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## Willing to Serve God

Paul described himself to Titus as “a servant of God”. And that was how he imagined himself in his pre-conversion days. He was, so he thought, blameless as “touching the righteousness which is in the law” (Phil 3:6); he was, in his own eyes, a marvellously-faithful servant of God. But when he met the risen Lord on the way to Damascus, he was quickly disillusioned and, years later, he confessed to Titus that at one time “we ourselves also were . . . foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures”.

On the morning of the momentous day when he set out for Damascus, Saul of Tarsus was completely unwilling to obey Christ’s call to believe: “Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matt 11:28). His disobedience was linked to the fact that, deceived by the devil and his own darkened understanding, he did not think of himself as labouring or heavy laden; he felt completely self-sufficient in spiritual things. Yet he no doubt imagined that the God of his fathers would, if his spiritual position became really desperate, give him the little help he needed. Thus deceived, he refused to look on Jesus of Nazareth as Israel’s promised Messiah; he was unwilling to receive the testimony borne by the Saviour’s miracles – and by His wonderful words and His resurrection from the dead. Saul of Tarsus was unwilling to accept Jesus as his Master although He had fulfilled all that was written of Him in the Old Testament Scriptures, which – so Saul must have told himself – he accepted without reservation.

Yet in spite of all this, a time came when Saul began to act as the obedient servant of a new Master; he asked: “Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?” (Acts 9:6). How did this tremendous change come about in someone who had been so violently opposed to Jesus? How was it possible to submit to Him instantly and express his willingness to do whatever he was directed to do? The answer lies in the unlimited power of the Holy Spirit to bring sinners effectively to Christ. Years later, Paul the Apostle was inspired to describe to Timothy “the power of God; who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began” (2 Tim

1:8,9). This effectual calling includes, in the words of the *Shorter Catechism*, “renewing the will”. Apart from this renewing of his will, Saul would have continued a persecutor; he would never have joined the despised flock of Christ; he would never have submitted to Christ as his Master.

What happened was completely beyond human power. Saul of Tarsus was perhaps the most unlikely of all the Pharisees in Jerusalem to become a follower of the Saviour – perhaps the most unlikely of all those living in the city at that time; such was his devotion to the Jewish faith. But nothing is too hard for the Lord – then or now. No one is too fanatically devoted to his beliefs, or too hardened in sin, to become the subject of the Spirit’s work. No one is so militantly opposed to true religion – so supportive of secularism, or a false religion, or some heretical version of Christianity – that he is beyond the reach of the Holy Spirit. Because God’s providence is all-reaching and His Spirit is all-powerful, any sinner – whatever his attitudes or his circumstances – may be transformed into a sincere servant of God.

Christ’s particular will for Saul was that he would take the gospel to the Gentiles. He was “to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified” (Acts 26:18). These were to be the results of his work – not that he could accomplish them by his own power but, through the Holy Spirit applying his preaching, sinners would be brought into the kingdom of God .

This was Paul’s commission, and his was the response of an obedient servant. He went wherever his Master sent him. So he obeyed immediately when, one night in Troas, he understood that the vision he saw was a message from the Lord – when the man from Macedonia pleaded: “Come over . . . and help us”. Paul was careful to keep to what God directed him to proclaim; no preacher has the freedom to alter his message to suit the spirit of the age. We can assume that, in whatever city or district Paul was sent to, he was, more consistently than Jonah, obedient to the call: “Preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee”. But central to all Paul’s preaching was the message of reconciliation: “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them” (2 Cor 5:19). And when Paul, as God’s servant, went out with this message, the Holy Spirit was again and again powerfully present to make sinners willing to follow Christ.

All such believers – not only apostles, not only ministers – are servants of God. They have been made willing to “serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear”. They are to live holy lives, not only outwardly but inwardly. Accordingly their aim ought to be like that of Paul, who made every effort “to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men”

(Acts 24:16). In Paul's words again, they are to deny "ungodliness and worldly lusts", to "live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world . . . zealous of good works" (Titus 2:12-14).

There is a sense in which we ought to consider them as not merely servants; they are slaves, for they "are bought with a price" (1 Cor 6:20). And their Master, we can be perfectly sure, will always take full responsibility for their welfare. In absolutely explicit terms, He has promised them: "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" (Heb 13:5). And Paul, on his Master's behalf, was able to assure all believers: "My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (Phil 4:19). God's servants are to recognise this aspect of their relationship to their Master; they are to go through life – as they face the difficulties and trials and temptations that confront them on the way to heaven – looking trustfully to the One who has undertaken to bring them all safely through this world and to take them at last to the glory and blessedness of the paradise above.

There their Master will meet each of them with the words: "Well done, thou good and faithful servant . . . enter thou into the joy of thy Lord" (Matt 25:21,23) – no matter whether, in their trading, they have earned five more talents or two. But the man, in the same parable, who did not trade with his talent was not a genuine servant; he was not willing to follow the Master's directions. Whatever his professions of proper conduct – he claimed, for instance to have kept his talent safely – he was still the devil's servant, for he had not traded with the talent he had been given. Here is one of the characteristics of God servants: however limited their talents may be, they do make use of them. For instance, they all have the talent of prayer. Some servants will be more active in prayer than others, but they will all have, more or less, answers to prayer. In particular, they will all, in answer to their petitions, be made perfectly holy at last and brought home to heaven.

But how can another generation of men and women be raised up to act as God's servants? Only by the powerful, irresistible work of the Holy Spirit. Yet He works by means. "It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe" (1 Cor 1:21). Those who are already God's servants should therefore be pleading earnestly for an outpouring of the Spirit, so that many sinners would be made truly willing to trust in Christ as they hear the gospel preached to them. But God's servants should plead also that, from among those who are brought to faith, some would be fitted with the necessary gifts and grace to follow Paul as preachers of the gospel, to serve God faithfully in spreading to the ends of the earth the biblical message of sin and salvation. This is the special means which God has appointed to make sinners willing to serve Him, to follow Him wherever He may place them.

## Jesus the Only Saviour (2)<sup>1</sup>

A Sermon by James Begg

Acts 4:12. *Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved.*

3 Let us now show that Scripture concurs in the truth of this text. The whole stream of revelation from the beginning points to Jesus and His finished work. The law which was given by Moses pointed to that grace and truth which were to come by Jesus Christ. The prophets prophesied beforehand of the coming and the sufferings of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the glory that should follow; “to Him give all the prophets witness, that through His name whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins”.

The first dawn of prophetic light in Eden, amidst the wreck of a fallen world, pointed to Jesus. “I will put enmity between thee and the woman, between thy seed and her seed: He shall bruise thy head and thou shalt bruise His heel.” Christ was the seed of the woman. On the cross Satan bruised His heel, and at that very time He bruised Satan’s head – spoiled principalities and powers, making a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it.

He is the seed of the patriarchs, in whom all the families of the earth were to be blessed. I say *of the patriarchs*, for you will find that the promise which was first made to Abraham was repeated afterwards in nearly the same words to Isaac and Jacob: “In thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed”, a statement explained by Paul when he says, “He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ,” who endured the curse of the law and wrought out an everlasting righteousness. Even already it has been fulfilled in the experience of myriads, “a great multitude which no man could number”, but it shall receive a more glorious and literal fulfilment when the Jews shall be brought in with the fulness of the Gentiles, when nations shall be born at once, and from the rising of the sun to where it goes down, the whole earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of God, as the waters cover the sea.

He is the “Shiloh” who was foretold to Jacob and was to come before the sceptre departed from Judah, and unto whom the gathering of the people was to be. He is the Messiah introduced by David when sacrifice and offering and burnt-offering were declared to be unavailing, saying, “Lo, I come, in the volume of the book it is written of Me, I delight to do Thy will, O My God: yea, Thy law is within My heart”. He is the “Redeemer” of whom Job speaks,

<sup>1</sup>The first part of this slightly-edited sermon was printed last month. Begg set out *first* to “remove an objection which naturally arises in the minds of some” to the truth that “there is only one way to heaven”; *second*, to “explain further the truth itself”.

who should stand at the latter day upon the earth, and whom the patriarch was confident he would see with his eyes, although worms destroyed his body. He is the “daysman” of whom the same patriarch speaks, who should lay His hand on us both – that is, the offending and the offended party – and so make peace. He is the “mighty one” raised up from among the people, the “man of God’s right hand”, the Son of man whom He made strong for Himself. He is the “stone” which the builders rejected, but which was to become the head of the corner.

He is the Saviour Solomon described as “set up from everlasting, from the beginning, ere ever the earth was”. He is the “child” of Isaiah, whose name was to be called “Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace”. He is the “root of the stem of Jesse”, who shall stand for an ensign to the nations, whom the Gentiles were to seek, and whose rest was to be glorious. He is the king who was to “reign in righteousness”, the man who was to be “as an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land”. He is the servant of God who was to be given for a covenant to the people, and a light to the Gentiles; to open the blind eyes, and to bring the prisoners and them that sit in darkness from the prison house. He is the messenger of God, anointed to preach glad tidings to the meek, to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound. Therefore when He was on earth and entered a Jewish synagogue and read as the usual lesson of the day this beautiful passage, we are told that He gave the book back to the minister and said, “This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears”.

And “who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah, this that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength?” The Messiah Himself will answer the question: “I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save”. “Why art Thou red in Thine apparel and Thy garments like him that treadeth in the winefat?” The Messiah will answer again: “I have trodden the winepress alone, and of the people there was none with Me”. He is the “righteous Branch” of Jeremiah, that was to be raised up to David, in whose day Judah was to be saved and Israel to dwell safely, and whose name was “to be called Jehovah our righteousness”. He was the “Messiah” of Daniel, who was to be cut off, but not for Himself; “the ruler of Israel”, to be born in Bethlehem Ephratah, the least among the princes of Judah. He is the “desire of all nations” spoken of by Haggai, who should suddenly come to the temple of God: “I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come”. He is the man whose name is “the Branch” spoken of by Zechariah, who should build the temple of God and bear all the

glory – the king who was to come “just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass”.

The angels of heaven filled the air with melody at His birth, and announced that the great Deliverer had at length arrived. The star of the east pointed the wise men to the manger of Bethlehem, where the infant Saviour lay. The Spirit of God descended like a dove and rested on His head, and a voice from heaven said, “This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him”. John, who baptized Him, pointed Him out to his disciples, saying, “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world”. When old Simeon took Jesus in his arms, he said, “Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace according to Thy word, for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation”. Philip said to Nathaniel: “We have found Him of whom Moses in the law and the prophets did write”.

Peter, James and John saw the Messiah on Mount Tabor, arrayed in robes of light, and they heard a voice from the excellent glory, saying, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him”. And hence Peter says in one of his epistles: “We have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty . . . when there came such a voice from the excellent glory, This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice . . . we heard, when we were with Him in the holy mount.” The woman of Samaria said, “I know that Messiah cometh . . . when He is come, He will tell us all things. Jesus saith unto her, I that speak unto thee am He.” Jesus said to the man born blind, whom He had cured: “Dost thou believe on the Son of God? He answered and said, Who is He, Lord, that I might believe on Him? Jesus saith, Thou hast both seen Him, and it is He who talketh with thee.”

The evil spirits that He expelled, the deaf and dumb and blind that He cured, the dead whom He raised, the angels that ministered to Him, the sun that was darkened at His death, the rocks that rent and the graves that were opened, all the prophets that spoke before the Saviour came, and all the eyewitnesses that recorded the facts of His history, unite in assuring us that He is the only, the omnipotent, the all-sufficient Saviour. And what was the uniform doctrine of the Apostles? “Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” God is in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing to sinners their trespasses. In Him alone we are chosen from before the foundation of the world, called in time, justified, adopted, sanctified, saved. It pleased the Father that only in Him should all fulness dwell. Even as there is but one God, so there is only “one Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus”. And “there remaineth no more sacrifice

for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgement and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries”.

Hence the song of heaven is full of Christ’s atonement: “Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood . . . be glory and dominion for ever and ever”. Hence the most wonderful and glorious object in heaven is the adorable Redeemer in the midst of the throne, “a Lamb as it had been slain”. Hence the “white robes”, in which all the ransomed of the Lord of every age and nation and kindred and tongue are arrayed, are robes which have been washed in the blood of the Lamb. “What are these which are arrayed in white robes, and whence came they?” “These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” John heard “a new song, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof; Thou art worthy to receive glory, and honour, and dominion, and power, for Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood”.

Suppose a ladder were let down from heaven and an angel were sent to say, Come up hither and I will shew thee the wonders of the sanctuary above. When you gazed round that region of glory, the greatest wonder you would behold would be Jesus, bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, the Lamb of God, the great centre of worship and influence. If you were permitted to speak to the glorified inhabitants of that blessed place and to ask them in what way they reached the realms of glory, they would all give the same answer. Adam, if in glory, went there through the second Adam, the Lord from heaven. Abel went there by faith in the coming sacrifice of the Messiah, Noah by means of the true ark of God, Abraham because he saw the day of Christ afar off and was glad. All the patriarchs went there because they “died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth”. All the apostles went there because they “determined not to know anything but Jesus Christ, and Him crucified”, and all the martyrs because “they washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb”.

Where are the self-righteous multitudes who despised the perfect righteousness of Christ and went about to establish a righteousness of their own – the crowds of worldly formalists, whom false churches impiously professed to send to heaven? They are not there. No one is there who will not rejoice to cast his crown at the Redeemer’s feet and to join in the blessed anthem of eternity which will fill the arches of heaven for ever: “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain”. “For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ”; “and whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken, but

on whomsoever it shall fall it will grind him to powder". If, therefore, any truth is more clearly revealed in the Word of God than another, it is that of the text: "Neither is there salvation in any other".

1. From this subject, therefore, we may infer the hopeless state of such as continue far from Christ, or trust for salvation out of Him. They that are far from Him shall perish; and one of the objects for which He shall come again is to punish such as "know not God and obey not the gospel". Mark, the awful result is the very same whatever state you are in if you are not in Christ, for there is salvation in no other. He warned: "He that abideth not in Me is cast forth as a branch, and is withered, and men gather them and cast them into the fire".

Do you speak of the mercy of God? What greater proof could He give of His mercy than in not sparing His only-begotten Son? But it is the very mercy of God you are despising; and if you trample on the offers of His love, if you are determined to be saved in your own way, and not in the way of God, you are not to wonder if you find yourselves barred from heaven and left to perish in your own devices. Christ is the way to heaven; Christ is the door; Christ is the shepherd; Christ is the mediator; Christ is the king; Christ is the intercessor. Out of Him you have no promises; out of Him God is a consuming fire – but in Him, God "hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath He seen perverseness in Israel".

2. If these truths have been brought home with power to your souls, happy are you. "O Israel, who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord!" Be assured that He that has begun a good work will carry it on until the day of Christ. The smoking flax shall be kindled into the light of the perfect day. The feeble shall become as David, and David as the angel of the Lord. "Trust ye in the Lord for ever, for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength."

3. But press forward to higher attainments. You must hunger and thirst after righteousness; you must grow in grace and in knowledge; you must ask, knock, use every effort and, above all, call down by prayer that grace without which you can do nothing, but with which you can do all things. Watch over yourselves with a godly jealousy, and let it be your desire that you may be like Christ here so that you may be with Christ hereafter. What miserable self-deception abounds in this world! Luther tells us that in his unconverted state he knew some who fasted and prayed and did penance, and yet open infidels behaved better, and murderers died more peacefully than they. So, alas, is it now. Many come to the house of God, but in works they deny Him – they do not do to others as they would wish others to do to them; they are liars, drunkards, swearers, covetous, tyrannical. "Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of His." "Let no man deceive



you with vain words, for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience.”

But if men are not saved, it is because they love darkness rather than light, their deeds being evil. It is because Satan “hath blinded the minds of them that believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ . . . should shine into them”. Christ is a sufficient and a willing Saviour. All fulness dwells in Him. Mark the expression. It has been in Him for ages. It is an unchangeable, inexhaustible supply of grace. The well of salvation is full, although many in ages past have drunk of it. The water of life is as pure as ever, though myriads have washed in it and become whiter than the snow. The riches of Christ are undiminished, although they have already enriched an exceeding great multitude which no man can number. Come in, therefore, O sinner, why standest thou without? It is for you the Master calls. The Lord says, “Turn you to the strong hold, ye prisoners of hope: even today do I declare that I will render double unto thee”.

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## The Light of a Holy Example<sup>1</sup>

*R L Dabney*

Matthew 5:16. *Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.*

**FG** was a lawyer of the old school. Born about the year 1785, the son of a large landholder in one of the Atlantic States, he was reared in the midst of that society – at once graceful, chivalrous, cultivated and irreligious – which followed the Revolutionary War and the influence of the French alliance. He was, like the lawyers of his day, deeply read in the old English law, and well acquainted with the English classics, scrupulous in his integrity, deliberate, shrewd, perspicacious in intellect, disdainful of all personal and professional meanness with infinite scorn, scrupulous and gravely ornate in dress, and ever dignified and courteous in manner.

The “flush times” of 1816, following the depression of the second war with Great Britain, found him in one of the Atlantic cities, in the full tide of his early success. He was tempted, like so many others, to venture everything in the purchase of real estate; and in a few years, chiefly by the treachery of some whom he had trusted, he was bankrupt. This misfortune left him a soured spirit. To gain the means for the more speedy payment of debts he departed alone to the extreme southwest; and for 20 years his friends

<sup>1</sup>Taken with slight editing from Dabney’s *Discussions*, vol 1. It is clear from his *Life and Letters* by T C Johnson that the “young minister” was Dabney himself.

saw him no more, and heard little of him, save that he was making large professional gains, had paid off his debts to the last penny, and was living the life of a *bon vivant* and man of society among the French of the light-hearted Southern capital.

At the end of that time he returned to the home of his fathers, a man verging on old age. His caustic wit, his ancestral and intellectual pride, his fondness for elegant literature, his sourness, were in no wise diminished, and his irreligious and epicurean habits much increased. Although the surviving kindred whom he found were decided Christians, he never accompanied them to the house of God, spent his Sabbaths in amusements, and observed the most jealous reserve concerning his religious views. It was understood that he had long learned to disdain both Protestantism and Popery as rival delusions, and was a low-type Socinian or rational Deist.

As the monotony of unmarried life crept on, his habits of free living grew upon him, until they threatened serious consequences. The account given by a simple servant, who was his valet, was as graphic as it was truthful. "My master," said he, "was very anxious to get some good old spirits, and yet he condemned all he got as adulterated. One time he says to me, 'Take my demijohn [a bottle containing from 3 to 10 gallons], and go to old Mr J; he is an honest, old-fashioned merchant. Tell him to send me some genuine French brandy.' I brought it, but he was as dissatisfied as ever. Then he said, 'Go to Mr H; he deals with the honest German farmers of the West; tell him to send me some honest, farm-made, old rye whiskey'. But when this came he pronounced it 'vile stuff'. However, I noticed that, though it was 'vile stuff', wherever it came from, the demijohn always went down very steadily. Well, so it went on, until one day he was very sick, and seemed to have a sort of fit, and not to know anything. I was so frightened I went off for Dr A, and he came; and he bled him in a great china basin from the washstand. However, he got entirely well; and he nibbled at the 'vile stuff' very skittishly after that."

Soon after this, Mr G astonished his friends by deliberately destroying his stock of drinkables with his own hands, and adopting the most rigid total-abstinence customs. But he declared that he did this from no temperance principles. He considered good wines and liquors a legitimate and very pleasant indulgence which, he said, he should certainly allow to himself if they could be procured. But he considered himself a connoisseur; he now found that all wines and liquors in America were adulterated. In good old times they exhilarated, now they stupefied; then gentlemen could indulge, even freely, in these convivialities and live to a ripe old age; now he noticed that free-living men died in a few years. He had determined therefore never

to taste even malt liquors again, simply because he did not wish to be poisoned like a rat.

Not long after this his solitude and approaching infirmities caused him to remove to the house of a widowed sister, where he spent the closing years of his life. Among the children of this Christian family was a son, a young minister of the gospel, but residing away from his native place in his far-distant charge, and a younger sister just budding into lovely womanhood. She was beloved by all for her sweet and consistent piety and her gentle, disinterested charity. This change of residence brought the wearied man of the world into contact with books and associates somewhat different from the former. The son was accustomed to visit his widowed mother annually during vacations; and on one of these visits he noticed in the uncle some such hint of an intellectual interest in Christianity as led him to introduce the subject, though with trepidation.

He found that the old man had been reading a number of Christian books, but only for mental amusement. He talked of their topics with the tone with which a naturalist might talk of some curious researches in entomology. "Nephew," said Mr G, "I have been reading lately Dr Hanna's *Life of Chalmers*. Did you know that great divine confessed he was a Presbyterian minister many years before he was a converted man? Isn't that considered very singular among you? And Dr Hanna – who, you know, is his son-in-law – relates that one thing which opened Dr Chalmers' eyes was his observing that many evangelical persons, all of whom he had considered fanatical, were more zealous to live holy and diligent lives of obedience, while claiming no merit therefrom, for their justification, than he and his friends were who relied on that sort of merit. I suppose it must have been true; but it strikes one as very queer, isn't it?"

In this strain he chatted on in the most communicative and amiable tone. He would make no avowal of any personal concern of the heart in these great truths, but admitted that his intellect was interested, and avowed himself willing to re-examine the system of redemption, more because it would occupy his abundant leisure in a pleasing manner than for any other reason. The young minister directed him to some suitable books and especially to the careful study of the Scriptures themselves. His visit ended without other developments.

The next summer he again went, according to his wont, to cheer his widowed mother. Soon after his arrival, she availed herself of a moment of privacy to say: "My son, strange things have happened here since you went last. Your Uncle F has confessed Christ. He sent for the session of the church, excusing himself for his difficulties in walking, and desired them to examine

his fitness for the communion of the church. They held a sessional meeting in his room; and Rev Mr W, who moderated the proceedings, says that never was such a meeting of session seen. The elders were so astounded by the strangeness of the change, and still so overawed by his reputation for sense and cynicism, that they were the questioned rather than the questioners. And then his religious experience was so original and queer. They say he seemed only afraid that they should give him credit for more grace than he thinks he has. He regards himself as a mere babe in grace, but says his mind is clearly made up to live and die in faith, and therefore he thinks he ought to confess Christ at once. He was as methodical and lawyer-like about it as though he had been writing somebody else's will. However, he was received and is now a regular member of the Q church."

This narrative the young minister heard with open-eyed wonder. "Do they really think," he asked, "that there is a saving change in him?" "Indeed we do;" she replied, "there has been a progressive change for some time. You know, though he was always the gentleman, we were always a little afraid of him; but now he is always gentle; his sourness and sarcasm are all gone, and he appears to be as willing to die as to retire to his nightly rest."

The young minister sought the first convenient opportunity to express to him his thankfulness for the wondrous change. It must be confessed there was also a little tendency to congratulate himself as one of the instruments of it; and hence, he was curious to know how far the instructions he had given or the books he had recommended had been useful. But the developments did not seem at all to gratify that vanity.

Had Uncle F read such and such books, which he named last year?

"Yes."

Had he been impressed by them?

"No; not particularly."

After a little while the old gentleman seemed to apprehend the drift of these inquiries, and said rather drily, "If you are asking for the means of this change, I cannot say that any of your books wrought it".

"What then," he was asked, "is the instrumentality which has wrought this great revolution? We all know that since last year your infirmities have not permitted you to go to church."

"Well," he replied, "I suppose that, so far as it was any one thing, it was Katy." (The niece.)

"Why," exclaimed the brother, "has she presumed to take on her the task of religious monitor? Does she preach to you?"

"O no; she is too modest for that. But you know, Nephew, she is the best person in the world" (and this he uttered with the peculiar air of nonchalance

and brevity with which he asserted his deliberate opinions), “and what I have seen for myself of her principles and conduct since I have lived here has changed all my convictions.”

Being encouraged to explain himself, he proceeded as follows: “You know that I was all my life a sort of Socinian or rational Deist, and regarded the whole system of experimental religion as a fanatical delusion. I saw so much falsehood, pretence and hypocrisy that I believed in no pretensions of superior holiness. Of course I did not deny a God or a hereafter; but I thought Christ one of the few sincere and pure men whom the world has possessed; and I expressed contempt for the idea that there was any Holy Ghost or regeneration. I supposed that, so far as anybody could penetrate the darkness beyond the grave with his hopes, those who were philanthropic, truthful, courteous and just had the best chance. And I felt that our chance, who cultivated these social virtues and made none of these pretences to superior grace, was far better than that of the Christians.

“My theory about conversion was this: In many, it was a rascally pretence (as my dealings with mankind showed). In the rest, it was an amiable delusion. I saw great numbers find out for themselves this fact. And they were truthful enough to avow it and frankly go back to the world. I saw a number of others who had evidently found out also that their supposed conversion was a delusion; but they did not have the candour to say so and they therefore continued to wear the mask – some from mere cowardice and false shame, others from calculated rascality. The third class was of those who continued sincere and, evidently, honest devotees. My theory about them was that they also were deluded, only they had not found it out yet. Many acquaintances whom I highly esteem were among this class and, as you know, some of my dearest relatives. I thought I saw in the enthusiasm of their natural temperament the reason why they remained undeceived. And as they, unlike the second class, were perfectly honest in their amiable fanaticism, I could love them none the less for this social virtue, nor had I any desire to undeceive them. They seemed to enjoy the delusion, and I was glad that they should do so.

“Such was my theory, and I was thrown close to Katy, and I have studied her thoroughly. I know that my estimate of her principles is correct; I have seen her tried too often. I saw in her not only amiability, which I have often loved in others, but an unaffected and supreme disinterestedness and love. I saw in her one person where there was no selfishness. I had seen many affect unselfishness, but this I saw was real, for I know the signs of hypocrisy only too well. She wasn’t like anybody else.

“Now, Nephew, I know human nature, unfortunately for myself. I know all about it, and I know that it is a poor, selfish thing. I know what it is capable

of in its lovelier phases, and what it is not. And it was perfectly clear that Katy had something which I, with all my pride of integrity and philanthropy, never had – which nobody has by nature. And it was an admirable thing too. Now, you see, I was obliged to ask myself where it came from, and as I was sure it could not come from nature, it must come from above nature. Here then was a divine principle actually at work. What else could I conclude? Well then the doctrine of regeneration must be true, absurd as I had thought it was before. There was no other solution. I saw that there is such a thing as the implantation of a superhuman, divine principle in a human being. And I had to believe that it came by this gospel. You see, Katy always says that, if there is anything good in her, it comes from God, through Christianity; that she gets it by believing the gospel and praying through Christ, and I am obliged to believe her. Besides, there wasn't any other way, which was not absurd, to account for it except that. But there was the thing, and it had to be accounted for.

“Now, you see, when I saw there really was a way in which God gave a person a new nature, as a man of sense I could not but know that it was good for me too. So I desired it for myself. How can a person see perfect disinterestedness, love, purity and truth, and not want it? At least I wanted it; I knew I had needed it all my life, amidst all my pride. Well, of course, the only thing to do was to seek it, and I did so. And that is just the history of the matter.”

“And you believe, Uncle, that you have received it?”

“Why, yes; that is my hope. Understand me, I don't think I know much about it; I know very little. I have only this one point: I know there is a redemption in Christ, for I see it wrought in one person; I know I need it; it is promised to prayer; I rely upon that.”

After an interval he added, with the same tone of inimitable nonchalance: “Nephew, I am not the least afraid to die; I should like very well to die this evening. I have pains and infirmities that nobody knows of and, as I am getting of less and less account, I should like to be gone. But it is all right; I am ready when my time comes.”

His time did come after some months of increasing sufferings, which he bore with Christian resignation and gentleness, and his darling Katy was one of those who received his parting breath. A few years after, she followed him, in the prime of her loveliness. We doubt not that they are now together before the throne; the old man of learning and logic and earthly wisdom as spiritual child, and the gentle young maiden as spiritual parent.

This remarkable experience of a very singular man is not presented as a symmetrical type. But it is exceedingly instructive as showing how the witness

of a true and holy life is made the divine warrant of the gospel. This is the continuous miracle, the spiritual resurrection, which proves that “Christ is risen indeed.” Mr F G had doubtless been conversant with other genuine instances of holy living before, and he had not been convinced by them. But the living power of this last holy example, where previous ones had failed, may be partly explained by the exquisite tact, grace and genius which embellished this instance of the divine life, disarming his spirit of adverse criticism and gaining for it a dispassionate judgement – and chiefly by the fact that God’s time to set to work by His Spirit had now arrived.

The most valuable lesson of this history is this: We see here how the logic of a holy life wrought, when once it was listened to, with a mind singularly perspicacious, deliberate and cautious, trained in all the learning of the law to the appreciation of valid evidence, and the distinguishing of false from true. When circumstances at length enabled this man to verify one instance of undoubted spiritual-mindedness, it was enough. He recognized it as the signature of a divine work, and by a process of inference as rigid as legal proof, ascending from effect to cause, he ascertained the personal agency of the Holy Ghost, the divinity of Christ, the doctrine of regeneration, the duties of faith and prayer.

The light of a holy example is the gospel’s main argument.

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## The Sacrament of Baptism<sup>1</sup>

### 1. Are Infants to Be Baptized?

*W K Tweedie*

On what foundation are Christian fathers and mothers to rest the right of their little ones to be admitted into Christ’s visible Church? We reply, *You are to rest it on the nature of the ordinance itself, taken in connection with the gospel as a system of free grace.* There is no express command in so many words for baptizing children; but the very nature of baptism – in the blessing which it figures and holds out – is such that children may be made partakers of all its benefits, as well as the hoary-headed. It is so framed by its Author as to be a medium of conveying grace into the soul, whatever the age of the baptized.

In explanation of this, I need scarcely remark that unless God works in the

<sup>1</sup>The first of three slightly-edited extracts from Tweedie’s little book *The Sacrament of Baptism*. The author was a prominent Free Church minister, latterly in Edinburgh, who died in 1863. He wrote a number of books, including *The Parables of our Lord*; several of its chapters were reprinted in this magazine in 2003-04.

ordinances, man works in vain. Without the blessing of the Spirit, all that we can do is but a ceremony. But let the Spirit of God bless the ordinance; let the unction of the Holy One accompany the outward act; let the blood of sprinkling be applied by Him while man applies the symbol, water – then the infant of a day's existence and the man that has touched the verge of fourscore years may equally be fit recipients of new-covenant blessings. Regeneration of heart, cleansing from the pollution of sin, and freedom in Christ from its guilt may all be imparted to our little ones as well as to ourselves.

We are born again, not of the will of man but of God; and surely an infant is capable of being born again from the moment of its first birth. Nay, the Word of God assures us that some infants have been so, for John the Baptist was “filled with the Holy Ghost from his mother's womb”. The power that creates can surely make us new creatures – the hand that formed the body or the power that breathed into it a soul can surely quicken that soul as it quickened the body. To question this appears to us to be limiting the Holy One of Israel. Moreover, it is manifest that our infant children can be no parties to our prayers on their behalf. They cannot act faith; they cannot confess sin; they cannot implore forgiveness; they are equally passive as regards both God and man. Are we therefore to restrain prayer on their behalf? Because they cannot unite with us in heart and understanding, are our supplications to be hindered? Are they to be left without a blessing being implored from the Lord? Affection and religion alike revolt at the thought, and we apprehend that children are as fit recipients of the benefits involved in baptism as of the blessings given in answer to believing prayer.

It is true that infants are not capable of being affected by the truths of the Word. The Word is not therefore the *medium* of their renovation – but, *in accordance with it*, the souls of our little ones may be blessed by the new-creating Spirit. The germ of immortal blessedness, the purity that fits for heaven, the principle that expands the powers of man into full-blown perfection may be deposited in the soul. The letter and the spirit of Scripture (Luke 18:15) unite in support of that opinion; so natural affection and the truth of God are here, in effect, at one; they both sanction the notion that little children may be partakers of the benefits of Christ's redemption. They are exposed to many dangers by their parents' sinfulness or neglect of duty; their souls may be placed in utmost jeopardy by their parents' ungodliness. Surely then it is not beyond the verge of soberness to infer that they may be admitted to many blessings in consequence of their parents' faith (1 Cor 7:14). The child is represented by the parent, and is in one sense holy if the parent is a believer.

But an analogy commonly employed for that purpose will make this matter simpler than a mere description. The sacrament of baptism among



Christians has been likened to the rite of circumcision among the Jews. At the age of eight days, their children were formally dedicated to God in terms of the covenant made with Abraham, and Peter assured the Jews that the promises of the covenant were made “to you and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call”. So the blessings are promised to all – parents and children alike. Infancy did not unfit the young Jew from occupying a place in the visible Church or from coming within the pale of the covenant. He had a soul to be saved; he had original sin to be washed away; he needed an interest in the Holy One of Israel. This therefore was all the qualification that he required, and the God of mercy placed him within the sweep of that covenant, which guaranteed to all His people the spiritual blessings which flow freely to old and young through Christ the friend of sinners: the purifying of the heart, the pardon of sin – in one phrase, the mercy of a covenant God.

As far as an outward act or the faith of his parents could make him, the infant Jew became a partaker of the blessings promised to Abraham, in virtue of that ordinance. The Messiah was the great subject of that promise, and incontrovertibly the children of the Jews were admitted to share the benefits implied in the assurance given to the father of the faithful: “In thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed”. When therefore the apostle addressed *to Jews* the words, “The promise is unto you and to your children”, he knew that those to whom he spoke would at once understand him as extending to them and theirs, in their Christian condition, the same privileges as they enjoyed under Judaism; and he gave no warning; he recorded no limitation and no restriction.

If any change had been made, this was the precise point at which to announce it. If the children of the Christians were to be debarred from what the children of the Jews enjoyed, it was right that this should be made known in order that *the truth* might be understood. A spiritual privilege once conferred by God is not to be annulled by any but its Author, and we must have His *command* before we can strip the offspring of Christians of a privilege which the Jews enjoyed. Yet there is no repeal, no hint to indicate that the blessings were, in spirit, either altered or curtailed.

Let us judge here then as dispassionately as we can; let us put away, if possible, the thought that we ourselves were baptized when we were little children. Let us lay aside the character of controversialists and think only as Christians. In that character ask, Is it conceivable that the God who, in mercy, placed the Hebrew child within the pale of the covenant would exclude the Christian child? Does the stream of mercy contract as it flows, instead of widening and deepening? If this were the case, the Christian dispensation

falls short of the Jewish, at least in this respect. If every Jewish child was formally dedicated to God when only eight days old, while children in Christendom may not partake of this privilege, the Saviour has limited, not enlarged, our blessings. If so, the Christian Church has one privilege less than the Jewish. And believing parents now are deprived of a rite by which they might solemnly place their little ones, whose hold on existence here is so precarious, under the guardianship of Him who is “the life” – who visited our world, that in Him all the families of the earth might be blessed.

But should we not rather conclude that He who brought in a better hope, He who established the covenant with better promises, He in whom all the promises of God are “yea and amen”, has secured to believers – and in them to their children – the benefits which flow through His Church? It is true that the little one whose existence has just begun is unconscious of the immortality that may await him in Christ; he can act no faith and manifest no repentance. But it is equally true that the infant of the Jew was as unconscious of the blessings promised to him and as devoid of faith. So we conclude again that, if our children may not be dedicated to God according to the Christian rite, they are less favoured than were the offspring of the Jews. In that case, the Saviour would have, in fact, repealed – not augmented – our blessings; and whatever leads to that conclusion, appears to be utterly opposed at once to the benevolence of the Redeemer and to the spirit of His religion. In short, baptism is the appointed sign of mercy; and if we interpose between children and it, we withhold from them one of Christ’s institutions symbolical of all His benefits.

Or further still, those who oppose the baptism of infants confess that infants may be *saved*. They grant that little children, dying before they become responsible agents, or capable of either moral good or evil in their own conduct, may be admitted to the blessings of Christ’s purchase, according to His covenant with the Father.

Now is it not strange to confess that children may have the thing signified and yet may *not* have the sign? They may have all that the deed conveys to them but may not have the seal affixed to the deed! Their names may be written among those of whom “is the kingdom of heaven”, but they may not be enrolled among the members of the Church on earth! The reality of glory may be theirs, but the sign of grace may not! But here again should we not rather conclude that the God whose mercy is as deep as floods has admitted our little ones, as well as ourselves, into the pale of the covenant that is well ordered in all things and sure? Since they may have the thing signified, why should they be debarred from the sign? Since they may be members of the Church of the firstborn on high, why exclude them in any sense from the

Church planted upon earth? Since parents are permitted the hope that their little ones who are interested in Christ have an abode in the home which He has gone to prepare, how strange to withhold them from a means of conducting them thither!

Or even further, it is confessed that children inherit from their parents a sinful and polluted nature. They are exposed to suffering and misery and death through their parents. And may they not, through their parents also, have a title to admission into the visible Church and the blessings involved in it – designed as these are to counteract evil and medicate the soul? If children are included in the covenant with their parents, if the promise is to fathers and children alike, who can forbid water that they should not be baptized, seeing that they are capable of enjoying the benefits purchased by the blood and applied by the Spirit of God?

He said to the Jews of old, “Ye stand all of you this day before the Lord your God . . . your little ones, your wives . . . that thou shouldest enter into covenant with the Lord thy God” (Deut 29:10-12), and the same may surely be said of every professing follower of Christ. We are urged therefore to the conclusion that our little ones, as well as ourselves, may partake of the benefits of the well-ordered covenant. They, as well as we, may be heirs of glory; they, as well as we, are immortal, and yet sinful; they, as well as we, may be interested in the love of Christ, and made partakers of His blessings.

Inasmuch as the plan of our redemption is one of free and sovereign grace – as salvation is not the result of works going before to merit or prepare for God’s favour but solely of mercy on God’s part; as we are born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God; and as the Spirit’s power is as inexplicable as the motions of the wind – we are forced to conclude that children may be the objects of His transforming power and saving efficacy, as well as the man that has reached maturity and manhood. Had the notion of merit entered at all into the terms of man’s salvation, we think infant baptism would have been indefensible. But as *all is of grace*, that is the foundation on which the hopes which we cherish, and the rite which we perform over children, are based. Resting *there*, we are rooted and grounded in the truth of God.

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It is a solemn business to die. It is to be done but once, and it must be well done or thou art undone for ever. Look upon every day as thy last, and defer not till tomorrow the repentance and faith required of thee today. Thus, whenever called, thou wilt meet God in peace, and be found of Him in peace.

Let all men behold the foul face of their hearts in the pure glass of the law of God and they will see a strange and astonishing spectacle which would end either in evangelical repentance or final despair.

*Oliver Heywood*

## Chastisement (2)<sup>1</sup>

John Calvin<sup>2</sup> preached on Job 5:17,18, “Behold, the man whom God corrects is blessed; therefore refuse not thou the chastisement of the Almighty. It is He who makes the wound, and who binds it up; who smites and who brings life.”<sup>3</sup> And he had this to say: “We have to mark here how Eliphaz has an eye to the intent and end at which God aims at when He chastises men. . . . It is a sign . . . that He is not willing that we should perish, and that He solicits us to return to Him. For corrections are as testimonies that God is ready to receive us in mercy, if we acknowledge our faults and sincerely ask Him for forgiveness. . . . It is needful for us to consider that God’s afflicting us is because He hates sin, and that His summoning us before Him is to make us feel Him to be our judge; but also that He needed to reach out His arms to us and to show us that He is ready to reconcile Himself to us, when we come to Him with true repentance. . . .

“It behoves us to be grieved by the evil which God sends us. And although the evil be turned to our benefit, and God does thereby show that He loves us; yet it is needful that there be some pricking and painfulness in it, in order that we may perceive the wrath of God and be displeased with ourselves in our sins. . . . Since, then, God wills the arrangement to remedy our vices by afflicting us, each one must study for himself this lesson, in order that all of us may confess with David, ‘Lord, it has been for my profit that Thou hast humbled me’ (Ps 119:67). David does not there speak of others, as if to say, Lord, Thou hast done well to chastise those who have transgressed, but he begins with himself. That is how we must do it. And it is what is here shown us by the Holy Spirit: ‘Behold, blessed is the man whom God chastises’.”

Robert Murray M’Cheyne,<sup>4</sup> suggests three ways a Christian can benefit from affliction or deal with the chastisement he receives from God. They form part of a sermon on these words from Job 34:31,32, “Surely it is meet to be said unto God, I have borne chastisement, I will not offend any more: that which I see not, teach Thou me; if I have done iniquity, I will do no more”.

His first point is submission: “It is the temper of one who justifies God: ‘I have borne chastisement’. This was the feeling of Daniel in the midst of the affliction which God brought on Israel. This is shown in Daniel 9:7,8: ‘O Lord, righteousness belongeth unto Thee, but unto us confusion of face

<sup>1</sup>Compiled by Peter Best from the writings of eminent Christians. The previous article appeared in September.

<sup>2</sup>Calvin (1509-1564) was a French-born Reformation theologian who wrote *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*.

<sup>3</sup>Scripture quotations in this section are translated from the French Bible which Calvin used.

<sup>4</sup>M’Cheyne (1813-1843) was a Presbyterian minister in Dundee.

. . .’, and in verse 14: ‘Therefore hath the Lord watched upon the evil, and brought it upon us; for the Lord our God is righteous in all His works which He doeth: for we obeyed not His voice’. You will notice, then, in all this, that Daniel accepts of the punishment of his iniquity. The same thing you will notice in Nehemiah 9:33: ‘Howbeit Thou art just in all that is brought upon us; for Thou hast done right, but we have done wickedly’. The same thing you will notice in Leviticus 26:40: ‘If they shall confess their iniquity, and the iniquity of their fathers, with their trespasses which they have trespassed against Me, and that they have walked contrary unto Me’. And then in the middle of verse 41: “If then their uncircumcised hearts be humbled, and they then accept of the punishment of their iniquity . . .”. God here says: if they accept of the punishment of their iniquities, He will remember them.”

The second point is humble inquiry into God’s meaning: “‘What I know not teach Thou me’. This is the proper improvement of affliction. This is the way in which Job himself received his trial: ‘I will say unto God, Do not condemn me: show me wherefore Thou contendest with me’ (Job 10:2). The same you will notice in chapter 23:3-7, ‘O that I knew where I might find Him! That I might come even to His seat! I would order my cause before Him, and fill my mouth with arguments. I would know the words which He would answer me, and understand what He would say unto me. Will He plead against me with His great power? No; but He would put strength in me. There the righteous might dispute with Him; so should I be delivered for ever from my judge.’ You will notice that Job was to be made acquainted why God thus dealt with him.

“The same was the case with Joshua. See Joshua 7: 6-9: ‘And Joshua rent his clothes and fell to the earth upon his face before the ark of the Lord until the eventide, he and the elders of Israel, and put dust upon their heads. And Joshua said, Alas, O Lord God, wherefore hast Thou at all brought this people over Jordan, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us? Would to God we had been content, and dwelt on the other side Jordan! O Lord, what shall I say, when Israel turneth her backs before their enemies! For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land shall hear of it, and shall environ us round, and cut off our name from the earth: and what wilt Thou do unto Thy great name?’ When affliction came, Joshua waited for an explanation. This also seems to have been the case with the Apostle Paul when he said, ‘Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?’

“Brethren, the opposite of this is very common among you. When God sends affliction into an ungodly family; when God takes away a child, or lays a father on a bed of affliction; do they enquire of God why He did it? Ah, you despise the chastening of the Lord. Brethren, it is a fearful thing not

to ask God's meaning in affliction. It is His loudest knock, and often His last. The same thing happens with God's children. You have been loving some idol, some secret sin, some secret lust; and God afflicts you. Do you ask an explanation? The same thing takes place in a church. The members are unholy. Then perhaps He afflicts it as He did Laodicea. Do we seek an explanation? Ah, no!"

The third point he considers to be the forsaking of sin: "'I will not offend any more. . . . If I have done iniquity, I will do no more.' God's great design in affliction is to make you forsake your sin: 'He that covereth his sins shall not prosper; but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy' (Prov 28:13). This was God's way with Manasseh; so it should be in all affliction. God afflicts you that you may cast away your sin; you will not hear His voice of mercy; you will not hear His voice of love; but He brings you under the rod, in order to bring you into covenant. How often does it do the contrary?"

On Revelation 3:19: "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous, therefore, and repent", the following points are made in Matthew Henry's<sup>5</sup> *Commentary*: "Here is added great and gracious encouragement to this sinful people [the Church in Laodicea] to take the admonition and advice well that Christ had given them. He tells them it was given them in true and tender affection: 'Whom I love, I rebuke and chasten. You may think I have given you hard words and severe reproofs; it is all out of love to your souls. I would not have thus openly rebuked and corrected your sinful lukewarmness and vain confidence if I had not been a lover of your souls; had I hated you, I would have let you alone, to go on in sin till it had been your ruin.' Sinners ought to take the rebukes of God's Word and rod as tokens of His good will to their souls and should accordingly repent in good earnest and turn to Him who smites them; better the frowns and wounds of a friend than the flattering smiles of an enemy."

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## A Vain Religion<sup>1</sup>

*C H Spurgeon*

**W**e will grant you that much of the religion which is abroad in the world is a "vain thing".

The religion of *ceremonies* is vain. If a man shall trust in the gorgeous pomp of uncommanded mysteries, if he shall consider that there resides

<sup>5</sup>Henry (1662-1714) was English Presbyterian minister and noted Bible commentator.

<sup>1</sup>An extract, slightly edited, from a sermon entitled, "Religion – a Reality".

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some mystical efficacy in a Romish priest and that, by uttering certain words, a blessing is infallibly received, we tell him that his religion is a vain thing. You might as well go for grace to the witch of Endor as to a priest; and if you rely upon “words”, the words of a magician will as soon raise you to heaven as the vain performances of the best ordained minister under heaven. Ceremonies in themselves are vain, futile, empty. All “ceremonial religion”, no matter how sincere, if it consist in relying upon forms and observances, is a vain thing.

So with *creed-religion* – by which I do not mean to speak against creeds, for I love “the form of sound words”, but that religion which lies in believing, with the intellect, a set of dogmas, without partaking of the life of God. All this is a vain thing.

Again, that religion which only lies in *making a profession of what one does not possess*, in wearing the Christian name and observing the practice of the church. But it does not so affect the character as to make a man holy, nor so touch the heart as to make a man God’s true servant. Such a religion is vain throughout.

My dear hearers, how much worthless religion you may see everywhere! So long as men get the name, they seem content without the substance. On all sides there are deceivers and deceived ones who write “heaven” upon their brows, but have hell in their hearts; who hang out the sign of an angel over their doors, but have the devil for a host within.

Take heed to yourselves; be not deceived, for He who tries the heart and searches the imaginations of the children of men is not mocked. He will surely discern between him that fears God and him that fears Him not.

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## Book Review

**Truth’s Victory Over Error, A Commentary on the Westminster Confession of Faith**, by David Dickson, published by the Banner of Truth Trust, hardback, 304 pages, £15.50, obtainable from the Free Presbyterian Bookroom.

This is indeed a first-class book and it is a real pleasure to see it in print again, so attractively produced inside and out. David Dickson, best known for his commentary on the Psalms, was one of Scotland’s most notable ministers. He came to the parish of Irvine in 1618 and his time there included a period of revival but it was also interrupted by persecution. In 1640 he became Professor of Divinity in Glasgow University and 10 years later he took up the same position in Edinburgh.

This commentary is based on Dickson’s lectures in Edinburgh, reproduced

from his students' notes. No one should be put off by the fact that the book is derived from university lectures or that its main focus is to oppose error. Nor should anyone be put off by the method Dickson uses. He begins by turning a statement from the *Confession* into a question, which he answers with a Yes or a No. This is then followed by a further question or questions, highlighting the errors of Roman Catholics, Arminians or any of a host of other groups who have gone astray in varying degrees from Scripture (the book concludes with a brief explanation of what each of these groups believed). The meat of the book lies in the answers to these questions, which are all concise and mostly brief. Anyone who reads the book carefully should have a better grasp of the doctrines of the Bible, and anyone who *studies* these answers and consults the proof texts quoted should acquire a solid understanding of these doctrines and be prepared to resist most of the errors in circulation today.

Though Dickson was not himself a delegate to the Westminster Assembly, he must have been entirely familiar with the thinking of his Scottish colleagues who made a notable contribution to the discussions which took place in formulating the *Confession*, and he was in complete sympathy with the overall emphases of the Assembly. Dickson was therefore in an excellent position to give to the world the first sympathetic exposition of the *Confession*.

The book includes a 20-page introduction by the noted Church historian Robert Wodrow, minister of Eastwood, near Glasgow, in the early eighteenth century. Wodrow leaves us this testimony: "The learned author brings in the different errors under proper heads, and in a most plain and solid way refutes them from the Holy Scriptures. At once he discovers [exhibits] the design of the particular branches of our excellent *Confession of Faith*, he establishes the truth therein laid down, and guards against the gangrene and poison of contrary errors, with judgement and perspicuity, and in a manner far above any character I can give." Dickson's "plain and solid" work is well worth reading and studying today. May the Lord bless it!

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## Notes and Comments

### Free Church Ministers and Ordination Vows

To take an oath or a vow is one of the most solemn acts in human life. The person taking the vow is citing God as a witness to the sincerity of his heart in what he is saying. It is lawful and appropriate to take vows, and to require vows, on the most solemn and important occasions in life, such as marriage, giving evidence in court, crowning a monarch or installing



rulers in public office, and ordaining office-bearers in the Christian Church.

The vows taken must be suitable. The questions put at ordination in the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland date mainly from 1711, with a few additions and modifications introduced at the Disruption of 1843 and at the separation of the Free Presbyterian Church in 1893. The questions cover, among other things, the doctrinal views of the candidate, his submission to the authority of the Church, and his upholding of the position of the Church on certain issues. For instance, Free Presbyterian office-bearers are required, reasonably enough, to approve of the Deed of Separation of 1893.

Rev David Robertson of Dundee has been appointed editor of the Free Church *Monthly Record*, the September issue being his first. This issue has numerous unedifying features, such as a picture of a Harry Potter book on the front, a favourable review of the same book by Mr Robertson's teenage daughter on the back, and a sermon preached at the Free Church General Assembly, entitled "The Public Teaching of our Church", in which there is not the slightest reference to the Lord Jesus Christ.

One of the threads running through Mr Robertson's first issue is the unhappiness that Free Church ministers feel with their denominational heritage. In his leading article, Mr Robertson resumes his attacks on Free Church worship, which he finds, generally speaking, to have "no soul, no spirit, and very little joy". The Assembly sermon of Rev Donald Smith, Lima, referred to above, consists almost entirely of tendentious questions, the purpose of which is to undermine any attachment that Assembly members might have to distinctive Free Church principles. Rev Iain D Campbell, Back, in a lukewarm review of *The Letters of Thomas Chalmers*, raises the possibility that the Disruption itself was a mistake. Chalmers' justification of the Disruption is "interesting", but the whole subject is dismissed as "dated" and "academic". Evidently the ground is being prepared for "closer links" with the Church of Scotland.

The fullest expression of unhappiness, however, comes from the Free Church Moderator, Rev John Ross, in his account of an induction at Badenoch, where he was interim-moderator. Speaking of the questions put at the ordination, he asks whether it is necessary on such occasions to make "a public display of the mysteries of the Claim, Declaration and Protest of 1842 or the Protest by Commissioners to the General Assembly of 1843, or a disavowal of all 'Popish, Arian, Socinian, Arminian, Erastian and other doctrines, tenets and opinions whatsoever . . .' ". Mr Ross was embarrassed by the bemused looks and "stifled sniggers" that these questions produced in the congregation, and also by the "kindly presence" of the "local Catholic priest". He thinks that these "arcane memories of 'old, unhappy, far off

things, and battles long ago” might be dealt with privately by the Presbytery prior to the induction. An induction should be a “joyous” occasion, not “a public justification of the continued separate existence of the Free Church”.

It is clear from what has been said that the Free Church ordination questions, far from being irrelevant and antiquated, are unpleasantly relevant to current opinions in the Free Church. No wonder there is a reluctance to read these questions in public. At every Free Church induction the presiding minister, according to the terms of Act V, 1932, makes the following statement: “It is my duty to explain to you, and also to the congregation here present, with reference to that part of the question which will be put to you as to ‘purity of Worship as presently practised in this Church’ that, in 1910, the General Assembly re-affirmed the legislation of the Church as to uniformity in public worship going back to the year 1707 . . .”.

Contrast this with Mr Robertson’s dismissal in his leading article of “this appalling unbiblical doctrine of ‘uniformity of worship’ (at least in the way it is commonly understood)”. Mr Robertson, at his licensing and two inductions, has three times “sincerely own[ed] the purity of worship as presently practised in this Church”. But was he in fact happy, on each occasion, with the prevailing Free Church practice? It does not appear so. Is this an honest way of taking vows?

Again, at every Free Church induction the minister or probationer is asked: “Do you approve of the general principles embodied in the Protest of Ministers and Elders, Commissioners from Presbyteries to the General Assembly, read in the presence of the Royal Commissioner on 18 May 1843 . . . ?” Contrast this with Mr Campbell’s book review: “Perhaps, as was suggested at our recent General Assembly, it is a pity that the Disruption ever happened; perhaps we are still reaping its unfortunate consequences in the divided landscape of modern Presbyterian Scotland”. The Protest must have been poorly worded indeed if Mr Campbell can simultaneously “approve its general principles” and yet entertain doubts about the step of separation which was its very essence.

Again, Mr Ross at his own recent induction to Greyfriars-Stratherrick disowned all “Popish, Arian, Socinian, Arminian and Erastian” errors. But why does he make out that these errors are “arcane memories” when in fact they are current, and even common. The words “Popish”, “Arian”, “Socinian”, “Arminian”, and “Erastian” may be arcane, but the doctrines are not. The Jehovah’s Witnesses and Mormons are Arians (believing that Christ is essentially an angel); many Church of England and Church of Scotland ministers are Socinians (believing that Christ is a mere man); and most Evangelicals are Arminian. State interference with the Church (Erastianism) is a live issue

in many countries, including Britain; while the “local Catholic priest” in Badenoch, along with every other Roman priest, has avowed doctrines which are Popish, whatever his private beliefs may be.

What the Free Church congregation in Badenoch needs is instruction in the basic principles of Christianity, so that they are no longer “bemused” at these words, and no longer “sniggering” during the taking of solemn vows which relate to the safety of their own souls. The errors of Rome on Justification, and of the Arians and Socinians on the Person of Christ, are deadly, and Christians need to be aware of these things. “In understanding”, Paul would have them to be “men” (1 Cor 14:20). But if Free Church ministers appear by their statements to be indifferent over truths such as the way of salvation, the divinity of Christ, and God’s sovereignty in salvation, who is going to warn the people? How will they avoid these snares and pitfalls? “The leaders of this people cause them to err; and they that are led of them are destroyed” (Is 9:16). *DWBS*

#### **Ruling Against Sexual Orientation Regulations**

The Sexual Orientation Regulations (SORs) of the British Government, rightly branded as “a gay rights charter”, came into force in Northern Ireland last January. They made it illegal to harass and discriminate on the grounds of sexual orientation in education and in the provision of goods, facilities and services. They criminalised, for example, Christians who speak against homosexual practices, decline to teach homosexuality in schools, and refuse to place children for adoption with homosexual couples.

Because the Northern Ireland SORs counteract Christian beliefs on sexual ethics and are a threat to Christian liberty, the Christian Institute and some churches applied for a judicial review of them. It was with much thankfulness that many Christians learned that the High Court in Belfast gave a judgement on September 11 which quashed at least the part of the Regulations which relates to harassment, and ruled that the Regulations do not apply to the school curriculum, nor to every action carried out by a faith group which receives some public funding.

The SORs for England, Scotland and Wales, which did not become law until April, do not have a section on harassment. However, the Government have been taking soundings on adding harassment laws to the regulations for the rest of the UK, as part of a proposed Single Equality Bill. We hope the High Court judgement will have a moderating effect on our Government as they consider this Bill. The Belfast judgement, we believe, was in answer to the prayers of many Christians. May there be continued prayer to God that He would preserve religious freedom and thwart the relentless enemies of biblical morality. “Arise, O Lord, let not man prevail” (Ps 9:19). *NMR*

### **Promotion of Physician-Assisted Suicide**

The legalising of physician-assisted suicide is once more being promoted. This would allow doctors to prescribe lethal doses of drugs for patients themselves to take in order to end their lives.

At a conference organised by the Royal College of Physicians in Edinburgh, Professor Sheila McLean, who is Director of the Institute of Law and Ethics in Medicine at Glasgow University, stated that there were good arguments for legalising physician-assisted suicide in Britain. She argued that it should be permitted in cases where it was “a competent request by an autonomous person”, and even in cases where patients are not terminally ill. She also advocated establishing suicide clinics where patients could be seen by doctors willing to prescribe the necessary drugs.

In a survey conducted by *The Herald* at the same time as the Edinburgh conference, almost one quarter of MSPs who took part said the law should be changed to allow physician-assisted suicide. A further 20% said they had not made up their mind. The results indicate, says one report, that this parliament is more likely than the last to agree to pursue the subject. In 2005, Liberal Democrat MSP Jeremy Purvis put forward a bill to change the law but did not receive enough support. He is now thinking of making another attempt.

Many will concur with the doctor in Scotland who wrote recently to the press: “Physician-assisted suicide: what a horrible term, that surely contravenes the very nature of a doctor’s calling. It is made no more acceptable by euphemistically using the term *Dying with Dignity*.” Apart from legalised physician-assisted suicide being the slippery slope to involuntary euthanasia, in God’s eyes it is no less self-murder because it has been assisted by a physician. And such a physician would be an accomplice in that murder. It is God’s inalienable right to bring life to an end, just as surely as it is His to bring it into existence. He declares, “See now that I, even I, am He, and there is no god with Me: I kill, and I make alive” (Deut 32:39). NMR

### **Call to Lower the Time Limit for Abortions**

Numerous calls to the UK government to lower the 24-week limit on “social” abortions have so far gone unheeded. The opinion submitted to the Commons science and technology committee on October 10 by “one of Britain’s most respected obstetricians”, Dr Vincent Argent, was that the limit should be reduced by eight weeks to 16 weeks. But he is not against abortion, and is in fact the former medical director of the British Pregnancy Advisory Service. However, pro-life activists are optimistic that this opinion, coming from such a source, will put significant pressure on the Government to change its mind.

While to reduce the limit would at least be a step in the right direction, it is imperative that the constant killing of unborn babies for so-called social reasons would come to a complete halt. May those who govern our nation realise that such inhumane legislation is not only barbarous but also breaks God's law and brings His holy displeasure on the nation. "Shall I not visit for these things? saith the Lord: shall not My soul be avenged on such a nation as this?" (Jer 5:29). NMR

### **The Darkness of the Brights**

A recent headline on a conservative Anglican website reads: "In Europe and US, non-believers are increasingly vocal". An indication of this fact is the growing prominence being given to the term *bright* as descriptive of non-believers – atheists, agnostics, skeptics, humanists and the like. Those who coined the term and founded the Brights movement in 2003 aim to change people's negative perceptions of atheists. They hope that the term *bright* will do for atheism what the term *gay* has done for homosexuality – make it appear innocuous and acceptable.

The Brights have atheists Richard Dawkins and Daniel Dennett as their most prominent publicists, and the movement is therefore receiving attention in some of the world's major newspapers. Leading members of the movement insist that they do not mean by the term "bright" that believers are less intelligent, but rather that Brights "tend to be a lot more intellectually honest". However, as such individuals blaze abroad their unbelief, they cannot hide their contempt of Christians and some of them have also been shown to be intellectually dishonest.

"For what if some did not believe? Shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect? God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar" (Rom 3:3,4). The Brights consider themselves to be enlightened but, sadly and solemnly, they are blind. "If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness" (Matt 6:23). NMR

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## **Church Information**

### **Ordination and Induction at Ingwenya**

We were thankful to the Most High that Rev A B MacLean's work permit was granted. This made it possible for him to encourage the Ingwenya congregation to proceed with their call to him.

On 12 June 2007 the Zimbabwe Presbytery appointed a meeting with the Ingwenya congregation on July 5, to moderate in the call to Mr MacLean.

On that day 40 communicants and 41 adherents signed a call to him to be their minister, with no dissents. The Presbytery was most willing to sustain the call and Mr MacLean indicated his readiness to accept it. It was then put into his hands. As the Presbytery had appointed July 13 for the Ordination and Induction, due notice was given to the congregation.

The pastoral charge of Ingwenya had been vacant since the retirement in February 2001 of Rev A B Ndebele on health grounds, following his road traffic accident in 1997. He had served faithfully as the congregation's pastor for many years.

The Presbytery then met on 13 July 2007 at Ingwenya. People came from different parts of Zimbabwe, in spite of the difficulties of obtaining transport in the country. Transport was arranged from the main centres of Mbuma, Zenka, Nkayi, Bulawayo and Zvishavane. Among us were Deputies from Scotland: Rev J MacLeod and Rev J R Tallach. There were over 1000 people present to witness the proceedings, including school children.

Public worship was conducted by Rev J MacLeod, who preached on Acts 26:22,23: "Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come: that Christ should suffer, and that He should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should show light unto the people, and to the Gentiles". He spoke on these points: (1) Paul is set before us as an example of a believer in Christ and a preacher of the gospel. (2) His doctrine. (3) His source of strength.

When public worship was concluded, the Moderator gave a brief narrative on the steps leading to this point. Then the appointed questions were put to Mr MacLean and he answered them appropriately and signed the formula in the presence of the congregation. He then kneeled down and the ministerial members of the Presbytery put their hands on his head. The Moderator prayed to the Head of the Church, ordaining Mr MacLean to the office of the gospel ministry. Then in the name of the Presbytery and by the authority of the Divine Head of the Church, the Moderator formally admitted Mr MacLean as pastor of the Ingwenya congregation. All the members of the Presbytery welcomed Mr MacLean among them with the right hand of fellowship.

Rev J R Tallach addressed the newly-inducted minister in suitable words. Rev P Mzamo then addressed the congregation appropriately as to their duties and privileges on having a minister settled among them. The Moderator read messages from the Sengera congregation in Kenya and from Rev J B Jardine, of the North Harris congregation, wishing Mr MacLean and the Ingwenya congregation the Lord's blessing. The meeting having ended with praise, Mr MacLean went to the door, where everyone had the opportunity

of shaking hands with him, welcoming him as the pastor of Ingwenya congregation. The congregation had prepared food for all, which was very much appreciated, especially by those who had come from afar.

We trust the Lord will bless Mr MacLean and his labours in Zimbabwe and the Church at large. "He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him" (Ps 126:6).  
(Rev) S Khumalo, Clerk of Presbytery

#### **Meeting of Synod**

The Synod of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland will meet on Tuesday, 13 November 2007, at 10 am, in the Inverness church, when the Moderator, Rev D A Ross, will conduct public worship.

(Rev) John MacLeod, Clerk of Synod

#### **Meetings of Presbytery**

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

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

**Outer Isles:** At Tarbert, on Tuesday, December 18, at 11 am.

**Skye:** At Portree, on Tuesday, February 5, at 11 am.

#### **Theological Conference**

This year's Theological Conference will be held, God willing, in St Jude's Free Presbyterian Church, Glasgow, on Tuesday and Wednesday, December 4 and 5. It is expected that the following papers will be read:

##### **Robert Bruce on the Lord's Supper**

*Rev David Campbell*

Tuesday 2.30 pm

##### **Law and Gospel**

*Rev J R Tallach*

Tuesday 7.00 pm

##### **The Divine Decrees**

*Rev H M Cartwright*

Wednesday 10.00 am

##### **Richard Baxter**

*Rev K D Macleod*

Wednesday 2.30 pm

##### **The Covenanters**

*Rev Roderick MacLeod*

Wednesday 7.00 pm

The paper on Wednesday evening is to be given in public.

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

#### **Urgent Need for Two Science Teachers at Ingwenya**

The Foreign Missions Committee is appealing for science teachers to work at John Tallach Secondary School in Zimbabwe. The school is short of two science teachers and there is no prospect of filling the vacancies locally. Applicants should have a degree which includes at least one science subject but a teaching qualification, while desirable, is not necessary. Those interest-

ed should contact the Clerk, Rev J R Tallach, Raasay in the first instance.

*(Rev) J R Tallach, Clerk of the Foreign Missions Committee*

### Electronic Subscriptions for Magazines

It has been decided that from January 2008 both Magazines will be available by e-mail, in pdf format, at the same time as the print editions. For 2008, these subscriptions have been set at £10 for *The Free Presbyterian Magazine* and £5 for *The Young People's Magazine*, reducing to £6 and £3 respectively for those who also subscribe to the print editions. Payment should be sent to the General Treasurer, 133 Woodlands Road, Glasgow, G3 6LE.

### Outreach Fund

By appointment of Synod, the special collection for the Outreach Fund, is to be taken in congregations in November. *W Campbell, General Treasurer*

### Mrs M Cartwright

We express our sympathy with Rev H M Cartwright, Edinburgh, on the sudden death of his wife Mrs Mina Cartwright on Saturday, September 22. We trust that the Lord will continue to uphold him in his sad loss.

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## Acknowledgement of Donations

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

*College & Library Fund:* A Friend, Newcastle, Ps 40:1-2, £40.

*Eastern Europe Fund:* Anon, for work in Ukraine, £25; Anon, Lewis, for Odessa Building Fund, £20.

*Jewish & Foreign Missions Fund:* For Israel: Anon, £25. The estate of the late M MacLeod, Fort William, £1000; Friend, Gairloch; £100 per JG; Mr N Pearce, Cymru, £117. For Mbumba volunteers project: Holland friends, €9995 per EVB; Holland friends, €35 000 per Mbumba-Zending Committee. H & M Cevik, London, £53.50; P Hoskins, Bournemouth, "To help believers in Zimbabwe", £50.

*Legacy Reserve Fund:* The estate of the late M MacLeod, Fort William, £1000; The estate of the late Mrs A MacGeddie, Tarbert, £2500.

*Congregational Treasurers* acknowledge with sincere thanks the following donations:

**Dingwall:** *Communion Expenses:* Anon, £40; K A, North Kessock, £40.

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

**North Harris:** *Congregational Funds:* DJG, £40; Mrs MacAskill, Glasgow, for minister's petrol, £40 per Rev JBJ.

**North Uist:** *Church/Manse Repairs:* North Uist Friend, £1000 per Rev DMD. *Communion Expenses:* Anon, Glasgow, £50.

**Portree:** *TBS:* Friend, for Bible distribution, £50.

**Raasay:** *Congregational Funds:* Anon, "In loving memory", £100; Anon, North Uist, £25 per Rev JRT.

**Santa Fe:** *Church & Manse Fund:* Various anonymous donations, \$3578; Chesley Friends, \$2361.70; Friend, \$101.

**Staffin:** *Jewish & Foreign Missions Fund:* CAF, £60.

**Stornoway:** *Communion Expenses:* Anon, £60, £20. *Congregational Funds:* C MacDonald, "For the Lord's Cause": £20, £25 per Rev DC, £29 per WMK. *Manse Expenses:* KMS, £160.