of the invisible Church – that is, of God's people, and especially God's people here on earth, now or at any other time – it makes them safe. "He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." When the Lord entered into a covenant with Abraham, He said, "I will . . . be a God unto thee" (Gen 17:7). And that is what God is to His people: He is a God to them. That is, everything He is and has is made over to them, in the covenant that He has made with them for

their salvation. All the divine perfections are for their safety, so that salvation is appointed by God for walls and bulwarks, for their defence.

Think of the wisdom of God – the infinite, eternal and unchangeable wisdom of God – dealing with them. Believers are in the hands of a wise God, and His wisdom is engaged in the covenant of grace for their salvation, for their defence. Our God is wise; He knows what to give and what to deny. He was wise when He dealt with Paul after he prayed that the thorn in his flesh would be removed. The Lord answered his prayer but not as Paul thought He would. Paul wished the thorn in the flesh to be removed so that he could serve his Master better. “How well”, he might say to himself, “I could run this race if I did not have this thorn in the flesh! How easily I could serve my Master if I did not have this thorn in the flesh!” But the Lord did not take away the thorn in the flesh, though Paul asked three times for it to be removed. He answered Paul in a better way. He said, “My grace is sufficient for thee; for My strength is made perfect in weakness”. This is a divine principle of Christ’s government of His people. It is better for you, Paul, that you have this thorn in the flesh, so that you will come daily to Me for grace, and for more grace.

The Lord is wise in all His dealings with His people and sometimes we get answers to our prayers in a way other than we expect. We dictate the way God should answer our desires and the means He should use to bring about what we want, but this is a mistake. We should leave the means and everything else to Him who is wise. In the covenant of grace, the wisdom of God is engaged – that infinite, eternal unchangeable wisdom of God by which He knows how to apply to any situation whatever power or influence or means He Himself will choose.

We can go through all the perfections of God and note that they are all engaged in the covenant for His people. The power of God is engaged to preserve them. The world may even take away your possessions; they may take away your rights and liberties; they may take away your reputation; they may even take away your life; but they cannot take away your salvation, because God will appoint walls and bulwarks; salvation will be the defence of your soul. They cannot reach it because God is engaged, in the covenant, to be a God to you in His infinite power. Wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth are all engaged in the covenant for you. God’s power is your power, God’s wisdom is made your wisdom, God’s holiness is engaged on your behalf; He will smite your enemies in His holy wrath.

And in the covenant of grace His holiness is allied to His mercy, while in the covenant of works His holiness was allied to His justice. The justice of God is now on your side. What was against you is now for you; now you are

viewed as one who has a perfect righteousness in the eyes of divine justice. All the benefits of salvation will be yours at the demand of justice. Justice is on your side on account of the imputed righteousness of Christ. You are viewed as if you had never sinned. Justice is well pleased for His righteousness' sake. The wisdom, the power, the holiness, the justice, the goodness and the truth of God are engaged on your side in the covenant.

“Over all His other works His tender mercies are”, and so His truth is engaged. O how faithful God is! He is faithful to His Word; the promises are yea and amen. Your salvation is a great salvation, for it is the defence of the inhabitants of this city. There is strength also, because God has pledged to Christ that He would give Him a people; and you, child of God, were among those God gave to Christ: “Thine they were, and Thou gavest them Me”.

Those who were at the Lord's table here yesterday were not children of Abraham according to the flesh, but they were of their father Abraham in a spiritual sense. They were here because God the Father said to God the Son in the covenant of grace: “Ask of Me, and I will give Thee the heathen for Thine inheritance”, among them the inhabitants of these islands. That is what they are: in the remote corner of north-west Europe sought by Christ from the Father and given by the Father to Him. They are bound up in a bundle of life and of love and of covenant arrangements and eternal, unchangeable pledges between the Father and the Son. Christ speaks of His people to the Father in, for example, these words: “None of them is lost but the son of perdition”, that is Judas. He says in effect: I have undertaken to save them; I have lost none of them; none of them will be lost. None of them will be lost – not in the days of the Saviour Himself, not in the days following, not in this late age in which we have our portion.

Then again the Father pledged to Christ that, on the basis of His soul's travail, He would see His seed and be satisfied. Christ was satisfied with what He saw here yesterday. The Father promised Him that He would be satisfied, and Christ *was* satisfied with His people who endeavoured, in the strength of promised grace, to pay their vows unto the Lord, testifying before all who were present that the Lord Jesus Christ was their only hope of salvation.

“They shall come and they shall declare His truth and righteousness

Unto a people yet unborn and that He hath done this.”

One of the last things Christ said before He died was: “It is finished”. These words are very similar to what you have at the end of Psalm 22: “He hath done this”. Christ said before heaven and earth: “It is finished”. They shall come and say, “He hath done this”. What a beautiful connection between their profession and His statement! There are pledges in the covenant between God and Christ, and you are there in the midst of them, child of God.

These pledges and promises made to His people in the Word cannot fail; so salvation is the defence of the inhabitants this city, viewed as those who are born again. How safe they are! How safe they are!

3. Application. We mentioned at the outset that the walls of a city in Palestine were costly to the people. Well, the walls of this city were costly to Him who made it. No charges were made on the people. He paid them Himself. He laid a foundation in Zion. He laid a foundation in the blood of His own Son. How costly these walls and bulwarks were! No taxes were raised on the people but this, that He would raise a revenue of praise and glory from them, a revenue of gratitude – that He would receive honour from them by their receiving and resting upon the foundation He has laid in Zion for sinners. So the people of God can say, “We have a strong city. We are weak ourselves, but Christ is strong; the salvation of God is strong; the bonds of the everlasting covenant are strong; the promises of the Word of God are strong, Christ’s satisfaction in His people is strong; God’s satisfaction in sinners receiving Christ as the foundation of their hope and salvation is strong.

Perhaps someone here is saying that they think salvation is wonderful but they feel they will sully the salvation of God by putting their hand on it. They conclude that they are not welcome, that salvation is not for them. Perhaps you are here and thinking like that. We thought so many a time. We came and went to the house of God envying God’s people and saying to ourselves: “It is not for me; it is not for the like of me”. Well, listen to the Word of God: “He shall see of the travail of His soul and shall be satisfied”. It gives satisfaction to Christ in heaven to see the blackest, vilest sinner laying hold, by faith, of the skirt of His garment in the ordinances of His house. It gives Him satisfaction; it gives honour to the Father who appointed Him as the ordinance of God for your salvation; it gives honour to the Holy Spirit, who is using all the wisdom of God to present Christ to you so that you will receive Him. It gives the honour of your salvation to Jesus Christ. It makes Him who said, “It is finished”, see the fruit of the travail of His soul. There is no doubt that in the Scriptures of truth there is a “come and welcome to Jesus Christ”.

By faith we believe the promises made to us by God; by hope we expect to receive the good things which God has promised; so that faith has properly for its object the promise, and hope for its object the thing promised and the execution of the promise. Faith regards its object as present, but hope regards it as future. Faith precedes hope, and is its foundation. We hope for life eternal, because we believe the promises which God has made respecting it; and if we believe these promises, we must expect their effect. Paul looks to eternal life as that which is future in regard to its remoteness; but in regard to its certainty, faith looks to it as a thing that is present. *Robert Haldane*

Regeneration and the Spirit (1)¹

Rev James R Tallach

God's warning under the covenant of works was: "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Gen 2:17). Man fell, and the sentence of death was passed on all men, for all sinned in Adam.

Since the Fall, the most momentous event that can overtake a sinner on the ground of mercy is regeneration by the Spirit of God. It separates a man from his past; as the father said of the Prodigal Son after his return: "He was dead and is alive again". It separates a sinner from the world: "You hath He quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins". This regenerating Spirit opposes Satan, "the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience" (Eph 2:2). Regeneration brings with it the capacity to praise God and thereby fulfil our calling to glorify God in this world. As Hezekiah said, "The living, the living, he shall praise thee" (Is 38:19). It is the cause for real rejoicing, as the Lord directed His disciples: "Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven" (Luke 10:20) – that is, in the Lamb's book of life.

The term *regeneration*. In the New Testament, the word *regeneration* translates a Greek word made up of two parts: *again* and *birth*. The word occurs in Matthew 19:28, where it refers to the renewal of all things at the end of the world. In Romans 8:19ff the same *idea* of renewal occurs and refers to the children of God and their bodies and the entire universe. The same concept also occurs in 2 Peter 3:13, where it refers to the new heavens and the new earth, the home of the righteous.

The only other place where the word is found is Titus 3:5, "the washing of *regeneration* and renewing of the Holy Ghost". The general view is that the terms *washing* and *renewal* in this verse both refer to a single idea. There is a reference here evidently to baptism, which becomes a true sign and seal of regeneration when the Holy Spirit renews the soul. The Apostle Paul conveys the same truth to the Corinthians: "Such were some of you; but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor 6:11). The outward application of water does not accomplish the change, but the inward work of the Spirit gives life to what is represented in the sacrament. This gives fellowship by the Spirit with the resurrected Christ to the regenerate sinner, and a part in the new age and kingdom which He came to establish.

Regeneration does not sweep away the old being of the sinner but the old nature. It causes that nature to begin again. Abraham Kuyper states, "Our

¹The first part of a paper delivered at the Theological Conference in December 2005.

being as man is not changed or modified, but before and after regeneration it is the same ego, the same person, the same human being. . . . All his constituent parts that distinguish him from all other beings are present in the sinner. Not his being but his nature became totally corrupt. . . . Being is that which makes him man, and nature manifests the character of his being and working.”² Turretin writes: “A new heart is said to be made in us by regeneration, not physically but morally. The same substance which was corrupted by sin must be restored by grace. If it is said that ‘the old man’ must be put off and ‘the new’ put on, nothing else is meant than that the corruption of sin (which is morally called ‘the old man’ because he descends from old Adam) must be thrown aside by man in order that the work of regeneration (signified by ‘the new man’) may be begun and carried forward.”³ Augustine says, “The capacity of having faith and love is of the nature of man, but to have them [is] of the grace of believers.”⁴

To say that the unregenerate under the preaching of the Word are no better than the seats on which they sit is both to say too much and to say too little. It is to say too much because the unregenerate have a human nature which is capable of transformation by divine grace, and the pew does not have this capacity. It is also to say too little as fallen human nature has an active enmity to the gospel, which a wooden pew does not have.

The term *regeneration* was used in different ways by different writers. Calvin appears to use the term to describe the work of the Spirit through the whole of the Christian life and to embrace conversion and repentance.⁵ On the other hand Witsius defines regeneration as the work of a moment. “If we consider this first principle of life,” he writes, “there is not the least doubt, but regeneration is accomplished in a moment, for there is no delay in the transition from death to life.” Turretin appears to agree with Witsius, for he writes: “The actual laying aside of vices and the correction of life and morals follow regeneration as its proper effects (Gal 5:22,23, Col 3:5). But regeneration itself is not properly such a disposition, but its cause (which consists in a renovation of the corrupt nature and restoration to the image of God).” It appears then that the later theologians confined the term *regeneration* to the first implantation of the divine seed in the soul.

The Necessity of Regeneration. James Buchanan emphasises the need for regeneration by pointing to John 3:3: “Except a man be born again, he can-

²Abraham Kuyper, *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, London, 1900, p 310.

³Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, P and R Publishing, 1992, vol 1, p 637.

⁴Quoted by Herman Witsius, *Economy of the Covenants*, den Dalk Christian Foundation reprint, 1990, vol 1, p 366.

⁵John Calvin, *Institutes*, book 3.3.

not see the kingdom of God”.⁶ The speaker is Jesus, who is filled with love, power and divinity and holds the key of David. He alone is able to open the door of salvation to sinners. God would have to depart from the whole design of the scheme of redemption before He would depart from this necessary condition, “Be ye holy, for I am holy”. The sinner would have to stand on the false hope that his heart is not naturally dead in trespasses and in sins, or on the other false hope that the kingdom of heaven does not require a spiritual, holy character.

Owen considers the fallen nature of the natural heart and thus demonstrates the necessity of regeneration.⁷ He quotes: “Other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart” (Eph 4:17,18). The mind, as the ruling faculty of the soul, seeks to lead the soul to rest in vain things, such as sin and the world’s pleasures. Instead of producing the order that the mind ought to create, this leads to instability and confusion. The need then is to be “renewed in the spirit of our minds” (Rom 7:2).

Again the understanding is the directive, judging faculty of the soul, guiding the soul in things dealt with by the mind. But the understanding is darkened, and nothing but vanity ensues. The heart includes the will. The light received in the mind is applied by the understanding and used by the heart. But spiritual darkness renders the heart incapable of any disposition to receive saving knowledge. Owen notes that although the world is thousands of years old, there is no sign of an end to the variety of vices, confusions and wickednesses which arise from the carnal mind. He is also quick to apply this sad state of affairs to the believer. In them the carnal mind shows itself through instability in holy duties, conformity to the world, and foolish imaginations giving rise to self-exaltation and self-satisfaction. By way of application he emphasises the need for constant watchfulness, meditation and humbling of the soul.

The first effect of all of the above is that the natural heart is alienated from the life of God. The life referred to here is the life of faith and spiritual obedience: “I live by the faith of the Son of God” (Gal 2:20). This life is lived in conformity to the Word of God, is lived to God and in God (Col: 3:3), is fruitful in holiness and is everlasting (Jn 17:3). The natural mind is alienated from this life. “My people is foolish . . . they are wise to do evil, but to do good they have no knowledge” (Jer 4:22).

The second effect is an inability of the mind. “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither

⁶James Buchanan, *The Office and Work of the Holy Spirit*, Edinburgh, 1842, p 17.

⁷John Owen, *Works*, vol 3, ch 3.

can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor 2:14). The natural man ascribes all things to the power of human reasoning, but God has ordained that the mind should receive what He has revealed. The things which the natural man cannot receive are the mysteries which "eye hath not seen nor ear heard" (1 Cor 2:9, cf Eph 3:8-11). His will is opposed to the revealed will of God and does not receive that revelation in the wisdom, holiness and suitableness of it.

The very phrase "the power of darkness" (Col 1:13), speaks of a mind filled with enmity against God and perverse lusts contrary to the will of God. Owen writes: "Let it be supposed that the mind of a man be no way hurt or impaired by any natural defect, such as doth not attend the whole race of mankind, but is personal only and accidental; suppose it free from contracted habits of vice or voluntary prejudices; yet upon the proposal of the doctrine and mysteries of the gospel, let it be done by the most skilful masters of the assemblies, with the greatest evidence and demonstration of the truth, it is not able of itself, spiritually and savingly, to receive, understand and assent unto them, without the especial aid and assistance and operation of the Holy Spirit."⁸ To summarise this last quotation: Let us suppose a man's mind to be working perfectly normally; let us suppose him to be free from powerful lusts; let the claims and truths of the gospel be preached by the best of preachers; yet this man will never receive the truth, apart from the Spirit.

The Tears of God's People (1)¹

T*ears are of God's appointment.* There is "a time to weep, and a time to laugh" (Ecc 3:4). On these words, Charles Bridges² says: "Who has not found the time to weep and mourn? 'Man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward' (Job 5:7,14:1). And yet lesson after lesson is needed to make us know the world to be a vale of tears. We look around to the right or the left to avoid this or that trouble. Is not this looking out for some by-path from the road, where we shall meet neither with promises, comfort, nor guidance? Be content with thine appointed lot. The tears of the child of God have more of the element of happiness than the laughter of the ungodly. The darkest side of the Canaan road is brighter than the light of a thousand worlds. Yet we may look for a change of seasons in God's best and fittest time. 'Thou hast turned my mourning into dancing' (Ps 30:6-11) was the experience of the man of God. Into Job's bosom was poured a portion double for all his sorrows (Job

⁸*Works*, vol 3, p 249.

¹Compiled by Peter Best from the writings of eminent Christians.

²Bridges (1794-1869) was an Evangelical preacher in the Church of England.

42:10). The mouths of the returning captives were filled with laughter, and their tongue with singing (Ps 126:1,2).”

Tears of sorrow and suffering are seeds. “They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him” (Ps 126:5,6). Matthew Henry³ comments: “Suffering saints . . . are in tears often; they share in the calamities of human life, and commonly have a greater share in them than others. But they sow in tears; they do the duty of an afflicted state and so answer the intentions of the providences they are under. Weeping must not hinder sowing; when we suffer ill we must be doing well. Nay, as the ground is by the rain prepared for the seed, and the husbandman sometimes chooses to sow in the wet, so we must improve times of affliction, as disposing us to repentance and prayer and humiliation. Nay, there are tears which are themselves the seed that we must sow, tears of sorrow for sin, our own and others’, tears of sympathy with the afflicted Church, and tears of tenderness in prayer and under the word. These are precious seed, such as the husbandman sows when corn is dear and he has but little for his family, and therefore weeps to part with it, yet buries it underground, in expectation of receiving it again with advantage. Thus does a good man sow in tears.

“They shall have a harvest of joy. The troubles of the saints will not last always, but when they have done their work, they shall have a happy end. The captives in Babylon were long sowing in tears, but at length they were brought forth with joy, and then they reaped the benefit of their patient suffering and brought their sheaves with them to their own land, in their experiences of the goodness of God to them. Job and Joseph and David and many others had harvests of joy after a sorrowful seedtime. Those that sow in the tears of godly sorrow shall reap in the joy of a sealed pardon and a settled peace. Those that sow to the spirit, in this vale of tears, shall of the spirit reap life everlasting, and that will be a joyful harvest indeed. Blessed are those that mourn, for they shall be for ever comforted.”

Yet tears of sorrow need to be moderated. “But this I say brethren, the time is short: it remaineth . . . that they that weep [be] as though they wept not” (1 Cor 7:29,30). Matthew Henry says, “As to afflictions: those that weep must be as though they wept not; that is, we must not be dejected too much with any of our afflictions, nor indulge ourselves in the sorrow of the world, but keep up a holy joy in God in the midst of all troubles, so that even in sorrow the heart may be joyful and the end of our grief may be gladness. Weeping may endure for a night, but joy will come in the morning. If we can but get to heaven at last, all tears shall be wiped from our eyes; and the pros-

³Henry (1662-1714) was an English Presbyterian preacher and Bible commentator.

pect of it now should make us moderate our sorrows and refrain our tears.”

Tears will accompany genuine repentance. “Peter remembered the word of Jesus, which said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny Me thrice. And he went out and wept bitterly” (Matt 26:75). We again quote Matthew Henry, who writes so aptly about this solemn event: “Peter’s sorrow was serious; he wept bitterly. Sorrow for sin must not be slight, but great and deep, like for an only son. Those that have sinned sweetly must weep bitterly, for, sooner or later, sin will be bitterness. This deep sorrow is requisite, not to satisfy divine justice (a sea of tears would not do that), but to evidence that there is a real change of mind, which is the essence of repentance, to make the pardon more welcome, and sin for the future more loathsome.

“Peter, who wept so bitterly for denying Christ, never denied Him again, but confessed Him often and openly, and in the mouth of danger. So far from ever saying, I know not the man, he made all the house of Israel know assuredly that this same Jesus was Lord and Christ. True repentance for any sin will be best evidenced by our abounding in the contrary grace and duty; that is a sign of our weeping, not only bitterly, but sincerely. Some of the ancients say that as long as Peter lived, he never heard a cock crow but it set him a-weeping. Those that have truly sorrowed for sin will sorrow on every remembrance of it, yet not so as to hinder, but rather to increase, their joy in God and in His mercy and grace.”

Copious tears can flow when a believer struggles with doubts and fears. “My tears have been my meat day and night, while they continually say unto me, Where is thy God?” (Ps 42:3). C H Spurgeon⁴ remarks: “When a man comes to tears, constant tears, plenteous tears, tears that fill his cup and trencher, he is in earnest indeed. As the big tears stand in the stag’s eyes in his distress, so did the salt drops glitter in the eyes of David. His appetite was gone; his tears not only seasoned his meat but became his only meat; he had no mind for other diet. Perhaps it was good for him that the heart could open the safety valves; there is a dry grief far more terrible than showery sorrows. His tears, since they were shed because God was blasphemed, were ‘honourable dew’, drops of holy water, such as Jehovah put into His bottle.

““While they continually say unto me, Where is thy God?’ Cruel taunts come naturally from coward minds. Surely they might have left the mourner alone; he could weep no more than he did . . . The wicked know that our worst misfortune would be to lose God’s favour; hence their diabolical malice leads them to declare that such is the case. Glory be to God, they lie in their throats, for our God is in the heavens – ay, and in the furnace too – succouring His people.”

⁴Spurgeon (1834-1892) was a Baptist preacher, at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, London.

Worshipping God¹

John Owen

Firstly, the *divine nature* is the reason and cause of all worship; so that it is impossible to worship *any one* Person, and not worship the *whole* Trinity. It is, and not without ground, denied by the schoolmen,² that the . . . object of divine worship is in the Persons *precisely* considered . . . But this belongs to the divine nature and essence, and to their *distinct* Persons as they are *identified* with the essence itself. Hence is that way of praying to the Trinity, by the repetition of the same petition to the several Persons (as in the Litany), groundless, if not impious. It supposeth that one Person is worshipped, and not another, when each Person is worshipped as God, and each Person is so – as though we first should desire one thing of the Father, and be heard and granted by Him, then ask the same thing of the Son, and so of the Holy Ghost; and so act as to the same thing three distinct acts of worship, and expect to be heard and have the same thing granted three times distinctly, when all the works of the Trinity, *ad extra*,³ are indivisible.

The proper and peculiar object of divine worship and invocation is *the essence of God*, in its infinite excellency, dignity, majesty, and its causality, as the first sovereign cause of all things. Now this is common to all the three Persons, and is proper to each of them; not formally as a Person, but as God blessed for ever. All adoration respects that which is common to all; so that in each act of adoration and worship, all are adored and worshipped. The creatures worship their Creator; and a man, Him in whose image he was created – namely, Him from whom descendeth “every good and perfect gift”: all this describing God as God.

Hence, secondly. When we begin our *prayers to* God the Father, and end them in the name of Jesus Christ, yet the Son is no less invocated and worshipped in the beginning than the Father, though He be peculiarly mentioned as mediator in the close – not as Son to Himself, but as *mediator to the whole Trinity*, or God in Trinity. But in the invocation of God the Father we invoke every Person, because we invoke the Father as God, every Person being so.

Thirdly, in that *heavenly directory* which we have in Ephesians 2:18, this whole business is declared. Our access in our worship is said to be “to the Father”; and this “through Christ”, or His mediation; “by the Spirit”, or His

¹Taken from Owen’s *Works*, vol 2, page 268. These are some of his preliminary points before going on to give “particular directions for our communion with the Holy Ghost”.

²The theologians of the Middle Ages.

³That is, outside of the Godhead.

assistance. Here is a distinction of the Persons as to their operations, but not at all as to their being the object of our worship. For the Son and the Holy Ghost are no less worshipped in our access to God than the Father Himself; only the grace of the Father, which we obtain by the mediation of the Son and the assistance of the Spirit, is that which we draw nigh to God for. So that when, by the distinct dispensation of the Trinity and every Person, we are led to worship (that is, to act faith on or invoke) any Person, we do herein worship the whole Trinity. And we worship every Person, by what name soever – of Father, Son or Holy Ghost – we invoke Him. So that this is to be observed in this whole matter: that when any work of the Holy Ghost (or any other Person), which is appropriated to Him (we never exclude the concurrence of other Persons), draws us to the worship of Him, He is not worshipped exclusively, but the whole Godhead is worshipped.

Israel Update

Rev J L Goldby

We have been given a small quantity of Trinitarian Bible Society Bibles kindly funded by TBS Canada. Some of these have been given out and some we use for services and Bible studies. A small quantity have been placed in the Church of Scotland Guest House for free distribution. The Society for Distributing Hebrew Scriptures has supplied us with a range of Hebrew Scriptures in parallel-language versions and a number of CD-ROMs which contain Bible versions in 17 languages, including Hebrew and Greek. Recently we held an interesting discussion with a gentleman who is engaged in Bible distribution here and in neighbouring countries. He told us that there is a great demand for Arabic Bibles – thousands are required and demand far exceeds supply.

In recent months a number of people who formerly attended our services have returned to their own countries. Among them were a couple who faithfully attended our meetings whenever they could and have now left for health reasons. All in our little group were sorry to see them go and we wish them well wherever the Lord may lead them to settle eventually.

For three months from September last year I resumed the study of Modern Hebrew in Ulpan Morasha. A number of interesting contacts have been made as a result. The acquisition of Modern Hebrew is a slow process but, although time-consuming, provides a valuable tool for social interaction with Israelis. I also attend a local synagogue whenever possible. On a recent visit I met the Professor of Talmud who was our first contact in Israel. I also

visited the Rabbi of the synagogue in his home and gave him a Psalmody and a CD of Scottish Metrical Psalms. Afterwards he commented on how faithful the Metrical Psalms are to the Hebrew and said that they deserved to be more widely known.

The occupants of the two ground floor flats in our block are both in wheelchairs. One is a young man with small children who has lost both legs from the knee down as a result of a suicide bombing. He had been a soldier waiting at a crowded bus stop when he tackled the bomber. His brave action no doubt saved many lives.

Despite Israel's withdrawal from Gaza, Islamic militants continue to fire rockets from Gaza into nearby towns in Israel. Sadly, these attacks result in civilian deaths and injuries to both Palestinians and Israelis. Most Arab-Isrealis have no desire to live under a corrupt Palestinian government divided by deadly infighting. We have friends in Nahariya, a small town in the north, near the Lebanese border. In the space of a month last summer, Hezbollah fired 800 Katyusha rockets into it. Our friend's son was in his house when a direct hit caused extensive damage, but thankfully he escaped unharmed. The translation of the Westminster Confession of Faith into Hebrew has been delayed because our translator (whose town was also a target of Hezbollah) was compelled to postpone her work.

Some time ago it came to our attention that the Church of Scotland may dispose of their church building in Tiberias. It is almost impossible to obtain such property in Israel and it appears that only one new church has been built here since 1948! Enquiries revealed that the disposal of the church and compound was indeed under consideration. The property is a very attractive two-story building with a good-sized piece of land, within a walled compound, beside the Sea of Galilee and close to the centre of Tiberias. To date the Church of Scotland has not made a final decision as to whether they should lease or sell their building but a decision is expected in April. Though the building is larger than we need at present, we have expressed an interest should the terms be sufficiently attractive. A long lease may be a possibility.

As numbers attending our services have decreased, we have moved the services to a small chapel in the Jerusalem YMCA. This is in a very central position on King David Street, directly opposite the famous King David Hotel. Those responsible for the larger facilities in the Finnish Mission and St Andrew's Church of Scotland have kindly given us the option of using their churches in the future should the need arise.

If your soul is to be saved, you must pray. God has no dumb children. If you are to resist the world, the flesh and the devil, you must pray; it is in vain to look for strength in the hour of trial, if it has not been sought for.

J C Ryle

Eastern Europe Mission News

Rev D A Ross

The communion season in Odessa intimated for January 2007 took place in the good providence of the Most High. The two elders of the Kirk Session, Mr Kenneth C Macleod and Mr Edward Ross, and I left for Odessa on January 18. Due to a heavy snowstorm in Glasgow, we were delayed and missed our flight from Heathrow Airport to Odessa. Next day, after another delay, we left London, arriving that afternoon to a warm welcome from our friends there. That evening we had the pleasure of all gathering together for a prayer meeting in the congregation.

On the first Sabbath, about 20 people attended the services. The communion season services began on the following Thursday, with one service each weekday and two on the Sabbath (when again about 20 people were present). The Lord's people there had looked forward greatly to this renewed opportunity of remembering the death of Christ, and we believe they found it to be spiritually refreshing. To some who gathered with them the manner in which we conduct the communion service was very new, and we discovered afterwards that a few of them took offence when, in fencing the Lord's table, we laid down the scriptural qualifications for being a communicant. However, we hope they will yet come to appreciate that this is in keeping with the Word of God. We trust that much blessing will follow this communion season.

It was a happy occasion too when Mr Igor Zadoroshnyy was ordained to the eldership in the congregation – after delays extending over two years. When our departure was delayed at Glasgow and then by high winds at Heathrow, we – and our friends in Odessa – began to wonder if we would arrive in Odessa. The Most High ordered it otherwise and it was a cause for much thankfulness to see a founding member of the congregation now an elder in it. We pray that Mr Zadoroshnyy will be kept and be enabled to fulfill, faithfully and diligently, all his duties as an elder in the Church of Christ.

The number regularly attending the services in the congregation remains much the same as in the past. However, some people do continue coming on occasional Sabbaths throughout the year, and we hope and pray that they too will be caught in the gospel net. One of them is an elderly Roman Catholic lady who has quite forcibly felt the impact – we hope for the good – of the stark difference between our plain, biblical manner of worship and the showy worship of Rome.

We also held a number of Field Committee meetings in connection with the mission work in Odessa and beyond. We visited the new mission building, the basement of which is almost complete. The basement does not look

large from the outside but, once inside, one finds ample storage space for Bibles, literature and humanitarian aid as well as room for the central heating system. Entrance into the basement will be from both inside and outside the building. The outside entrance also serves as a fire escape and will be useful for loading and unloading Bibles and books. Our hope is to proceed with stage two of the building – that is, the ground floor and first floor shell and roof. Needless to say, building materials keep increasing in cost due to inflation, which has galloped during the past few months. However, we hope that sufficient money will come in soon to the Eastern Europe Fund to enable us to proceed with this second stage. May the Lord open the hearts of many to support this important work in an especially needy part of the world!

The aim of any Christian mission is to obey the Scripture directive, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature”. By the grace of God, the Free Presbyterian Church has engaged in this work in a number of countries and we seek to continue doing so in Eastern Europe in particular. We therefore crave the prayers of the Lord’s people so that this work would continue and that there would be spiritual fruit.

Book Reviews¹

The Reformation, A Handbook, by T M Lindsay, published by the Banner of Truth Trust, paperback, 275 pages, £7.75.

Thomas Lindsay was ordained in 1872 as Professor of Church History at the Free Church College, Glasgow, where he continued until his death in 1914. Since 1902 he had been Principal of what had become the United Free College. Apart from a probationary period assisting Robert Candlish, he had no experience of pastoral ministry. His wife was a daughter of Alexander Murray Dunlop, advocate and later MP for Greenock, who drew up the Claim of Right (1842) prior to the Disruption and was legal adviser to the Free Church of Scotland. Professor D F Wright describes Lindsay’s two-volume *A History of the Reformation* as “one of the most substantial Scottish accounts of the Reformation, with a particular interest in its social and domestic aspects. Lindsay’s social concern was evident in his involvement incrofting agitation and with labour leaders” (*Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Biography*).

The book now reprinted by the Banner of Truth Trust was first published in 1882 as a Handbook for young people in Bible classes. By the time he wrote his two-volume history (1906-07) Lindsay claimed to “have read and

¹Books reviewed here are obtainable from the Free Presbyterian Bookroom.

re-read most of the original contemporary sources of information". But he acknowledges that the first three parts of this earlier handbook are "simply a compilation from the best and most-easily accessible histories of the Reformation, and make no pretence to original treatment of the vast and complicated religious movement which they describe". Even so, it is a skilful and useful "compilation".

Comprehensive and easily-read narrative accounts are given (a) of the Reformation in Germany which brought the Lutheran Churches into existence, (b) of the Reformation which led to the emergence of the Reformed or Calvinistic Churches in Switzerland, France, the Netherlands and Scotland, and (c) of the Reformation in England during the reigns of Henry VIII, Edward VI, Mary and Elizabeth, which produced the Anglican Churches. On account of the area covered, the treatment is not in depth, but the pace is kept up and the reader's attention engaged. These chapters provide a useful introduction to Reformation history, knowledge of which seems limited today even among those adhering to Reformation doctrine, principles and practice.

The fourth part of the book is a discussion of the principles of the Reformation, though it does not enter deeply into the theological issues involved. Lindsay interprets the Reformation as essentially a revival of religion, of which he sees "anticipations or antecedents" in some questionable medieval persons and movements. He considers its impact upon the political and social life of Europe. He maintains that the Reformers did not consider themselves to be forming a new Church but bringing the Church back to the biblical faith of the universal Church, separate from the usurpations and corruptions of the Pope and of Rome. He regards "the priesthood of all believers" as a key doctrinal principle of the Reformation, the leading impulse of which he sees as "the earnest desire to get near to God" – an outcome "made possible through the doctrines of Scripture and of justification by faith".

Dr Wright notes that "Lindsay favoured a more liberal approach to confessional subscription, and also actively supported William Robertson Smith (although he affirmed biblical infallibility)". That "he favoured biblical infallibility" is not altogether an accurate statement. Our attention has been drawn to articles in *The Expositor* of 1894-95, entitled "Professor W Robertson Smith's Doctrine of Scripture" and "The Doctrine of Scripture: The Reformers and the Princeton School".

In these articles Lindsay endeavours by specious reasoning to argue that the views of W R Smith (not those of the Princeton theologians) were in accordance with the teaching of Calvin and the Reformers and that they, like him, distinguished between the Word of God and the Scripture, asserting that "the Scripture, therefore, in the strictest sense, is not this Word of God, but

the record which conveys it to us". Lindsay explains that it was Smith's view, with which he agrees, "that when we speak of the infallible and authoritative character of Scripture, the infallibility and authoritativeness belong primarily to the Word of God, and only secondarily to Scripture, and belong to Scripture because it is the record which contains, presents, or conveys the Word of God". What makes the Word of God infallible to a person, he claims, is not an infallibility belonging to the Scriptures but rather the witness of the Spirit. "Infallibility does not consist in formal inerrancy at all, but in the power which compels me to know that God is through this Scripture speaking to me now as He spoke not merely *by* the prophets and holy men of old, but *to* them and in them, and giving me through them in word and picture the message of His salvation".

It was such views of a distinction between the Word of God and Scripture that permitted men like Lindsay, Alexander Whyte and W G Blaikie to shelter the destructive critics in the nineteenth-century Free Church and vainly to believe that the concept of the infallibility and inerrancy of Scripture could be demolished and the substance of the Word of God and the gospel which it proclaimed preserved – with disastrous consequences for the Church in Scotland. While Lindsay writes in a manner which could be interpreted in keeping with this view, he does not propound it in this book.

It would be good if perusal of this volume would kindle a desire, especially among the young, for whom it was originally intended, to delve deeper into the study of the sixteenth-century Reformation movement, which has been foundational to the blessing enjoyed in connection with the gospel throughout subsequent centuries. Merle d'Aubigne's *Reformation in England* and John Knox's *Reformation in Scotland* (both published by the Banner of Truth Trust) are worth putting on one's reading list. (Rev) Hugh M Cartwright

The Priority of Preaching, by John Cheeseman, published by the Banner of Truth Trust, booklet, 27 pages, £1.50.

In this booklet Mr Cheeseman, an Anglican minister since 1976, first discusses in brief compass the essential place which preaching has in the life of the Church today, as in the past. Having pointed to the Biblical and theological grounds of the necessity for preaching, he counters some common objections to it from the anti-authoritarian and visually-conditioned spirit of the age and reminds us that the preaching of the gospel is the power of God unto salvation.

The subject of the second and lengthiest chapter is "The preparation and delivery of a sermon". No attempt is made at originality but the author condenses into a few sentences what is treated at greater length and depth in

many other works. The preacher's absolute dependence upon God the Holy Spirit and his care to avoid a mechanical or rationalistic approach to preaching should not make him feel immune to the need for counsel regarding the way in which he conducts himself in the study and in the pulpit, even after many years. While he might not appreciate or approve all the advice given in a work such as this, it should make him examine himself and willing to learn. The third chapter stresses that "the practice of preaching cannot be divorced from the *person* of the preacher". Attention is drawn to the necessity for sincerity, godliness, fearlessness, love, and a conscious dependence on the Holy Spirit.

Those who have preached for years and read many books on the subject may yet benefit from having basic principles concisely presented anew for their prayerful consideration. Those who are concerned as to whether the Lord is laying upon their spirits a burden to preach may find this simple presentation helpful in assessing their call to this work. People in the pews who might not be inclined to read a more substantial work on the subject may be stimulated, by this brief outline of what the preacher has to be and to do, to pray more earnestly for those engaged in this glorious but solemn calling.

(Rev) Hugh M Cartwright

Sermons on the Beatitudes, by John Calvin, published by the Banner of Truth Trust, hardback, 128 pages, £9.00.

Calvin preached these five sermons in 1560 to his own congregation in Geneva, in the course of a series of expository discourses on the Gospels. He not only considered Matthew 5:1-12 but also the corresponding passages in other Gospels; and the first sermon deals with the preceding context.

Interestingly these were the last sermons taken down, before his final illness, by Dennis Raguénier, Calvin's faithful scribe. It is not known if any of Calvin's later discourses were recorded; certainly none of them survive. The sermons in this slim volume follow the preacher's usual pattern, blending exposition of the passage before him with application to the contemporary situation. And, by and large, that application is still relevant.

The translation is by Robert White, formerly of the University of Sydney, who has a specialist interest in the Reformation in French-speaking areas of Europe. The English of the translation reads well; the publishers describe it as "a modern idiom", but it leaves us with the Most High addressed as "you". A significant part of the book is taken up with introductions and notes; while these are useful, the meat of the book lies in the sermons themselves. Spurgeon described Calvin's sermons on Ephesians (still available in English) as "priceless". We should be thankful that, even in such a degenerate age as this, there is still a demand for the sermons of the Genevan Reformer.

Notes and Comments

Conscience, Democracy and the Law of the Land

Increasingly the law of the land is coming into conflict with the consciences of those who have regard to the law of God. In the 1940s Johannes G Vos (in *Blue Banner Faith and Life*, articles republished as *The Westminster Larger Catechism: A Commentary*, New Jersey, 2002) wrote of developments in the USA: “Protestantism, [Roman] Catholicism and Judaism are to be put on a level and all distinctive features of any of them regarded as unimportant in the interests of ‘Americanism’ and ‘tolerance’. This is one of the most vicious and deplorable tendencies of our day, and we should be awake to its menace. If this emphasis on a false ideal of ‘tolerance’ succeeds, true biblical Christianity will be eliminated as a powerful influence in our country, and the day may even come when orthodox Bible Christians will have to suffer persecution as ‘enemies of democracy’.”

The situation in Britain today with regard to this “false ideal of tolerance” is worse than that envisaged in these words. The imposition of laws and regulations in the name of equality and non-discrimination threatens to put Christians whose consciences are informed by biblical principles in the position of having to choose between breaking the law or abandoning numerous legitimate and honourable occupations in which they would be required to trample conscience and the law of God underfoot.

Neither conscience nor appeals to tolerance and personal freedom of choice can be regarded as excusing individuals or bodies from compliance with laws which are within the competence of lawmakers to impose. The person who conscientiously rejects these laws may have to endure the penalty attached to the breaking of the law rather than trample upon his conscience but he cannot escape from his obligation to the law. However, the principle that law is superior to conscience becomes an instrument of oppression when law itself is formulated without regard to the ultimate authority to which both law and conscience should be subject. Conscience has no right to justify conduct which the law, in keeping with the revealed will of the Lord of conscience, has declared to be wrong. Conscience has a right to object to laws which contradict the law of God, and lawmakers have no right to impose such laws upon citizens.

True freedom is not freedom to do what one likes but freedom to do what God requires. In the interest of giving freedom to those who like to do what God forbids, the true foundations of freedom are being undermined. One person’s freedom becomes another person’s bondage when it forces him to do or endorse what his conscience condemns, and the adjudicator between

the two becomes, not some absolute standard, but the will of the democracy, or of those in it who are able to manipulate its procedures. Democratic government itself becomes a tyranny when it is not regulated by regard to the absolute standards of God's law but appeals to the will of a godless majority or, more likely, succumbs to the pressures of a vociferous and ruthless minority. In such a situation there cannot but be conflict between the enlightened conscience and the ungodly law.

The Christian's appeal to the right of conscience to determine his conduct is not to some merely-human civil right which he has to beg for in common with those who wish to trample God's law underfoot and force the conscientious Christian to compromise his conscience and forfeit his freedom. If the perceived civil rights and consciences of groups of citizens come into conflict, conscience by itself cannot be the ultimate arbiter. If God's "perfect law of liberty" is not recognised as the ultimate authority, freedom will be subject to the prevailing views of society or of those who determine its laws. Invariably, in a sinful world, that will result in the restriction of the freedoms of those who are determined to hearken to God rather than to men. It will result in increasing legislation, growing lawlessness, more extensive intrusion into the personal lives of citizens and more conflict between the Christian conscience and the law. Democracy that is not informed by a common, or at least prevailing, regard to the law of God will become increasingly divided and increasingly intolerant, in its legislation and practice, of those whose consciences owe their allegiance to God.

"Woe unto them that decree unrighteous decrees, and that write grievousness which they have prescribed" (Is 10:1). "Help, Lord; for the godly man ceaseth; for the faithful fail from among the children of men. . . . The wicked walk on every side, when the vilest men are exalted" (Ps 12:1,8). *HMC*

Morality and Scottish Schools

It has been announced that nursery-school children as young as three could soon be studying philosophy. This is the result of the success claimed for a primary-school project in Clackmannanshire, which found an increase in pupils' IQ scores. Researchers found that pupils taking part had greater confidence and were more aware of their own and other people's feelings.

Under the scheme pupils do not, of course, study philosophy in any formal way but might discuss fables to work out elements of right and wrong. In response to this news report, a letter to *The Scotsman* welcomed teaching in a context *without* right and wrong answers; such is the way of thinking which pervades Scottish society today. Modern education has jettisoned the idea of absolute truth and of absolutes in morality, even in the face of declining

standards of behaviour everywhere and, in particular, in schools. Yet, however relativistic society's idea of morality may be, no one can avoid seeing the consequences – decreasing standards of behaviour among pupils, especially in an age when there are few, if any, effective sanctions to enforce discipline.

Surely, were it not for the spiritual blindness that afflicts modern Scotland, there would be a loud cry for effective moral teaching based on absolute right and wrong – and therefore a loud call for a return to teaching from the Bible. We, in common with other countries, have turned away from the Scriptures and, having sown the wind, are reaping the whirlwind. It is not philosophy that little children need, it is the Bible.

High among the Scottish Executive's concerns about young people is what has been described as "Scotland's appalling record on teenage pregnancies and the spread of sexually transmitted diseases". Clearly, what our young people lack is a solid understanding of the Bible's teaching on relationships between male and female – which is now very much a thing of the past. But what is the official response to a study showing that many primary teachers are "uncomfortable" dealing with issues such as homosexuality? To propose "better training" on how to deliver sex education.

Yet, not surprisingly, the survey found there was still "considerable unease" among teachers about the curriculum in "sex and relationship education" even *after* further training. It seems there is a determination in official circles to drive out the remnants of scriptural morality. When will it become clear that no amount of *amoral* education will bring about a reduction in teenage immorality? May the Lord rescue Scotland from its lemming-like rush to destruction!

A "Super" Casino for Manchester

Gambling is a sin with numerous different aspects. There is an element of covetousness: "Be content with such things as ye have" (Heb 13:5). There is often a degree of atheism in which the providence of God is treated as impersonal "chance", or there may be superstition with a dependence on "lucky" numbers, pens, days and the like. There is a distrust of the fatherly care of God, and a despising of the privilege of prayer in which we are invited to come to God by Christ and make our requests known unto Him. There is a profaning of the holiness of providence – which we should view, not as detached spectators, but with childlike reverence as the outworking of His eternal counsel and wisdom. There is a pre-occupation with the utterly trivial – the spin of a fruit machine, the outcome of a horse-race – and a neglect of the great things of Christ and the gospel.

Gambling is also a breach of the Eighth Commandment: "Thou shalt not

steal”. We are required to further our own “wealth and outward estate”, but most forms of gambling are imprudent and liable to lose money. We are required also to seek the material prosperity of others, “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself”, but the gambler enters into a contract the very reverse of this, in which each party is hoping to deprive another of his wealth, in return for nothing. In a righteous contract there would be mutual benefit, but in gambling such an outcome is impossible. No party is producing anything and the whole transaction is a sinful wasting of time. Added to all this is the callousness of those who run gambling businesses and make their livings out of the sin and folly of others.

Gambling is not only sinful in itself, but like every other sin, it has harmful consequences. Many are impoverished, and not a few ruined, along with their families. Others are catapulted to vast wealth which proves their downfall. Many more become addicted. It is estimated that Britain presently has 300 000 problem gamblers. Among young people gambling is often associated with alcohol abuse, drug-taking and juvenile crime.

Recent governments have exacerbated the problem. The National Lottery was introduced in 1994; online gambling has not only been permitted but encouraged, and the latest plan is to allow the building of eight “small” casinos, eight “large” casinos”, and one “super” casino to be located in Manchester. It is claimed that these casinos will help to “regenerate” poor urban areas, but it is certain that many thousands of people will soon be worse off, financially and morally, if these buildings are ever opened. What these towns and cities so desperately need is the power of the gospel, transforming men’s lives from within and giving them a desire for something better than the wealth of this world.

“But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing in to this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. . . . But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life” (1 Tim 5: 6-9,11-12).

DWBS

Church Information

Synod Agenda and Committee Reports

Clerks of Presbyteries, conveners and clerks of committees, and all interested

parties should note that all items of business intended to be placed on the Synod agenda must be in the hands of the Clerk of Synod by April 3.

Conveners and clerks of all standing committees of Synod should note that all committee reports must also be in the hands of the Clerk of Synod by April 3, for printing. These reports should contain information about the work of the committees during the year. Recommendations and proposals should be sent as separate items for the Synod agenda. *(Rev) John MacLeod, Clerk of Synod*

Jewish and Foreign Missions Fund

By appointment of Synod, the first of the year's two collections for the Jewish and Foreign Missions Fund is due to be taken in congregations during March.

R A Campbell, General Treasurer

Stornoway / Achmore Congregation

The Achmore communion will from now on be held on the second Sabbath of May, the Lord willing.

A M Mackenzie, Session Clerk

Acknowledgement of Donations

The General Treasurer acknowledges with sincere thanks the following donations:

College & Library Fund: Anon, CAF cheque, £50; Anon, Newcastle, Ps 119: 33-40, £40.

Jewish & Foreign Missions Fund: Anon, Liechtenstein Interfiducia Trust, CHF 20 000.

Magazines Fund: R & DF, £300 per AAM.

Congregational Treasurers acknowledge with sincere thanks the following donations:

Breasclete: *Congregational Funds:* Anon, £50.

Dingwall: *Where Most Needed:* KAM, £200 per Rev NMR.

Gairloch: *Congregational Funds:* MM, Thurso, £50 per Rev AEW.

Laide: *Eastern Europe Fund:* Odessa Building: Anon, Shialdaig, £50; Anon, Shialdaig, £50; KC, Lewis, £100; Anon, Ross-shire, £5; Friend, Lochcarron, £300; Friend, Aultbea, £40; Friend, Shialdaig, £25; Anon, Laide, £50; Friend, Raasay, £10 per Rev DAR; Anon, £10; Anon, Laide, £10; Anon, £1000; Friend, Mellon Charles, £30; Friend, Aultbea, £20 per CR. *Where Most Needed:* Friend, Inverness, £20 per KCM. *Magazine Free Distribution Fund:* Friend, Holland, £34.72 per Rev DAR. *TBS:* IM, £100 per Rev DAR.

North Tolsta: *Communion Expenses:* MM, £10 per Rev DC; Finlayson 10, £20; Anon, £30, £20, £10. *Congregational Funds:* Finlayson 10, £20; J M MacLeod, £50; Anon, £20. *Manse Expenses:* LMA, £150. *Where Most Needed:* Anon, £20, £100; Anon, "In memory of loved ones", £1000.

North Uist: *Congregational Funds:* Anon, "In memory of the late Mr D J MacAskill", £50.

Portree: *College & Library Fund:* CN, Staffin House, £10. *Congregational Funds:* Friend, Tunbridge Wells, £50 per Rev FMD. *Where Most Needed:* CN, Staffin House, £50; Anon, £300 per Rev WAW.

Raasay: *College & Library Fund:* Anon, £10 per JM. *Congregational Funds:* Anon, £270; Friend, Raasay, £40.

Richmond: *Church & Manse Fund:* Chesley Friends, \$1179.

South Harris: *Car Fund:* North Uist Friend, £80 per Rev KDM. *Congregational Funds:* Mr J Webster, £50. *Jewish & Foreign Missions Fund:* Leverburgh Care Home, £170. *Sustentation Fund:* MacLennan family, Luskentyre, £250.

Staffin: *Where Most Needed:* Anon, £40, £100.

Stornoway: *Jewish & Foreign Missions Fund:* Anon, for Kenya Poor Relief Fund, £20.