

A Lecture.

By the REV. D. MACFARLANE, Dingwall.

Delivered on Sabbath Evening, 16th September, 1906.

(Taken down by a Hearer.)

“Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building, fitly framed together, groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord; in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit” – Ephesians 2:19-22.

The apostle in this chapter describes the privileges that belong to God’s people – to believers. Notwithstanding what they were by nature – children of wrath, even as others – when changed by grace and reconciled to God through the death of Christ, they were accepted as if they had never sinned, and that because of the full satisfaction given to God by the work of Christ in their room and stead. If they did evil, He did good; if they deserved punishment, He bore their punishment; if they deserved to die eternally, He merited for them eternal life. To these privileges we desire to direct your attention for a little this evening; and we ought not only to attend to them as things that belong to others, but to seek that they should belong to ourselves. These privileges belong to all God’s people, whether Jews or Gentiles, white or black, old or young, wherever they are situated in this world. They are spoken of in two ways – *negatively* and *positively*.

(1) *Negatively*. – The first privilege here then, besides those mentioned in the eighteenth verse, is that they are no longer “strangers and foreigners,” for he tells them at the twelfth verse that such they were before they were effectually called – before they were saved. “At that time,” he tells them, “ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world.” They were outside those privileges before they were called by the gospel; and so we also, if we are made the children of God, were at one time outside these privileges, and were “strangers and foreigners.” There was not such a thing at all among them in their heathen state as any of the privileges that belong to God’s people. They had not the Word of God; they never heard of Jesus Christ, the Saviour; they knew not that they must be born again. They had not the means of grace; they were never seen as a people going up to God’s house to serve the living God, and to receive His blessing. They were strangers; and so are all who are in an unconverted state, even although they are in possession of the outward means of grace. Strangers may come amongst the inhabitants of a country, or into a family, occasionally, but they do not belong to that country or that family. People may come to the house of God occasionally, but still they are strangers, just as you may see strangers passing through the country, and calling at a house here and there, but they are none of those families. Sinners in a state of nature are strangers to themselves. This may appear wonderful but it is no less true. What is your age? Are you twenty years old, and yet you do not know yourself? Have you been, so to speak, twenty years along with yourself, and yet cannot tell your neighbour who you are? Then if you are still in a state of nature, you are also a stranger to God; you do not know Him. You are a stranger to the peace of God which passeth all understanding; you are a stranger to the experiences of God’s children; you are a stranger to spiritual things. You can understand natural things, but as to spiritual things, they are a mystery to you; they are hidden from you. All these things are true of many who have lived for scores of years in a gospel land from their youth upwards; they are strangers to

themselves; they are not yet convinced that they are sinners, that they are lost, that they are children of wrath, and they are strangers to God and to His Son, Jesus Christ. They know not in their own experience, nor in a saving manner, the way of salvation. If you ask some in Dingwall of the way of salvation, they will keep as far as they can from Christ's humiliation and death; they will say that God is merciful, that He never created man to cast him into hell, and that all will yet be saved. It is lamentable the ignorance of spiritual things that is to be found amongst people in possession not only of one copy but of many copies of God's Word. Believers, however, are not strangers; they know what it is to be born again. Then, also, they are not foreigners. You see, a foreigner is a person of another country who comes to this kingdom, but has none of the privileges of this country's citizens. So sinners by nature are outside the kingdom of Christ. Even in a gospel land this is true. Until you are born again – until you are found in Christ, not having your own righteousness – you are just like a foreigner who has no interest in a country he visits, at least, not so great an interest as the real natives of that country.

(2) Positively. – But then the apostle proceeds to speak of their privileges in a positive way. Not only are they not strangers and foreigners, but they are fellow-citizens with the saints. The Church of God is called a city, and the members of that church are citizens. One way of being a citizen is to be born in that city. Some have to buy the privilege of citizenship, but those born in the city are free; they are by nature citizens. So that those born in Zion, in the city of God, may say with Paul that they are freeborn, while another had to say that the privilege cost him much. A citizen is entitled to all the privileges common in a city; and, in like manner, there is not a blessing which God provided for His people but belongs to each and all who are born in Zion, and who are citizens of the city of God. All things are theirs; the gospel is theirs; Christ is theirs; the Holy Spirit is theirs; eternal life is theirs; all the blessings of Christ's purchase are theirs – not only the blessings they need for eternity, but also those of time – all things are theirs. They have a covenant right to the bread they eat, to the water they drink, to the raiment they put on – all temporal blessings necessary for their journey through the wilderness of this world have been secured to them at the expense of Christ's sufferings and death. Farther than this world they do not require those temporal privileges, and so Paul says, and says for the teaching of others, "Having food and raiment, let us be therewith content," for we shall soon be in a state where such are not necessary. He speaks now to Gentiles, to the Ephesians, who were worshippers of false gods and goddesses, who at one time cried, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!" but now they are changed – they are fellow-citizens with the saints. In the chapter which we have read (Ephesians, 3rd chapter), this is spoken of as a mystery, that the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs and of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ Jesus, by the gospel.

Again, the church is compared here to a house, and believers are of the household of God. They are members of God's family. Notwithstanding what these Gentiles were, and what all men are by nature, this is now their privilege. God has a family in this world. God's household is divided between earth and heaven. Paul, in speaking of the family of God, finds some of them on earth, others in heaven; but he never finds any of them in a third place. There are those who hold that some of God's people are in a middle state in eternity. Well, Paul knew of no such thing, and he knew the family of God better than any now living. If there are any of the human race in another place in eternity, they do not belong to God's family; they are of the devil's family; they are in hell. The Word of God is our rule and guide, and unless we hold views in accordance with Scripture, we are in error. The teaching of Scripture concerning the household of God is that there are some of them in heaven, the others on earth, and if there are others, they are still to be born into this world. This third part has not yet come into existence; but when they are born into the world, God will convert them, and bring them unto Himself, by regeneration and the new birth. The household of God

in eternity is to be found but in the one place – in heaven. We insist upon this point, my friends, the more because there is a time coming when the contrary error will be swallowed by the great majority in Scotland, and even in this town. “That is impossible,” you say. Well, when Dr. Kennedy was here, it was thought impossible that such a departure from truth could have occurred amongst those who sat under his ministry; thirty years ago it was considered impossible that the majority of his congregation could go over to another gospel, but still they did it; and some of them who at one time would have raised their voice against error, or any departure from Dr. Kennedy’s teaching, are now silent and dumb. One of the privileges of believers, then, is that they are regenerated by the Spirit, and born again into the family of God. They are of the household of God. God Himself is their Father, as we have been observing in the 18th verse, that through Christ we have access unto the Father by one Spirit, and they are His children. But in this world they are, as it were, in the nursery. Children, when but very young, are left in the nursery. Ah! if we be God’s children, we are as yet in the nursery; we crawl, we try to walk, we stumble many a time, and we need Christ, the Elder Brother, to raise us up.

In the house on earth, we are being prepared for the house in heaven, “the house not made with hands.” What expectation have you now in view of death? Have you any sure hope that you will be amongst those grown-up children – that you will join them in heaven? Well, before you can have any such hope, you must be of the household of God upon earth; and once you are a child of grace, that relationship is everlasting. In going to a foreign country, you can break many a tie, but you cannot break the relationship between you and your father. A boy going from Dingwall to America, sets a long distance between himself and his father, but all that distance does not affect their relationship. That relationship stands as surely in America as it did in Dingwall, and such is the case with the child of God; the relationship is everlasting. Perhaps you say, “Oh, that I had an assurance from God that I belong to His family on earth!” Well, have you any delight in God? Do you love Him? Are you grieved that you do not love Him as you would like? If so, that is something of a child’s spirit. There is such a thing as natural affection, and I may say that there is in God’s children a natural affection according to grace; they feel they are attached to God, although at times they cannot call Him their Father; still, their desire is after His name. There are many in this world, and that in the land of the Bible, who never examine themselves on this point. They go to eternity on a peradventure; but that is a most hazardous, a most dangerous thing. We ought to know who we are, whose we are, who is our father, and to which family we belong. Are we still of the old family of Satan, or have we been translated to the family of God, so that Paul might say of us, as he said of these believers, “Ye are of the household of God”? I have never, during my thirty years’ ministry, preached to a congregation in which I could not address some, at least, as the children of God, and it will be a sad day, if such a day should come, when, in my own poor way, I will address an assembly of immortal souls where there is not one of the family of God.

“Marvel not that I said unto you, Ye must be born again.” To be born again is not a shadow, not a picture – it is a reality it is a work of God in His people, which none but Himself can accomplish. We had no hand in our creation, and in like manner, and in a spiritual sense, “we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works.” You young people, what do you think about this matter? Do you put off this important matter until it is too late? Will you go unconverted to the grave? In a churchyard, you see many more graves of young people than you do of old people – more short graves than long ones – and some of these people put off the salvation of their souls until it was too late, and such as died in that state are lost. You are still left, and Christ appeals to you to come to Himself, that He may save you, and that you may become members of His mystical body, and of the household of God. Were it not for the power of spiritual death, no sinner could bear the

thought of being without Christ. Even a child of God is brought very low when he is in darkness about his state for one day, while others are in darkness about their state all their lifetime without any concern.

Another privilege belonging to God's people is that they are built on a sure foundation. The apostle compares the church of believers to a building. "Ye are built," he says, "upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets." What does he mean by that? I need not ask the question of God's people; they know what it means. Does it mean that believers rest upon an arm of flesh – on these good men, apostles and prophets? Ah! it does not mean that at all. What, then? It means that they rest upon the foundation set forth in the prophets and preached by the apostles. It was the same foundation of which both prophets and apostles spoke, and it is the same foundation we preach, so that it may also be said that believers are built upon the foundation ministers preach now. You may examine yourself on this. Read the writings of the apostles and prophets, and see in these that it is Christ Jesus, the Son of God, as Mediator, that is set before sinners as the only foundation. Now, these are said to be built, and this implies the work of another. It was God, by His Spirit, that laid them on this foundation – Christ. By faith they received Christ, but it was God's work to lay them on the foundation. It implies also that they are being built. The house is not yet complete: there are more stones to be put into the building. God at first called effectually many of the Jews, brought them out of a state of nature, and laid them upon this foundation. He then turned with the gospel to the Gentiles, and found many there, whom He laid on this foundation; and from that day to this the gospel has been preached to sinners. God needs stones for the building. It is not complete yet, but when it is complete – when the top-stone is put on the building – then the Bible shall be sealed. There shall be no more preaching, no Sabbath, no such thing as people coming to church. See then, my friends, that you have your place in the building, that you are on the sure foundation. The apostles and prophets never spoke of the work of man as a foundation, except in warning people against it as a foundation that would be swept away when the flood and the storm came.

Then the apostle speaks of Christ Himself as "being the chief corner stone," as well as the foundation. The use of a corner stone is to unite the building; and believers not only rest upon Christ as the foundation, and are united to Him, but they are also united to one another in Him. They are one building. There are many stones in a house, but the house is one; and so the church is one, though there are many members in it. In Christ all the building is fitly framed together, and groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord. The work of God in this spiritual building is a work that shall stand; it is fitly framed together – so firmly framed that it will never be broken to pieces again. It is different from the state of man at the first creation. Man was perfect then, but he fell from the estate in which he was created. But this building is fitly framed together in a different Covenant Head, the Lord from heaven, the second Adam; it will never break down. There is also life in this building. Where there is growth there is life. Even in the herbs of the field there is life, and therefore they grow. There is life in man, and he grows from childhood to manhood. And so from new-born babes the family of God grow up unto Him who is the Head, till they come unto the stature of a perfect man in Christ Jesus; and when they attain to that height, God removes them from the nursery, and sets them amongst His princes in heaven. The apostle now turns to those to whom he writes, and says, "In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the spirit." Ah! my friends, is this true of us? When we read in the Scriptures the privileges of God's people, that they are a building of God, can we apply this to ourselves? Ah! the day of trial will come – it is hastening on – but now is the day of our opportunity; this is "the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation."

This spiritual house is the habitation of God Himself. At the consecration of the temple, Solomon said that the heaven of heavens could not contain God, and how much less that

house which he had built? But what is really, outside heaven, the habitation of God? Ah, He says, "Though heaven is my throne, and the earth my footstool, yet I will dwell with him who is poor and contrite in heart, and who trembleth at my word." If you are a stone in this spiritual building, God dwells in your heart. He not only dwells in His church as a whole, but He dwells in the heart of every member of His church. What a wonderful thing, what a mystery it is, that God would create man to be a habitation for Himself, and when the house was destroyed by sin, that He would, of His own mere good pleasure, grace and mercy, begin to rebuild the fallen house, and to make it more beautiful and better in every respect than it was before it broke down! When God creates a person anew in Christ Jesus, it is with the object that He may dwell in his heart. I appeal to you, my friends, have you found God in your soul at any time? However it may be with you, it is true of believers, that God is not only above them in heaven, and around them – God is everywhere – but He is also in them; in a spiritual sense, He dwells in their souls. They are a temple of God, and so the temple was a type of Christ's human nature, and a type of the Church also.

In conclusion, let those who have received tokens that they are the children of God, walk carefully; let them not lose sight of their covenant with God; let them walk humbly; and seek to walk like Enoch and Noah, of whom it is written that they walked with God. Let them be afraid of sin outside themselves and of sin in their own hearts. God's people are making progress towards the heavenly Canaan, towards the house above; and there is nothing so dangerous to them as sin. The sinfulness of their nature makes them mourn like Ephraim of old, and they feel their need of the redemption wrought out by Christ. They appreciate the doctrine of salvation by grace. Speak to those who have found out their need of Christ, of salvation by grace, and they say, "Ah! there is no hope for us there." But preach to them salvation by grace, and they cry, with hope and joy, "I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of God." Let them glorify God with their bodies and spirits, which are His, and show forth the praises of Him who hath called them out of darkness into His marvellous light. The Lord add His blessing, and to His name be the praise. Amen.

[November 1906]

Brief Notes of Sermons.

By the late REV. FINLAY COOK, Reay.

Preached in Pulteneytown Free Church, Wick, on Thursday of
the Fast before Communion – 27th June, 1852.

["We regret that these Notes are so incomplete, but such as they are, they may be welcomed by our readers. – ED.]

I. – FORENOON.

“How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation” – Hebrews 2:3.

This day is set apart for fasting, humiliation, and prayer. We ought not to trifle with our privileges; we ought to seek some good to our souls. We ought to go to a throne of grace and confess our sins of omission and commission. But if we neglect the great salvation, all will be of little use at last. Those who trifle with their privileges, their bands shall be made strong. Some are as careless on these occasions as the brute animals, but I hope you will not be thus. Now, a Saviour is offered you; now, the chief of sinners is invited to come to Him for salvation. You were early devoted to the Lord in baptism; show this by your life and conversation, and seek to have the witness of the Spirit in yourselves.

The apostle warns us not to let slip “the things which we have heard.” He warns us not to let slip another warning, another promise, or another offer of Christ. We are ready to let the word come in at one ear and out at another. Christ’s teaching in His state of humiliation was, “Repent, and believe the gospel.” “Though heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle shall not fail, till all be fulfilled.”

I shall state some particulars about this salvation. When we speak of salvation, we must speak of a Saviour who procured salvation for sinners. For there is no other name given among men whereby we must be saved, but the name of Jesus. Then we shall speak of the application of this salvation.

Jesus is the Saviour of sinners. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” He sent His co-equal and co-eternal Son. You must consider Him as equal with the Father – as the self-existent, eternal Jehovah – the Creator and final Judge. But the Son had to assume our nature, and take unto Himself a true body and reasonable soul. The high and holy One humbled Himself to redeem them that were under the law. This Saviour, who humbled Himself, became a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. He was reproached and persecuted, yet He loved sinners, persecutors, enemies. He came under the curse that we might get the blessing – we, who despised the law and trampled it under foot. The curse was laid upon Him. If you keep Christ out of view, you will have nothing but heathen morality. Behold the Shepherd smitten with the arrows of justice by His own Father, by which a way of access is opened unto God through His flesh, and by faith in His blood. Paul speaks of “the Church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood”; and Peter says, “For you were not redeemed by corruptible things, such as silver and gold, . . . but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.” It is through this channel that all the blessings of the new covenant flow to the elect. On the Cross the ransom was paid, the satisfaction given; and now the offer is given freely and fully – “Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money, come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk, without money and without price.”

But the other side is *the application*. I would need to have the application myself. The “all things” are now ready. But it is the application that makes the distinction between the elect and the reprobate. “When the Spirit is come, he will convince the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment.” You may have head religion, but not a drop of grace, without this. You can never be a partaker of this salvation without the application of it by the Holy Spirit. But you must use the means of grace; it is the bucket you must bring to the fountain. Use all the means, but be not satisfied with the dead forms. Those who have tasted something of the love of Christ will go further than these, as the Church in the Song of Songs – “It was but a little that I passed from them (the watchmen), but I found him whom my soul

loveth.” Some dead, formal hypocrites have been praying for twenty or thirty years, and have not sought or got an answer yet. Days of preparation are set apart for the Lord’s Supper. Do not despise them; yet do not make merit of them.

The first thing here in the work of application is the quickening influences of the Spirit. He opens the understanding and the heart, and sets the glass of the holy law before your face. You will then see how black it is, and that will bring down your high looks. If the holy law condemns you before a throne of mercy and grace, how will you appear at a white throne of judgment? How will you stand there? When the law comes home, your language will be, “How can I be justified before a holy God?” Then the gospel comes in the offers of a Saviour. Oh, prize your privileges. The preaching of the gospel is the most precious thing on earth. Oh, how would a poor minister or elder rejoice to see a poor creature coming from the means of grace, concerned about his soul! There would be joy in heaven over him – over one sinner that repenteth. This is a feast when the soul is brought from darkness to light. This comes by hearing the gospel. “Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” Oh, you will be blessing the Lord that you have the opportunity of hearing the word. Others would rather something of the world, those who have their part and portion here. When the Spirit looses your bands you will sing a song of salvation to the Lord, seeing your enemies dead on the seashore.

Sinner, behold now the Lamb of God as the true and faithful witness of the great salvation. You must be born again, or you will never understand anything of this salvation, though you may have notions of it, as a blind man would have of colours. It is by faith that the soul is united to Christ. It must be “He in you, and you in Him,” or else be miserable through eternity. Be wise, my friends, sell all for the pearl of great price. It is here you are brought to a state of peace and reconciliation with God. Be not triflers or mockers, lest your bands be made strong.

Pray that He may be with us on this occasion. May He bless His word; and to His name be the praise!

II. – AFTERNOON. (Same Text.)

This salvation will occupy the attention of the redeemed through eternity. There is a height and a depth in it that passeth knowledge. Christ purchased salvation for us, and He is now exalted to make this salvation effectual. The Son glorified the Father on the earth, and the Father now glorifies the Son in heaven. When Christ shall appear again; then shall His people also appear with Him in glory.

Much depends on how you are exercised this day. Be thankful you were baptised, and are a member of the visible Church, but if you neglect this great salvation you will not escape. What is the good of this salvation to you or me unless it is applied by the Holy Ghost. Christ left the world as man, but His work is still going on in it by grace.

This is said to be a “*great* salvation.” It was a great God who purposed and planned it. He is a great King; we are worms of the dust before Him, crushed before the moth. It is with this God we have to do. He is the omniscient and omnipresent Creator. When you see God in the works of creation – sun, moon, and stars – you behold His wisdom and power; but when you behold His greatness in the work of redemption, oh, you will wonder at His infinite condescension, love, and kindness towards sinners. Some say that Christ died for all. It is true that all get good of Christ; even the atheist and the infidel have benefited by Him, and formal professors enjoy the privileges of His Church, though they will get hell at last. Some spend these advantages on their lusts. Oh, the privileges of the children of God! Justification and sanctification, grace and glory.

It was a great Saviour that purchased this salvation. Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. You will never see the glory of this salvation till you see Christ as the author of it, and be taught by the Holy Spirit, and get the effectual calling, whatever your talents, gifts, and learning. When Christ saw the Church as an infant cast out in the open field, He cast His skirt over it, and said "Live." If you have experienced this for yourself, everything you have and need is in the covenant, ordered wisely and well. "All things work together for good to them that love God, who are the called according to his purpose."

Christ sits upon the throne, and subdues sinners to Himself. When the love of Christ takes possession of a soul, it makes the son leave father and mother, and every other object, and say, "None but Christ! none but Christ!" So you see the greatness of this love. Seek to get an experience of it; be not satisfied with hearing about it. His name is the Lord, the Lord God merciful and gracious, long-suffering, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin. Seek to get into the refuge. The prodigal got the best robe in his father's house. The publican was justified, though he had nothing but sin. The children of Israel tempted Him forty years in the wilderness, yet He never said He was the God of the Egyptians. He leads the blind in a way that they know not. What a Saviour you have to do with!

What a great number will be around the throne of God and the Lamb! Seek you now to be among them, lest you be shut out from among them for ever. Every *impenitent* sinner, whether rich or poor, neglects the great salvation. There is no middle place – only heaven or hell. This is a solemn thing. Such cannot escape. Seek that the Lord would send out His light and truth. Whatever you know, if you do not know Christ and His salvation, what is the good of your knowledge? It will only be a candle to lead you to hell at last. Be not satisfied in your spiritual ignorance. Lastly, the prayerless neglect the great salvation, and if they continue so, they shall not escape the wrath that is to come.

[November 1906]

Notes of a Sermon.

Preached by the REV. DONALD BEATON, Wick,
As Retiring Moderator of Synod, in St. Jude's Hall, Glasgow,
on the 13th November, 1906.

"Turn, O backsliding children, saith the Lord, for I am married unto you; and I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion: And I will give you pastors according to mine heart which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding" – Jeremiah 3:14-15.

For the better understanding of the remarkable prophecies and warnings we have recorded in this book, it is necessary that we should recall the fact that the twelve tribes of Israel were now divided into two kingdoms. When Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, ascended the throne, Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, led the ten tribes in revolt against the house of Judah and from that day onwards the ten tribes were usually referred to as Israel or Ephraim. But Jeroboam not only led the revolt of the ten tribes and became King of Israel, but he set up idolatrous worship lest when the ten tribes went up to Jerusalem to worship that they would be influenced by their brethren to join with them. It was a subtle and cunning device, but it did its work admirably as far as Jeroboam's wish was concerned; but the verdict of the Holy Spirit on Jeroboam's conduct is that he made Israel to sin, and her idolatry became so great that the Lord gave her a bill of divorcement. This was intended to teach a solemn lesson to Judah, but she, while outwardly professing to be true to the worship of the God of Israel, was playing the part of a traitress, and the searcher of hearts told the prophet that even the "backsliding Israel hath justified herself more than treacherous Judah." Her treachery lay in this that she appeared in the guise of a friend, but acted as an enemy, for she had not turned with her whole heart, but feignedly to the Lord. But great though Israel's sin had been, that of Judah was greater still, because she was playing a hypocritical part, and to provoke Judah to godly jealousy the Lord addresses Israel, inviting them to come back to Him – "Return thou backsliding Israel, saith the Lord," and He graciously promises that He will not cause His anger to fall upon them, because He is merciful and does not keep His anger for ever. But if He on His side was to show mercy, He required of them an acknowledgment of their iniquity. Then He gives Israel another invitation accompanying it by gracious promises, "Return, O backsliding children, saith the Lord, for I am married unto you; and I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion: and I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding." In directing attention to those gracious words let us consider: –

- I. – The invitation to backsliding Israel;
- II. – The reason the Lord assigns for giving this invitation;
- III. – The promise accompanying the invitation.

I. – The invitation to backsliding Israel – "Return, O backsliding children."

It is an invitation to a backsliding people – to a people who had enjoyed great favours, and who had now turned their backs upon the God of Israel. The sin of backsliding is a sin of peculiar danger and subtlety. It begins in the heart though it afterwards shows itself in outward actions. The peculiar form in which it manifested itself in Israel was in idolatry. And were it not true that Scripture testifies that the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked, and that experience confirms this declaration, it would seem a thing almost incredible that a people who had been recipients of such wonderful favours should ever allow themselves to go to such excess in idolatry as Israel did. The sin of the children of Israel in setting up the golden calf tells that, notwithstanding the feelings of awe with which they had heard the thunderings of Sinai, they were prone to idolatry. And the people that sang so loudly the praises of Jehovah by the shores of the Red Sea, were now saying to the golden calf, "These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt." And even Aaron when he saw it built an altar. The sin of Israel in this matter is written with a pen of iron that coming generations might never forget the awful danger of this sin. The Lord had told them that no strange god was to be among them, neither were they to worship any strange god, but their wayward hearts showed continual propensity to idolatry until at last the long-suffering of the Lord had reached a limit beyond which He would not allow them to go without severe chastisement. He gave them unto their own heart's lust and they walked in their own counsels. And as they wandered far from Him, He chides them in words of infinite

tenderness, “Oh that my people had hearkened unto me, and Israel had walked in my ways! I should soon have subdued their enemies, and turned my hand against their adversaries.” Israel, now in the hour of their need, had forgotten that the Lord had been their Rock, and they went to Assyria and Egypt for help and looked to idols that were the work of men’s hands. The sin of backsliding may be almost imperceptible in its beginnings, but gradually the deadening of the affections, the cooling of the zeal that burned so vehemently to begin with, the listless indifference in which spiritual exercises are engaged, may tell all too plainly that the deadly canker has begun its work in the soul. The first wrong step may appear a very trifling matter, but if it is the first of a series that ends in the worship of the golden calf or the painful experience of Christian in the Castle of Giant Despair, then it is a matter of tremendous import to the believer. One might argue at great length and with uncommon skill about the dangerous step taken by Christian, but the good man at first might tell you that there was no use of making too much of the matter. But if you saw him in the Castle of Giant Despair, it would need no argument to convince him then how dangerous was the step that was the first in a series that led him further and further from the King’s highway. The heinousness of this sin is seen in the heartfelt confession of sin that follows when true repentance is given to the backslider.

It is to be further observed that the Lord addresses Israel as His children – backsliding children – but still children. The covenant relationship in which they stood to Him gave them a right to this honourable relationship. And the ingratitude of children – the children which He brought up and nourished, but who rebelled against Him is charged against them. He appeals to heaven and earth against them. “Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth, for the Lord hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me.” It is to these that He appeals and to whom He addresses the gracious invitation, “Return.”

To the penitent sinner it is a precious invitation and the gracious words that accompany it are words that are fitted to encourage. But what is really meant by returning to the Lord? It is a turning in which there is acknowledgment of sin and confession of iniquity. It is such a returning as a repentant sinner shows when under a “true sense of his sin and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, doth with grief and hatred of his sin turn from it unto God with full purpose of, and endeavour after new obedience.” It is to be carefully observed that our Shorter Catechism speaks of a true sense of sin – such a sense of sin as the psalmist had when he said: – “Against Thee, Thee only have I sinned and done this evil in Thy sight.” The psalmist’s sin may have caused a great deal of injury to his fellowmen, but when it is brought home to him it is to God he goes as the Being against whom he has sinned. But his confession does not end here, for he acknowledges his transgressions saying, “My sin is ever before me.” It was no general vague sense of sin that made him make the confession, for his words reveal how conscious he was of the particular sin – “my sin is ever before me.” And the psalmist’s sense of sin is further revealed by his willingness to submit to the sentence of the God against whom he has sinned – “That thou mayest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest.” But accompanying such a sense of sin in repentance unto life, there is an apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ Jesus. Not in the meaningless sense in which the world speaks of God being merciful, but God revealed by the Holy Spirit as a sin-forgiving God. The remarkable definition given by the Westminster Divines, so rich in its experience and careful statement of Scripture truth, is worthy of our most serious attention, but time forbids us to dwell longer on the exposition of its several statements. When Israel’s day of repentance came the Lord Himself, who promised to heal their backsliding and love them freely, fulfilled His gracious promise, and the language of Israel then was, “Asshur shall not save us; we will not ride upon horses; neither will we say any more to the work of our hands ye are our gods, for in Thee the fatherless findeth mercy.” Assyria (Asshur) and the help of

horses from Egypt and the idols to which they had looked in the day of their calamity all had failed, and now they see how unbelieving they had been. Many a strange wandering the backslider may have, but it is a beautiful sight to see him returning weeping, and out of a heart that has felt keenly the sin that has been committed, making this wonderful confession – “In Thee the fatherless findeth mercy.” For the condition of a child of God that has backslidden may well make him feel that he is fatherless. But in this invitation He reminds Israel of a covenant transaction, and this now brings us to the second point.

II. – The reason assigned for the invitation – “for I am married to you.” The closest relationship that exists among men on earth – the relationship of marriage – is often referred to in the Old and New Testament Scripture as the relationship which exists between the Lord and His people. Under the figure of the marriage covenant Israel is spoken of as married to the Lord, and her unfaithfulness to Him is compared to adultery – spiritual whoredom. This covenant which the Lord made with Israel in infinite condescension implies as an essential element in its true fulfilment, love to the Lord who entered into this relationship in His great mercy. And true love to God implies love to His commandments, but Israel acted a feigned part, and while she many a time professed much love, yet her heart went after her lovers. How often she went to Assyria and Egypt and the heathen nations from which she was too ready to learn their ways, and worship their gods! Those who are married to the Lord should never forget that it is required of them that they love the Lord. But this covenant relationship requires for its true fulfilment not only love, but obedience. The Lord is the head of His church, and the members of that church owe Him implicit obedience – an obedience that makes for the highest interests and eternal well-being of the individual. It is the new obedience of which the Shorter Catechism speaks, and is one of the signs of repentance unto life. It shows itself in an inward purpose of heart, accompanied by an outward endeavour; and this new obedience will seek conformity to His holy will as revealed in the Word of God, and the more this is realised the more submissive the believer will be.

It is further implied in the relationship in which the Lord stood to Israel, that she would be faithful to Him. But this is the testimony of the Lord concerning her: – “Surely as a wife treacherously departeth from her husband, so have ye dealt treacherously with me, O house of Israel.” Israel’s infidelity to her God became at last so outrageous that He gave her a bill of divorce, and she became then the prey of the heathen nations, after whose gods she lusted. When she saw idols of wood and stone, she bowed down to them and served them, and forgot the Lord God who was her husband. And in Israel’s spiritual whoredoms and treachery we have a picture of the human heart. How powerful are the influences alluring us to the worship of our idols, and how treacherous are our hearts! And though every believer knows, in a more or less degree, that fidelity is required of him, how often has he to lament that his idolatries are the cause of his dispeace, and that the Lord has justly been displeased with him. It remains now for us to consider: –

III. – The gracious promises accompanying the invitation – “I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and bring you to Zion; and I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding.” Israel’s sin was exceedingly great, but the Lord’s mercy was abundantly sufficient to cover their transgressions when they returned to Him. They had been scattered as a punishment for their idolatries, but now He promises them that though there be but one of them in a city He will bring them back from the land of captivity; and with weeping and supplications will they come, showing the genuineness of their repentance. Their case may have appeared hopeless, but when the Spirit of the God of Israel began to work in the hearts of the captives it moved them to tears, and they returned to Him with supplications, saying: “Behold, we come unto Thee; for Thou art the Lord our God.” And the Lord was to bring them to Zion – the Zion which they loved so

well; for in the land of captivity, where they hung their harps upon the willow trees, they gave expression to the feelings of their hearts: "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy." They went away from Zion and the worship of the God of Israel, but they were brought weeping as they came; and how pleasant would the tabernacles of His grace be to the people that came back from captivity to Zion, the city of their holy solemnities. There is nothing impossible with the Lord when He begins to work. His Holy Spirit is omnipotent, and He can change our idolatrous hearts and make us fear the Lord God, and to weep for our sins in departing from Him. But the Lord is not only to bring Israel back; He is to provide pastors after His heart to teach them knowledge and understanding. Their teachers formerly had been treacherous; and between lying prophets and priests who were chief in the trespass, it would have been a miracle if the people had not been led astray. It may suit some to say that if a church has sound principles that is the main thing; but there is no use hiding from ourselves that one of the greatest curses God sends upon a church is to give treacherous persons for her teachers, as, on the other hand, one of His greatest blessings is to send pastors after His heart who shall feed the people with knowledge and understanding. Who can tell what an inestimable blessing Christ has conferred upon a congregation when He gives a pastor after His own heart – one jealous for the honour and glory of the God of Israel; one who will sanctify the Lord God in his own heart, and before the people to whom he ministers. Happy, indeed, are those his servants who hear from his lips the words of wisdom that will build up the saints and edify the Church of God. To such as these, who are in the secret presence of the Most High, they will bear the impress of the responsibility they feel as they plead with their fellowmen to be reconciled to God through Christ. Others may allow themselves to trifle with matters that affect the eternal destinies of their fellow-sinners, but they lay to heart the words of the apostle, "Moreover, it is required in stewards that a man be found faithful." These pastors after God's heart were to feed the captives, who had returned, with knowledge and understanding. And the beginning of all true knowledge is the fear of the Lord. And however useful human knowledge may be in its own sphere, the true pastor after God's heart will be desirous, above all things, that his people be taught the fear of the Lord, which is the beginning of heavenly knowledge. And he will further teach them that to depart from evil is understanding. These instructions, accompanied by the Holy Spirit, will make them that will not be unfruitful. Thrice happy are the people to whom God has given pastors after His heart, who are feeding them with knowledge and understanding. It is such a provision as this that will make His saints shout aloud for joy.

[December 1906]

Notes of a Sermon.

By the late REV. D. MACDONALD, Shieldaig.

"The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runneth into it
and is safe." – Proverbs 18:10.

THE Lord Jesus has many names in Holy Writ. When you mention the names of warriors and patriots, the great things which distinguished them, present themselves to the mind. When you mention the name of the sun, you think of his beauty, his light, his heat, that he alone keeps the visible world in existence, and that without him the world would come to nought. In speaking of this "tower" which is Jesus Christ, it may be remarked that when one begins to make a building, he first draws the plan. The plan of this "tower" was drawn in the mind of God from all eternity, – Christ set apart for the salvation of His Church. The

humanity of Christ is built upon the attributes of God, the human nature being assumed by the divine.

I. It is said that this tower is *strong*. Christ was strong as God. It is the test that is put upon any one that proves his strength. God is strong to defend His glory, His law and rights. Some kings are imposed upon, and they have no strength to oppose their oppressors. Their laws are disobeyed and their properties illegally taken away. But that is not the case with God; He is strong, being possessed of omnipotent power. All other powers have received their power from Him. When the old world rebelled against Him, and trampled upon His law, He proved His strength by destroying them and sweeping them away with the flood from the face of the earth. He was strong in reducing the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes.

Christ was strong in creating the world by the Word of His power – when He called forth the heavens, earth and sea, garnished the heavens with lights, and filled the earth and sea with all kinds of creatures, and continues to regulate them by His unerring wisdom. The planets revolve upon the palms of His hands.

This tower is not only strong as God, but as man. There was no access to this tower for sinners of mankind except by a human nature, and so the divine nature had to come to borrow materials from the human in order to accommodate the human race. The Lord prepared for Him a body. This tower was tried in His human nature and proved strong. He was besieged by strong powers. All the powers of the world tried to pull Him down, – kings, princes, and the lower orders. Satan tried Christ, and instigated all human powers against Him, but they could make nothing of Him. They have tried Christ in His people also. But still Christ in His kingdom is increasing in strength. He must reign till all His enemies are made His footstool.

Death has a universal sway in this world, and is a powerful king, but Christ is stronger than he: He has deprived him of his power by restoring the dead to life. The grave has kept so many under its sway, and is not yet satisfied, but Christ mocked its power, and rose after conquering it. He has the keys of death and hell, and at the judgment day shall denude it of all its power.

There are objects, to which your hearts warm, when you hear their names mentioned, on account of their excellence. The name of Christ is very sweet to a believer. Just as the sun warms the earth, so does Christ cheer and kindle the grace of love in the heart. The sun brings alive; so does Christ; it was He that imparted life to the believer. The sun gives heat; Christ warms the heart with love to God and man. The sun directs by his light; Christ enlightens the heart, preserves the soul from danger and leads it in the right way on to glory. The sun makes fruitful; Christ makes the souls of His people fruitful in love, faith, and self-denial. The sun cheers when he rises, dispelling darkness; Christ cheers the heart, when He begins to shine in the promise. The sun is full of light and cannot be scanty, but continues to give light on account of the abundance that is in him. Christ is full of all blessings, and continues to bestow them abundantly upon His people, to perfect their happiness for time and eternity. The sun sometimes becomes eclipsed. Christ hides His face from His people, and leaves them in darkness. When they commit sin, He frowns, chastises, and leaves them in darkness. As the tears of repentance are shed, He breaks in again upon them with the light of his countenance, dispelling their darkness, and as a father comforts his children, He comforts them, renewing His love and giving them proofs of His close relationship to them, as was done to the prodigal son. When He thus entertains them, their love and gratitude know no bounds.

There are other towers to which men flee that they may be saved from the wrath of God, such as the works of the law. They substitute these for the work of Christ. They clothe themselves with their own righteousness. But the law of God and the sword of justice shall prove to them that this refuge is not a strong tower, when they shall be taken out of it and destroyed. Almsgiving, voluntary humility, attending upon the means of grace, and partaking of the sacraments are towers which sinners make their refuge, but death shall pull them down

to the ground, and their inmates shall be put to the sword of God's justice. Millions make a strong tower of confession to the priest and think that he can forgive their sins, when they should confess their sins to God only in Christ's name, who can alone forgive, and save us. Episcopalians make a strong tower of baptism, and think that they are renewed in it, and have their sins washed away; circumcision availeth nothing. The Jews made a strong tower of the patriarchs, who were a blessing in the Church in their day, but Christ must be the Saviour and pattern of the believer. He has left us an example to follow Him. The Jews also laid great stress upon circumcision. But all these towers proved ineffectual to save a sinner. The Scribes and Pharisees were very zealous following the traditions of the fathers, so that they found fault with Christ Himself. But O! what a weak tower to protect a soul from the punishment of sin after death. Some under the gospel make it their tower or hope of heaven, that their parents were pious. Absalom had a very pious father, David, but he could not impart his own good qualities to him. Piety is not hereditary, and those that trust to the piety of parents or relatives as a ground of their hope for eternity shall find that the floods and storms shall rage against their house, built upon the sand, and that it shall have a tremendous fall at death. The tower of Babel was strong, but it fell, and the builders were confounded, as they attempted to reach heaven with it. Everyone who attempts to reach heaven with their building apart from Christ as a foundation, shall be confounded at death. The temple at Jerusalem was the most magnificent in the world, but enemies have not left a stone of it. There have been many towers in our land, but the rude hand of age has denuded them of their beauty and laid them in ruins. There is no trace of their inmates. But Christ, the strong tower, can never be taken by enemies, and those that have fled to Him for refuge since the time of Abel to this moment are quite safe and perfectly happy within Him. Christ can never become old; from everlasting to everlasting He is the strength of His people, and is a treasure house of blessings to make them happy and blessed.

II. "The righteous runneth into it and is safe." All are dead in the first Adam. A dead man is insensible of his danger. Do to him what you like, – he cannot flee. They must hear the voice of the Son of man. Christ's voice conveys conviction of sin and light. Then the sinner awakes as a dart of light enters the dungeon of his heart, and he finds himself in Satan's arms, condemned by the law of God, and void of God's image. He sees how Satan was deceiving him when tempting him to live in sin, pretending to be his friend, when tempting him to gratify his lusts, so as to prepare him for hell. Then he awakes to a sense of his danger, and he begins to abhor sin, Satan, and foolish companions. Christ takes out the heart which was hard, and a nest of serpents, evil spirits and lusts, and gives him a new heart. Seeing the suitability of Christ as a sacrifice dying in their room, such souls flee to Him, and the face of their hope is towards Him, and the face of their thoughts and affections. For what have they fled to Him? They have fled for mercy and salvation – to secure shelter from the wrath and curse of the law of God, to have their sins washed away in Christ's blood, to be clothed with his righteousness, to become His members and adopted children, to know Him and worship Him, to enjoy His face and to be enriched with spiritual supplies out of His fulness.

Those who "run" to this refuge will not be asleep in unconcern about their souls, or have their souls absorbed in worldly objects. They do not run slowly, but flee as for their very lives. When "the avenger of blood" was pursuing, the pursued would require to flee with all his might. A sight of the avenger and the sword would make him flee. They flee with the tears of repentance, with a broken heart, with much darkness, mourning their miseries. The curse of the broken law and his officers took them by the throat to be destroyed. They flee to Christ to pay the debt and to set them free. Christ sets all free from condemnation who flee to Him – Romans 8:1. They flee in order that their conscience may have peace. They flee to be washed in Christ's blood, and take shelter in the wounds of the nails and the gash the spear made in His side, that they may get peace from the terrors of the fiery wrath of God. Christ

receives them with open arms and open breasts and allows them to drink of the water of life freely, and they become united to Him, embracing Him by faith. As stones are quarried, polished, and placed upon the foundation, so are believers whose hope is fixed upon Christ and His finished work for time and eternity; they are quarried from their natural state through the blasting of the fire of the law, and polished by the Spirit – Ephesians 2:18. They are united to Christ through faith, and cemented together in love. The head of this tower is in heaven, where His gracious presence is immediately enjoyed by the Church triumphant. The Church militant enjoys glimpses of His presence here. In the midst of storms and floods blowing from hell, sin and the world, Christ in good time draws nigh, making the glory of His power and love manifest in quelling the storms and floods that threaten to drown them, as He did to the disciples, when He came walking upon the sea, giving them always additional proofs of His love and affection towards them.

III. The wicked will not flee to this tower. Being dead in sins, they do not feel their need of fleeing to Christ. When people are very fond of their companions, and long with them, they do not like to leave them and follow others. Men by nature are much taken up from their infancy with the world, with the carnal mind and Satan. Satan gives them plenty of pleasures congenial to their carnal minds so as to keep them from fleeing to Christ. But when death comes, they shall regret their folly. When they are in hell they cannot flee to Christ.

“To-day, if you will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.” If you come, there is room in this tower, and plenty of Joseph’s goods to make you comfortable. There was no room in the Ark, when the flood came; there was no room in the Temple for the Gentiles, till the veil was rent. There is room through the rent body of Christ. There is an eternal feast going on in this Temple; Christ is their food – His glory as God-man. The blessings they possess in His company shall ravish their hearts with indescribable joy.

[January 1907]

Notes of a Sermon.

By the late REV. JOHN KENNEDY, D.D., Dingwall

(Hitherto Unpublished.)

“Yet have I set my King upon my holy hill of Zion” – Psalm 2:6.

This Psalm is divided into four parts, each consisting of three verses. In the first part we see the heathen and the people, the kings of the earth and the rulers, rising in their rage against the Lord and His anointed. In the second, appears Jehovah sitting and treating with derision the impotent wrath of men, and high over all their rebellious uprisings constituting Messiah King upon His holy hill of Zion. In the third, the King of Zion speaks from His throne, declaring Jehovah’s decree announcing Him to be the Son, and pointing to a day when there was a manifestation of His eternal Sonship. That day was the day of His actual enthronement in human nature by His resurrection and ascension. He declares that He was allowed to ask and would receive the heathen for His inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for His possession. And His power is sufficient to secure this, for as “with a rod of iron” He shall break them all and “dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel.” How terrible in this aspect seems His reign! But let us not forget that, as given to Him, they were all hostile, actually in revolt. Nations, as such, shall be broken out of their form, and a reconstruction of

their broken pieces shall take place, and as to individuals, by the word of His mouth shall He break them in pieces, that He may heal all who will not finally be utterly destroyed. In the fourth part, kings and judges are addressed. They are subject to Jehovah's king who is the Son, and they are called to serve the Lord and to kiss His Son – His King. And they are solemnly assured that if they refuse to submit to Messiah, they shall utterly perish. How fitting a *finale* to all this is the declaration, "Blessed are all they that put their trust in him!"

The text is at the beginning of the third part of the psalm, "Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion." In this announcement all who love God and His anointed must rejoice. Over all who are rebelling against God, on earth and in hell, is one set as king in whose hand the pleasure of Jehovah shall prosper. How sweet to every lover of God ought the rest, given by this assurance, to be! And to every lover of Messiah, how glad this announcement! When he thinks of His divine glory as the eternal Son, and of His human nature subsisting in its perfect beauty in His divine person, where but on the throne would he wish to see Him? And when he thinks of what He was in Bethlehem, in Nazareth, on the hillsides of Judea, shelterless and amidst the people despised and persecuted, of His agony in Gethsemane, and His reproach before ungodly courts, and of the shame and agony of His death on Calvary, and of His burial in the grave of Joseph, how well-earned does the lover of Christ count His place upon the throne! And the children of Zion must rejoice in their King. For them He reigns, and amongst them He dwells. All His wisdom, grace, and power are pledged to make His reign effective for their good, and let all who love the nations be glad. True, they must join trembling with their mirth as they think of the destruction of rebellious men and peoples by His rod of iron, but let them join mirth with their trembling, as they think of the time when all nations shall yield to His sway as the Prince of Peace, and the earth shall be filled with knowledge and resound with His praise.

It is Jehovah who speaks in the text, Jehovah the Father as representing the Godhead. It is of His anointed He speaks – of the Son as Mediator. Him the Father constitutes King; He is *His* King. All the reins of the divine government are in His hands; and by divine appointment and as associated with God, because Himself divine, He reigns. And He is set upon the hill of Zion. That is God's hill. It is a hill of holiness as it is set apart for the residence and service of God. Messiah is King upon it, because it is placed under His kingly protection and sway, and because He dwells there as nowhere else in all His dominions. The place is in Zion.

This is in Old Testament language the doctrine taught us in such New Testament words as "head over all things to the Church." It is quite true that there is a peculiar relation to the Church as His mystical body which Christ sustains as King. But the visible Church is also peculiarly related to His reign, as distinguished from the world. The visible Church is the organisation set up for the spiritual edifying of His body; it is a society in the midst of which His spiritual people are, and separate from the world by the common profession of its members, as claiming to be the people of the Lord. In behalf of the Church in that aspect of it, He specially reigns, and in this mixed community, there is a special presence of this King. But while this is true, it is just as true that His dominion extends beyond the Church. "All power in heaven and earth is given" unto Him. All nations are subjected to His sway. Kings and rulers are required to submit to Him. All the powers of darkness are subject to Him. "All things are put under Him." And it is manifest that it is because He is King of Zion that this universal dominion is given Him. He is "head over all things to the Church." He hath "power over all flesh" that He may "give eternal life to as many as" the Father gave Him. It is to Him who is set upon the hill of Zion kings and judges are called to submit. It is the King of Zion who is King of nations. And it is because He is King of Zion, this universal government has been given Him. True, this universal government is natural and necessary to God. Apart from the mediation of Messiah, there must have been this government. But it is quite as true that all this government has been given over to Messiah's hands as mediator. As mediator the Son

exercises this divine, natural, necessary government of all; and it is because He is the mediatorial King of Zion, and in order to the fulfilment of God's purposes bearing on His Church, that this power is now given into His hands.

We are therefore required to consider in connection with the enthronement of Christ in Zion: –

I. – How the Church stands related to this King;

II. – How the kingdom of Christ in Zion stands related to the powers outside the Church.

- I. – The Church is so related to this King, that,
first, she must be regulated solely by His will;
secondly, that she is specially under His protection; and
thirdly, that she may be honoured and benefited and gladdened by His presence.

1. The will of Christ must be the law of the Church. If He is king by divine appointment, and if He who is appointed King of Zion be himself the Son, surely the Church must take her laws from Him alone. This is surely sufficiently plain to require no proof. And He has issued a statute book. The Bible is the book of His statutes, and the Church has received it. She has access to an open Bible in which all the laws of her King are clearly revealed. She needs no directions beyond those which are there given her. At all times, and in all circumstances, there is enough to guide her in the Scriptures.

And *He can guide her*, according to His Word. The Church needs this guidance, and Christ can give it. By His Spirit, He can dispose and enable the Church to know and to walk according to His mind in the Word. His glory as King demands this. He must surely have the power to make His reign efficient. Needs His Church aught besides His Word and His teaching in order to her work being regulated according to His mind? What infidelity is at the foundation of all Erastianism! Civil rulers claim the control of the affairs of the Church, and on what ground, except such as implies unbelief in the efficiency of Christ's government by His Word and Spirit? Christ is ignored as King of Zion. His laws are set aside as if without authority, and the idea of His Spirit's power and presence scouted and ignored.

2. The Church is specially under the wing of His protection. O, were it not so, how long would a Church survive on this earth! The presence of His Church on earth is intolerable to all that is in the world, and to all that is from hell on earth. It is only by ceasing to be what a Church should be that she ever becomes tolerable to the enemies of God and His anointed. But under Christ's wings she can be protected. How much is being done by the great enemy, sometimes as a roaring lion, at other times as an angel of light! Sometimes he seeks to devour, at other times to ensnare. Sometimes the spirit of error, other times the spirit of persecution, and again at other times the spirit of licentiousness, is at work. How could the purity, the stedfastness, or even the existence of the Church be preserved, if Christ were not King of Zion. If there is a Church on earth, it is only because of the reign of Him whom Jehovah set as King upon His holy hill of Zion.

3. His presence in Zion may be enjoyed. Not all who are in the visible Church enjoy this privilege, but all the true children of Zion do. All who were born of God in Zion, and have, in the right of Christ, the status of citizens there, do enjoy the honour, the privilege, the blessedness of His presence. He can by His Spirit, visit them; He can, by His Word and Spirit make Himself known to them; He can speak to their hearts; He can bring them near to Himself; He can cause them to embrace Him and find rest in Him. He can delight them with His beauty, constrain them with His love, guide them by His light and truth. They have at times such views of His glory as abase them before Him; at other times such impressions of His Word as do them good; and at other times, they can sing in His ways and in hope of His glory.

II. – We must consider the relation of the kingdom of Christ in Zion to the powers outside. The very position of the text demands this. On one side we see the people and their rulers rising in rebellion against God and His Christ, and on the other side, we see nations given over to His hand, smitten by His rod of iron. How do He and His Church stand in relation to these powers outside Zion?

1. What is Christ's relation to the kingdoms of this world?

(1) It is such that they are subjected to His sway;

(2) That He is to exercise power over them with a view to the fulfilment of God's pleasure in reference to the Church.

(1) Subject to His sway. "By him kings reign." Since, in a certain sense, civil government is founded on nature, according to the normal state of things, in relation to God, there must be a civil government administered under God, and were there no Mediator and no Church there would be this. But while it is true that civil government is thus of God as God, all control of that government has been given to Christ as mediator, so that by Him "kings reign and princes decree justice." This authority as Mediator over kings and nations Christ hath because He is King of Zion. To the Mediator who is King of Zion they are all subject.

(2) He exercises His power over them with a view to the fulfilment of God's purposes bearing on His Church. The effectual calling, the edification and glorifying of His people, the confusion of all their foes, and the manifestation of His own glory in and through all – these are the ends to be answered by the exercise of Christ's power. Let these unquestionable Scripture truths be kept carefully in view.

2. How stands the Church related to "the powers that be," to civil rulers? The relation must be such that she ought not to be enslaved or ignored, but rather acknowledged and aided. This is the important practical question. This is the question of the times.

(1.) The Church must not be enslaved by civil rulers. Her province is distinct from theirs. Her work within that province is well defined. Over her in that province there is but one Head, the King of Zion, and in all her work, His Word must be the only rule. No power hath a right to interfere between her and Christ. Christ gave no such right. True, in civil matters, the members of the Church are in subjection to "the powers that be." It is Popery to claim exemption from this. And no power is qualified to interfere. Is it likely that civil rulers know better than the Church what the mind of Christ is? If they have neither the right, nor the qualification to interfere, on what ground can Erastianism be justified? Just think of ungodly men acting as patrons, pretending to know better than the Church who are to be pastors of the flock. And think of a conclave of judges, who may never have spent one earnest hour in studying the Word of God, controlling and reversing the action of the Church in spiritual matters.

(2.) The Church must not be ignored. Civil rulers are not to act as if the Church had no existence, as if they had only to let it alone. This is very evident from their relations to Christ and to each other under Him, from the divinely sanctioned conduct of civil rulers in days of old, and from the prophecies of God's Word bearing on the Church and civil rulers in the New Testament times.

(1) From their relation to Christ. Both are under subjection to Him. From Him the Church derives its functions as "the pillar and ground of the truth," and its power of "the keys." As already stated, by Him "kings reign and princes decree justice." The right of government over the nations, wherewith Christ is invested, He hath, because He is King of Zion, and He hath, in order to Zion's protection and prosperity. Is it likely that He would delegate power to civil rulers, that can be legitimately employed without reference to the Church, or in a way that practically ignores its existence? Christ's own mediatorial kingdom

over the nations, He hath, with a view to the Church's weal, and is the power He confers to be used with no bearing on that end? It is monstrous to suppose this.

(2) From their relation to each other. They are separate and distinct, but they are at any rate neighbours. The Church is a benefit to the nation, and apart from its influence on their views and habits, there is no guarantee for a right social condition of the people. The nation must owe much to the Church. And is there to be no acknowledgment of this? Is there to be no return for this boon? The Church, by doing its work within its own sphere, proves a blessing to the nation, and shall not civil rulers, acting within their own sphere, reciprocate? Their very neighbourhood, as well as their delegation to consider above all the honour of Christ in the prosperity of His Church, lays them under obligation to see to it that the Church is acknowledged and supported.

(3) There was a divinely sanctioned acknowledgment of the Church by civil rulers in Old Testament times. There was nothing then in the relation of Church and State to Christ to make their mutual obligations exceptional and temporary. Their several provinces were distinct as now. The king who ventured then to do the priest's work was smitten with judgment, and yet so was the king who refused to countenance and aid the Church.

(4) The Word expressly declares that "the nation and kingdom that will not serve" the New Testament Church "shall perish" – Isaiah 60:12. Not "the nation" only, as if it referred only to the conduct of the people, but "the kingdom" also, referring to the civil government. This, of course, is no warrant for the pretensions of Popery, claiming as it does for the Church the government of the nations, but it does declare the certain destruction of all peoples and governments that shall not countenance and aid the Church. And the idea of "the earth helping the woman" is not an Old Testament one merely.

The New Testament directions as to the mode of supporting a gospel ministry furnish no argument against a State endowment of the Church. The general condition of the New Testament Church made such directions seasonable, and in any circumstances the free-will offerings of the members of the Church ought to be required and used. And the abuse of this, which has been so often made, furnishes another instance of the contempt that has nowadays been shown towards Old Testament teaching. All that is not expressly abrogated in the authorised practices of Churches and nations in days of old, is, and must be, still binding. To desiderate express sanction in the New Testament for all that would be regarded as binding on the conscience is to cast contempt on the Scriptures of the Old Testament, and utterly to repudiate their authority.

Such I hold to be the doctrine of this Psalm regarding the reign of Christ in Zion and over the nations, and such I hold the testimony of our Church to be. It is because I regard it as Scriptural that I care to hold it. I believe that it has been given to our Church by the Lord, and that, as to a Church of old, so to her, He saith, "Hold that fast which thou hast that no man take thy crown." The Lord, in the light of His Word, and by the working of His providence, defined the position He assigned to our Church in 1843. It lies between that of a Church which consents to be enslaved, and a Church which refuses to be established. To move towards either side is to abandon the post which has been assigned to her. So long as the Established Church is under the accursed yoke of patronage [This sermon was preached before the abolition of Patronage in the Established Church, and about the beginning of the old Union negotiations with the U.P. Church.], and so long as she refuses to assert her right to spiritual independence, and until that right is conceded by the State, union with the Established Church is an unlawful alliance. Nor is it a call from heaven that invites her to the other side.

True, her main testimony was that on behalf of right to spiritual independence. But what was the nature and form of that claim? Did the Church concede that she must receive her right to that independence of civil control, from the State? Verily no; she maintained that her right was given her by her glorious King. She insisted that whether the civil rulers of this

country acknowledged or disallowed it, it was already hers from Him by whom all kings reign and princes decree justice. Did she claim from them the right to act in loyalty to Christ, in the face of all the trials which she might have to endure? Verily no; this she had as made free by Christ, and this she could have in spite of all the powers in earth and hell. This had Daniel in the lions' den as surely as when a prince in the palace of the king. The right to act according to conscience no power could deprive her of; and the resolution so to act in the face of all opposition only the grace of God could give her. But what she claimed was the right of exemption from all interference with her, while acting according to the will of Christ within her own province. This she claimed on the ground of her being a Church of Christ, constituted by Him to do His work, according to His laws on earth. She demanded to be acknowledged by the State as a Church of Christ exclusively occupying the spiritual province, and therefore entitled to do the will of Christ within that sphere.

And she claimed this in terms of a special settlement between the State and the Church in Scotland. She acknowledged the lawfulness of such a compact as had been formerly entered to, and of an alliance, according to such a compact, between the Church and the State. Her very position was an acknowledgment of this. She disowned and refused any alliance that would enslave her, but she claimed, in the name of Christ, and in terms of previous compact, such an alliance as would consist with liberty to act according to the will of Christ.

Is it lawful to abandon that position? Has not our Church a testimony to raise in behalf of Christ's supremacy before the State, as well as to her own members? Does not the honour of Christ demand this? Can she do so, if she occupies the same platform with those who will allow no statutory acknowledgment of the Church and repudiate all aid from the State? Is she to cease to tell the rulers that it is a sin not to support, without enslaving the Church of Christ? Was she once entitled to do so, and has her King now called her to be silent? What was duty in 1843 is duty now. Is there less done now than then to the dishonour of Christ? Is Christ less worthy now than then of all that was claimed in His name? If we think not so, let us hold fast our testimony. He is, I fear, coming to settle long-standing controversies with our guilty land. We have had our period of quiet. Not long did such a respite ever last. The nations are waxing wanton in their forgetfulness of Christ's supremacy. Nor is ours an exception. Our rest may soon be broken. The chariot wheels may as yet be unheard, and the glare of the flame of His anger may as yet be unseen. But judgment's visits take individuals and nations by surprise. Blessed, in prospect of Britain's morrow, is the Church or the individual found faithful when He cometh!

"There is a great talk nowadays of union," Spurgeon says in a recent sermon. "The walls of the various Churches are to be broken down, and the denominations are to be blended. Think not of it in such a fashion; the only union possible or desirable is that we all unite to sit at Jesus' feet. It is not allowable that we concede one truth, and you, another. That is not Christian charity, but common treason to Christ. We have no right to yield an atom of the truth of God, under the pretence of charity. Truth is no property of ours; we are only God's stewards, and it behoves us to be faithful to our trust. Neither one Church nor another has any right to abate its testimony one jot, if it be true. To alter the statute-book of Christ is blasphemy."

[February 1907]

Notes of a Sermon.

By the late REV. LACHLAN M'PERSON, East Williams, Ontario, Canada.

[Mr. M'Person was one of the two ministers who protested against the Union of the Churches in Canada in 1875.
– See Magazine, December, 1902, and November, 1903: – Ed.]

“And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil” – John 3:19.

The greatest wonder that ever was heard of is this – that light should ever have come into this dark world. This is the greatest mercy that the world could ask for – the greatest good that could be done to it – and yet this is the thing which the world feels least thankful for, the thing which, more than anything else, it lightly esteems. This is proof enough of the world's badness, and also sufficiently shows the justness of its condemnation.

- I. – This world is in a wretched and deplorable state by nature – it is in *darkness*;
- II. – The light that has come into it, to remove its darkness;
- III. – The *choice* men make between the two – they love darkness rather than light.
- IV. – The *consequence* – condemnation.

I. – The world's sad state by nature is darkness. The natural sun is the source of life and happiness to the world. What a sad thing would it be to the world, if by some accident it were turned out of its orbit, and made to wander away beyond the reach of the sun's rays! But quite as sad is the thing that has happened to it in a spiritual sense. Sin has turned it out of its spiritual orbit, and sent it away from God, its Sun, and made it to wander in thick and interminable darkness. What has happened to the world in this case is not much felt nor deplored by the great majority of men, just because this is itself one of the effects produced

by its apostasy. O what sad work has sin done in the world! Its state is represented by a being in darkness, and the metaphor suits the case well, for it is *a world without a sun*. Men are in their natural state, sitting in darkness, and in the region and shadow of death, and are “without hope and without God in the world.”

The world’s darkness is fourfold –

- (1) The darkness of *sin*;
- (2) the darkness of *ignorance*;
- (3) the darkness of *guilt*; and
- (4) the darkness of *eternal damnation*.

(1) The darkness of *sin*. Sin is the original darkness from which all the others spring. Darkness is its proper name. It defiles and darkens the soul. Its works are called the “works of darkness.” And the world is completely under its power. They are its slaves – “serving divers lusts and pleasures” – “fulfilling the lusts of the flesh and of the mind,” Sin reigns in them as a king. The natural man knows not to do anything but sin. He is led to it willingly. His nature teaches him the art of sinning. O, what sort of a life is this to an immortal soul!

(2) The darkness of *ignorance*. The god of this world hath blinded their eyes – 2 Corinthians 4. They know not what they lost – know not what they are – know not the way back to God. The world are utter strangers to God – groping like men in the dark. This ignorance makes it easy for them to commit sin, and makes them willing to continue in its service, and content to be without God.

(3) The darkness of *guilt*. The world is under sentence of death – in prison, as it were. God’s favour is not towards them. His countenance does not shine upon them. A condemned state is a dark state. It is a dark prospect that lies before it.

(4) The darkness of *eternal damnation*. This is the *end* of the world. This is the inheritance to which the sinner is born, and as soon as he is of age he shall come to it. “Children of wrath” – “condemned already,” This is the perfection of the world’s darkness – the “blackness of darkness forever.”

This is the world’s deplorable condition, the darkness in which it lies by nature. O what need of the light, and what a blessing it would be, if it should come! But –

II. – “Light is come into the world.” –

- (1) Let us consider what it is;
- (2) how it came; and
- (3) why it came.

(1) *What it is* – “The bright and morning star,” the Sun of Righteousness – Christ, who is the brightness of His Father’s glory, the express image of His person. He is a great light. The people that sat in darkness saw a great light – a glorious sun, sufficient to enlighten the whole world. He is strictly this light. “I am the light of the world.” “The true light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world – John 1:9. But *the Gospel* is also meant, which brings the offers of salvation to sinners and shows them the way to eternal life. It is through the Gospel that sinners come to see. It is called light – “the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ” – 2 Corinthians 4.

(2) *How it came*. The light came out from free grace – free grace sent it. A purpose of grace from eternity brought it forth. It was pure mercy to the world that this glorious light should ever shine upon it. God had compassion on the world; He so loved it that He sent this light into it.

(3) *Why it came*. To save the world. “God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved” – verse 17. That the world might be delivered from its *darkness*, that sinners might come unto it, and be led to God and eternal life.

Now, put these three together and you have the light that came into the world – Christ, free grace, and eternal life. This is the light that shines in the world. Surely now men shall be saved.

III. – The *choice* men make between the two. What would any one think but that there was no room left for a choice. Their own miserable state would say this. The preciousness of the blessing itself, and the peculiar way in which it came – as the free, rich, and sovereign mercy of God – would all say there is but one thing to be done, that is, to welcome and accept of the light. But, O wretched world, unworthy of such an offer, and deserving to be left to its darkness and perish forever, that knows not the day of its merciful visitation, but desires to be let alone, and despises the remedy that free grace provided and sent unto it! “But men loved darkness rather than light.” This was not simply making the best of a hard condition, but a testimony to their entire satisfaction with it. Light and darkness are put in competition, and the sinner gives his deliberate vote which of the two he thinks the better. And he does not thus give his vote simply as a judge, who has no other concern in the matter than to give his opinion, but he does so as one who is making a choice for himself. He *loves* darkness. It is no mistake, undesigned on his part, and falling out through inadvertence; but he takes up with the thing that he has a liking to, and takes up with it just on *that account* – for he *loves it*.

Men loving darkness rather than light! Who will own this charge? I dare say the most of you deny it: it is too disreputable a thing to own. But it is nevertheless true of the most of you – yea, of every one of you, young and old, who are not in Christ Jesus, and thereby become new creatures. And as I bring this charge against you, I will endeavour to prove it.

(1) Men flee from conviction of sin. They are troubled when the light gets into their conscience and begins to discover to them things they would rather not see. The sinner always tries to get rid of convictions. He tries to smother them and blow out the light. He will endeavour either to reason them away or forget them. Many are the means which are made use of for this purpose. Some go to the bowl, others to company and amusement, and others to their farms and their trade, to drown or drive away their convictions. And why? What harm will these convictions do to them? Why, no harm in the world, but rather much good, if they would only listen to their voice and forsake their sins. But this they are not willing to do, and therefore they hate conviction, because it makes them uneasy in their sinful courses. There is no clearer proof in the world that a man loves sin, than that he will continue in it even when his own conscience reproves him for it, and warns him of the sad consequences of it. And rather than be thus staggered in his evil course, he would rather his conscience had no eyes; and accordingly he tries to blind it. There is no witness that has so much power to convince a man as his own conscience. He may have something to say to our witnesses in defence of his practices, but this witness shuts his mouth, and he cannot stand to hear it. He must stop its mouth from saying anything – he must put it from speaking – for he cannot contradict nor disprove what it testifies.

Ah! how often do men shut their eyes against the light! They don't like to know what they should do. They try not to know it, and then excuse themselves with their not knowing it. They are all the time afraid that some one will tell them of it, and they feel but little obliged to the person who informs them, or points out to them, their duty. Now, is not this true? I put the question to your consciences – the conscience of every one of you. Is it not true that you resist the light in your own consciences? Most of you very likely had some convictions of conscience, more or less, at some time or other; but you got the voice of conscience silenced, and you are yet continuing in the old courses. Is it not true that you shut your eyes against the light, and try to be ignorant of your duty, so that it may give you no trouble? Is it not true that when you find the minister coming too close on your sins, you feel uneasy, and, like the woman of Samaria, would like that he would break off and speak of

something else? Is it not true then that you *love* to be in the dark? And O, why? Can you answer that? The text answers it for you, and more correctly than most of you are disposed to do. It is because your deeds are evil. You love your *sins* more than your *souls*.

(2) Men usually hate those who reprove them for their sins. It is not because they are able to disprove what they say, but rather because they know what they say is true; and they love their own evil course so well that they hate the man that would stop them in it. If you loved the light and your own souls, you would esteem him as a real friend who would reprove you for what he saw in you that was sinful. John Baptist reproved Herod for his sin, but Herod only hated John for this, because he knew what John said was true; but he loved his sin too much to forsake it. Ahab hated Micaiah for a similar reason, and the false prophets of old were esteemed and praised by many because they flattered them in their sins. So now, flatterers are esteemed while faithful reprovers are hated and evil spoken of, just “because men love darkness rather than light.”

(3) Men, for the most part, care not about hearing the Gospel. This, as we have said, is the light. It is by it, instrumentally, that men are saved. But O, how many in this place scarcely ever come to hear it! Does not this evidence that they love the darkness rather than the light? And many who do hear it only come occasionally, when the weather is fine and the roads are good. When the Sabbath comes it puts people on making their choice; and O, how clear is it that those love the darkness rather than the light, who prefer to spend the day at home in sloth and idleness and in idle company, speaking about the world and worldly things, instead of coming to hear the Gospel! But there are many of the regular hearers of the Gospel to whom it is more a weariness than a pleasure, and whose hearts were never moved by it. It is called glad tidings, but to them it is dry, uninteresting tidings. They have nothing of that peculiar desire for it that the true people of God have. The same thing is true of the written Word. It is a book that is little read by the greater number of people. All this goes to prove that men love darkness rather than light.

(4) Men, for the most part, have a particular dislike to personal dealing's with God. “Draw nigh unto God, and he will draw nigh unto you” – James 4:8. The most of people are strangers to prayer, to confession of sin, &c. Now, can you say that you love God when you never pray to Him? Some of you never prayed in your lifetime, and yet I dare say you would say you love God. You are strangers to Him, and you desire to continue strangers, which is proof enough – were there nothing more – that you don't love Him. Ah! no, you do not, for you have another object you love, and that is darkness. O, think what is it that you love – “darkness!” You love chains – sin – blindness – devil. Hell? But you don't love hell. Ah! no. The devil does not put that in – he does not tell you to love hell – he does not offer this to you at all; for he knows this will follow the rest. But he offers what he knows you love – sin, darkness. But although *he* does not offer hell to you, yet God will offer it, and oblige you to take it, willing or unwilling.

Notice excuses and objections, &c.

(1) Why sinners are not saved. The sinner says, because he can't believe – a decree is against him – can't transform himself – it was not given him – he got no *grace*, &c.

Answer. No; we will bring you to the text, and hold you there. Hear it – “This is the condemnation.” What? Decree? No; but “loved darkness rather than light.” Did you try? You got talents. What did you do with them? Did you do as you could?

(2) Where to put the *light*. Sinner says, “In the Bible.” But it must come nearer. “Then put it in the *head*.” But no; that won't do. God says the *heart*. Here the sinner objects out and out. And why? The heart is the devil's den. There he reigns, and carries on his own work, and he cares not as long as the “light” comes no nearer him than the head. The heart is sin's den. All abominations are there. *Darkness* is there, therefore the light must *not* come there. Ah! there are many who have much light in their heads, who are yet loving darkness as much as

though they had no light. The sinner would say to God, "O, trouble me not either with the light or with hell, and then I'll be content."

IV. – The *consequence* of the choice sinners make – "*condemnation.*" How?

(1) Because this blessing was vouchsafed to thee while God passed by the angels that kept not their first state. He made a distinction between you and them, while He might have left you to perish, as He did in their case. Your condemnation is therefore greater than theirs.

(2) Because without the light you could not be saved, although you were willing and should try. There is a difference between our sinning in despair and our sinning when a door of escape is opened up. There might be some kind of excuse for the former in this, that there was no inducement for them to love anything else but darkness, because their condition was eternally fixed, and nothing could alter it. But to sin when there is hope, is to sin in defiance of mercy as well as judgment, and the light coming into the world takes away every shadow of excuse that otherwise sinners might have. They are hereupon condemned, not so much because they had been sinners, as because they despised and neglected the light. Besides, this decides for ever the question of the sinner's enmity to God. This shows his determination to continue a rebel, and to despise the means of reconciliation.

(3) Because of the *nature* of the light, which enhances the value of it beyond all reckoning, and makes it the most precious thing that God could offer. It is Christ, Free Grace, and Eternal Life! How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?"

(4) Because the Gospel has come to you. You might be in ignorance of all that God has done for sinners. You might not hear that light came into the world, as is the case with many of Adam's race. But God sent you the Gospel, and this is the condemnation, that you love the darkness notwithstanding.

And now what say you to it? This light has come to you to-day. An offered Christ, an offered salvation, and eternal blessedness, and all this through free grace, are set before you for your acceptance. Will you go away declaring that you will still remain as you are, the servants of sin, and the children of wrath? Are you resolved to keep your backs turned upon Christ? And is this the answer that we must bring back, that you would have nothing to do with Him? If so, then know it, that the Gospel is the saddest thing for you that can be. It were better for you that you never heard it. O, the time is coming when you will curse the day that ever you heard the Gospel! Yes, the infidels of Lobo, the carnal, worldly professors of Lobo, and the self-righteous Pharisees of Lobo will curse the day that they heard the Gospel, and you will count them happy who never had the happiness of knowing that light came into the world.

Let me plead with you before we part, touching this matter, old men and old women, and young men and maidens too. What are your thoughts about it? What was your purpose this morning about it when you made up your mind to come to church? Did you then make up your minds that you would this day come out to hear the Gospel in order that you might come into the light and cease from henceforth to love the darkness? Was this your purpose and your business in coming here to-day? Or is it not rather the reverse? You came, it is true, to hear the Gospel, but with no intention to obey it. You came with your minds made up to remain in darkness, and therefore the Gospel is but a small matter to you – a thing with which you have no thought of having to do. O, how long shall it continue thus with you! What is it that makes you to hate the light? What is your reason for not coming unto it? If you only once came, you would be repenting all the rest of your lifetime that you had not come sooner. Is not light preferable to darkness, life to death, heaven to hell? What is there in the darkness that comforts you? You say, "It pleases ourselves, and that is the comfort we desire." Well, allowing that you have this comfort of which you speak, yet let me ask you, "Will it comfort you when the darkness of death comes; when that sun that now shines so pleasantly over you

shall shine on you no more; and this world, with all its pleasures, temptations and allurements, with which it deceives you, shall bid you adieu?" It will be dark then, O sinner, when you must part with all you know and love in the world, and with the world itself too. What comfort will the darkness afford you then? And will it comfort you when the shadows of the everlasting evening shall stretch themselves over you, and the blackness of darkness forever shall close in upon you? Oh, Christ is on His way, and His appearance will be terrible to you who love darkness. Prepare yourselves to meet Him, for meet Him you must, once at least, that you may see Him who is the "Light of the world," and know and be convinced whether you have done wisely in preferring the darkness to Him. "Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him; and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him" – Revelation 1:7. For "He shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ" – 2 Thessalonians 1:7,8.

O how can you then look Him in the face, high and lifted up on His great white throne, and come to be glorified in His saints and admired in all them that believe! – verse 10. You will then be ashamed to think that this is the person that you so much despised. Oh! you will say, "We never thought that Christ was so excellent a person, and that those who obeyed the Gospel should have so rich a reward. Alas! what have we done, wretched creatures that we are, that could have chosen darkness rather than Christ! O Christ, we will come to Thee now; we will believe Thee now, and will never more love darkness." But no; you have said to Christ – "Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways"; and He will now say unto you, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire; ye loved darkness, and therefore unto the blackness of darkness forever ye shall go."

[March 1907]

A Sermon.

By the REV. D. MACFARLANE, Dingwall.

Preached on Sabbath Evening, 30th September, 1906.

(Taken down by a Hearer.)

“Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach. For here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come” – Hebrews 3:13-14.

The preceding verse was the subject of our discourse this afternoon, and there is an intimate connection between that verse and what we have in these two verses. In the 12th verse we have an account of what Jesus did in correspondence to the ceremonial law. He “suffered without the gate;” and the design of His sufferings was that He might “sanctify” His people – save them from sin. That was one great reason why Christ came into the world and died. There was no way of sanctifying sinners but by the blood of Him who was God-man. The blood of bulls and of goats could not take away sins. Even although men were to shed their own blood it would be of no avail in this matter. Even although a perfectly holy man were to shed his blood it would not sanctify a single sinner. This required the blood which is called the blood of God: for we read that God “purchased the Church with his own blood;” and the blood which Christ shed belonged to God, inasmuch as He assumed our nature, and united it to His own divine person.

In these words we have three things to consider: –

- I. – The duty here enjoined: – “Let us go forth unto him without the camp.”
- II. – The reasons the apostle annexes to this exhortation.
- III. – Those who comply with this command or exhortation of Christ’s shall have to bear His reproach, and they will do it willingly.

I. – The duty enjoined here: – “Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp.” You will observe that the drift of the apostle throughout this epistle is to draw people away from Judaism, or the way of serving God which was instituted in the wilderness. He wishes to call them away from those types and shadows to Jesus Christ and to His service as set forth in the Christian Church. This is the scope of the whole epistle, and unless we keep this in view, we cannot understand exactly what the apostle means by going forth without the camp. In speaking of the camp here, he has in view the camp in the wilderness, where the children of Israel encamped when brought out of Egypt. It was a large camp, the number of the people being so great that it would occupy miles of space. The temple service, as afterwards observed, was of the same nature as that which was conducted in the wilderness, the only

difference being as to place, the one being in the wilderness and the other in the land of Canaan. And, substituting the temple for the tabernacle, the apostle exhorts, and that in the name of God Himself, the Hebrews to go outside the temple, or in other words, to leave that Church state which God set up at Mount Sinai, and which served its time, for Christ Himself had now come, and had cried "It is finished" – old things had passed away, behold, all things were made new. This explanation is necessary in order that we may understand what the apostle means when he exhorts the Hebrews to go forth unto Jesus with out the camp. They were to leave the camp, and to receive Jesus, in whom they would find everything that was needful. They were to sustain no loss by leaving the camp or the temple behind them, but they were to gain much – very much. If you find Jesus, my friends, you are great gainers, no matter what you may leave behind you for His sake.

But we shall say a few words on what is implied in that temple or camp. In it there was the priesthood set up by God when He gave the law on Mount Sinai. There was a whole tribe – that of Levi – set apart to minister to God at the altar. Those were to be His ministers in offering up sacrifices, and they were to act as a sort of mediators between God and the people: and they were thus a type of Him who is the glorious Mediator, the Lord Jesus Christ. The services set up, the ceremonies performed, and everything about the worship of God at that time were significant of things to come; as the apostle says in the 9th chapter of this epistle, that Christ was come as an High Priest of good things to come. There were then those who stood as mediators between God and the people, but in a typical sense only, and in no other. For as there is but one God, so there is but one mediator between God and men – Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul takes care to point this out when he says that Christ was the angel who led the people in the wilderness. Christ was the rock; Christ was the great leader. From the first revelation of God's scheme of salvation, Christ was the only Mediator, but at that time, in order to educate people in the knowledge of Christ's mediation, there were typical mediators set up, and those taught of God might learn, and did learn, a great deal by means of those typical mediators. Not only were there priests to offer up sacrifices, but there were also bloody sacrifices to be offered up, for "without the shedding of blood" there could be "no remission of sins." It was blood alone that could make atonement, and although at that time the blood of irrational creatures could not make atonement for sin, still it taught the people to look forward to Him who was to come, and to shed His own blood to make atonement. Thus the ceremonial law was full of instruction, and it was also a manifest token of God's favour to the people, for by it the gospel was preached to them, as the apostle says in the 4th chapter of this epistle – the gospel was preached unto them as well as unto us.

There was but one gospel from the beginning. It is the same gospel we have now as they had in the wilderness and in the land of Canaan, in the tabernacle and in the temple, with this difference, that the revelation under the New Testament is much clearer and more easily understood than that which was given under the typical dispensation. Although the ceremonial law was abrogated by the death of Christ, that is, as to its observance, still it is not abrogated in the sense that it is of no use to us now. Though we are not to observe that law, it is left in the Bible for our instruction. We have not only one but two revelations of the covenant of grace. We have the old and we have the new, which is the complement of the old. We can look back and read the gospel concerning the Lord Jesus Christ more clearly, so that our privileges are much greater than were those of the people under the ceremonial law. You have your Bible with these things contained in the books of Moses. Read it, and seek that the Holy Spirit would anoint your eyes so that you may behold Christ, as the saints of old saw Him before He came in the flesh and finished the work His Father gave Him to do. Then turn from that to the words of the gospel. Incline your ear and hear His own voice declaring, "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that, which was lost." Woe unto us, my friends,

if we perish in our sins, neglecting the great salvation while we have these two lights, the light of the ceremonial law, and the light of the gospel shining around us!

We are to leave behind us, not only the priests who served at the altar, and the sacrifices – for there is but one Priest now, the Lord Jesus Christ, there are no sacrifices now but His – we are also to leave behind us the mode of worship observed in the tabernacle and the temple.

If you lived in the days of Solomon, and entered the temple, you would notice the greatest difference between the way in which worship was conducted then and the way it is now, or ought to be, in the simplicity of the gospel. At the door of the temple you would see the laver, a vessel containing water, in which the priests when they entered washed their hands and their feet before they dared to take part in the service, for holiness became the house of God; and then to remind them of the fact, of which they themselves were conscious, being taught of God, that everything they did was mingled with sin, they must not leave the temple without again washing their hands and their feet. There was great instruction in these things. Well, we are to go forth from that and come to the blood of Jesus. That blood is still set before us, and before we begin worship we may “wash and be clean.” We may wash our hands in innocence and surround God’s altar; and when we are conscious of our imperfections in our endeavours to serve God, we may before we leave God’s house, wash ourselves in the blood of Jesus, and come to God with the prayer of the psalmist, “Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean; wash me, and I, shall be whiter than snow.” Ah, my friends, what are we doing with the provision which God made for us in the blood of Jesus? Why do we live for one moment under the guilt of sin, and under the sinfulness of our imperfections in holy things? Why not come to the blood of Jesus at once and be delivered from all these evils?

As you passed the laver there would meet you a brazen altar, upon which fire was kindled, and the beast, slain to make atonement, was burnt. You must leave that behind you too, for that was only a type of the sacrifice of Christ; and we read that He, by one sacrifice, made for ever perfect them that are sanctified. As you proceeded to walk through the temple you would find another altar. After passing through the first tabernacle you would find at the door of the Most Holy a golden altar, upon which incense was burning, in the smoke of which the High Priest was to go into the presence of God in the Most Holy place with the blood of the sacrifice, which he was to sprinkle seven times on the altar, signifying that atonement was made by blood. This was done in a typical sense at that time, but in due time atonement was to be accomplished by Jesus Christ, who was to shed His own blood, and thereby – as the Apostle tells us here – He sanctified His people. You are to leave behind you even this golden altar and the burning of incense. We know there are many in our day who profess to worship God, and yet they have never gone without the camp. They still burn incense. If you have read – and if not, you ought to read – what is taking place in the Church of England, you will see that many unscriptural rites are being introduced into it, such as the burning of incense and the sacrificing of Christ, as if He had not died at all. Well, those who do such things never went forth without the camp.

But you would notice another thing in the temple – a golden candlestick with six branches, the stem of the candlestick making the seventh, which number signifies perfection; and this lamp signified the light that God gives to His Church. This light He gives in two ways:

(1) By the revelation of His Word. As we have seen, there were seven branches, which signifies perfection, so the revelation which He has given of Himself in Scripture is perfect; there is no defect in it.

(2) By the work of the Holy Spirit in enlightening the souls of men in the knowledge of Christ and of divine things. The Spirit is all-sufficient for this work. It is not merely the aid of the Spirit that is required, as Arminians teach. From the time in which the soul is quickened

to life, and awakened out of its spiritual slumber, the work of the Spirit is required. Yes, from the very beginning of the good work until the soul is made perfect in holiness, and immediately passes into glory at death. By denying this a defect is imputed to the Holy Ghost, who is equal with the Father in wisdom, power, and glory.

You would again observe in the temple the sounding of trumpets and the praising of God by instruments. We are also to leave that behind us, and we are to go to Jesus Christ, whose word is the perfect rule of faith and practice, and we are to look to the Holy Spirit as all-sufficient. There are very few churches in Scotland, England, or Ireland now which do not use instruments – dead instruments – to praise God; just as there are many who light candles during the day for religious purposes, not because the day is dark, but just because they refuse to comply with what God commands here. Why? They have never gone forth to Jesus without the camp; for if they had, what then is the meaning of what the apostle exhorts the Hebrews to here? And yet they tell us at the same time that religion never was so prosperous as it is now. Ah, how infatuated such men are! What a delusion they are under to think they have gone such a length after Jesus, whereas they have not moved a step outside the camp – not a foot from the state in which they were by nature. The Jews are less guilty for clinging to these things, for they were accustomed to them, than we who have received the gospel in its full revelation, if we turn back to these beggarly elements again. There is no excuse for us in this kingdom, to whom God has given the glorious gospel, if we go back to those types and shadows again. These, then, are some of the things we are to leave behind, and the meaning of the apostle is clear, for in speaking of the ceremonial law, he says, “Touch not, taste not, handle not.”

Another thing you would see in the sanctuary, or first tabernacle, is a table supplied with twelve loaves. What did that signify? Though some give a different meaning to that provision, I take it as a type of Christ – “the bread of life.” He says, “I am the bread of life.” You are now to go forth from that typical bread to Christ Himself; to feed on Him who gave His body to be broken and His blood to be shed, that His people might be reconciled to God, and live on Him as their spiritual food. “I am,” He says, “the living bread which came down from heaven; if any man eat of this bread he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”

Lastly, on this head, if you were permitted to enter the Most Holy place, you would see there the Ark of the Covenant, containing the law of the Ten Commandments, and covered by the Mercy Seat, on which God sat as the God of salvation, and where grace reigned through righteousness. You are now to go forth from that typical representation. The vail has been rent from top to bottom by the death of Christ, and we have now free access to the Father through His incarnate Son, who was typified by the Mercy Seat, and in whom God was reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them.

We are not only to go forth without the camp, but we are exhorted to go unto Jesus. A person may leave the ceremonial law, and yet not come to Christ, and unless we come to Christ, we shall perish. We may leave one error and fly to another, we may leave one refuge of lies and remain in another. Although you leave the camp, there is no safety for you unless you come to Jesus. You should come to Christ alone, now, and leave all other sacrifices behind you; close with Christ and with His finished work as the only ground of your salvation. And if God is teaching you, that is just what you do, and although it is God alone who can teach you, still it is my duty and privilege to enjoin upon you that you come to Jesus Christ, and receive Him according to the revelation given of Him in the gospel – receive Him in His divine person, in His two-fold natures, in His three-fold offices, His finished work and His exaltation now at the right hand of the Father, and His continual intercession on behalf of His people, until He brings them to be with Himself at last. Christ must pray till He has with Himself the last individual of those for whom He shed His blood. As long as you have need

you pray; when your needs are made up there is no necessity for prayer. Although Christ personally has no needs, yet we may say that He intercedes as long as there is need, and there is need as long as His mystical body is incomplete. "Prayer shall be made for him," the psalmist says, and Christ prays Himself.

You must also go to Christ in the way of worship which is set up in the New Testament, such as reading, preaching and hearing the word of God, and the administration of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper, prayer, and singing praise to His name; offering Him "the fruit of our lips." This is the only kind of sacrifice now. We are to offer to God not carnal sacrifices as of old, but spiritual sacrifices. These, each and all of us are bound to offer up daily to God, as the apostle says in the verse following, we are to "offer up the sacrifice of praise to God continually," but acceptable to Him only through Jesus Christ. We are to go forth unto Jesus and to His service; we are to observe all things appointed by Him in His service, and not to bring in anything not appointed by Him. He is the Head of His own Church, and has a right to ordain everything in His service and worship. He has done this, and given us a perfect rule in His own word and especially in the New Testament.

II. – Now we come to the second head, and that is, the reasons annexed to the exhortation to enforce the duty enjoined here by the apostle.

(1) The first reason why we should go forth without the camp is the example of Christ, who went forth himself. The word, "therefore," here connects the words of the 13th verse with those of the 12th verse, where Paul says that Jesus – that He might sanctify the people – suffered without the gate, from which he infers the duty, "Let us also go forth." Christ is the great Pattern to which His people shall be conformed, and surely we ought to follow His wonderful example. He went forth to suffer and to die: He turned His back on the ceremonial law and on the typical mode of worship so long observed. If Christ's example does not prevail with you to obey the exhortation, I know not what to say to you. He took the lead, and he expects His disciples to follow Him, for He says, "My sheep follow me, and I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand." And those who do not follow Him show that they are disobedient, and that they are not His disciples at all.

(2) The second reason is that "here we have no continuing city." The temple was within the city, and all the worship rendered to God at that time was conducted within the city. The apostle may have had in view the fact that the temple and the entire city of Jerusalem itself were soon after this to be destroyed by the Romans, and in that sense it was indeed time for them to leave the city, as it is time for us to leave behind us all that God has abolished in His own service. Christ left the city, and was crucified outside it on Mount Calvary. He left it both ecclesiastically and politically, for the old theocracy was to come to an end. But applying this to our life in this world, let us go forth unto Jesus without the camp, for here on earth we have no continuing city. We are pilgrims in this world – strangers in a strange land. "Arise, let us go hence," for this is not our rest. We must all leave this world soon. True, this world shall last longer than we, but let us remember that the earthly house of this tabernacle shall be dissolved. Let this move us more and more to go forth unto Jesus. We are getting nearer death and eternity every day: let us redouble our efforts every day to go forth unto Jesus, for here we have no continuing city.

(3) The third reason advanced to enforce the duty inculcated here is that we seek a city to come. Surely those who expect to go to heaven – a city whose Builder and Maker is God – ought to be very willing to go forth unto Jesus, and to follow Him whither He went. Before leaving this world He told His disciples, "I go to prepare a place for you, and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself: that where I am there you may be also" – John 14:2,3. There is a great difference between the state of God's children

in this world and their state in heaven; between the kingdom of grace here and the kingdom of glory above. In this world they are, as it were, from home. When you are from home, no matter how kind people may be to you, still you do not expect every comfort; you are a stranger, and you do not feel at rest till you get home. So it is with those here who seek another city. The citizens of heaven, my friends, are where the Triune God dwells; the citizens are myriads of holy angels, and a great multitude, which no man can number, of people redeemed by the blood of Christ: but while the latter are on earth the city is in futurity – it is still to come. When you expect a good thing, you are content to bear your present discomforts, and you console yourself with the thought of the good thing to come: so the apostle comforts himself and his fellow-believers who were sojourners in this world with the good hope of the city that was to come.

Another thing to be noticed on this point is the “seeking.” They make diligent use of the means of getting to the city: they give all diligence to make their calling and election sure. As they go forth they seek evidence of their interest in Christ, evidence of their title to the inheritance, proof that they are children; “and if children, then heirs – heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ.” Have you ever spent even a few minutes examining yourself whether you were an heir of glory? If not, it is time for you to begin, and do not say, “What’s the use?” Ah, the city to come is worth all your self-examination. It is worth while to make diligent use of all the means God has given us. Indeed, the means of grace have been set up for this very purpose – to bring many sons to glory, to call His people to the fellowship of His Son, to regenerate them, to justify them, to sanctify them, and then to glorify them.

III. – But I must hasten to the last head – Those who go forth unto Jesus shall have to bear His reproach. When the sinner is awakened to a sense of his lost condition he does not at all bargain with God as to what he may suffer. He does not say, “Save me, O Lord, give me an interest in Christ, but do not give me trouble.” There is no such bargain at all; only, “Lord, save my soul for Christ’s sake.” But those who go forth to Him must bear His reproach, and this just means all the reproach cast upon God’s people on account of their connection or relationship with Jesus Christ. The very death that Jesus died was, to the Jews, a stumbling-block, and to the Gentiles, foolishness: it was an accursed death. There was thus a reproach cast upon the very means which God provided for saving sinners. There is a reproach cast by the enemies of God on all who follow the Lord Jesus Christ: but believers who are taught of God soon come to reckon such things as Moses did, of whom it is said, that he esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt. The reproach is Christ’s, and far from being ashamed of it, believers consider it greater riches than all the applause showered upon the great ones of this world. There is great honour put upon those who are called upon to bear this reproach. It is a cause of glory. Of themselves and of their infirmities they are often ashamed, but the reproach of Christ is their glory.

In conclusion, my friends, how are you individually with regard to what we have been discoursing upon? You have been called again and again to go forth without the camp, not only in the sense explained, but from the camp of the fellowship of this world. Have you obeyed the call? It is once more put before you, and in speaking to you we include ourselves. Let us go forth from everything that is hurtful and sinful; let us go forth unto Jesus, and He will be all our salvation and all our desire.

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