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“The Hearing Ear and the Seeing Eye”

God made everything. His final act of creation was to bring mankind into existence. Like every other part of His work, Adam and Eve were perfect in every respect. “God saw every thing that He had made,” we are told, “and, behold, it was very good” (Gen 1:31). Adam’s body was perfect; as was Eve’s. And so were their souls.

It is particularly drawn to our attention that “the hearing ear, and the seeing eye, the Lord hath made even both of them” (Prov 20:12). This was true of the body’s senses; it was also true of the soul’s – God gave the two original human beings the spiritual capacity to see and to hear, and to do so perfectly. So when God came into the Garden of Eden in the cool of the day, as one may assume He did before the Fall, Adam and Eve were able to take in His words with spiritual satisfaction. And as they looked around the Garden, they could appreciate the beauty and the perfection of all they saw. Accordingly, when the Lord spoke and also when they saw the wonder of His works, their pure hearts were without doubt lifted up in the spirit of worship.

Yet although God made man perfect, neither Adam nor Eve continued in that state. In response to the devil’s temptation, “when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was *pleasant to the eyes*, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat” (Gen 3:6). When they saw the attractiveness of the fruit, their souls’ eyes were no longer functioning properly; their minds were no longer acting under the influence of God’s holy law; they no longer looked at the world around them as they had done when their hearts were in absolute subjection to God’s will. Then they might have seen the fruit as attractive but, knowing that it was forbidden, they would not have been in any degree tempted to take it and eat it.

Now all was changed. They were fallen creatures. Only as fallen, could they have viewed the tree as desirable to make them wise. After all, God had already given them real wisdom. We might feel tempted to ask how those who had such wisdom could have acted so foolishly, but we must not seek to explore what God has not been pleased to reveal. There is a high degree

of mystery in the Fall: perfect creatures, under the devil's influence, became grossly imperfect; every part of them became defiled by sin.

Similarly the ears of their souls ceased to function properly. Thus, when "they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day . . . Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden" (Gen 3:8). As fallen creatures, they did not expect to find the Lord's words pleasant; they could only expect His message to be utter condemnation.

So it is with all their descendants while they remain in a state of nature. The words of prophecy: "when we shall see [the Messaiah], there is no beauty that we should desire Him" (Is 53:2), were fulfilled when He took human nature and went about the various districts of Judea and Galilee. Many saw Him, but because the eyes of their souls were blinded, they did not welcome Him. And because the ears of their souls did not function, His words had no attraction for them. They heard Him, but they found His message a "hard saying" and they went away. Thus it is today also. Sinners are shown Christ in the preaching of the gospel; He is set before them in the pages of Scripture; but because the eyes of their souls are blinded, they do not see Him. What is more, they do not want to see Him. Likewise, they may hear His words read or spoken but, because the ears of their souls are completely deaf, they do not receive the gospel message. And, apart from the work of the Holy Spirit, they never will.

Yet, by the Spirit's work, some sinners are made able to obey the call: "Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else" (Is 45:22). And although they cannot open the eyes of even one sinner, preachers are sent out to give that call. Thus Paul was sent to the Gentiles "to open their eyes" (Acts 26:18). Like other gospel messengers, he was powerless to bring one sinner to look to Christ by faith. But many who were spiritually blind when Paul came to their district had their eyes opened to see Jesus through his preaching. What Paul could not do, the Holy Spirit did. He makes the soul able to see – recreates in the soul the seeing eye.

When the soul's eyes are made to function, so are its ears. Thus Luke writes of how in Philippi "Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul" (Acts 16:14); and she did so because the Lord made her soul able to hear. The Apostle no doubt spoke about sin and salvation, pointing emphatically to the sinner's need as condemned to a lost eternity and polluted by sin – needing forgiveness and the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. But he would have spoken with equal assurance of the perfect provision made for sinners in the work of Christ –

“that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them” (2 Cor 5:19).

As he spoke, the Spirit was at work in Lydia’s heart, making it accessible to God’s Word. The ears of her soul were opened so that she could take in what was said. Previously her unopened heart would have rejected the truth; now she was able to receive it. Previously her unopened eyes could not perceive the Saviour whom Paul proclaimed to her; now she saw Him by faith and could say, “He is altogether lovely” (Song 5:16). Previously she could not discern the truths of the gospel; now she could say of her Saviour: “His mouth is most sweet”, for she had with opened ears heard Him address her through His ambassador and was taken up with Him and the gospel.

Yet, in later life, she would have felt the need again and again to ask the Lord to make the eyes and ears of her soul function more effectually. It was a godly man who prayed: “Open Thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy law” (Ps 119:18). His eyes had already been opened, but he felt the need to ask for them to be opened further so that he might understand God’s revelation better. Believers need the Holy Spirit to work in their hearts so that they may “grow in grace, and in the knowledge of [their] Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ”. Not only does the Lord make both the hearing ear and the seeing eye in the soul; it is He who makes the soul more receptive to the truth and brings it to look to Christ more trustfully.

Though the apostles, like the prophets before them and the preachers of today, had no access to anyone’s heart, yet it was their duty to call on their hearers to believe. Jeremiah cried: “Hear now this, O foolish people, and without understanding; which have eyes, and see not; which have ears, and hear not” (Jer 5:21). His hearers’ souls were dead – and so were blind and deaf; they could not receive the truth. What, people might then ask, was the point in Jeremiah calling on his hearers to hear and see – in other words, to believe? And what, one might ask today, is the point in a preacher calling on the unconverted to believe in Christ and be saved? None whatever – if there is no power beyond his own. But it is the most reasonable thing in the world if there is reason to believe that the Holy Spirit in sovereign mercy may accompany the truth with power to the hearts of the spiritually-dead.

There is every reason to believe that the Spirit will so apply the truth. While sinners cannot themselves open their blind eyes or their deaf ears, they are commanded to look to the Saviour and to hear Him. But “the things which are impossible with men are possible with God”. The call of the gospel is the means God has appointed to bring sinners into His kingdom. The Holy Spirit has the power to make the ear of the soul hear, and the eye see. What an encouragement to seek the Lord in the way He has appointed!

The Ministry of the Apostle Paul (1)¹

A Sermon by *A S Patterson*

Ephesians 3:8,9. *Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; and to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world, hath been hid in God.*

In these words, Paul describes the nature and functions of his ministry. On this occasion, when we meet together for the solemn service of ordination, let us briefly enquire into their meaning, and lay seriously to heart their sacred and salutary lessons. May God grant that, by doing so, we may all be led to perform more faithfully our respective duties, and that thus too the connection which may be this day constituted between a pastor and his people may be both sealed and sanctified!

Let us consider: (1.) The Apostle's character as described here: "me, who am less than the least of all saints"; (2.) The functions which he was called to execute: "that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which, from the beginning of the world, hath been hid in God"; and (3.) The source from which that office was derived: "unto me is this grace given."

1. Let us glance at **the Apostle's character** as described here: "me, who am less than the least of all saints". It is by no means to be inferred from this description, that the apostle was either no saint at all or, in respect even of his present attainments, a saint of a very subordinate or inferior class. At the time when he wrote this Epistle, he had laboured diligently and suffered severely in his Master's cause, and the Epistle itself is pervaded by the holy sentiment and pious fervour of an eminently-saintly soul. Paul was a sincere and distinguished saint, and we are not to suppose that he meant, by the language of the text, to deny this fact. It is quite consistent with the doctrine that his writings are fully and infallibly inspired to admit that, if he does not positively assert the reality of his own saintship, he may have been ignorant of it. But it is utterly discordant with that most important doctrine to suppose that he denied in one of his epistles what was actually true; by doing so, he would virtually have affirmed what was positively false.

The expression, "me, who am less than the least of all saints," is then just a strong superlative. By the use of it the Apostle affirms – of course, accurately and truly – not that he was no saint at all, not that his faith was

¹This sermon, preached at the ordination of a minister, is reprinted with slight editing from *The Free Church Pulpit*, vol 2. Patterson (1805-85) was a grandson of John Brown of Haddington and a minister in the Hutchesontown district of Glasgow.

feeble and his love was cold, but that, taking all the circumstances of his case into account, his appropriate place was the lowest, or one of the lowest, in the catalogue of saints. In his life there was, more especially, one fact, or a rather series of facts, that may well be supposed to have led him to this conclusion. It is that which he mentions so humbly: "I am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the Church of God". The dark memory rushed into his mind of the malignity and rage with which he opposed, for so long, the faith and the followers of Him who, because He loved the world so well, had lived a life so weary and died a death so sorrowful.

"Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" re-echoed on his ear. The loftiness of the office with which he had been invested, and the riches of the grace which had converted, protected, guided and consoled him, instead of prompting a vain-glorious feeling in his heart, convinced him rather how wicked he once had been, and how unworthy he still remained. And, under the impression of these sentiments, he declared that he was "less than the least of all saints" – that is, one of the most insignificant of them all.

(1.) The description which the Apostle here gives us of his character must not, on any account, encourage the idea that a Christian minister can dispense with personal piety. The method of salvation is the same for ministers as for other men; and, in watching for the souls of others, they must not neglect their own. Are they not "by nature the children of wrath, even as others"? Is Christ not the Saviour to whom they, like the vilest of the race, must betake themselves for pardon and eternal life? Is not faith the instrument by which they, like others, must obtain an interest in the atoning sacrifice? And is it not as true of personal religion in their case as in that of men who have even stronger temptations than themselves that, without it, "no man shall see the Lord"?

What though a man have treasured in his mind the learned lore by which, for 18 centuries, the religion of Jesus has been accumulating glorious illustration and defence? What though his memory be laden with the treasures of a hundred commentaries? What though his imagination can depict the horrors of eternal darkness and the ecstatic joys of heaven? What though his clear-eyed intellect can penetrate into the deeper recesses of the truth and scatter to the winds the dogmas of the heretic? What though, in silent audience and tremulous suspense, the thousands whom his fame has gathered around the pulpit where he ministers, hang breathless on his lips, as he discourses in mild or majestic eloquence? And what though, willingly descending into the secluded scenes of pastoral labour, he diligently instructs the ignorant, counsels the perplexed, warns the impenitent, encourages the trembling, and strews for the departing pilgrim with blessed promises – as if with beautiful flowers – the path that leads to the inheritance?

Do we say that these things are worthless in a minister? Do we say that these things are useless to the Church? God forbid. But this we say: these things may, to a great extent, exist where there is no saving, sanctifying faith in the minister at all. And this we say: though he “speak with the tongues of men and of angels”, and though he “understand all mysteries and all knowledge”, and have not faith and its accompanying piety, he is “but as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal”, in so far as his own salvation is concerned.

But it is not the man himself alone that suffers from the want of personal religion, but also all the people of his charge. Nor is it the former only, but the latter also, who may be expected to benefit from ministerial piety. Such piety secures or implies a motive to pastoral activity and zeal. The pious minister knows and believes the love of God towards man, and cordially loves Him in return. He realises the guilt and danger of immortal souls, the fearfulness of eternal destruction, and the glory and felicity of the brighter and better world. Those souls he loves, and regards as a charge which his heavenly Father has committed to his hands. Do you then think that he can be otherwise than active, diligent and devoted?

Again, personal piety in the Christian minister will facilitate his progress in the knowledge of the truth. As a pious man, he must enquire with earnestness into the meaning of his Father’s message, so that to him pertains the promise, “If thou criest after wisdom, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasure, then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God”. As a pious man, he may be expected to be meek, so as to have a security for the fulfilment of the pledge, “The meek will He guide in judgment, and the meek will He teach His way”. As a pious man, he will surely be a man of prayer, and is it not written: “If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him?”

As a pious man he will have in his own soul the personal experience of true religion, and this experience may often cast a flood of light on the meaning and reality of the doctrines of the faith. Again, personal religion will make a man faithful in the exposition and application of sacred truth. Persuaded that the Bible is the very Word of God, that there is but one atoning Saviour, that there are but two states in eternity, and that the soul and immortality are matters too serious to be trifled with, he does not handle “the Word of God deceitfully”. He warns every man and teaches every man and seeks to commend himself “to every man’s conscience in the sight of God”. And though the world brand him, who is an ardent and honest servant of his Master, as a fanatic and enthusiast, these names would pass by him like the idle wind,

were it not that they remind him of the criminality and danger of those by whom they are imposed, and melt his heart into compassion for their souls. Further, personal religion in the Christian minister implies the habit of earnest and believing prayer for assistance as he discharges his solemn and momentous duties, and for assistance to the people of his charge in receiving the message of God's holy Word.

And finally, it secures the influence of an example corresponding to the instructions which he gives – an example such as may prove to the people that he is in earnest when he calls them to a life of faith and piety, shows them what true religion is, and recommends it by the dignity and pleasure which follow in its train. Thus important is personal piety on the part of the minister in its connection with his official conduct and success. And how sad a blank, how monstrous an inconsistency does the lack of it imply! We need not marvel if, in such a case, Christianity is coldly preached, the glory of the gospel is obscured, the labour of pastoral exertion is avoided, the people practically reject instruction and counsel with the taunt, “Physician heal thyself”, and immortal souls remain unpardoned, unsanctified, unsaved?

(2.) The description which Paul here gives us of his character may teach us that, even where an individual is a decided and distinguished saint, the level which he occupies as a religious man may be, in some sense, comparatively low. The circumstance which may be regarded as having mainly contributed to lower the Apostle's place in the catalogue of the saints was this, that he had spent so large and important a portion of his life in pursuits that were not only alien from the gospel of Christ, but fiercely opposed to His kingdom and His cause. For so long and precious a period of time he had hated that Saviour who had so strong a claim on the glowing affections of his heart; he had remained ignorant of that gospel which formed the very crown and climax of that older system which he had so intensely studied and to which he had so dogmatically clung; he had persecuted those who were the true friends of Israel, the very pillars of the earth. When his mind reverted to these days of darkness – the days of blindness and of blasphemy, of malice and of madness – he felt as if much of his transitory life had been lost to the high pursuits and ecstatic joys to which even fallen humanity is called; he felt as if, highly though the Lord had honoured him, the stamp of degradation had not yet been completely blotted from his brow.

Impenitent sinners, is there not in this a monitory voice to you? Should you not be prompted seriously to attend to religion now, by this calculation – a calculation which even Paul's experience confirms – that every year, indeed every hour, which is withheld from faith and godliness is withheld from a service delightful, dignified, divine? And if you ever become saints

at all, you will find yourselves occupying a place lower in the scale of moral dignity the longer you shall have remained in unbelief and sin – but if you never become saints, you can expect only one doom to befall you.

There is another principle which determines the comparative place which a particular believer occupies in the scale of Christian saintship, namely, the amount of his actual attainments. And to whatever extent Paul may have been able to abide this searching test, what a humiliating view might it give, if fairly applied, of a multitude of saints! How many, who justifiably obtain the character of enlightened and devoted Christians, are but faint and feeble after all if contemplated in the light of their religious advantages! And how faltering is the faith of others who may have external privileges scarcely inferior to theirs; how dormant is their love; how great is their ignorance! Brethren, if you would hold an honourable and useful place among the saints on earth and would hereafter wear some of the brighter coronets of heaven – while you are warned by the Apostle’s earlier career – be prompted by the virtues which dignified and cheered his better days to be “strong in faith” and radiant with the fire of holy love and willing to be, to bear and to do, whatever your heavenly Master may prescribe.

(3.) The description which Paul here gives of himself, as “less than the least of all saints,” may serve as a model of humility. Here, as elsewhere, he reflects on his early life with lowly penitence. And has there not been much in the early life of all of us to warrant the self-same sentiments? Nor in our earlier life alone – in the days when youthful ignorance and reckless hearts so often seduced us into sin – but even when experience had combined with holy writ to speak to us of our duty and our destiny. As ministers, as people, as husbands, as wives, as parents, as children, as masters, as servants, as friends, as neighbours, as human beings, how often have we thought and felt and spoken and acted as neither men nor Christians should have done?

The intercession of Christ is not a mere presenting of petitions for us, similar to that which believers owe one another. It is, on the contrary, a glorious representation of that will of Christ by which we are sanctified, founded on the dignity of His Person, the efficacy of His oblation, the merit of that righteousness which He fulfilled in our stead, and on that sacred covenant by which He has obtained for Himself the right not only of praying for favours on our behalf, but also of demanding the heathen for His inheritance – demanding them as a due reward and the purchase of His labour.

The unspotted holiness of God is the glory of all the divine perfections.

Christ will exercise judgement according to both natures: the *divine* nature displaying infinite majesty, knowledge and power; the *human* performing the acts of judgement in a visible and audible manner.

The chief happiness of man consists in likeness to God.

Herman Witsius

The Dunnottar Covenanters of 1685¹

2. Two Letters

1. *A Letter from Alexander Peden to the Covenanting prisoners in Dunnottar Castle.*²

Dear Friends,

I long to hear how you spend your time, and how the grace of God grows in your hearts. I know ye and others of the Lord's people, by reason of the present trial, have got up a fashion of complaining upon Christ; but I defy you to speak an ill word of Him unless you wrong Him. Speak as you can, and spare not; only I request you, let your expressions of Christ be suitable to your experience of Him.

If ye think Christ's house be bare, and ill provided, harder than ye looked for, assure yourselves Christ minds only to diet you, and not to hunger you; our Steward kens [knows] when to spend and when to spare. Christ knows well whether heaping or straiking [giving exact measure] agrees best with our narrow vessels, for both are alike to him. Sparing will not enrich Him, and spending will not impoverish Him. He thinks it ill-win [won] that's holden off His people. Grace and glory comes out of Christ's lucky³ hand. Our vessels are but feckless [feeble], and contain little; his fulness is most straitened when it wants a vent. It is easy for Christ to be holden busy in dividing the fulness of His Father's house to His poor friends. He delights not to keep mercy over night; every new day brings new mercies to the people of God. He's the easiest merchant ever the people of God yoked with. If ye be pleased with the wares, what of His graces makes best for you, He and ye will soon sort [agree] on the price. He'll sell good cheap, that ye may speir [ask] for His shop again, and He draws all the sale to Himself.

I counsel you to go no further than Christ. And now, when it is come to your door either to sin or suffer, I counsel you to lay your count with suffering, for an outgate [way of escape] coming out of any other airth [quarter] will be prejudicial to your soul's interest. And for your encouragement, remember, He sends none a warfare on their own charges. And blest is the man that gives Christ all his money. It will be best for you to block [bargain]

¹Footnotes have been added by Rev D W B Somerset; he has also modernised the spelling.

²Alexander Peden was one of the best known of the field-preachers in Covenanting times. He wrote this letter in July 1685 and died six months later on 28 January 1686, aged about 60. The letter is taken from Patrick Walker's *Six Saints of the Covenant* (ed D H Fleming, 2 vols, London, 1901), vol 1, pp 110-114, and is also included in J C Johnston's *Alexander Peden* (Glasgow, 1902, reprinted 1988), pp 215-9.

³That is, here, over and above the standard measure or stipulated quantity.

with Him, when you want hand-money; and the less ye have, He has the more heart to frist [give on credit to] you, and so it is best for you to keep in with your old acquaintance. New acquaintance with strange lords is the ready way to make a wound in grace's side, which will not heal in haste; the sore may close before the wound dry up; for grace is a tender piece, and is very easily distempered with the backslidings of our present time. And if the wheels of it be once broke with sin, all the moyen [means, influence] in the world will not make it go about, until it be put in Christ's hand.

I hope I have said more on this matter than is needful, for I have seen the marks of tenderness deeply drawn on your carriage [conduct]. The temper of these backsliding times invites us to double our diligence in seeking of God; for it seems God has a mind to search Jerusalem with lighted candles, and to visit all your chambers; and there shall not be a pin in all your graces but God shall know whether it be crooked or even. He will never halt until He be at the bottom of men's hearts. He has turned out some folk's hearts already, and has slit mo [more]; it seems He has a mind to make the inside the outside.

There was but a small wind in our former trials, and therefore much chaff lay scattered and hid among the corn. God has now raised a strong mighty wind, and it is certain that Christ's corn cannot be driven away; He will not want a hair of His people's head, He knows them all by head-mark. If our hearts could blaze after Him, we would rather choose to die believing and suffering than sin by compliance. I defy the world to steal a lamb out of Christ's flock unmissed. What is awaiting at the last Day of Judgement, Christ must make them all up. The storm will not ly [continue] long when the people of God have the worst of it, when the wind is both in their back and face; a great fire in God's furnace will soon divide the gold from the dross. God's mill has been grinding fast, and it will not stand for want of water, if the people of God would hold out of the gate [keep out of the way], and give enemies a rid [cleared] field, that God may be full of their flesh, and it is like He may give His enemies a knock o'er His people's head.

God is giving the saints a little trial, somewhat sharper than ordinary, that they may come out of the furnace as a refined lump, that they may run and be ready at the touck [beat] of the drum. It is honourable to be a footman in Christ's company, and run at Christ's foot from morning to evening. The weakest in all Christ's company will not tire to go and ride time about, for Christ will take His friends on behind Him; when they begin to weary, and dow not [are not able to] hold foot, Christ will wait on them.

O how sweet will it be to see Christ marching up in a full body, with all the trumpets sounding the triumph of the Lamb's victory, when His sword

shall be made red with the blood of His enemies, when all the heathens shall be rounding [whispering] among themselves that He has done so great things for His followers! Verily, I fear, the followers of the Lamb shall be forced to tread on the dead corps of wicked men ere all the play be played; the whole land shall have enough ado to shovel them into the earth; Christ will kill faster with His own hand than the kingdom will be able to bury; and many shall be buried unstraightened [not laid out], and moals [mounds of earth] shall be the winding-sheet of many that look life-like in that day.

The blood of God's foes shall preach strange things to His people, and we should rejoice with trembling. They that will not serve God, to themselves be it said: The day is near, when Blood shall be the sign of Christ's soldiers, and "No Quarters" shall be their word. "Death and destruction" shall be written in broad letters on our Lord's standard; a look of Him will be a dead stroke to any that comes in His way. It is best for you to keep under the shadow of God's wings, and to cast the lap [fold] of Christ's cloak over your head until ye hear Him say that the brunt of the battle is over, and the shower is slacked. I am confident the safest way to shoot [escape] the shower is to hold out of God's gate, and to keep within His doors, until the violence of the storm begin to ebb, which is not yet full tide. Christ deals tenderly with His young plants, and waters them oft, lest they go back. Be painful [pains-taking], and lose not life for the seeking. Grace, mercy and peace be with you.

2. *Janet Linton's Letter from Dunnottar Castle.*⁴

From Dunnottar Castle, July 17th 1685

My Dear and Loving Husband,

These are to show you that I have had the fever since I heard from you, which has weakened my body very much; but I have been strengthened from my Master, which has failed nothing of His promises to me, and that His strength should be made perfect in my weakness. My dear heart, bless the Lord on my behalf that ever it should have pleased such a holy God to have looked upon such an unworthy sinner as I am, or to have honoured the like of me to suffer anything for His name's sake, or bear His cross in a day when there is so few longing to wear His livery, and He has kept me from denying His name before a godless generation, that is fitting fast for destruction, when He has

⁴A number of the Dunnottar prisoners left accounts of their sufferings, but the following is the only surviving letter from the time of the imprisonment. It is taken from John Longmuir's *Dunnottar Castle: Its Ruins and Historical Associations* (tenth edn, Stonehaven, 1894), pp 75-7. In one of the lists of prisoners, Janet Linton appears as Janet Whitelaw, but whether this was her maiden name, or her married name, or simply an error, is not clear. From Dunnottar, she was taken back to Leith, and from there banished to New Jersey, so it is possible that she never saw her husband and family again.

suffered many that spent their time better nor I did to fall; but it is free mercy; and, O my dear heart, if I could speak to the commendation of free mercy! For the Lord has made all things easy to me and He has been so kind to my soul sometimes since I came to prison that I counted all things nothing in comparison of Him; and He has made me so to rejoice in Him, that I have thought I was beyond doubts in my condition: but it is free mercy indeed, for I have nothing of mine own: but I desire to believe in my kind Master, that has begun anything of grace in my heart, that He will also finish it.

Now, my dear, ye sent me word with James Crawford that ye would come to me if we were banished, which has been a sad exercise to me since; but I entreat you, let not such thoughts enter into your mind: for I am sure you are far out of your duty if you intend such a thing; for ye know that our Lord He has said that those that will not leave wife and children for Him, they cannot be His disciples. I know it is very sad to you, but ye man [must] encourage yourself in the Lord, and take His word for your support in your affliction; and when ye are afraid, trust in Him, and He will never fail you; and I entreat you further to close work in spearing [asking] the cause why the Lord is contending so sharply with His poor people, that I think He is giving the dearly beloved of [His] soul to the hands of our enemies; but we have no reason to complain, for and if He had given us what we deserved, our portion had been in hell – at least we had been among those that is standing in opposition against Him this day. And that is my comfort, that our stock is in His hand, and He will let our enemies do nothing but that I hope will be for His own glory, and His people's good.

Now, my dear, ye are dear indeed unto me, but not so dear as Christ; therefore I desire ye to quat [resign] me and all your enjoyments freely to the Lord, and it will not be the worse for us, for He loves a cheerful giver; but, if any man draw back, His soul has no pleasure in them. Now, I entreat you, be at your duty, and leave even to the Lord, and keep His way, and be faithful unto the death, if ye would have the crown of life, and beware of pleading a favour from our Lord's enemies, and think not much of it that you are reproached, not by enemies, but by friends; for that is the shame of the most part of this generation; it will be your glory before it be long, if ye keep the ways of God. Now I hear that there is some gating [getting?] of the gospel, and I entreat you follow the gospel, my dear; and be valiant for the truth on earth, and prepare for death and judgement, and neglect not your heart-work. Now, my dear, I can say no more for your encouragement, but leaves you and my children to the Lord's protection and guiding, and believes He will be father and mother to you according to His promise; but I desire your brother to be careful of you and not to let you want. I know he is come in

great trouble with our business; but he man [must] not be offended at my poor bairns for it.

Now, I am troubled that neither you nor none of my friends sent me a line with James Crawford, but I hear you are in great trouble, which I desire to be concerned with. Now, my love, I ken [know] not what the Lord will do with me; but I think I will see you although I be banished out of my native land. Now, as for worldly concernment, I can say nothing to you, for I ken you can beitt [help] me in nothing, but I desire you, if James Curll has gotten his cow again, to send me that money. Now, let not want of the world trouble you, nor think not God a hard master. Now, if we have food and raiment, let us therewith be content, for life everlasting will make up all our losses.

Now, no more at present, but rests your near, and loving, and sympathising wife, and be till death separate us. Although enemies have separate our bodies, they shall never separate my love from you, so long as life endures. Now, I entreat you, if ye be spared till our Lord come back again, that ye be a kind father to our dear children, and I desire James Scott, my Christian comrade, to be kind to you, and to encourage that poor woman that is with you. Now, my love to James Scott, and to Adam Herknes and his wife, and his brother; and to William Greav, and Robert Wilson, and to John Scot and his wife, and Robert Scott, and Johnstoun, and his Lady, that I should have begun at; and my love to my father and his family, and especially to my sister Helen, and show her to keep the ways of God; and my love to your father and his family. Now, David Scott mends very ill, but I hope he shall mend; but our dear friend James Atchisone is win to glory. Now, no more; farewell to you, it may be in time, but not in eternity.

I rest your loving wife,

Janet Linton

Now, show all my dear friends not to neglect to hold up my case to God, for indeed they are threatening us with sharp trials, and we was shortly [harshly] examined.

There is no possible way in which a sinner can be freed from the perpetual obligation of the law as a covenant than by presenting, in the hand of faith to it, the infinitely perfect and meritorious righteousness of the second Adam as a full answer to all its high demands. When this glorious righteousness is received by faith, and graciously imputed to a man, the law in its covenant form is fully satisfied with respect to him.

A sinner depends on the righteousness of Christ for justification to no good purpose if he does not rely on it only, and neither in whole nor in part on his own obedience. No man since the fall begins to be either good or happy till this promise begins to be fulfilled to him: "I will put my laws into their minds, and write them in their hearts" (Heb 8:10).

John Colquhoun

A Scottish Christian Heritage

A Review Article by *Rev H M Cartwright*

Just over half of this book¹ consists of biographical accounts of five Scottish ministers, a form of writing at which Mr Murray excels. Each chapter is slanted towards highlighting specific lessons which the author considers its subject exemplifies. The second part has two chapters dealing with missionary themes. One focuses on the missionary spirit as illustrated by Scottish missionaries to the New Hebrides. The other concentrates on Robert Moffat “Africanus” (1795-1883) as representative of his generation of Scottish missionaries. The third part, which contains much of the more controversial material in the book, has a miscellaneous collection of subjects: The Churches and Christian Unity in Scottish Church History, Scottish Preaching, The Problem of the Elders, and The Tragedy of the Free Church of Scotland.

Without endorsing every conclusion drawn, we found the chapters on John Knox (c1514-72), Robert Bruce (c1554-1631), Thomas Chalmers (1780-1847) and John MacDonald (1779-1849) stimulating profitable reflection. Knox’s pivotal place in the Scottish Reformation, and the centrality of preaching and prayer in the influence he had, are underlined. Mr Murray says of Knox that “he did not believe that what was later to be called the ‘regulative principle of Scripture’ has so determined everything in the Church that we have one permanent blueprint that covers everything”. We are not aware that Knox’s view differed from that of Calvin or of the Scottish Presbyterian Church throughout its history. He too held that the Church’s doctrine, worship, government, discipline and practice should have biblical warrant and that matters not determined by Scripture should be done “decently and in order” in accordance with scriptural principles. This principle made for a more thorough sixteenth-century Reformation in Scotland than in England.

Bruce is an example of a man enabled to stand fast in dark and difficult days, living in the presence of God and knowing much joy in Christ. Mr Murray suggests that from Thomas Chalmers, regarded as “at the centre of a recovery which brought the churches in Scotland from mediocrity, indifference and unbelief to new conditions of spiritual vitality”, abiding lessons may be learned relating to the subject of revival. A significant lesson learned from the awakening in the Highlands associated with John MacDonald “was the one underlined at an earlier date by Jonathan Edwards: a work of God is not to be judged by the amount of excitement or by the height of the emotion, but by the long-term moral and spiritual results”.

¹*A Scottish Christian Heritage* by Iain H Murray, published by The Banner of Truth Trust, 416 pages, hardback, £16.00, available from the Free Presbyterian Bookroom.

The chapter entitled “Horatius Bonar and the Love of God in Evangelism” also stimulates thought on important matters. Attention is drawn to the controversy between Dr Bonar (1808-1889) and Dr John Kennedy over the participation of Free Church ministers in the Moody and Sankey movement. Bonar was a man of God whose Christ-centred, humble and holy life shames us. His ministry was blessed to many. He stood firmly against critical movements in the Free Church which undermined the Scriptures and against the earlier union movements. He did, however, advocate pre-millennial views, favour the singing of hymns in the public worship of God and countenance the evangelistic methods of the Moody and Sankey mission of 1873-74.

His support for Moody occasioned a pamphlet debate with Kennedy. Mr Murray regards “the central doctrinal point” in this debate as the view which Moody preached, Bonar endorsed and Kennedy denied, that the gospel invitation is to be preached “as an expression of the love of God to all who hear it”. We cannot here analyse the controversy between Bonar and Kennedy, which our author says “has complex aspects to it”. Mr Murray acknowledges that “it would be a monstrous injustice to imply that Dr Kennedy did not preach the love of God. He did, yet with a care not to individualize it” (p 193). But he goes on to suggest that, to the extent to which he was consistent with his principles, the warrant for the pleading note found in 2 Corinthians 5:20 was necessarily overshadowed in Kennedy’s preaching. Kennedy did not find the warrant for the pleading note where Mr Murray finds it, but that he found warrant enough for it in the Word of God is evident from reports we have of his preaching.

From recollections recorded in Auld’s *Life of John Kennedy, DD*, we note two. One man heard him preach from Isaiah 55:1: “He began by opening up the free and wide invitation of the gospel to all classes of sinners”. Another recalls the impression made on her when young in Aberdeen: “I remember vividly his powerful dealing with conscience, his solemn urgency and tones full of emotion, and his benignant smile as he would sometimes bend over the pulpit and say, ‘My dear fellow sinner’, when unfolding to us the love and glory of Christ, and pressing us all to an immediate closing with Him”. Mr Murray himself, in *The Invitation System*, described Dr Kennedy as “one of the greatest evangelists of Scotland”. Those who have themselves tasted “the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 8:39) and have been commissioned to preach Christ to their fellow sinners will feel not only free but constrained to plead with them to “taste and see that the Lord is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in Him” (Ps 34:8).

The second section of the book demonstrates that the missionary spirit will correspond to the spiritual stature of individuals and flow from love to

Christ, and that it is inspired by biblical truth. “The driving impulse was *faith* in Scripture as the Word of God, and in the teaching it contains. . . . When faith was undermined in so many of the Scottish churches towards the end of the nineteenth century a great era of Scottish missionary endeavour slowly came to a close” (pp 223,224).

Robert Moffat was “convinced that evangelisation must precede civilisation. . . . Nothing less than the power of Divine grace can reform the hearts of savages, after which the mind is susceptible of those instructions which teach them to adorn the gospel they profess” (p 270). In evangelizing he acted on the principle that “preaching the character and commandments of God prepared the way for the preaching of redemption. . . . The most alarming and solemn parts of the whole counsel of God were all necessary, and Moffat spoke of death, judgement and eternity, themes not appreciated by his hearers. . . . But conscience had to be awakened and sometimes it was the truth about last things that did it” (p 255). Mr Murray comments that “this lesson needs to be remembered wherever the moral decay of society tempts Christians to suppose the plain preaching of the gospel cannot meet the situation” (p 270).

In the chapter on “The Churches and Christian Unity in Scottish Church History” Mr Murray complains that while Scottish churchmen have given full treatment to “the headship of Christ . . . the collateral truth that Christ’s will, as revealed in His Word, is the sole rule for service in His Church . . . [and] the question of church government”, less attention appears to have been given to “the relation between the churches, considered as denominations, and the unity of the Church universal” (p 279). This subject Mr Murray properly regards as “both relevant and important”. He alleges that a distinction between the Church visible and invisible was used by seventeenth-century theologians to justify the existence of unbelievers in the Church, and considers that Scottish insistence on a national Church rendered this inevitable. He regards their view that the unity of the Church requires oneness of organisation throughout the nation as encouraging “an exclusiveness which was contrary to the spirit of the gospel” (p 294) and as having “skewed subsequent discussion on the question of denominations” (p 302).

The seventeenth-century Scottish theologians thus criticised did not believe that Church unity was secured by gathering all the various churches or congregations in a region or nation under one government. They believed that the Church is originally one and that this unity finds expression outwardly in common government – the essential elements of which can be deduced from Scripture. The Church is not a voluntary association of individual congregations but an organic body, with Christ as its Head, which has branched out all over the world. It was not divisiveness but

concern for the unity of the body of Christ which caused the seventeenth-century men to resist the emergence of separate denominations and to insist on the existence of one Church united in doctrine, worship, discipline and government. The visible Church does not consist formally of those who are believers but of those who profess belief. It would contradict the facts to suggest that this view encouraged a lax approach to the spiritual and ethical demands made on members of the Church.

Recognising that “it is impossible to classify Scottish preaching under any one type”, the chapter on “Scottish Preaching” is not merely historical but challengingly enunciates principles relevant to the pulpit everywhere, always – with regard to the form, content and aim of preaching and the essential Christ-centredness of the preacher’s life and ministry.

We have to part with Mr Murray again in much of what he writes on “The Problem of the ‘Elders’”. The use of “problem” and of inverted commas around “elders” in the title indicates the thrust of the chapter. Mr Murray questions the view that the eldership as defined in Scripture includes those who rule and do not preach as well as those who rule and preach – a view which appeals not only to eldership in Israel and passages such as Romans 12:8 and 1 Corinthians 12:28, but principally to 1 Timothy 5:17: “Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine”.

Undoubtedly there have been differences of opinion and practice and inconsistencies in conclusions drawn by those who hold the view which Mr Murray questions. However, the history of Scottish Presbyterianism certainly does not justify the fear that the distinctiveness of the ministry, and the necessity for a divine call to its exercise, are lost where those engaged in the government of the Church, but do not preach, are regarded as elders. By none has the distinction between clergy and laity been repudiated more than by those whose Presbyterianism was highest; yet they have most strongly maintained, in principle and practice, the distinctiveness of the minister or preacher from those who rule but not preach. The position held in mainstream Scottish Presbyterianism since the Reformation has avoided the extremes of Hodge on the one hand and Thornwell on the other.

The debate over one or two offices has sometimes contributed to confusion but it has not obscured the fact that 1 Timothy 5:17 has been understood, with Patrick Fairbairn, to teach that all elders are expected at least to “be able to discern between carnal and spiritual in the characters of men, be capable of testing their knowledge in divine things, and by private fellowship and friendly admonition, if not otherwise, subserve the interests of truth and righteousness among them. . . . But the gift of teaching in the more distinctive

sense, or, in modern phrase, of preaching the gospel with intelligence to the edification of others is not represented as indispensable".² Those who engage stately in that work require divine calling and equipment. This subject requires much fuller treatment than can be given in this review.

The final chapter, "The Tragedy of the Free Church of Scotland", illustrates its opening sentence: "In the last quarter of the nineteenth century a change of belief over the Bible took place in the Free Church of Scotland, with more far-reaching consequences than anything that had happened since the Reformation". The conclusion of the book is: "Scotland was a witness to what the Bible can do, and she has since shown how, without that light, a people once godly, serious and upright, can become as earth-bound and frivolous as any other nation".

The whole volume is interesting. Much of it is profitable. Areas requiring more critical assessment have been indicated above.

Regeneration and the Spirit (3)¹

Rev James R Tallach

The Regenerating Work of the Spirit. This work is best described in the chapter of the *Confession of Faith* on effectual calling: "All those whom God hath predestinated unto life, and those only, He is pleased, in His appointed and accepted time, effectually to call, by His Word and Spirit, out of that state of sin and death, in which they are by nature, to grace and salvation, by Jesus Christ, enlightening their minds spiritually and savingly to understand the things of God, taking away their heart of stone, and giving unto them an heart of flesh; renewing their wills, and, by His almighty power determining them to that which is good, and effectually drawing them to Jesus Christ: yet so as they come most freely, being made willing by His grace" (10:1).

This is a mysterious work. Thus Solomon says, "As thou knowest not what is the way of the spirit, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child; even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all" (Ecc 11:5). And again Jesus said to Nicodemus: "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit" (Jn

²*The Pastoral Epistles*, pp 214-5.

¹This is the final part of a paper presented to the Theological Conference of 2005. The previous section dealt with the place of the Holy Spirit in regeneration, and the question of a preparatory work.

3:8). It is a work that comes from above: “Ye must be born again”, or from above (Jn 3:7).

As noted above, Adam’s spiritual life was from within himself, but the life infused by the Spirit at regeneration is from God. He is the fountain of life (Ps 36:9), and that life, for the believer, is hidden with Christ in God (Col 3:3). The fullness of this life is communicated to Christ as mediator, and to us from Him, so that we receive out of His fullness (Jn 1:16). The fountain then is in God, the fullness is in Christ, and the shedding abroad of that life is by the Spirit (Rom 8:11). Kuyper writes of this mystical union with Emmanuel: “It is a union invisible and intangible; the ear fails to perceive it and it eludes all investigation; yet it is very real union and communion, by which the life of the Lord Jesus directly affects and controls us. As the unborn babe lives on the mother-blood, which has its heartbeat outside of him, so we also live on the Christ-life, which has its heartbeat *not* in our soul but *outside* of it, in heaven above, in Christ Jesus.”²

The manner of the communication of that life is by way of the new covenant. The order is, first, “I will write [My law] in their hearts”; that is, a new principle of life will be infused. And secondly they will walk in God’s statutes; that is, vital signs of true religion will arise from that soul. This work of regeneration pervades the whole soul. As the Fall brought depravity to every faculty of the soul, although no man was as evil as was possible, so grace affects all the faculties of the soul, yet not so as to sanctify the soul perfectly. As John Newton said, “I am not what I was, I am not what I ought to be, I am not what I hope to be, but by the grace of God I am what I am”.

The mind, which by nature is enmity to God and unable to discern spiritual things, is given an understanding of spiritual things. “The Son of man is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know Him that is true” (1 Jn 5:20). This is a saving gift: “Give me understanding and I shall keep Thy law” (Ps 119:34). The mind is thereby renovated and the soul made obedient to God, “renewed in the spirit of your mind” (Eph 4:23). The will is the principal seat of rebellion in the soul and the place where depravity mainly shows itself, but the work of regeneration makes a willing people in the day of the power of the Spirit of Christ (Ps 110:3).

A principle of holiness and righteousness is implanted instead of the original righteousness lost at the Fall. A spirit of love is shed abroad in the affections by the Spirit of God. This was the promise of the Old Testament: “The Lord your God will circumcise your heart, and the heart of your seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thine heart and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live” (Deut 30:6). In the New Testament, Paul says, “The love of

²Abraham Kuyper, *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, London, 1900, p337.

God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us” (Rom 5:5). This divine act is accomplished without violence to the soul, as the sinner is drawn with bands of love and cords of a man. Significantly the terms used to describe this activity are: “I will *allure* her” (Hos 2:14), and: “*Draw* me, and we will run after Thee” (Song 1:4).

All this is accomplished within the context of the Word. “How shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?” (Rom 10:14). Thus regeneration is effected by the Word: “Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever” (1 Pet 1:23). There is no confusion in the Greek New Testament over the relative roles of the Spirit and the Word in the work of regeneration, as the prepositions used in each case are different. Regeneration is effected *by* (Gk, *ek*) the Spirit and *by* or *through* (Gk, *dia*) the instrumentality of the Word. The Word is the instrument in the hand of the Spirit in regeneration. The Word brings the knowledge of Christ, and the Spirit unites the soul to Him by faith, as the branch is engrafted into the vine. “I am the true vine”, Jesus said, “and My Father is the husbandman . . . abide in Me” (Jn 15:1,4). The Spirit may also work without the Word, as the *Confession of Faith* reminds us: “Elect infants, dying in infancy, are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit, who worketh when, and where, and how He pleaseth; so also are all other elect persons who are incapable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the Word” (10:3).

The Word calls for repentance and faith, and the Spirit forges these two graces in the heart. As the Word is written on the fleshy tables of the heart, they are ever found together in the renewed life and expressed in different ways: *leaving* and *cleaving*: “Ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God” (1 Thess 1:9); *fleeing*: “Who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us” (Heb. 6:18); *mourning* and *rejoicing*: “They shall look on Me whom they have pierced and mourn for Him” (Zec 12:10); *despising the wages of sin* and *admiring the gift of God*: “How many hired servants of my father have food and to spare and I perish with hunger!” (Luke 15:17).

Warfield says, “At the root of all, lies an act seen by God alone, and mediated by nothing, a direct creative act of the Spirit, the new birth. This new birth pushes itself into man’s own consciousness through the call of the Word, responded to under the persuasive movements of the Spirit; his conscious possession of it is thus mediated by the Word.”³

Conclusion. We have noticed something of the work of the Spirit in applying the decree of the covenant of grace and the merits of Christ’s death to a dead

³Quoted in S B Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*, IVP, 1997, p 125.

and unregenerate soul. The Nicene Creed states: "I believe in the Holy Ghost".⁴ This is not merely a belief that the Spirit exists, in the sense that London and New York exist, but it expresses a trust in the Third Person of the Trinity as we trust the Father and as we trust the Son. This trust is illustrated by the Children of Israel following the Spirit through the wilderness: "As a beast goeth down into the valley, the Spirit of the Lord caused him to rest: so didst Thou lead Thy people, to make Thyself a glorious name" (Is 63:14). That trust is expressed by David: "Thy Spirit is good; lead me into the land of uprightness" (Ps 143:10). That trust is particularly well vindicated by the work of the Spirit in regeneration.

Obituary

Mr Finlay Thomson

A few hundred yards beyond the house where Finlay Thomson lived most of his days, there stands prominently, on its own, a place of worship known as Teampaill Moluaidh, a building dating from the twelfth or thirteenth century and which, we are informed, was possibly built on the site of an earlier church. Moluag, as he is known in history, and after whom this building is named, was a sixth-century contemporary of Columba and would doubtless have preached the same gospel as that eminent missionary. That gospel, we are told by such as are competent to judge, was scriptural and not as yet corrupted by Rome; it was that which, at the outset, was entrusted to those commissioned to begin the evangelisation of the world by preaching repentance and remission of sins at Jerusalem. We do not know what form of worship is followed by those who use the building at present, but its presence there to this day bears testimony to the fact that the gospel of salvation was preached in Lewis at an early stage of the Christian era.

Times of darkness no doubt followed over the centuries but one would like to think that the Lord did not permit the light kindled to be totally extinguished. Whatever may have happened over the intervening centuries, it is certain that, in more recent times, Christians of no ordinary stature were

⁴Quoted in G F MacLear, *Introduction to the Creeds*, London, 1889, p 31.

raised up within the bounds of the sea-girt parish of Ness, and that is what we believe the subject of this brief obituary proved himself to be in his own day and generation. We are told that all the Thomsons in Lewis may trace their presence in that island to the arrival, in 1739, of a James Thomson, an SSPCK schoolmaster, who taught in a school at Swainbost. The Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge was “an Edinburgh-based benevolent society which sought to promote Protestantism, chiefly in its Presbyterian form”; so the name Thomson has, in Ness, been associated with the gospel for a long time.

As far as Finlay’s forebears are concerned, the first person of that name mentioned in the pages of this Magazine was his godly great-grandmother Margaret Thomson, or Mairead Donn, as she was popularly known. She was one of those who stood faithful in 1893 “among the honourable women who followed Christ in His down-trode Cause at that time” and has left a fragrant memory behind her. Her son, Donald, was to be a stalwart pillar, as Rev William MacLean remarked in his obituary: “When Andrew Finlayson, who succeeded Malcolm MacLeod as missionary in Ness, died at the comparatively early age of 52 in January, 1935, the burden of the congregation fell on the shoulders of Donald Thomson and his brother elder, John Morrison, the son of a worthy father who stood in the day of trial. . . . From 1937 until his death (in 1948), the congregation of Ness was favoured to have Donald Thomson to feed them as David did his people, according to the integrity of his heart and to guide them according to the skilfulness of his hands.”

Finlay Thomson was born in Ness, at the family home in Skigersta, on 17 October 1938. Although neither his father nor his mother made a public profession of faith, their life and walk were exemplary to the extent that one would be inclined to cherish the hope that it was well with them at last. Theirs was a Christian home and under its roof the family of five boys and one girl born to them were taught to respect the Sabbath and to attend the means of grace. In those days almost every household in Skigersta was Free Presbyterian, and in that village, as indeed generally throughout the Ness community, there were not a few God-fearing men and women who sought to influence others for good.

The presence of such had its own effect on the rising generation. In this connection, we are told that one Sabbath morning, while Finlay was still a little boy, he was allotted the duty of taking the cow along the road, presumably to pasture. On the way, he happened very briefly to play football with a stone which he came across on the road. This was observed and reported to his father. On Monday, Finlay, after having no doubt received paternal admonition, was summoned to appear before Christina MacDonald

(“Bantrach Rudair”), a widow who lived nearby, and who is still remembered in Ness as a much-beloved, godly matriarch whose smiting did not break the head of any whose misconduct she felt obliged to reprove; on the contrary, it was a kindness remembered, as in Finlay’s case, over a lifetime. It might be said of her what was said by one who appreciated the interest taken in him by the noted Separatist, John Grant: “I’ll get the rod from John, but then I’ll get honey with it”. There was also the watchful eye of Rev William MacLean!

At the age of 17, Finlay, like many of his contemporaries, joined the merchant navy, and for some years he was employed as a deckhand by the New Zealand Shipping Company. It appears that at this time he did have some thoughts as to his spiritual state, but these thoughts were transient, like the morning cloud. Out of regard to the minister concerned and also no doubt as a result of his upbringing, he several times, while his ship was berthed in Auckland, attended services conducted in that city by Rev William MacLean; Mr MacLean had visited Australia and New Zealand as a deputy in 1962 and the following year he accepted a call to Gisborne.

In 1963, Finlay elected to give up deep-sea sailing and having, with the help of his family, built a house in Skigersta, he married Catherine MacRitchie, whose home was very near the one in which he was born. For some time, he earned his living working as a weaver, but that was only until the opportunity presented itself of returning to sea, this time as a fisherman. In the port of Stornoway and further afield he, in due course, became well known as a first-class seaman and expert fisherman. Strong in physique, manly and courageous, he was much respected by those who sailed with him, especially after he came to skipper his own boat. For seven years, until he suffered an injury to his right hand, he was a member of the group of intrepid Nessmen who annually visit Sulasgeir to harvest the young of the solan goose (“an guga”), spending around 14 days on that rocky islet situated 40 miles north of the Butt of Lewis. He used to dwell on the unity and friendship which prevailed among them and how he relished the “family” worship in which they engaged morning and evening. In his time, this worship was conducted by Donald Murray, a much-respected elder in the Free Church, but Finlay took part and often led the singing.

It was after he became a fisherman that the Spirit of God began to strive with him and the salvation of his soul accordingly became the one thing needful. The Bible began to accompany him to the wheelhouse. In seeking to enter into the kingdom, he was to discover that he had to contend, not only with foes present within as a result of his fall in Adam and the corruption of his whole nature, but also the opposition of Satan without.

We are informed that he was much affected by a sermon he heard preached in the Lionel church in October 1972 and that from that time forth he turned his back on the world, although he did not yet have the assurance he sought. At this time, apparently, chapter 23 in the Book of Job became precious to him and he often quoted the words of verse 10: "But He knoweth the way that I take: when He hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold". He was wont to say that he did not understand the last part of the verse, but towards the end of his life he confided that he was now beginning to do so and was to some extent able to enter into its depth of meaning. The following Spring, the communion seasons in Lewis followed one another in due order and Finlay, if at all possible, was in attendance. We are told that he could never understand how anyone in health and having the opportunity to attend could be absent on such occasions.

He was present at the Stornoway communion in February 1973 and was a guest, with others, in Mary Ann Matheson's house between the services. Some verses from Psalm 107 were sung, with Dr Hugh Gillies leading the praise, and he was so much affected and overcome by the words of verse 29. "The storm is changed into a calm / at His command and will; / So that the waves which raged before, / now quiet are and still," that he had to leave the room. It is thought it was then he obtained the assurance that he was indeed within the circle of the divine favour and thus on the way to the desired haven. Throughout his life he felt spiritually bound to the Lord's people present on that occasion. In March 1973, the Session gladly received him as a communicant member and, over the years which followed, his walk, life and conversation proved that its confidence in him was not misplaced. He was elected a deacon in 1975 and five years later he was ordained to the eldership. As an office-bearer he was exemplary.

He was much attached to Gaelic, his mother tongue, and much preferred to use it, rather than English, when expressing his thoughts and engaging in prayer. He had a way with young people and many became very closely attached to him. The testimony of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland was precious to him and in church courts he was ever anxious to prevent any change being introduced that might adversely affect it. His personal and oft-expressed desire was to leave to posterity what he himself had inherited. The words of Malcolm MacLeod, a missionary in Ness in the 1890s, exactly reflect Finlay's aim and attitude: "When our fishing boats would be leaving for the English fishing grounds, the boats behind would try and keep those in front always in sight; each boat would aim at steering as directly as possible in the line of the one going before". At times of crisis, as in 1989, He remained rock-firm in his attachment to the Church of his fathers, and his

example no doubt influenced others who might have been inclined to waver. His godliness was both sincere and transparent.

Around 1989, his health began to deteriorate and shortly thereafter he had to bring his seafaring days to an end. Over the years which followed, he bore his affliction with remarkable patience, although at times he endured much pain and suffering. The nature of his trouble was such that there was little that physicians could do apart from making the pain more bearable. He was several times hospitalised in Stornoway, Glasgow and Inverness and, in Stornoway at least, if it was at all possible, he conducted family worship in the ward, being joined by other like-minded patients. He was humble and self-effacing above many, but in such circumstances, he did not fail to let his light shine before men, in a manner that earned the respect even of strangers present. In 1997, he was rushed to the Western Isles Hospital after sustaining a heart attack and, for a time, his life was in the balance. However, he recovered and for the next few years he was found, as health permitted, attending the public means of grace.

In July 2003, his youngest daughter Catherine, at the age of 21, suddenly took ill and died. This was an unexpected event, which her loving parents and siblings felt deeply. Finlay sorrowed, but no one heard him murmur. Those closest to him say that this sad event left its mark and it appeared to have the effect of drawing him nearer to his God. It was noticed that, at family worship, he obtained much nearness to Him in prayer.

Over the last period of his sojourning, he suffered much but, as stars shine in the night, so, in very trying circumstances, his light shone before men. His mind was constantly on the truth. In hospital, when his ability to speak was impaired, he wrote down his thoughts on a pad. "For me to live is Christ and to die is gain", he wrote on 3 July 2006, and the following day, "He hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows – *soirbhichidh rùn an Tighearna 'na laimh*".⁵ "Wednesday was not a good day," he wrote on July 7, "can't get near the Lord." He complained that he found the world breaking in and taking away his thoughts. The last entry was: "I was waiting on the Lord to give me the truth and I opened the Bible at Philippians 1. We have to leave all our worries at the Lord's feet – the family and everything in the Lord's hands." We are told by his widow that "on August 24 he was very conscious that it was his last day on earth. His reply, on being asked how he was feeling was, 'It'll be better when it is all over. It's not me that's doing it. It's Someone else who is doing it for me.' After some sleep, he sat up in bed and said, 'It's good to be in the Lord.'" These were the last words she heard from him.

Shortly thereafter his spirit departed to be with Christ, which is far better.

⁵"The pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand."

The date was 24 August 2006. On the occasion of his funeral, the family worship in the Lionel church was attended by a multitude from all parts of the Western Isles, the number far exceeding the capacity of the building. He was laid to rest in the grave of his fathers in the Habost cemetery, situated within sight of his home in Europie, beside the ocean so familiar to him in life and from which he procured his livelihood over so many years. Not far away lie the graves of Rev William MacLean and Rev Alexander Morrison, faithful ministers whom Finlay loved and respected in life and of whom he often spoke. They sleep in Jesus, as do others there who also were lovely in their lives. Neither the thunderous roar of the Atlantic rollers breaking on the nearby beach nor any other sound shall awake them until “the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and the trump of God”. “So man lieth down, and riseth not: till the heavens be no more, they shall not awake, nor be raised out of their sleep.”

The Ness congregation, the whole community and all who love and care for the Cause of Christ have reason to mourn the loss sustained. We can only hope and pray that the Lord will raise up others to fill the breach. To his devoted, like-minded widow we anew extend our sympathy as well as to his two sons, three daughters and, also, to his four siblings, one of whom, Norman, is an elder in the Ness congregation. (Rev) J MacLeod

Ask, Seek, Knock

A Sermon Outline by John Kennedy

Matthew 7:7-11: *Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you . . .*

It is evident that these words are spoken to the children of God. This is sufficiently plain. The child is warranted to ask for what the Father has promised to bestow. He must ask in the name of the Mediator, and by the aid of the Holy Spirit. The Lord controls the asking as well as the giving.

The Asking. The child must be before the Father’s presence.

He must ask in accordance with the Father’s mind.

He must be encouraged by the Father’s manner towards him.

He must be brought near the Father on the mercy seat.

He must realise the Father by faith and lay hold upon the promise.

He lays hold of the Father in His faithfulness and grace.

The Seeking. Often the child cannot find the Father.

The Father sometimes hides from the child.

The child continues to seek in all appointed ordinances.

Then he asks when he is brought near to the Father.
 As the Lord speaks to him, he pours out his heart.
 The Father alone bestows needed grace and strength.

The Knocking. The child has foolishly wandered from the Father's house.

He returns at midnight when the doors are shut.
 He is separated from the privileges of the children.
 He is knocking at the door as if he were a stranger.
 He now feels as an outcast through backsliding.
 He cannot go in till the door is opened.

Receiveth. Embracing the promises, he has a present receiving.

Faith and hope feast on Christ in the promises.
 He now finds what keeps him seeking till the end.
 The door of the Father's house is now open.

Dingwall, 9 July 1882

Book Review

The Gospel of Free Acceptance in Christ, An Assessment of the Reformation and New Perspectives on Paul, by Cornelis P Venema, published by the Banner of Truth Trust, hardback, 351 pages, £16.00, obtainable from the F P Bookroom.

This author's earlier book was favourably reviewed in this Magazine in November 2006. Entitled *Getting the Gospel Right*, it too dealt with the Reformation teaching on Justification, in opposition to some modern aberrations. The first book was a slim paperback, this a more substantial hardback, allowing the author to develop particularly the biblical doctrine in much more detail.

In an introductory chapter, Professor Venema points out that "in the last several decades, Pauline scholars have engaged in a process of thoroughgoing deconstruction of this very doctrine. Indeed, so widespread and influential is this new reading of Paul, which claims that the Reformation got the gospel wrong, that it might be regarded as something of a consensus opinion among many contemporary biblical scholars" (p 2). These scholars who follow this "new perspective on Paul" base their arguments on studies of the views of the Jews around the time of Christ. The Reformation perspective saw the Jews seeking righteousness by works, while the new perspective sees them acknowledging grace and denies that they were making obedience to the law of God the basis for their place within the covenant. These scholars seem to miss the fact that salvation is *all* of grace – to rely partly on works and partly on grace is in reality as dangerous as to rely on works alone for acceptance with God.

The new perspective also has serious ecumenical tendencies. According to N T Wright, the current Bishop of Durham, this understanding of "Paul's doctrine of justification by faith impels the churches, in their current frag-

mented state, into the ecumenical task. . . . [It] is not merely a doctrine which Catholic and Protestant might just be able to agree on as a result of hard ecumenical endeavour. It is itself the ecumenical doctrine, the doctrine that rebukes all our petty but often culture-bound church groupings, and which declares that all who believe in Jesus belong together in the one family” (quoted, pp 17,18). But, clearly, only on the basis of a false doctrine of justification is there any possibility of Roman Catholics and Protestants coming together in theological agreement. At the same time there is a dangerous, all-too-ready assumption that an outward acceptance of some of the truths of the Bible is the same as saving faith. It is not.

We may be thankful that Professor Venema has put his finger on this area of ecumenical concern as well as the specific matter of the errors of the new perspective on Paul. Not least, he shows by a careful examination of Scripture evidence that the traditional Protestant understanding of justification is the true one. It is a pity that the author has chosen in this, as in his previous book, not to use the Authorised Version for Scripture quotations.

This is not a book which everyone needs to read. But those who feel they ought to know about a serious contemporary deviation from true Christianity will find this book a useful guide, not only to the errors addressed, but also to justification – which used to be described, correctly, as the article of a standing or falling church.

Notes and Comments

Sabbath Petition Decision

Previous notes have informed readers of the progress of the Petition presented on behalf of the Synod to the Public Petitions Committee of the Scottish Parliament seeking to have that body consider the formal recognition of the Lord’s Day as a day of rest from business and commerce. As already reported, the petition and the petitioners left no one in doubt that the Church’s primary motivation in submitting the petition was religious – the belief that the Sabbath Day is divinely ordained and that its observance by a constitutionally-Christian nation is a recognition of the claims of God, which would honour God and enjoy His blessing. That recognition of the Sabbath as the day of rest which is to be observed follows logically from it being the day appointed in the Bible, the Book which is fundamental to the Christian identity of our nation. In keeping with the teaching that the Sabbath was made for man – for every man and for man as a whole – the aim of the petition was also philanthropic in the widest sense, the benefit of body, mind and human relationships, as well as soul.

The Petition was forwarded to the Department of Trade and Industry and the Scottish Executive but their responses to it were not favourable. The DTI considered that present legislation provided workers with “the necessary protection and flexibility they require, negating the need to appoint Sunday as an official day of rest”. It was considered that “there is no substantial demand for change to the present regime” and that “the current situation strikes the right balance between all the interests involved”. The lengthy response from the Scottish Executive makes clear that “Scottish Ministers do not intend to pursue legislation to regulate retail shop opening hours in Scotland”. The reasoning of the letter does not grapple with the arguments presented in support of the petition but illustrates the mercenary and selfish outlook which informs much of the opposition to the recognition of the first day of the week as “a weekly day of rest from work”. We had the opportunity to comment in writing on these responses, and the letter sent to the Public Petitions Committee should appear in the full Report submitted to the Synod. It was mainly a reiteration of what we had endeavoured to put to the Committee previously.

At the time of writing, no formal communication has been received from the Public Petitions Committee but we understand that at a meeting on 20 March 2007 Mr Michael McMahon, Convener, stated that our petition did not get a warm reception. Mr John Scott, Vice-Convener, added that, while they respected the views of the petitioner, the petition did not reflect the views of the country. The conclusion was that “they close the petition”. The outcome is disappointing even if predictable. It demonstrates how closed the minds of those in authority, in our secularised society, are to the claims of God. However, although our Petition has not been granted, we trust that the raising of the issue has stimulated thought and prayer and may have given encouragement to some who witness on behalf of the Lord and His Holy Day. But perhaps it should also make us consider our own ways. Apart from complaining among ourselves about the dreadful state of religion and morals in our nation, what are we doing in the way of praying and speaking out and working in support of feeble efforts made to call our people back to the public righteousness which alone exalts a nation?

HMC

Scotland’s Religious Leaders

The BBC News website has reported that “Scotland’s religious leaders” attended a Rangers-Celtic football match on the afternoon of Sabbath, March 11, in an effort “to banish sectarianism from football”. The leaders in question were Cardinal Keith O’Brien of the Church of Rome, and Rt Rev Alan McDonald, Moderator of the Church of Scotland. Sport is essentially an activity for children, and the absorbed attention bestowed on professional sport is one of the evils of present-day society. “When I became a man”, said

the Apostle Paul, "I put away childish things" (1 Cor 13:11), and we believe that faithful religious leaders would have been warning the players and crowds on both sides to prepare for eternity, rather than sharing with them in their childish vanities.

But professional football matches are also notorious for wickedness. The filthy singing alone should be enough to deter any true Christian from attending, unless duty required him, and much of the crowd behaviour is obscene and brutal beyond description. The writer was told recently of British Red Cross workers helping a stroke victim (who subsequently died) at a football match and being sworn at by spectators whose view was obstructed. At Rangers-Celtic matches the Red Cross workers have to wear helmets for their protection. True Christians should be praying for the end of such events, rather than taking part in them. "Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them" (Eph 5:11).

But on top of all this, it was the Sabbath day. Did these religious leaders never read the Fourth Commandment, "Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy"? Did they never hear that the Lord's people are to "call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord" (Is 58:13)? Had they no religious needs of their own to attend to on the Lord's Day, or no preaching of the gospel that evening requiring their preparation and prayer? It is by the preaching of the gospel that the kingdom of Satan is to be brought down, not by attending football matches.

Alas, these men are indeed Scotland's religious leaders at present. Making empty, symbolic gestures to rectify a secular evil, and breaking the Sabbath in the process, is all the religion that many Scots have. "If the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch" (Matt 15:14). The root of the problem is not "sectarianism" at all, but the irreligion and wickedness of the human heart and the rejection of Jesus Christ; and the only cure for this is the preaching of the true gospel with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. "The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds" (2 Cor 10:4). *DWBS*

Church Information

Statement of the Southern Presbytery of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland to the Prime Minister, Home Secretary and First Minister of the Scottish Parliament

The Southern Presbytery of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland, met in Glasgow on 27 March 2007, wish to convey their profound concern regarding the Sexual Orientation Regulations, already imposed on the

people of Northern Ireland and soon to be imposed upon mainland Britain.

The Word of God solemnly declares that “Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people” (Proverbs 14:34). These regulations make a practice forbidden in the Word of God a “right” protected by law. “Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen. For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: and likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet. And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient” (Romans 1:24-28). This must be displeasing to God. The passing of the Sexual Orientation Regulations into law will be a clear indication that we, as a nation, have cast off the restraints of God’s Word. Departure of this nature from the Holy Bible is not without precedent. A tolerable familiarity with the history of nations will show that Divine retribution following upon such apostasy is common. Denial of the supreme authority of God to give laws to men is a sin, spoken of and warned against in the Bible: Psalm 2:2-4: “The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against His Anointed, saying, Let us break Their bands asunder, and cast away Their cords from us. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision.” As those who defy the laws of men should be afraid of appropriate civil retribution, so those who defy the laws of God must expect appropriate divine retribution. Galatians 6:7,8: “Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.”

The Government intends to make conduct which is viewed by very many of the people of Great Britain as immoral a “right”, to be respected by all, upon fear of punishment. A homosexual couple will be allowed to insist on their rights in terms of their sexual relationships when, for example, they book a room in a Bed and Breakfast establishment. The host’s conduct will be deemed reprehensible by the law if he insists on his rights in terms of his conscientious objection to the conduct such a relationship supposes. We are deeply disturbed that this law will make it a crime to inform our consciences by the Word of God and to act accordingly. These regulations are oppressive

and will instil a fear of persecution in the minds of many honest people. “What mean ye that ye beat my people to pieces, and grind the faces of the poor? saith the Lord of God of hosts.”

None will deny that the progenerative relationship between one man and one woman is absolutely essential to the preservation of mankind and therefore attracts the protection of the law. But homosexuality has no such credentials. It was never esteemed to be of such intrinsic value to well-ordered society that Governments pulled all the levers of their utmost legislative powers to make it a “right” protected by law. One is left asking why there has been such a legislative preoccupation of this Government with an activity so injurious to our well-being. Furthermore we are compelled to ask if there is any liberty that a Government which will enact regulations such as these will not encroach upon, erode, or outlaw, to cater to the demands of a powerful and well-organised few.

We therefore commend the law of God, summarily comprehended in the Ten Commandments, as the infallible guide for both law makers and law keepers. “This is that eternal law which cannot be altered, being founded upon an unchangeable ground, the congruity to the nature of God, angels and men” (Sir James Dalrymple of Stair: *The Institutions of the Laws of Scotland*).

Meeting of Synod

The Synod of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland will meet in the Inverness church on Tuesday, 22 May 2007, at 6.30 pm, when the retiring Moderator, Rev Keith M Watkins, will conduct public worship.

(Rev) John MacLeod, Clerk of Synod

Home Mission Fund

By appointment of Synod, this year’s special collection on behalf of the Home Mission Fund is due to be taken in congregations during May.

R A Campbell, General Treasurer

Acknowledgement of Donations

The General Treasurer acknowledges with sincere thanks the following donations:

Eastern Europe Fund: Anon, Canada, “for Odessa Church”, £250; The estate of the late Miss P van de Ridder, £56 619.82 per R & R Urquhart LLP.

Jewish & Foreign Missions Fund: Anon, Canada, “for work in Israel”, £250; The estate of the late Miss P van de Ridder, £169 859.47 per R & R Urquhart LLP.

Outreach Fund: Mr T L James, Wales, £10.

Congregational Treasurers acknowledge with sincere thanks the following donations:

Gairloch: *Congregational Funds:* Anon, for Church alterations, £1500.

Halkirk: *Congregational Funds:* Anon, for manse heating, £50.

Lochbroom: *Where Most Needed:* Anon, £40.

NB: The donations acknowledged for *Laide* in the April issue were in fact for *Inverness*. The mistake is regretted.