

# Outlines of Three Sermons.

By late Rev. JOHN SINCLAIR, Bruan, Caithness,  
Preached on 26th January and following Sabbaths in 1840.

[These outlines are taken from the author's own manuscript. Some abbreviations have been slightly enlarged. Further outlines on the same subject will appear in future. Mr. S. Died, August 22nd, 1843. See "Ministers and Men in the Far North," by Rev. Alexander Auld.]

"Jesus answered and said unto her, if thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith unto thee, Give me to drink, thou wouldest have asked of Him and He would have given thee living water" – John 4:10.

We find in the fifth verse that Jesus came to a city of Samaria called Sychar, "near to the parcel of ground Jacob gave to his son, Joseph." In Genesis 33:18-20, we have an account of this incident, "He built an altar and called the name, El-elohe-Israel," God, the God of Israel. I cannot say that Jacob had any foreknowledge of what would take place here now, but no doubt he had an eye to Jesus, the Messiah, in whom God is the God of Israel. And Jesus, as God, knew then what He would do now. Some places were sacred, such as Mount Moriah, which is likely Calvary, and Araunah, which is Mount Zion. He makes "the place of His feet glorious." Days were when the places of even the saints' feet were sweet to others. Jerusalem was yet built in its own place, but because Christ is "Head over all things to the Church," and is everywhere present, men are now to worship God not in this place nor at Jerusalem, but everywhere, "in spirit and truth."

Jesus was weary with His journey. Notice here two things. First, His weariness purchased any ease His own get. "He took their infirmities and bare their sicknesses." It is sweet to ride on Christ's "own beast." Take all things at His hands. Second, as He sweetened the grave, so He sweetened every suffering of His people by His own sufferings. He arrived at the well about the sixth hour. This was the very hour at which darkness began. His darkness was the procuring cause of His people's light. The woman came "to draw water." A person may meet Him going to the well, others, such as the sons of Zebedee, met Him when they were at the fishing. "Jesus saith, Give me to drink." He may ask any sacrifice, even life itself, but not the sacrifice of the soul; He desires its salvation. His disciples went "to buy meat," He remained behind doing good. His bread was to do His Father's will, and to finish His work. The minister was thirsty, but He got satisfaction to his soul and body. She gave Him a surly answer, or may be an answer in surprise. She perhaps saw something striking in His countenance. Jesus does not answer her in a similar fashion; His example to us is to overcome evil with good. He is kind even to the wicked; so ought we to be. The only danger is that they may think the kindness is done from esteem of them as righteous. Here lies a danger to both parties which is to be avoided. Jesus does not answer the woman's inquiry but pursues His gracious end. He answered, but not her question, "If thou knewest the gift of God." Ignorance was her loss. Ignorance is at the foundation of all destruction. It is far from being the mother of devotion, as the papists say.

*Second outline.* –

We intend, if the Lord will, to show: –

- I. Some marks of ignorance.
- II. The danger of ignorance.
- III. Some things to be known.

We stated that ignorance was at the root of the destruction of every soul that perishes. "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge." This does not refer to the lack of the general knowledge even of divine truth. "Though," says the apostle, "I have all knowledge and have not charity, I am nothing." A person may have much speculative knowledge, and no saving knowledge. "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them." They who hear Christ's words, and do them not, build on the sand. But saving knowledge is the knowledge of Christ, "the gift of God." "This is life eternal to know thee the only true God and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." Now there are two kinds of knowledge, and so two kinds of ignorance. There is sanctified saving knowledge, and it may have little outward knowledge along with it. "God hath chosen the foolish things to confound the wise." These fools being in the way that is wisdom "shall not err therein." They shall wander to glory. Unsanctified knowledge is that which is taught by the precept of men, and not by the Holy Ghost. It has no effect upon the heart. It is important therefore to know whether our knowledge is saving or not. Let us now endeavour to point out: –

I. *Some marks of ignorance.*

1. *All who are living in any known sin display ruinous ignorance.* – "How long shall the wicked triumph? Understand ye brutish, and ye fools when will ye be wise" (Psalm 94:3-8). They show their ignorance (1) in not knowing that such cannot see God. "If I regard iniquity in my heart the Lord will not hear me." But He does hear His own people. "His ear is open to their cry." Or (2) they do not know that there is a God to punish sin. "The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God." Therefore, "They are corrupt; they have done abominable works." Or (3) they do not know the torments of the hell to which they are going. "I shall have peace, though I add drought to thirst." If they had known the bitterness of the belly of eternity, sin would not be found so sweet in the mouth of time. Or (4) they do not know the sweetness of Christ. "Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again; but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst." They shall not come hither to draw. Those delivered from this thirst will be sensible of a corrupt fountain within them, and shall mourn on account of it. "O wretched man that I am." They will be grieved that sin is dwelling in them. The enemy, however, will be endeavouring to pour down the throat of the new nature that which is loathsome to its taste. The flood was sent after the woman so as to destroy the man-child.

2. *All unconcerned persons are ignorant.* – "If thou hadst known even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong to thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes" (Luke 19:42). The person who was never brought under soul concern, and was never made to find its salvation to be the great "one thing needful" is under soul-destroying ignorance. We hear now and then of a person under soul concern. Now if we were never under it in such a way as that it swallowed up all other things as Moses' rod swallowed those of the Egyptians, we were never truly concerned and, therefore, have no hope of salvation. If, on the other hand, soul concern began with us early, then it will be the one important thing all through life. (1.) Because the soul is worth more than the whole world. "What shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" If we had the soul on the one hand, and the world on the other, there would be no comparison in value. The world was made only to serve the soul. The world shall be burnt up, but the soul cannot be. (2.) Because time is only a shadow, a vapour in comparison with eternity. Then man is a fool to catch the vapour, and lose all the rest of time. O eternity, eternity! If soul concern is begun early, it is then the one important thing through life. So it was with John the Baptist. He gave his life at last. If this concern swallowed up all others, it will be in view night and day. Whatever joys or griefs we may have of an outward nature, they cannot quench this fire. If this point is not settled with

us, let us examine whether our concern is based on the Word. Let us also ask ourselves the question, Is it still with us, the one thing needful, before which all other things yield?

3. *All those who have not been made fools in their own eyes are ignorant.* – All such are in this state to whom their salvation under the concern spoken of did not seem beyond their knowledge as to how it could be effected. “If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool that he may be wise” (1 Corinthians 3:18). “Woe to them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight” (Isaiah 5:21). “Now ye say, we see; therefore your sin remaineth” (John 9:41). Now the following are a few reasons why this is so: – (1) Because no man is born with saving knowledge. “There is none that understandeth.” “For vain man would be wise, though man be born like a wild ass’s colt” (Job 11:12). Therefore men must be made fools in their own eyes. (2) The Word alone is not sufficient to give saving knowledge. “Ye say we are wise, and the law of the Lord is with us” (Jeremiah 8:8). The Word contains all necessary knowledge, yet we need the Holy Ghost for making application of it to any particular case. (3) Therefore we must find all that we need. The Apostle Paul, the Ethiopian eunuch, the three thousand on the day of Pentecost, and the Philippian jailor, all had to cry, “What must we do to be saved?” All were at a loss here. Christ only could be their wisdom, and the Holy Ghost only can shew Christ. I shall now mention some of the consequences of being made a fool in one’s own eyes. (1) If you are made a fool in your own eyes you are often in a strait between sin and duty. So were Solomon, Paul, and other saints. Other persons are confident in themselves. You will not be so, if you are without the Word for the course you would pursue. (2) If you are made a fool in your own eyes, you are often in a strait how to kill sin. – “What shall I do to be saved?” “Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” Here wisdom is needed to the very last. (3) If you are made a fool, you see your own ignorance. “So foolish was I, and ignorant; I was as a beast before thee” (Psalm 73:22). “I am more brutish than any man, and have not the understanding of a man” (Proverbs 30:2).

4. *All who are not praying for the Spirit are ignorant.* “If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith unto thee, Give me to drink, thou wouldest have asked of him.” Be our knowledge what it may, it is not saving without this. “If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.” No man by nature has the Spirit. And it is a mark of the world that they cannot receive Him (John 14:17). Whatever else a person is praying for, if he is not praying for the Spirit, all is worth nothing.

Observe the following reasons: – (1) Because without the Spirit there can be no new birth. It is folly to look for heaven without that in the face of the double affirmation of the Judge. “Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” “Except a man be born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” This folly is ruinous. Oh! if we could but keep this one point in view. (2) Because there is no sanctification without Him. “Through sanctification of the Spirit.” No sin is mortified without Him. “If ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body.” Till the Spirit apply the Word to the soul it will never sanctify. Not a drop of blood will be drawn till the Word of God enter the joints and marrow. (3) Because there is no right prayer without the Spirit. “We know not what to pray for as we ought.” There is no humility, faith, or fervency without the Spirit. The world who are not seeking Him have not the Spirit, and Christ prays not for them. They have the Spirit who are truly seeking Him. One mark of these is that they are weary of their own spirit. It is not the natural man who receives the things of the Spirit, and therefore he has not the Spirit. Examine this one point and see to it.

II. *The danger of ignorance.* Many think to screen themselves under ignorance. “We are ignorant, but the Lord is merciful.” Now, the Scripture says the very reverse. “It is a people of no understanding, therefore, he that made them will not have mercy on them” (Isaiah

27:11). (1) Man had knowledge given him. It was a part of that image in which he was created. But he tore it from him, and now stands blind by his own deed. When we cannot understand our own case or the Scriptures then guilt is proved. "We willingly are ignorant." (2) We do not love to get knowledge. "How long ye simple ones will ye love simplicity, and the scorers delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge." We hate the Word in which knowledge is conveyed. We hate prayer, the other means of obtaining knowledge. And we also hate to turn from sin at His reproof. Say, do we not hate knowledge, and then are we not guilty? (3) We reject Him in whom "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hid." God has made Christ Jesus wisdom to us. In Him we find the knowledge of ourselves, of Christ as the way, of the Father, of heaven and hell, of time and eternity. Now we do worse than Adam did. Not only do we dash away the image of God given by His Word, but also the rent heart of Jesus Christ in which we might read the knowledge of God. He rent his heart that we might read what He knew of the Father. Now, guilt infers danger. Observe two respects in which ignorant sinners lie under danger. (1) The Lord will have "no mercy on them" (Isaiah 27:11). The charge is ignorance with all its train of evils. The sentence is heavy. "He that made them will not have mercy!" And who then can? What is the matter? "They will not come unto me that they might have life." However ignorant, if they would come, there would be hope. "O draw me, we will run after thee." As many as will not come to Christ of this ignorant people they shall have no mercy while in this state of ignorance. If any seek mercy He will give knowledge. When they will be "taught of the Lord," then they shall cry, "Teach thou me." (2) The second respect in which there is danger is that of destruction. "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge" (Hosea 4:6). God's people were a heavy burden to the priests. Yet many of the priests were like the people. Come direct to Christ Himself. Every man is his own priest now. Get Him who is made wisdom to the ignorant.

### III. *Application.*

Consider James 1:5, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him." (1) If any man, woman, or child, any ignorant person, lack wisdom, (2) let such ask of God. Let them ask in private or in public. Look not to man but ask of Him. (3) He gives for nothing; He has pay in His hand. (4) He upbraideth not; He does not use upbraiding language. He will not say "Get you gone," if you come for wisdom. (5) The full promise is for those *asking in faith*. In Christ, the door, the Father has all and is reconciled. Christ has pardon for guilt. He has the spirit of wisdom above measure. He has so to every comer, however unworthy. There is no want but may be supplied in Christ. It is greater honour to Him to bring fools nigh. It has seemed good to the Father to hide these things from the wise and the prudent, and to reveal them unto babes.

*Third outline.* –

We intend further to show: –

*Some things which the Bible testifies respecting "the gift of God," under these heads; –*

I. *In what way God gave "the gift."*

II. *What things are in "the gift."*

I. First let us consider *in what way God gave "the gift."* We need not stay long to show that the gift is His own Son. "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son." Indeed, the Spirit is often called a gift, but only through the Son. "Because thou thoughtest that the gift of God may be purchased with money." But even here the Spirit is a gift through the Son. Although a creature, then, could know of this gift, unless he knew the way of getting it, that is, not with money, he would do as Simon Magus did, seek it in a wrong way. Let us see then what the Scriptures say of the way in which He gave the Son.

(1.) The Father gave the Son with his “whole heart and whole soul” (Jeremiah 32:40,41). “I will make an everlasting covenant with them.” “I will plant them in their land assuredly with my whole heart and my whole soul.” The everlasting covenant is the fountain from which this blessed stream of ‘planting’ flows, but the stream cannot be greater than the fountain; therefore, the covenant in which the Father gave the Son is “with his whole heart and whole soul.” Now, what is His whole heart and whole soul, but all His attributes? When a person does anything with his whole heart it is with the consent of all the faculties or powers of his soul. So when Jehovah does anything with His whole heart it is with the consent of all His attributes. When He created man He could do it with His whole heart, because there was nothing in Himself to oppose the work. But after sin entered, the attributes of justice, righteousness, holiness, and truth, all stood back and would not consent to give any favour to man. Now, in giving Christ, the Father had in the gift what fully satisfied all the attributes. “Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other.” Wherefore, at the Saviour’s birth there was “glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth, goodwill towards men.” Hence in Colossians 2:9 – “For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.” Everything that makes up or constitutes God dwells in Him, and in Him his people are complete or full, because they receive “of his fulness and grace for grace.” The goodness of God gave Him, or He gave Him in goodness. “Thou art good, and thou doest good.” He has a good heart. It is the sum of His glory. “I will make all my goodness pass before thee” (Exodus 33:19). It is His very nature. It is His glory. “There is none good but one, that is God.” Hence it was natural for God to give His Son. I mean, he acted from His very nature in giving Him. Judgment is His strange work, but goodness is natural to Him. He does good. It is His work, His common work. His goodness is His glory. Therefore, when goodness gave the Son, God committed to Him His very glory in respect of everyone who receives Him. The Mediator takes hold of this, “I have glorified thee upon the earth.” Hence learn (1) the greatness of His goodness. “Oh how great is thy goodness!” It appears in giving his Son for wicked wretches. Here we may say, “Behold the goodness and severity of God.” He was severe to His own Son, O! not against His will, that He might be good to them who are made to ask of Him. “He spared him not.” Goodness and severity both are seen on Calvary more than in heaven and hell! His nature is truly wonderful. “Canst thou by searching find out God?” (2) Those who ask of Him will glorify Him, because Christ is entrusted with God’s glory in and for them. “This people have I formed for myself; they shall shew forth my praise.” “They shall abundantly utter the memory of thy great goodness.” Here are two pleas for a throne of grace; the nature of His goodness, “Thou art good and ready to forgive,” and the manifestation of His glory, “What wilt thou do for thy great name?” (3) Learn to delight in His great goodness. “They delighted themselves in thy great goodness.” But let it be through the right channel – Christ, or else it will degenerate into carnality. When the Lord was good unto them it was said of others that they “waxed fat and kicked.” (4) Learn, hence, to flow to this goodness. “They shall flow together to the goodness of the Lord for corn and wine and oil and barley.” When many flow together then is the better success. See Pentecost, and see Kilsyth. Oh! our meetings, our meetings! How little fruit! Remember goodness is God’s very nature. So we find so much laid in His goodness as well as graciousness. “Good and upright is the Lord; therefore will he teach sinners in the way.”

(2.) The love of God gave the Son, or He gave Him in love. “God so loved the world.” It is an amazing love. He loved His own Son with everlasting infinite love, yet He *so* loved the world. It passeth knowledge. If we would measure it we cannot, but would run into error about it. Only you may behold it, taste it and know it. You may taste it as you would taste the waters of the ocean. The gift of the Son was very freely done. What is done in love is done freely. One cannot do anything in love, and not do it freely. Something may be done in pity

or mercy, and not freely, but if in love then it is done from the bottom of the heart. We may think and speak of the love of God, but, if we would feel this love to the full, we could not stand it for a moment. It does not seek a price. "The Father himself loveth you." "I will love them freely." This love is inexpressible and inconceivable. It is everlasting and eternal. It is sovereign, free, and immutable. It is also a love of complacency, it is infinite in measure and rests in its objects in Christ.

(3.) Mercy gave Him up, or He was given in mercy. Hence He and the blessings in Him are called "the sure mercies of David." The mercy of God has in it a multitude of mercies. It is tender mercy and is kept for thousands. It endures for ever, and is well suited to meet the misery of its objects. Never any one came that was shut out at this door of mercy. Mercy is written about the door. This is the signpost, "the sure mercies of David." The throne of grace has these two marks – mercy and grace.

(4.) Justice gave Him up, or He was given up in justice. Hence "He laid on him the iniquity of us all." As He got authority to receive all comers, and none could enter without pardon, justice counted over to Him all their crimes, and laid them on Him. Hence He knew the bitter cup of wrath. There was not one sin but He knew of. You need not be hiding them. If a sinner had known this that there was no stop, for the sake of justice to the Spirit, he would have asked for the Spirit. Be sure and take all your sins with you, when you ask the Spirit to mortify them.

(5.) Righteousness gave Him up, or He was given in righteousness. Hence "it became him to fulfil all righteousness." There is not one commandment but He fulfilled. He magnified the law. He gave millions to the law for pence. Now, the Holy Ghost may be given because Jesus is glorified, and has glorified the law. If we had known this, we would have asked of Him the Spirit of obedience, the living water for a well-spring of keeping the law and for sealing in the faith.

(6.) Holiness gave Him up, or He was given up in holiness. Hence Christ loved the Church and gave himself for it that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word. This is the opening of the fountain for sin and uncleanness. He undertook to make them pure. He is made their sanctification. Now, if we had had known this, we would have been saying, "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." There is no stop here on account of former defilement.

(7.) Truth gave Him up, or He was given up in truth. Hence, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." He came in the flesh to fulfil the truth of God. So, "Truth springs from earth. Mercy looks down from heaven." If one under sentence of death got word that another had actually died in his room, he would have asked a testimony of the case. So here, He gives the testimony, "I am He that was dead and is alive again."

(8.) Wisdom gave Him up, or He was given up in wisdom. So He is "the wisdom of God." He is made wisdom to us. So if you are a fool come here for wisdom. This shuts out every objection.

(9.) Power also gave Him up, or He was given up with the consent of God's power. This is "the power of God" which is "unto salvation." It will conquer all opposition to Christ in the salvation of sinners. The Father has promised the Son: "I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness." His very power is pledged for this end.

(10.) He is given freely, without money and without price. He is given to all in offer, which authorises all to come. “Ho, everyone.” “If any man thirst.” The gift is, as it were, thrown down. Let any take it.

(11.) It is a gift without repentance. God made the Son a priest without repentance, and He will never seek to recall Him from anyone to whom He has been once given. He may recall everything but this, and shall recall everything unless we have this. “He that hath not from him shall be taken away even that he hath.” Unless we have the Son we have no life. Profession, talents, all will be taken away. “If we knew this we would have asked of him, and he would have given us living water.”

*Application.*

(1) Thrice happy they who are made to seek Him. They will get “grace for grace.” “Out of his fulness they will be filled with all the fulness of God.” (2) Miserable they who seek Him not. They shall die in their sins, and God will pursue them with all His arrows. (3) Then “seek him while he may be found, call on him while he is near.” Cry to Him “out of the depths.”

May He bless His word, and to His name we desire to give everlasting praise. – Amen.  
[December 1896]

## Outlines of Sermons.

By late Rev. JOHN SINCLAIR, Bruan, Caithness,  
Preached on 16th and 23rd February, 1840.

“Jesus answered and said unto her, if thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith unto thee, Give me to drink, thou wouldest have asked of Him and He would have given thee living water” – John 4:10.

We mentioned on the last occasion two ways of asking knowledge respecting “the gift of God.” Christ Jesus. The first way was *to ask at the Word*. “Search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and they are they which testify of me” (John 5:39). There is no true light of the Spirit but in and agreeably to the Word. See that it be the Word that is the candle. The second was *at or from the Spirit*. “He shall receive of mine and shall show it unto you.” It is only the Spirit that can make the Word to shine. We need light with the truth in order to “search the deep things of God.”

We also endeavoured to show from the Word: –

*First.* The way in which God gave the gift, that is, “with his whole heart and his whole soul” (Jeremiah 32:40,41). He gave Him with the full consent of all His attributes. “In him dwelleth the fulness of the Godhead bodily,” all that constitutes God. He gave Him, therefore, with the consent of the following attributes – (1) *His goodness*. “Thou art good.” In Christ He makes “all his goodness pass before us.” “That in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness towards us through Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:7). The whole cabinet of His goodness is opened in Him; and alas! that we cannot see it. (2) *His love*. “God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son” (John 3:16). In Him “God is love,” and to those who receive Him nothing but love. Where will you find a God of love? In Christ. (3) *His mercy*. In Him are “the sure mercies of David.” The psalmist speaks of Him as “the God of my mercy.” (4) *His wisdom*. He is “the wisdom of God.” In His person, work and offices as mediator, He is the result of infinite wisdom and knowledge how to save. (5) *His power*. Jesus Christ and Him crucified is “the power of God unto salvation.” The Father says, “I will help thee” in conquering all opposition. (6) *His justice*. Justice “laid on him the iniquities of us all,” that is, of all the elect. Justice, therefore, had nothing to say against the bestowal of the gift, and will have nothing to say no more than if men had never sinned. It will acknowledge the receivers of the gift as just. (7) *His righteousness*. Therefore it became Him “to fulfil all righteousness.” In Him is no deficiency, His people are “complete in him.” They are “complete in him” in every service. (8) *His holiness*. Christ was “holy harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners.” He was holy for His people, and He makes them holy. Holiness entrusted Him to bring no unholy thing to heaven. (9) *His truth*. It had said to sinners, “Thou shalt die.” He assumed, therefore, their nature and became their representative and so actually died. As their sense of spiritual death is a passage to life spiritual, so their temporal death is a passage to life eternal. To show Christ’s absolute power over death there are three bodies that shall be witnesses in heaven. His own personal body, the glorified body of believers, and the mystical body, the whole company of the redeemed, delivered from death eternal. (10) *God gave the Son freely*, “without money and without price.” He gives Him to the most worthless, to “the chief of sinners.” (11) *He is offered to everyone*. “Ho, everyone that thirsteth,” whatever that thirst may be. In Isaiah 55: 2, they were thirsting for the world. Zaccheus had the thirst of curiosity. This woman thirsted for common water and for sinful lust. Manasseh and Paul thirsted for the blood of the saints. O sinners of each class come ye to the waters! (12) *He is given irrevocably*, “without repentance.” Not only will He never withdraw Christ, but He will never grudge anything to

any who receive Him. "If thou knewest the gift of God thou wouldest ask of him and he would give thee living water."

*Fourth Outline. –*

*Second. Let us now show in the second place what things are in the gift.*

Hitherto we have been speaking of the sovereign freeness with which the gift is given, that there is nothing in the nature of God drawing it back. Whatever the value of it be to them who receive the gift, it is absolutely given by everything in the divine nature. Now observe what is in the gift: –

I. *Intrinsically or in its own nature.*

II. *Its properties, or uses to which it is applied.*

III. *The ends for which it is applied, and which give additional value.*

I. *Intrinsically, or in its own nature.*

Now here we are at a stand at the very outset. For the gift is not only "the gift of God," but the gift is God. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father) full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). Here we may say, "Canst thou by searching find out God?" "What is his son's name, if thou canst tell?" He "thought it not robbery to be equal with God." He is "the express image of his person," yea, "God over all blessed for ever. Amen." But Jesus was not only God in order to draw near to Him, but man to draw near to us. "The Word was made flesh." "A body hast thou prepared me." This body was a part of the gift. In the mysterious union between the divine and human natures in the person of Christ there are many wonders. (1) The two natures constitute but one person. "Of whom as concerning the flesh, Christ came who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen" (Romans 9:5). (2) These natures will be united for ever. "This man continueth ever" (Hebrews 7:24).

II. *The properties or uses to which the gift of God is applied.*

*First.* The work which the Son of God did in the flesh, in human nature, was all done in the room of men, in the room of the elect, and not for Himself. He was born for men, "Unto us a child is born." They could never "bring a clean thing out of an unclean," and the Son of God became the seed of the woman to "bruise the serpent's head." He fulfilled all righteousness. He lived a life of obedience for sinners. He was "made under the law to redeem them that were under the law." He was made unto His people righteousness. He also was engaged in doing good in their room. All His sufferings were endured for sinners. He was cut off, but not for Himself. He was made sin, and made a curse in their room.

*Second.* It is further true that what Christ did in the flesh had divine value ascribed to it as if the divine nature had done it. (1.) Consider in this light His being born. "The holy thing shall be called the Son of the highest." Hence also He is called "the mighty God." From this flows His people's being made partakers of the divine nature through the promise. For "He is the first-born among many brethren." So also the Holy Ghost comes upon them and they are born into the kingdom of God. They are conformed to Christ's image. Their souls are restored in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness, and their bodies are made eventually wholly sanctified. Seek nothing lower. From this flows also the infallibility of the people of God from grace or glory. They are joint heirs with Christ. As His natures cannot be separated from one another, so their souls and bodies being united to Him by the Holy Ghost and faith, can never be separated from Him without, as it were, tearing Him. "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou *me*?" Oh! if we had known how near the elect are to Christ it might make us afraid to meet them, and yet glad to do anything for them. The first Adam was made a holy

man, and all men were united to him. The second Adam is the Son of God, and all who believe are united to Him. (2.) His righteousness is ascribed to the divine nature. It is said to be “the righteousness of God.” Sinners are “made the righteousness of God in Him.” Hence observe (1) the immense *spirituality* of the righteousness of Christ. God seeks spiritual worship from His creatures, and here He found it. We may say in this case that it was God worshipping God! “I have glorified thee on the earth; I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do” (John 17:4). Here is something to which poor carnal creatures may go to seek “grace for grace.” It is here also they may obtain support, for it is not on the strength of their own graces, except as evidences, they ever enter heaven. (2) *Its infinite extent*. “Thy righteousness is very high.” Though this righteousness was wrought out in one body, yet, that body being united to the divine nature the righteousness extends to infinity. We, therefore, hear David, Paul, and others all saying “My God, my Saviour,” as if He was the God and Saviour of none else. But He is a God and Saviour to each and all of His people. Hence a wedding garment is prepared for every one of them. See to it that you have a garment for yourself. He has plenty. (3) It is an *eternal* righteousness. Like God’s inherent righteousness, it will last for ever. A work will seem to wax old, a promise may seem to wax old, but get Christ in the promise, and then it will stand for ever. We take the promise and not Christ when we do not see Him to be the purchaser of it and the ground of its fulfilment. If you are living on promises, and not by faith in Christ Jesus, they will fail you in a strait. If you have no view to Christ they will fail you altogether. (4) It is an *unchangeable* righteousness. For He is “Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.” This righteousness is like the clothes of the people in the wilderness, it waxes not old. All other righteousnesses will wax old. (5) The righteousness of Christ is *redolent from “the ivory palaces.”* So God is well pleased for His righteousness’ sake.

Of aloes, myrrh, and cassia,  
A smell thy garments had,  
Out of the iv’ry palaces,  
Whereby they made thee glad.”  
Psalm 45:8.

Christ’s righteousness filled heaven with odours sweet.

(3.) All His sufferings have divine value as if done by His divine nature. Hence it is written, “The Church of God which he purchased with his own blood.” It is also said that “the Lord of glory was crucified,” and “the Prince of life killed.” (1) Here again we observe His spirituality comes in view. His blood is *spiritual* blood. “How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” (Hebrews 9:14). Hence His blood can cleanse “from all sin” (1 John 1:7). As the presence of God can go through every place so this spiritual blood can be conveyed by the Holy Ghost into any crevice of the heart. If you can tell in what part of your soul or body the divine presence is not, then say what the blood of Christ cannot cleanse. The existence of hell affords no objection to this doctrine. The blood of Christ is not appointed for hell more than for the fallen angels. But the blood of Christ has cleansed the believer’s hell already. Christ endured His people’s hell, the wrath of God, and as there is but one hell, as the wages of sin, they shall never enter another. (2) It is *infinite* blood. “Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.” As the sea cannot be fathomed so this blood cannot be. He casts their sins into the depths of infinity, never to rise any more. As salt water kills dry land creatures, so this sea kills sin. Yet the sea is never defiled. The blood of Christ is not only pure blood, but it is also purifying. (3) It is *eternal* blood. He offered himself “through the eternal Spirit.” Its effects are eternal, either in killing or healing. It is either a cup of salvation or of damnation. It will be true concerning us either that He “washed us from our sins in his own blood” or that we have “trodden under foot the Son of

God, and counted the blood of the covenant wherewith he was sanctified an unholy thing.” (4) Lastly, it is *unchangeable* blood. “He which is filthy, let him be filthy still, and he that is holy let him be holy still (Revelation 22:11). “He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet.” Hands and head were already washed in the blood of Christ in regeneration and justification. The believer further requires to be washed once for all, in the whole soul, body, and spirit, in order to complete sanctification.

*Application.*

(1.) *To openly unholy.* Come and ask for washing in the blood which cleanseth from all sin. The apostle says, “Be not deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.” But he adds, addressing the Corinthian believers, “And such were some of you; but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Corinthians 6:9-11). If you do not come and ask, it were better you had never been born.

(2.) *Hypocrites.* Some pretended to take Christ and did not. Another said, “I go, sir, and went not.”

(3.) *Those seeking Christ,* striving against sin, come to this blood. Whatever else you go to will not do. Try this open fountain. Seek the Spirit of God who can baptise you with the water and the blood.

*Fifth Outline*

*Third. Let us now consider for what ends or purposes God gave the gift of His only begotten Son.*

All these ends or purposes are included in the word “everlasting life.” “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 Him, not “to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved,” not to give a cup of damnation, but a cup of salvation. It is living water the Son gives, “the earnest of the Spirit,” spiritual life now, which will end in eternal life. Indeed “this is the condemnation,” when we refuse Christ; and if we had known that it is not by coming to Christ, but by staying away from Him, that we are ruined, we would ask of Him, and He would give us “living water.” Death was the disease that fell upon sinners, and, therefore, life must be the cure. As it was by breaking a covenant, the covenant of works, “by one man” that “sin entered into the world and death by sin,” so there is no life till the covenant be fulfilled. “If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.” The purpose, therefore, for which this gift, even Christ Jesus, is given is all summed up in one word – “I will give thee for a covenant of the people” (Isaiah 42:6;49:8) Now, in the Father’s giving the Son for a covenant, three things are implied: –

(I.) His fulfilling the first covenant requirements. “As by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous” (Romans 5:19).

(II.) His kingly power to bring them out of the miserable state of bondage in which they are held by sin and Satan: “Say to the prisoners, Go forth” (Isaiah 49:9).

(III.) That He shall be a new covenant head and surety to instate them in an infallible covenant: “Jesus was made a surety of a better covenant” (Hebrews 7:22).

(I.) Let us then consider, first, His fulfilling the first covenant requirements. This includes two things. 1. An obedience of suffering for every transgression in disobedience. 2. An obedience of fulfilling the commandments as given to Adam in a state of innocence.

1. While Adam stood, he had only to perform what the law required, but when he fell he required to suffer, and that willingly, for the offence he had done. The willingness with which it is done constitutes the principal part of obedience. Hence, so much weight is laid in the Word of God on Christ's willingness to obey and suffer. "I lay down my life that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself" (John 10:17-18). It is also said, "He became obedient unto death" (Philippians 2:8). Hence on the other hand, in virtue of unwillingness, all the sufferings of men and devils in hell, can never satisfy for one sin. But by Christ's willingness we are sanctified. "Lo, I come to do thy will, O God" (Hebrews 10:9-10). He not only suffered, but suffered most willingly. As His sufferings were otherwise of divine value, so they were endured with divine willingness. The Son was willing in Himself to suffer, and so willingly He did the Father's will. As the Father gave the Son with his whole heart and soul, so the Son by His obedience and sufferings pleased the whole heart and soul of the Father. He is well pleased for Christ's righteousness sake. Learn (1) the impossibility of man's obeying. He cannot suffer without impatience. If Job cried for death, and cursed the day of his birth, for earthly trouble, though he had some grace, yea much grace, what impatience must sinners have in the torments of hell, ever adding sin to sin, and never, never, diminishing one! (2) The infinite satisfaction which was to the Father in Christ's sufferings. "Who is this that engaged his heart to approach unto me?" (Jeremiah 30:21). The whole heart of the Father and the whole heart of the Son met. All the divine attributes were satisfied by the obedience of Christ. The Son's heart was as much set upon giving obedience, as the Father's was in receiving obedience. (3) Is it not then a woeful hard heart we have? We not only deny the obedience of our own heart, but we would deprive, if we could, the Father of His Son's hearty, willing obedience. Oh Capernaum! Oh Bruan! What will come as the reward of such hardness? (4) Those truly willing, behold here ground of hope. If even any of these sufferings were in your stead, they were willing sufferings, neither forced, nor grudged, and therefore Christ upbraids not any who come asking to be made partakers of His obedience. Nay, He freely offers it all. Why did the Son of God become poor? Was it not that He might be a Saviour for the poor, for flesh and blood, for those under the law, for sinners, for the accursed, and all with willingness? He does not grudge His sufferings to any who will take them. As for despisers thereof, His blood will yet cry aloud for vengeance against them. Seek, then, to get a sense of your lost and miserable state. Seek to get the blood of Christ applied to your consciences, and also the heart of Christ implanted in your souls.

2. His obedience of fulfilling the commandments. Just as Christ said "It is finished," when His sufferings were finished, so He also said, "I have finished *the work* which thou gavest me to do" (John 17:4). The elect not only owed suffering, but also serving ever since the fall. They owed serving all the time of suffering. They could never do both. But Christ both served and suffered. He was all His life "a man of sorrows," and He went about all His life "doing good." He not only paid the original sum of debt to justice, but kept the books clear of new debt. His whole life was one of suffering and obedience. The Son became the covenant head of the elect before they sinned. Though they are actually interested in His work of salvation when they believe, yet they were in Him, in one sense, from all eternity. He took them up when Adam left them, and carried them to His dying moment. "As in Adam all die, so in Christ all shall be made alive." Christ was the plague of death. "He swallowed up death in victory." It cost Him a battle, yet He conquered. Here, again, learn (1) the impossibility of man's satisfying the law and justice of God for sin. He would have to suffer for all the debt, and satisfy the law at one and the same time. You would need to "wash and make you clean," yea, to go back to the innocency of Adam, before this could be done. Further, those who would be justified by the law would need to live without meat, drink, clothes, light, or any comfort. Their mourning would require to be as deep as hell, their fasting as long as hell, and

their praying as loud as hell. And throughout all this, they would require to give perfect obedience, serving God day and night. Where are old prayers here? Bring them forth, and burn them as filthy rags. Communicating will not justify you, unless you could eat hell-fire with it. On the other hand, though you give your body to be burnt, there is no profit without charity, the love of Christ begetting love in you. Give up hopes from the law. Seek to be “dead to the law by the body of Christ.” (2) Observe the exact fulfilment of the law by Christ. “Thy law,” saith He, “is within my heart.” His righteousness is “the righteousness of God.” It is of His own appointment, and by His own working. “My heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels,” saith the Son (Psalm 22:14). The heart that had the law within it was God’s heart, for the Son is God, and he was as tender of the honour of the law as the Father. (3) Those who will not take this righteousness, refuse God the obedience of Christ. They despise all He did. Better despise all the worship of heaven than this. All that has been or ever will be done that is of any value is only the fruit of this righteousness. They shall die without mercy who despise the blood of the Son of God. Such would have no honour done to Christ through eternity. Our guilt is truly of a crimson dye. Truly we say in our hearts, “There is no God.” There is more guilt in unbelief than in all other sins. It shut the greater number of the children of Israel out of the promised land. (4) Those, then, who get Christ’s righteousness, get the righteousness of God, *done with the heart*. A poor creature can do nothing with the heart. Get this righteousness first, and it will engage your heart also. If we believed that Christ engaged with all His heart, then He would engage us. “The love of Christ constraineth us.” Behold, on the strength of what obedience believers go to a throne of grace and duty. They go depending upon the obedience of Christ, which was heart obedience, the obedience of the heart of God. This source of strength gives life to faith and works.

3. We add a third part of Christ’s work as covenant head. He is mediator between God and sinners in order to bestow all this. “He is exalted to give repentance and forgiveness of sins” (Acts 5:31). None can give the benefit of Christ’s obedience and sufferings but the Holy Ghost, and none but He can give the sense, and feeling, and enjoyment of this benefit. Now, Christ possesses the Holy Ghost without measure, and all who get Christ, get all the blessings we have mentioned. He procures by His obedience and intercession the way, that was shut up by law and justice, for the Spirit to go forth, and the Spirit goes forth that He may show to sinners the things that are Christ’s. What! will He show all this? Then, “it is time to seek the Lord, till he come and rain righteousness upon us” (Hosea 10:12).

*Application.*

(1) To those who have fled from self, sin, and the law to the Gospel. You may rely upon the oath and promise of the Father. “I have made a covenant with my chosen, I have sworn unto David my servant” (Psalm 89:3). You may trust in the blood of the Son. It is “the blood of the everlasting covenant.” (2) To those who cleave to self, sin, the law, and works. Remember there is no other atoning sacrifice, there is no righteousness but Christ’s. There is no other intercessor for transgressors but Christ. May He bless His Word, and to His name be everlasting covenant praise through Christ. – Amen.

[January 1897]

## A Sermon.

By the Rev. DONALD MACFARLANE, Raasay.

“Therefore thus saith the Lord God, Behold I lay in Zion for a foundation, a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste” – Isaiah 28:16.

In this passage of Scripture we see a glorious light breaking forth in the midst of darkness. The promise of the Messiah renewed to the Church of God is that light. As all the rays of natural light emanate from the sun as their source, so all Gospel promises proceed from Christ, the Son of righteousness; and they all point to Him as the only hope of sinners. “For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God” (2 Corinthians 1:20).

The state of the true religion was very low when this promise was given, as may be gathered from the context, and the first chapter of this prophecy. The people in general were bad, but their rulers were worse. They were scoffers at the Word of the Lord. “Wherefore hear ye the Word of the Lord, ye scornful men, that rule this people which is in Jerusalem” (verse 14). And notwithstanding the divine threatenings denounced against them, they were making themselves secure: “Because ye have said, We have made a covenant with death, and with hell are we at agreement; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come unto us: for we have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood have we hid ourselves” (verse 15). But the Lord assures them that their refuges shall be no protection to them when He deals with them in judgment: “Judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet: and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding place. And your covenant with death shall be disannulled, and your agreement with hell shall not stand; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, then ye shall be trodden down by it” (verses 17,18).

It was in these circumstances the promise was given. In the words of the text there are three things to which we would call your attention, viz.: –

- I. – The foundation spoken of.
- II. – The laying of the foundation, and
- III. – The superstructure, or that which is built on the foundation.

I. – The foundation. A foundation, as is well known, is the basis on which something is built. Christ is said to be a foundation because the church of believers is built on Him. And it is evident from Scripture that it is Christ that is meant by the stone spoken of in the text. He is often spoken of in the Word of God under this figure. The apostle Paul says of the rock which was smitten by Moses in the wilderness, out of which the people received water, “And that rock was Christ,” that is, a representation of Him. The Psalmist says, “He brought me up also out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock” (Psalm 40:2); and there is no doubt but it is Christ that is signified by the rock there. Again, “The Lord is my rock and my fortress, and my deliverer: my God, my strength, in whom I will trust” (Psalm 18:2). The apostle Peter, quoting our text, applies it to Christ. “Wherefore also it is contained in the Scripture, Behold, I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded” (1 Peter 2:6). Christ speaks of Himself as the rock upon which His Church is built. “And upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18). Some say that Peter is the rock, but Peter himself says, as we have seen, that Christ is the rock, and we believe him. Paul again says, “For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 3:11).

From these Scripture references – and many more might be added – it is evident that the Lord Jesus Christ is the person meant by the stone laid in Zion for a foundation. The Church of believers has but *one* foundation, and that foundation is Jesus Christ, as Paul asserts. He who is the foundation is God. No creature, man or angel, can be the ground of a sinner’s hope for eternity: “Thus saith the Lord; Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord” (Jeremiah 17:5). “Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is” (verse 7). Christ

as to His divine person is God, equal with the Father in nature, power, and glory. He is the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of His person, upholding all things created by Him, by the word of His power. When in His state of humiliation on earth He was the Son of man, who was at the same time, with regard to His Godhead, in heaven. This could only be true of Him who was God as well as man. A mere creature cannot be in heaven and on earth at the same time. He claimed to be God equal with the Father, "I and the Father are one," and He proved that claim by the miracles which He performed. He healed all manner of sickness, raised the dead to life, and did many other wonderful works, which none but God could do. So that He said to the Jews who denied His divinity, "If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not, but if I do, though ye believe me not, believe the works: that ye may know, and believe, that the Father is me, and I in him" (John 10:37,38). It was necessary that He who was to be the Saviour of sinners, and the foundation of His church should be God, and of Christ it is true, "From everlasting to everlasting thou art God" (Psalm 90:2). None can be the rock on which the Church is built but He of whom this is true.

It was also necessary that He who was to be the foundation should be *man* as well as God. Without this He could not be the foundation of our hope. Christ is God-man. The Word that was from all eternity with God, and was God, was made flesh. He assumed human nature. It was in that nature He was the "tried stone." "He took not on Him the nature of angels; but He took on Him the seed of Abraham." He took on the nature of man, a true body and a reasonable soul. As the Father prepared that nature for His eternally begotten Son, the Son took it into union with His divine person. This was necessary that He might finish the work the Father gave Him to do. His divine person supported His human nature when suffering, and the dignity of His person added infinite efficacy and merit to His obedience unto death. But there is more than this to be said of Him who is the rock of our salvation. As God-man, Christ holds a threefold office as prophet, priest, and king. Now, although He is prophet and king when He is working out everlasting redemption for His people, we think that it is chiefly in His *priesthood* He is the foundation laid in Zion. For it was in that office He magnified the law, and made it honourable, and laid the foundation of our salvation. But more on this subject when we come to speak of His sufferings.

1. We have hitherto been speaking of Christ as the stone laid in Zion for a foundation. We shall now come to consider what is said of the stone. It is "a tried stone." The word, "tried," must refer to the sufferings of Christ. If the stone signifies Christ, as most assuredly it does, the trial of it cannot have any other meaning than His sufferings. Christ was tried by suffering. Suffering is a trial. God's people are tried by suffering, wicked men are tried by suffering, but Christ was tried that He might be the foundation of our hope for eternity. "He suffered, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God." He suffered in His human nature. It was for the end that He might suffer He became man. As God He could not suffer. But He took that difficulty away, as Paul observes, "Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Philippians 2:6-8). Christ suffered in His soul and body. He took the place of His people under the broken law, and as they sinned in soul and body, and thereby incurred the curse of the law, He had to suffer in His whole human nature. He was made a curse for His people that they might be delivered from the curse of the law. During His state of humiliation He was "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." He was the "tried stone." By whom was Christ tried? He was tried by men, He was tried by devils, and He was tried by His own Father. Sin made His people liable to suffering from these three parties, and Christ, as their surety and substitute, must suffer from them. Yea, He is willing to suffer

all that the law required as a satisfaction for the sins of those given Him in the everlasting covenant. "He loved his church and gave himself for it."

(1) He was tried by men. David prayed that He should not fall into the hands of man. But the New Testament David fell into the hands of sinful men, and that when they were at their worst. They could not be worse on this side of hell. There is such a thing as *restraining grace*, which keeps wicked men from going all the length they would go in wickedness, and which they would go, were it not for that restraint by which they are bound, as with a chain in God's overruling providence. Satan is said to be bound, and wicked men, who are his willing servants, are bound by this restraint. And we thank God for it. But God withdrew that restraint from the generation who crucified the Lord of glory. He left them to themselves. And what evil will not sinful men do if left to themselves? This is clearly seen in the cruel treatment which Jesus received when He was delivered into the hands of sinful men. That generation left to themselves were more like wild beasts than reasonable beings. They are in Scripture compared to bulls, dogs, unicorns, &c. Men of all ranks, ages, and professions were combined against the Lord and His anointed. Kings, judges, priests, soldiers, and others, rose up in fury against Him. The Church that professed to be the Church of God thirsted for His blood. They rejected His claim as the Messiah; they mocked His prerogatives as king, prophet, and priest of His Church. They scourged Him; they spat upon His face; they struck Him with their hands; they cried, "Away with him, away with him, crucify him." They nailed Him to the cursed tree. They crucified the Lord of glory! They showed no pity for the "man of sorrows." They had no mercy for Him who is plenteous in mercy to miserable sinners. In their wild treatment of the Son of God they were more like incarnate devils than men. Surely "the carnal mind is enmity against God." Surely in man by nature "no good dwelleth." Those who say that some good dwelleth in him would do well to think of how fallen nature showed itself in the sufferings of Christ, and sinful nature is still the same.

(2) He was tried by devils. It is hard to say whether Christ suffered more from men than from these evil spirits. There are some things that men can do that devils cannot, and there is some things devils can do that men cannot. But one thing is sure, both were of one mind against the Lord. Both were actuated by the same spirit of enmity against Him, and both exerted all their power to inflict suffering on Him. But they differed in the methods used. Men used physical force. They crucified Him by wicked hands, devils used temptation. The former wounded His body, the latter harassed His soul with temptations. To be tempted is a great trial, inasmuch as it causes mental suffering. Christ was tempted of the devil; and although He did not yield to the temptation, yet He suffered by it. The old serpent attacked the Saviour in the wilderness by three awful temptations. It is remarkable that as men denied His being the Son of God, the devil made an attack upon His Sonship too. "If thou be the Son of God." It is a bad sign when men and Satan agree in their views and use the same arguments. But in all his attacks Christ met him by the sword of the Spirit, and made him retreat for a season. It was but for a season. For it would appear that in the last sufferings of Christ the prince of darkness, with all his hellish host, attacked Him again so as to intimidate His human nature in view of the awful cup of wrath which the Father gave Him to drink. But in this he was defeated also, for Christ said, "The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" He did drink it. Who but the Blessed One Himself knows what He suffered from evil spirits?

(3) He was tried by His own Father. O, has not the Father's beloved Son suffered enough from men and devils? He suffered much, but it is not enough. It is not enough for the glory of the Father, it is not enough for the love of the Son, it is not enough for the justice of the law, it is not enough for the bruising of the head of the serpent, and it is not

enough for the redemption of His people. He must suffer more, He is willing to suffer more. As yet He only suffered from creatures, He must suffer from God. Creatures cannot inflict the punishment of sin but in a small measure: it requires the arm of Almighty God to inflict that punishment. So it pleased the Father to bruise His Son, and to put Him to grief. "He spared not his own Son." In the Garden of Gethsemane He bears visible marks of suffering. From the agony of His holy soul there oozes forth through the pores of His holy body a bloody sweat. There is no creature touching Him, He is suffering from the immediate hand of the Father. He is drinking the awful cup! Again, the hiding of the Father's face from Him on the cross, causing His bitter cry, "My God, my God, why has thou forsaken me?" is another indication of how He was tried by His Father. It was after He had suffered from His Father He cried, "It is finished." He glorified the Father on earth, He finished the work which He had given Him to do. By His death He made full atonement for the sins of His people, and is the foundation laid in Zion. In His priesthood Christ is the foundation.

2. Christ as the "tried stone" is "a sure foundation." "The foundation of God standeth sure." It is "sure" on many accounts.

(1) It is sure because nothing could satisfy the justice of the law of God but the obedience of Christ. The blood of bulls and of goats could not do it. But Christ did it by the one sacrifice of Himself. "Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other" (Psalm 8:5-10).

(2) It is sure in opposition to all other foundations. "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." The house that was built on the sand fell because the foundation was *not* sure. All who build their hope for eternity on their own righteousness, in whole or in part, shall perish, for that foundation is not sure.

(3) It is sure because it is an everlasting foundation. The sandy foundation lasted for a short time, but when the trial came it gave way. But this foundation stood all the trial that was put upon it by men, evil spirits, and the wrath of God. It shall never give way.

(4) It is sure because it is able to bear the weight of all heavy laden sinners trusting in Christ for salvation. Though you are as heavy laden with guilt as Manasseh was, come to Christ. He is able to save you, and to keep you from sinking into that place of woe where you deserve to be. This foundation can bear the weight of the chief of sinners. It has been found by the experience of believers to be a sure foundation. They found no sure resting place till they came to Christ. All other foundations they tried failed. They now could trust millions of souls, though they had them, to this foundation. They can then recommend it to others. It is "a sure foundation."

3. Christ is also spoken of in the text as the "corner stone." A corner stone is necessary in a building as well as a foundation stone. Christ is both in the spiritual building. As the foundation stone He supports the Church; as the corner stone He unites all believers, so that, although they are many, they are one church built on Him. He unites Jews and Gentiles. All believers are united to Christ, and united to one another. So the Apostle Paul says, "And (ye) 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" (Ephesians 2:20,21). It is in Christ they "are fitly framed together." But the corner stone is useful for another purpose. It beautifies the building as well as unites it. Christ beautifies the Church. The world saw no beauty in Christ, nor does it see any in His church. But all the spiritual beauty that is to be found among men in this world is in the people of God, and they derive all their beauty from Christ. They have a beautiful garment, the white robe of Christ's righteousness, they have the beauty of holiness in so far as they bear the image of Christ.

As they are in themselves, it is true that they have many defects and imperfections, but in Christ they are complete. You are not to judge of them as they are in themselves, but as they are related to Christ. If you look at the stones in a building, apart from the corner stone, you may observe much roughness about them. But if you view the building as a whole from the corner stone, you will see that there is beauty. Christ says of His church, "Thou art fair." He sees more beauty in them than either the world or themselves can see. They are now imperfect, but they shall yet be made like unto Him who is "fairer than the sons of men."

II. – The laying of the foundation. Who lays it? The text says, "Behold, I lay," saith the Lord. The work of laying the foundation stone is not entrusted to any one. God reserved that honour to Himself. There are foundations laid by men for poor sinners, but these are not to be trusted in. None can stand but that which is laid by God. "Salvation is of the Lord." He is the author of our salvation.

1. When did God begin to lay the foundation? In eternity. The foundation of the Church was laid before that of the world was laid. The world shall come to an end, the Church is to last for ever. The foundation of the Church was laid in the *eternal purpose* of God. Christ, who is the foundation, says, "I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was. When there were no depths, I was brought forth; when there were no fountains abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled, before the hills was I brought forth: While as yet he had not made the earth, nor the fields, nor the highest part of the dust of the world. When he prepared the heavens, I was there: when he set a compass upon the face of the depth: When he established the clouds above: when he strengthened the fountains of the deep: When he gave to the sea his decree, that the waters should not pass his commandment: when he appointed the foundations of the earth: Then I was by him, as one brought up with him: and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him; Rejoicing in the habitable part of the earth; and my delights were with the sons of men" (Proverbs 8:23-31). God's eternal purpose is the original source of the salvation of sinners, and that purpose was according to His own will. (Ephesians 3:11). In that eternal purpose everything pertaining to the salvation of His people was arranged, and Christ, who was to work out their redemption, was set apart by the Father. The foundation was laid firmly and deeply in the secret counsel of God.

2. He laid it also in the revelation He first gave of His purpose. No creature knew God's purpose of salvation till He made it known. And it was made known in the time of need. Man sinned, destroyed himself. But before the way of salvation is revealed, he is brought to trial, charged with his guilt, condemned. What is he to do? Is there a way of escape? It was then God said for the first time in this world, "In me is thy help." "A word in season, how good it is." And how was He to help? He laid help upon One that is mighty. He revealed Christ as the seed of the woman who was to bruise the head of the serpent, and who, in working out redemption for His people, was to be bruised Himself. He was revealed as the "tried stone" – the foundation. God laid the foundation before our first parents in the first promise given of the Saviour of sinners. This was good news to those who were on the eve of sinking into everlasting perdition under a load of guilt. It is good news to you, sinner. And He who revealed the foundation to them was able by His grace to build them on it.

3. He laid the foundation in the institution of the bloody sacrifices of the Old Testament. These sacrifices were a type of Christ. They had no efficacy to take away sin, but as they represented Him. And all who were saved under that economy rested on Christ alone as the foundation of their hope. God set Christ before them in these types and shadows as the foundation, in order that the Church then might be built on Him.

4. God laid the foundation in the death of Christ. He gave His Son to suffer, to die. "When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his son, made of a woman, made

under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons” (Galatians 4:4,5). Creatures could do nothing in causing the death of Christ, but as they were permitted by God. So Jesus said to Pilate, “Thou couldst have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above” (John 19:11). So far as creatures were concerned in His death, it was the most wicked act ever perpetrated in this world, but so far as it was the work of God, it was the greatest manifestation of His love ever made known to men or angels. “God *so loved* the world that he gave his only begotten Son.” He gave Him unto death.

5. The foundation is laid ministerially in the preaching of the Gospel. It is in this sense Paul says, “I have laid the foundation” (1 Corinthians 3:10). “We preach not ourselves but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus’ sake” (2 Corinthians 4:5). In setting forth the way of salvation to perishing sinners he would know nothing save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified; and as for the ground of his own hope, he says, “But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross (sufferings) of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Galatians 6:14). This was also the preaching of the other apostles, and it is the preaching of all the true ministers of Christ. There is a kind of preaching of Christ in our day, which is not the preaching of Him as the foundation. His example is to some extent set before sinners, but His atonement is ignored. It is not the preaching of Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. The sure foundation is not set before sinners, and why? The preachers themselves are not built on Christ.

6. Where is the foundation laid? He who laid it tells. It is laid in Zion. “Behold I lay in Zion,” &c. Zion means the visible Church. Christ’s name is made known in Zion, and is confined to that place. It has often been said that salvation is impossible outside the visible Church, and that, if rightly understood, is true. For as no stone can be built on a literal foundation till it is brought to the foundation – where the foundation is – so no sinner can be built on Christ till he is brought within the visible Church, where Christ is. The apostle Paul is plain on this: “How shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard?” And in order that sinners throughout the world may be brought to Christ, the command is given, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature.” “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God” (Romans 10:14-17).

III. – The superstructure, or that which is built on the foundation. The foundation was laid that a building might be erected upon it. Christ died that His people might live. In every building there is a builder. Who builds the Church? He who laid the foundation – God. So we read, “When the Lord shall build up Zion he shall appear in his glory” (Psalm 102:16). When He built the world He appeared in the glory of His power. When He builds the church He appears in the glory of His grace. “Then, if God is the builder, we need not fear that the church shall not be built, and when built, it will be to the praise of His glorious grace.

1. Observe the means by which the Church is built on the foundation. In this work the Lord uses means.

(1) He employs men in the work of building. Every builder has labourers, God has His. Who are these? Paul answers, “For we are labourers together with God; ye are God’s husbandry, ye are God’s building” (1 Corinthians 3:9). All the labourers are first built on Christ, and then they are sent forth to build the Church, as instruments in God’s hand. Paul was building before his conversion, but not on Christ as the foundation. He was building himself and others upon the sand, upon man’s own righteousness; and not till he was built on Christ was he employed as a labourer together with God. There were many labourers in the Jewish Church, but they rejected the true foundation and corner

stone (Psalm 118:22). But in every age God has true labourers, prophets, apostles, and others in the early ages, and now He has ministers of the Gospel and others, and he shall have them till the end of time. All believers are expected, and are under obligations of grace, to do what they can, according to their several abilities and callings, to do their share in this glorious work. The prayers of God's people are powerful means of carrying on this work. So it is written, "When the Lord shall build up Zion. . . . He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer" (Psalm 102:17). There are various other ways in which private Christians may be useful in advancing the Lord's work in the world. There is work for each, work for all.

(2) There are other means used as well as labourers. What are these means? Those appointed by God, and none other. The means appointed by Him for the building of His Church are complete. They are not to be added to, nor taken from by men's inventions. They are the Word, the Sacraments, and prayer. The Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are God's Word; there are two Sacraments, baptism and the Lord's Supper. These, along with prayer, are the means of grace which God has given for the building up of His Church in these last days. All other means besides these are but men's inventions, and they are never owned of the Lord in building His Church. "To the law and to the testimony, if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isaiah 8:20).

(3) The Holy Spirit, the third person of the glorious Trinity, to whom is entrusted the work of applying the redemption purchased by Christ, works by these means. The means, though divinely appointed, are in themselves ineffectual, but as they are used in the hands of the Spirit. We have the means, but we need the Spirit. As the Son, the second person, undertook in the everlasting covenant, to work out the redemption needed, the Holy Spirit, the third person, undertook to apply it to the heirs of salvation, and He will do this work.

2. There is, lastly, the material built on the foundation to be considered. What is it? It is the Church. "And upon this Rock I will build my church." The Church here means the Church of believers, as is evident from our text. "He that believeth shall not make haste," as also from 1 Peter 2:5, "Ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house." Believers are the stones built on Christ.

(1) Observe first, the state in which the stones built on this foundation are found. What are these by nature, and where are they? They are not in Christ. They are not living stones. They are in a state of nature, "dead in trespasses and sins" (Ephesians 2:1). They are the children of wrath, even as others (verse 3). A great change must then take place before they are built on Christ. As the stones used in a building must be dug out of the quarry in which they originally are, and of which they form a part, before they are put in the building, so sinners must be taken out of the state in which they are by nature before they are in Christ. "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). As no stone ever came out of the quarry till it was taken out of it, so no sinner will ever come out of a state of nature till he is brought out of it by the Spirit of God. All who are built on Christ as the foundation are found in a state of nature, which is a state of sin and misery, but they are not left there.

(2) Consider the change of state and nature which all built on Christ undergo. They are taken out of their natural state by the Holy Spirit. How does the Spirit work? He works by His Word. He quickens and awakens sinners by the terrors of the law. "And you hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins" (Ephesians 2:1). They did not quicken themselves, but the Spirit quickened them. And when He begins His effectual work He uses the law first. "By the law is the knowledge of sin." When the law comes the sinner is not only

awakened, but is also convinced of his sins. He now believes God's testimony concerning him as a sinner. He sets to his seal that God is true. He is sure that he is a child of wrath, that he deserved God's wrath, and he fears that wrath shall be his portion for ever. He is moved with fear, he cannot be any longer at ease in Zion. He has discovered for the first time that he has a lost soul. He asks in his inmost soul, "What must I do to be saved?" He knows that, if saved, something must be done to satisfy the law for his sins. God is just as well as merciful. And as he is as yet ignorant of the way of salvation, he begins to compound with the law. He tries his utmost to lay a foundation for the salvation of his precious soul. He forsakes every known sin, he endeavours to perform every known religious duty. He tries to keep the Sabbath day holy, he prays, reads God's Word, attends on the means of grace, and seeks to be conscientious in everything. Such a person would seem to be broken off from the rock of which he formed a part, but he is not yet in Christ. Many a stone that was broken by the hammer that was never put in the building. Many a sinner that was to some extent awakened that was never savingly united to Christ. There is more required. He must be broken off from the law as a covenant of works before he is in Christ, and this takes place in the case of all who are built on the sure foundation. "I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God" (Galatians 2:19). "By the deeds of the law no flesh shall be justified." Before a sinner is dead to the law, willingly dead to it, he is enlightened in the knowledge of Christ, in the knowledge of His person, His death, and finished work. So it is written, "Ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ" (Romans 7:4). The law is necessary as a means to convince of sin and misery, and to show the impossibility of salvation by it; but before sinners are brought to believe in Christ, the Word of the Gospel is necessary. It is the incorruptible seed by which the redeemed are regenerated, and it is such that believe in Christ. The unrenewed heart will never unite with Him, as clay and iron in the image could not be united. Christ, therefore, said, "Ye must be born again." As many as received Him were born of God. The Spirit, in all His graces, dwells in the new heart, and the first act of faith is to *receive* Christ, the second, which immediately follows, is to *rest* on Him alone as the foundation laid in Zion.

(3) As in other buildings, there are stones of different sizes in the Lord's house – small stones and large stones; all are needful to make up the building, and each has its proper place in it. Some are more public to the eye, others are hid in the wall. Ministers are public persons in the Church, set up as watchmen on the walls of time; others are more private; both occupy the place assigned to them by the Great Builder. The one cannot say to the other, I have no need of thee; and the mark of the greatest is this, "I am less than the least." O what a wonder to be the least stone, to have a place at all in the Church of Christ!

(4) What is remarkable about this house is, that unlike other buildings, a great part of the work of polishing the stones is carried on after they are placed in it. Believers are perfect as to their justification, but their sanctification is only begun. It is a progressive work. When they believed in Christ, they knew but very little of the fountain of corruption that dwells in them. When Christ made Himself known to them as their Saviour, and the Beloved of their souls, the carnal mind seemed to be dead, but they found out afterwards that it was not dead. So some have experienced more soul trials after their conversion than when they were awakened to a sense of their lost condition. "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" is their cry till they are made perfect in holiness. But He that hath begun a good work in them will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.

(5) The work of building was begun in the garden of Eden, when sin entered the world now near six thousand years ago, and it is not yet finished. Many stones have been put in it since, "and yet their is room" for more. The good work shall go on progressing till the

top stone is put on it. “The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it” (Zechariah 4:9). “He shall bring forth the headstone with shoutings, crying Grace, grace unto it” (verse 7). Then that world, which was used as a scaffolding, shall be taken down, but the Church built on Christ shall stand immovable for ever.

1. In conclusion, a word to the careless sinner. You have been born in a Gospel land – within the visible Church – where Christ’s name is made known. You live in sin, in forgetfulness of God, and of the needs of your never dying soul. You are on your way to eternity, where you must be miserable for ever in hell, if you die without Christ. We beseech you in the name of Christ to pause, and to think of the eternal concerns of your precious soul ere it be too late. You are invited to Christ. Seek Him while He may be found, call on His name while He is near. Rest not till you find a saving interest in Him, till you are found in Him, and on Him as the foundation laid in Zion. If you perish eternally, we shall be free of your blood.

2. To the self-righteous. You are building on a sandy foundation, which may give some support to a false hope, till you come to the floods of death. Then the foundation shall give way under your feet, and you shall sink into that place of everlasting despair prepared for the devil and his angels. You also are invited to Christ – the sure foundation; and if you perish, we shall be free of your blood.

3. To the Lord’s people. What a glorious foundation the Father provided for you! His own beloved Son in whom His soul delights. He spared not Him, but delivered Him up for you all. Think of the love of the Father in giving His own Son; think of the love of the Son in laying down His life for you; think of the love of the Spirit, who opened your eyes to see your need of Christ, who led you to Him, who enabled you to receive Him in the free offer of the Gospel. Let your meditation on God be sweet; be swallowed up in contemplation of Him. You are often tossed with the tempest of temptation, you are burdened with a body of sin and death, you are afflicted with the manifold afflictions of this life, you are perplexed with doubts and fears, but the foundation of God stands sure under your feet; you shall never sink, you shall never perish. Christ says, “Because I live, ye shall live also.” He died once, He lives for evermore. Be humble, be thankful. Live not to yourselves, but unto Him who died and rose again. Labour for the coming of His kingdom. Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To Him be glory, both now and for ever. Amen.

[February 1897]

## A Sermon

By Rev JAMES S. SINCLAIR, John Knox's Tabernacle, Glasgow.

“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” – John 3:16.

We are told in the opening verses of this chapter that Nicodemus, a man of the Pharisees and a ruler of the Jews, came to Jesus by night. Nicodemus had become secretly convinced that Jesus was no ordinary man, but a teacher who possessed the presence and power of God in His work. He was, therefore, anxious to meet Jesus, but to escape observation, came by night, and said unto Him, “Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God; for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.” It was no doubt a great step on the part of Nicodemus to give this testimony, if we consider his as yet imperfect knowledge, and the keen sense he had of the enmity with which his Jewish brethren regarded Christ. The testimony, however, true as far as it went, was inadequate in at least two important respects. First, Nicodemus appeared to have nothing more than a belief in Jesus drawn from the observation of His miracles. The belief was therefore only natural or intellectual. “Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” The Lord Jesus did not in His reply proceed to convince Nicodemus of the inadequacy of his faith by a process of reasoning, but with all authority declared unto him the great fundamental doctrine of the new birth, without the experimental knowledge of which a man could in no wise see the kingdom of God. Natural knowledge, without an inward radical universal change in his soul by the communication of a new spiritual life, would be of no avail. The second inadequate feature in

the testimony of Nicodemus was his acknowledgment of Christ simply as “a teacher come from God.” He did not as yet apprehend that Jesus was the promised Messiah, the Son of the living God. The Lord Jesus therefore graciously led him on from the consideration of the “earthly things,” things that concerned the new birth which required to take place in his soul on earth, to contemplate “heavenly things” concerning Himself who had come from heaven as the Saviour of sinners. In unfolding these “heavenly things” Jesus declares Himself to be “he who came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven” (verse 13), in one word testifying both to His humanity and divinity. Then, after announcing with evident reference to His death upon the cross, and its consequent benefits, that “as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life,” He proceeds to give a full epitome of the great work of salvation from its origin to its end, in the remarkable words of our text. “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.” Let us now, therefore, in dependence upon the Spirit of God, consider: –

I. – The love of God: “God so loved.”

II. – The objects of His love: “the world.”

III. – The manifestation of it: “that he gave his only begotten Son,” and

IV. – The ends of the whole design: “that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

I. – The love of God. In speaking of this wondrous love we shall take occasion to point out, first, its nature, and secondly, its properties.

1. Its nature. It is very important that we should know the exact nature of this love, as many have erred concerning the faith in regard to it. Many are not slow to ascribe even to the love of God these weaknesses that are characteristic of natural affection among men. According to Arminians it is at best but a weak ineffectual thing, because, if it is set upon all men, as they say, it fails to secure the salvation of multitudes of its objects, who perish in their sins. This is not the love of God revealed in the Bible, for the latter is an effectual, saving love, and no other will meet the case of helpless, perishing sinners.

(1) Let us observe then that the love of God here set forth is not a natural affection whose exercise towards men His nature necessarily demands. The love of God viewed as natural and necessary is only to be seen in exercise between the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost in the glorious Godhead. This love is an essential element in the blessedness of the Triune God. But the love of God to creatures is not essential to His blessedness. He is eternally blessed in Himself, and would have been so had no creature ever existed. He required no object of satisfaction outside Himself. The very existence of creatures is a pure act of His good pleasure. To say, therefore, that His love to men is a necessary affection of His nature is to make Him dependent for part of His blessedness upon His creatures. This is derogatory to His all-sufficiency as the self-existent God, and makes Him a dependent being. This changes God into a creature. His own word declares Him to be “blessed for ever, and dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto” (1 Timothy 6:16). The conclusion, therefore, is that His love to His creatures is not a natural and necessary affection. Let no one think, however, that it is any less glorious on this account. It is a revelation of His character which results in the deliverance from everlasting misery, and the entrance into eternal life, of a vast number of unworthy sinners of Adam’s race.

(2) What, therefore, does this love actually consist in? It consists in a free voluntary purpose on the part of God to reveal His goodness in the salvation of men. “I *will* make all my goodness pass before thee” (Exodus 33:19). The Scriptures declare that God is good, and the love which He has set upon sinners for their salvation is a manifestation of the boundless

goodness of His character. This manifestation was not natural and necessary, but voluntary, and therefore originated in the will of God. He willed to show the riches of His goodness; He willed to set His love upon sinners, and so we find in the Scriptures the purpose and the love of God inseparably united. His eternal purpose to save sinners, and His eternal love are frequently spoken of as expressing the same thing. They are also mentioned together, as in the following passages: "I *will* love them freely" (Hosea 14:4). "Be thou partakers of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God; who hath saved us . . . according to his own *purpose and grace* which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began" (2 Timothy 1:8,9). The purpose and love of God, having reference to one and the same end, and to one and the same persons, must infallibly secure the salvation of their objects. "The counsel of the Lord standeth for ever." "Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord; and the people whom he hath chosen for his own inheritance" (Psalm 33:11,12). We shall now speak of the properties of this love which further disclose its glorious character.

2. Its properties. These are the following: –

(1) It is eternal love. The love of God to sinners existed before the foundation of the world" (Ephesians 1:4). It shall also last through eternity. "I have loved thee with an everlasting love" (Jeremiah 31:3).

(2) It is infinite and unchangeable love. God is infinite, and this is the love, not of a finite being, but of Him who is the infinite God. When it is said that "God loved," the love is necessarily like Himself, and therefore infinite. "God is love." It is also unchangeable. "I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed" (Malachi 3:6). His people's sins are fitted to provoke Him to withdraw His love, but, saith He, "The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee" (Isaiah 54:10).

(3) It is undeserved and unmerited love. It is undeserved, because the objects of it were sinners, rebels, "children of wrath even as others." Instead of love they deserved the everlasting hatred of God. "Thou hatest all workers of iniquity" (Psalm 5:5). It is also unmerited. They who deserved the wrath and curse of God could not merit any good thing, far less His eternal and unchangeable love. No merit can purchase this love. The merits of Christ did not purchase it; they are its immediate fruits. The love of God in Christ Jesus not only gave eternal life to sinners, but removed the barriers which, on account of sin, law and justice had righteously set up between God and men, and which would have effectually prevented them from ever enjoying His love.

(4) It is love unto salvation. It is not a fruitless sentiment in the mind of God, but is efficacious to the salvation of sinners. It absolutely secures the salvation of its objects. "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him" (1 John 4:9).

(5) Lastly, it is sovereign love. God passed by fallen angels, and loved fallen men. Nor is it set upon all men. It is only set upon such as were "chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world" (Ephesians 1:4). "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated" (Romans 9:13). Instead of quarrelling with the divine sovereignty it becomes us to wonder that the least love or mercy should be shown to even one of our hell-deserving race. Rebels who deserve to be cast into everlasting woe, as the righteous reward of their sins, may well marvel that the infinitely holy God should set His love upon an innumerable company of them. The Lord hath said, "I will have mercy upon whom I will have mercy." This sovereign mercy is revealed in Christ, and the most direct way to its enjoyment is for us to come as unworthy sinners, and ask for it at the feet of a sovereign God in Christ Jesus. Such persons will speedily learn that it is "no vain thing" to wait upon God. Yea, He has given a free invitation

to all to look to Himself as the only Saviour. "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is none else" (Isaiah 45:22).

## II. The objects of His love: "the world."

Under this head we shall consider, first, the character and state, and secondly, the number of these persons, as designated by "the world."

1. What is their character and state. Their character is that they are *sinner*s. They broke the law in their natural head, Adam; they are possessed of a corrupt nature, and have committed innumerable actual transgressions against the same law. "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). None of the human race, the elect included, are anything less than sinners. Sin has also made them *rebels*. We are rebels against the authority of God, because we despise His law and trample it under our feet. "We have rebelled even by departing from thy precepts and thy judgments" (Daniel 9:5). Further, we are *enemies* against God. "The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be" (Romans 8:7). We are therefore filthy and polluted in the sight of God. What is more foul than enmity to that God who is "glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?" Such is the character of "the world." What is the state of "the world." The whole world is under the righteous curse of God. For "cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them" (Galatians 3:10). All have not only failed to keep the law, but all have transgressed its precepts, either in thought, word, or deed, so that all are without mistake under the curse. It is upon such persons, as were enemies to Himself and under His righteous curse, that God set His eternal and everlasting love. They were meet fuel for hell, yet He loved them, that they might be made meet for the enjoyment of eternal glory. It is therefore matter of great encouragement to all who hear the Gospel that it is sinners whom God loves. It is unholy rebels and enemies whom He has chosen in Christ from all eternity, and therefore souls, sensible of their miserable and guilty condition, are encouraged to look to Him who loved vile sinners, and sent His Son "to be the propitiation for their sins."

2. Why are they designated "the world" in respect of number? Because God loved persons "out of every kindred, tongue, people, and nation" in the world (Revelation 5:9). It was a common misunderstanding on the part of the Jews that God had a gracious regard to no people but themselves. Under the old dispensation He showed them His peculiar favour, but He clearly intimated by His servants, the prophets, that the Gentiles should in due time be brought into the Church, and that "all the ends of the earth should see the salvation of our God." "The Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising" (Isaiah 60:3). Many passages might be quoted from the Old Testament in proof of this truth, and the New Testament is full of it. The Apostle Paul points out in the second of Ephesians that Christ by His precious blood had brought those nigh who were "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenant of promise," and it is these same persons whom he speaks of in the first chapter of this epistle as chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world. The coming of Christ was therefore the time at which this great enlargement of the Church's borders was to take place, and so the apostles are bold to declare the love of God to Gentiles as well as Jews, yea, to sinners of all nations under heaven. It was for this end that the Lord Jesus commissioned them, saying, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15).

An error on this important doctrine has crept into the professing Church, and we would do well to beware of it. At the time of Christ's appearance the erroneous tendency was to limit the love of God, and the hope of salvation to one people, now the tendency is to extend this love to a degree unwarranted by the Word of God. For this purpose the expression "world" in our text is taken as applying to every person that ever was or shall be born into the

world. God is therefore said to have loved all men in the widest sense of the term. Various passages of Scripture are used to establish this view. We believe, however, that, in the case of all passages so used, an unwarrantable construction is put upon them, and that, if closely examined, they teach nothing but what is in perfect harmony with the clearly-revealed doctrine, that God's love, while extending to sinners of every nation, is set only upon some, though many, whom He chose in Christ from everlasting. In order, therefore, to guide our hearers in the examination of such passages, we shall state a principle laid down by eminent divines: – Every place in Scripture, where universality is apparently attributed to the love of God, the atonement, or the salvation of men, has a limitation in the context, and a decided limitation in the analogy of the faith. If we apply this rule to the passage before us we find that there is a limitation in the very heart of it. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son," not that all universally, but "that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish." Again, in the following verse we are told that "God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved." "The world" is here unmistakably used in a limited sense, for the Son did not come to save the whole world, otherwise the whole world would have been saved. Vast multitudes of the race were in eternity, and many of them, sad to say, in a lost eternity, before He appeared in the flesh. The Saviour also declared that the wicked should go away into everlasting punishment, and so many would be lost forever. Observe further in the first chapter of this Gospel, tenth verse, that the expression "world" is used in the same verse in two distinct senses. He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not." In the first two clauses of this verse "world" includes the material creation, while in the last clause it refers only to man. Even in the last clause the expression "world" has a further limitation. It cannot be said that none of the "world" knew Christ. Some did know and receive Him, for we are told almost immediately after that "as many as received him to them gave he power to become the sons of God." "The world" must therefore be taken in the above passage either as the unregenerate, or as the greater portion of the world. It is in fact perfectly clear, that this word must be taken in an indefinite sense in many parts of Scripture, and that such indefinite expressions must be understood in the light of those that are definite. If you wrench such words as "world" and "all" from their context you can easily give them a universal meaning of the widest extent, but it is the duty of the reader of Scripture, yea, of any book whatsoever, to consider every word in the light of its context, and thus to learn its correct meaning. When, therefore, we look at this same Gospel where the word "world" so frequently occurs, we find that in no portion of the Word of God is the doctrine of God's love to the elect only more clearly set forth, "All that the Father giveth me shall come unto me" (John 6:37). "Thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him" (John 17:2). "I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world" (verse 6). "I pray for them; I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me" (verse 9). All these passages clearly prove that it was not all but a portion of the human race which God gave to Christ that they might be saved. It is not ours, however, to conclude that, because all are not chosen, we ought not to trouble ourselves about the matter of salvation. It is our highest duty to seek an interest in that salvation which God in His eternal love has provided in Christ, and no other consideration whatsoever can relieve us from this duty. "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon" (Isaiah 55:6,7).

III. The manifestation of His love: "that he gave his only begotten Son." It is evident from these words that it is God the Father who is spoken of in the text as having "so loved the world" as to give His only begotten Son. This display of love is exceptionally wonderful and

glorious. In speaking of the gift of the Son we shall refer, first, to the gift of God, and secondly, to the immediate purposes for which He was given.

1. The gift of God was His only begotten Son. "The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. When there were no depths, I was brought forth" (Proverbs 8:22-24). He was by eternal generation the only begotten Son of the Father. He is also co-equal with the Father in substance, power and glory. The Father is God, but the Son is also God. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). What an unspeakable manifestation of love is it that the Father gave the Son, who is also God over all, for the salvation of hell-deserving sinners? The gift of all the angels and archangels in heaven, and all created existences together were nothing to this. The redeemed may well say, "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift" (2 Corinthians 9:15).

2. The immediate purposes for which God gave His Son. These provide a marvellous manifestation of this love.

(1) He "gave him to be head over all things to the Church, which is his body" (Ephesians 1:22). The Father in the everlasting covenant gave the Son to be the head and representative of elect sinners, that in this capacity He might perform the work of a mediator between God and guilty men, and in due time accomplish their eternal salvation. The Son as Creator was infinitely exalted above their persons, as creatures, and as holy, was also infinitely exalted above them, as sinners, yet the Father willingly gave Him that He might be their surety and substitute, and thus take their place under the law, satisfy justice, and obtain for them eternal redemption, and eternal life. The Son, with equal love and willingness, undertook the work. "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:10).

(2) God actually gave the Son "in the fulness of the time" to perform the work committed to Him. This work involved a life of humiliation, obedience and suffering on the earth. It was necessary, therefore, that the Son should assume human nature, the assumption of which was His first act of humiliation. It was humiliation for the Creator of heaven and earth to veil His glory, and to take flesh and blood. He was born a little child in Bethlehem, and in a low condition. His mother was a humble virgin, and His birth place was a manger. There was no room for mother and child in the inn. There was no room among men for Him who dwelt in the bosom of the Father amidst the unspeakable glories of heaven from all eternity. His first dwelling-place on earth after His birth was in a stable among the beasts that perish. Such was the deep humiliation that attended His birth in the flesh. All His future life in this world was a life of humiliation. He hungered, thirsted, was weary, and had not where to lay His head, and all this was done that His people might be delivered from the miseries that their sins deserved, and might enjoy a blessing instead of a curse. Further, He was made "under the law" in the room of His people. This involved Him in the imputation of their sins. He who was holy, harmless, undefiled, bore the sins of a company which no man can number. "He hath made him to be sin for us," says the Apostle, "that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (2 Corinthians 5:21). The Son of God, having the sins of men laid upon Him, suffered the curse due to these sins. For this reason He suffered from men, devils, and the justice of God. The last act of suffering was, when He endured the infinite wrath of God on the cross. It was then He drank the full cup of the righteous indignation of God, paid the full penalty that justice demanded, and finished the work of redemption. "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us" (Galatians 3:13). In all this work we behold the love of God to guilty sinners. Abraham laid his son upon the altar, but was not permitted to shed his child's blood. But here, we have God the Father,

for the great love wherewith He loved accursed sinners, drawing the sword of infinite justice, and bathing it in the precious blood of His eternal Son. "Awake, O sword, against my Shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, said the Lord of hosts" (Zechariah 13:7). The Son cried, "It is finished," and gave up the ghost. The dignity of His person added infinite merit to the sufferings of His humanity, and justice received infinite satisfaction. The work of redemption was thus completed for ever. We have to observe, however, that the Lord Jesus not only willingly and lovingly endured all necessary sufferings in order to satisfy a broken law, but he kept the law perfectly in its precept in the room of His Church. He fulfilled the covenant of works, so as to obtain the promise of eternal life, originally lost by His people in Adam their first covenant head. The law of God is summarily comprehended in these two great commandments, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and soul, and strength, and mind; and thy neighbour as thyself." The Son of God rendered infinitely perfect obedience to this law, and so obtained eternal life for His people. He, therefore, secured not only eternal redemption, but eternal life, not only everlasting freedom from the curse, but the everlasting enjoyment of the favour and fellowship of God. "The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:23).

Some represent the work of redemption, as if it were solely the interposition of Christ between the Father, as an angry judge, and men as guilty sinners, and thus as if the Father showed no love at all. This is a very unscriptural view of the work. In every step of it, from its origin in the covenant of grace to its execution in the incarnation, obedience and death of Christ, we have as surely the display of the Father's love to sinners as we have of the Son's. The Father undoubtedly displayed His righteous wrath in the curse of the law, and in the sufferings of Christ upon the cross. But it was He also who, out of His eternal love to sinners, provided His own Son as a sacrifice in their stead. We see therefore in the cross of Christ a glorious manifestation of the love of God to guilty men, for He spared not His Son, but freely gave Him up to an accursed death, that poor sinners might be set free. "God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

IV. The ends of the whole design: "that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

1. The first end is that sinners may believe in the Son of God. To believe in the Son is to "receive and rest upon Him alone for salvation, as he is freely offered in the gospel." No one is excluded from believing in Him in virtue of any natural circumstances whatsoever. Race or rank is no obstacle. Whosoever, young or old, rich or poor, Jew or Gentile, moralist or open sinner, believeth in Him, shall not perish, but have everlasting life. Faith, however, is absolutely necessary. It is only "he that believeth that shall be saved." "He that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him." A historical faith is not sufficient. We may believe by our natural powers the historical record of the work of redemption, and have no saving knowledge of Christ. Saving faith is the gift of God, and the fruit of His Spirit's work in the soul. "By grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8). This faith is a consequence of the new birth. What is its first effect? It unites the soul to Christ. Christ offers Himself as a Saviour in the gospel, and the soul, by this heavenly faith, receives and rests upon Christ for all the ends of salvation for which He came into the world.

2. The second end is that believers "should not perish, but have everlasting life." No sooner is a sinner united to Christ by faith than he obtains two benefits. The first is, freedom from the curse of the law from which Christ has redeemed His people. That curse is "everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power" (2 Thessalonians 1:9). The believer shall not perish, because he is now no longer under the curse. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus" (Romans

8:1). The second benefit is 'everlasting life.' Christ says that He gives unto His sheep eternal life. This eternal life begins in spiritual life. The dead sinner is made partaker of spiritual life in the new birth. Faith is the outcome of this spiritual life, and it is the same life that will eventually be swallowed up in eternal life. This eternal life is in heaven, but the believer becomes an heir of it here, through his union to Christ by faith. He is therefore said to have everlasting life, because he is a rightful heir of it in Christ Jesus. Believers are heirs of an "inheritance that is incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for them who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation" (1 Peter 1:4,5). The love of the Father, the obedience of the Son, and the work of the Holy Spirit, concur to this gracious and blessed end.

#### Application.

(1) If you are still in your natural state, you are dead in sins, under the curse of God, and in danger of hell fire for ever. God, in His eternal love, gave His beloved Son, that He might die, and open up a way of escape and salvation for even such as you. Now, in the day of your merciful visitation, seek grace to believe in Christ, lest you perish for ever. At the judgment seat you will have to answer, not only for your transgression of the law, but for your rejection of the gospel. If you are then found in your sins you will have to bear the wrath of the Lamb, and the punishment of unbelief through eternity. Flee now for your life to Christ, the only refuge for sinners from the tempest of the wrath of God. "Seek ye me," saith the Lord, "and ye shall live" (Amos 5:4).

(2) You that have good reason to hope you were enabled by grace to believe in Christ, seek a deepening sense of your absolute unworthiness of any good thing at the hand of God, and especially of the salvation that He has provided in His beloved Son. The more lively your faith in Christ the deeper will be the sense of your constant need of dependence upon Him in all His fulness. Seek to get such a measure of nearness to Him by faith as to be filled with ever-increasing wonder and praise at the eternal unchangeable love of God manifested in His Son, to such unworthy, hell-deserving 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."

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## A Sermon.

By Rev. JOHN R. MACKAY, M.A., Gairloch, Ross-shire.

“But to him that worketh not, but believeth upon him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness” – Romans 4:5.

In this passage of the Word of God our attention is directed to several particulars: –

- I. – A people, poor and oppressed;
- II. – The refuge of this people;
- III. – The way by which they come to this refuge; and
- IV. – The privilege which is theirs when they come.

I. – Our text makes mention of a people poor and oppressed. “He who worketh not” is only one of a class; and what the characteristics and distinguishing circumstances of that class are will be better understood if we observe how they are contrasted with another very different class of which mention is made in the preceding verse. “To him that worketh is the reward reckoned of debt.” “He that worketh” is, again, one of a contrasted class, a typical instance of that large company of whom the Scripture saith elsewhere that they are rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing. The two classes which, in the words of our text and of the preceding verse, are thus contrasted, compose the whole human race. They are the hungry whom God filleth with good things, and the rich whom He sendeth empty away.

What is it that renders “the poor in spirit” so poverty-stricken? There are several reasons which our text suggests, and to them we shall briefly draw attention: –

(1) The poor in spirit work not. By this is not meant that they are idle or inactive. None is so active or so profoundly exercised as they. Yet here they are said not to work, nor would they recognise themselves if spoken of under a different appellation. For by work is here meant something which merits life or favour from God, and of power of that nature they are deeply conscious that, as they are in themselves, they have none. Their confessions to this effect are numerous. “In me,” says one of them, “that is to say, in my flesh, there dwelleth no good thing.” “In thy sight,” says another, “shall no man living be justified.” In brief, it has become a commonplace with this class of people that those who expect to win the favour of God through some good thing which they themselves may perform, are yet under the curse (Galatians 3:10).

(2) Again, they are poor and oppressed because they are ungodly. To have lost the power of obtaining life is distressing, but to have acquired and actually to have exercised the power

of meriting or deserving death, that is more distressing still. What, then, is the nature of this ungodliness which is such an affliction to the poor? How desperately wicked the heart of man is, who can know? Let us rather incline our ear, that we may hear and understand what the Lord, who searches the heart and tries the reins, says concerning it: "There is," saith He, "none righteous, no not one. There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable, there is none that doeth good, no not one. Their throat is an open sepulchre, with their tongues they have used deceit, the poison of asps is under their lips. Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood, destruction and misery are in their ways. And the way of peace have they not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes" (Romans 3:10-18). Such an account of human nature will to many seem simply shocking; yet is it the very ungodliness of which the poor in spirit complain. And those who have most deeply known the plagues of their own heart will be the readiest to acknowledge that for all how terrible is the description which the Holy Spirit gives of man's heart by nature, it is not a whit more terrible than are the actual facts of the case.

All mankind are thus ungodly, but not all are aware of it. They are not all bowed down because of it. The afflicted poor are *consciously* ungodly. The words of our text make that plain. They are said to believe upon Him that justifieth the ungodly. Now, in saving faith there is the self-application of a cure or remedy – I mean that when one receives the redemption, which is in Christ Jesus, one receives it for oneself, and not for another. In receiving the redemption that is in Christ, we receive a redemption of which we have a deep consciousness of personal, individual need. The whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick. It is not, then, more true that to those who have no sense of thirst cold water is comparatively tasteless, than it is true that when there is no deep sense of personal ungodliness, God who justifieth the ungodly is not, and cannot be, an object of love and adoring wonder.

But to them that believe upon Him that justifieth the ungodly is He precious, and precious in this sense, yea, received in this sense He could not be, were they not deeply conscious of their own ungodliness.

(3) And yet again, for we are enquiring into the causes which render "the poor" so poverty-stricken, we cannot imagine an individual to have a deep personal realisation of ungodliness without having at the same time some sense of the wrath and displeasure of God. To know oneself as lost in the sense in which, in Romans 3:10-18, the Apostle speaks of all mankind as lost, is, in other words, to behold one's sins in the light of God's countenance; and in the light of that countenance is there always in more or less measure apprehended that the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against such ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness.

Need we, then, wonder that "the poor," who know so great reason for sorrow, are poverty-stricken? But is there no hope, no escape from this pit wherein is no water? Yes, there is. Blessed be He whose name alone in all the earth is excellent.

II. – This leads us in the second place to offer some remarks on the refuge that has been prepared for this people. What is that refuge? The refuge of the ungodly is He that justifieth the ungodly. He is the King Eternal and Invisible, the only wise God, the Supreme Judge, and He justifieth the ungodly. He dwells in light unapproachable, but it has pleased Him to reveal Himself as Creator, Lawgiver, and Judge. Above all, it has pleased Him to reveal Himself as the justifier of the ungodly. This is that glory of His which excelleth, and in comparison with which other revelations have no glory. Here mercy and truth are met together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other. A deep sense of the glory which is revealed when God justifieth the ungodly led the Psalmist, in the 89th Psalm, to say: "I will

sing of the mercies of the Lord for ever: with my mouth will I make known thy faithfulness to all generations.” For God, who is light, and with whom is no darkness at all; just, and with whom is no iniquity – He justifieth the ungodly, and that, strange as it may seem, in order to declare His righteousness. “Deliver me,” says David, “from blood-guiltiness, and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness.”

That God should justify the good and the holy, that is, declare them innocent, is only what must have been expected. But that He should justify, that is, pardon all the sins, and accept as righteous in His sight the person of the ungodly is what provokes wonder. Yet it is not more certain that He has revealed Himself as the Creator of sun, moon, and stars, than that in Christ He has revealed Himself as the justifier of the ungodly. This is the wisdom of God, this is the power of God; this is the glory of God; the light of the Lamb which will irradiate the New Jerusalem for ever and ever. That we may contemplate this mysterious subject in the light of Holy Scripture, we must, to begin with, observe that this act of the ungodly’s justification is on the part of God an act of grace, of free and sovereign grace. Only because He purposed from all eternity to reveal Himself as Jehovah, Jehovah, God merciful and gracious, is He spoken of in the words of our text as justifying the ungodly. Of the truth of this assertion the Scriptures of the New Testament afford many proofs. “We are predestinated,” says the Apostle, “to the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself to the praise of the glory of His grace.” “By grace are we saved,” and the headstone of the whole building shall be brought forth with this shout, “Grace, grace unto it.”

But we should view this great subject of the ungodly’s justification very defectively, indeed, if we were to overlook the most important truth, that when God justifieth the ungodly, He does so on the ground of the satisfaction which has been rendered to His law and justice through the obedience and death of the Lord Jesus. It is on the ground of an atonement that the Supreme Judge justifieth the ungodly; yea, so justifieth them, as that they shall never any more throughout all eternity come into condemnation. We are said to be justified freely by the grace of God, but only through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. “Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood” (Romans 3:24,25). Without the shedding of blood no sin is remitted. If God, then, justifieth the ungodly who believe upon Jesus, who shall lay anything to the charge of the Judge who thus justifieth, or to the elect who are thus justified? The answer to all questions of this nature is: It is Christ that died, yea, rather that is risen again. The Just One bore the penalty which the unjust ones deserved to suffer. The Just One, by obeying and suffering, satisfied the law, and has thus become the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth. It is in the beloved Son that they who otherwise were ungodly are accepted; it is in His blood they have redemption, even the forgiveness of their sins. Their ungodliness is the great distress of the poor and oppressed. God reveals Himself in Christ not to condemn, but to justify all those who come unto Him by Jesus Christ, and thus He becomes a refuge, an infinitely desirable refuge for these poor and destitute ones. The fact that in this way of salvation the law is not made void, but is rather established; yea, that the righteousness of the Supreme Judge is most clearly revealed when in this manner He justifieth the ungodly is an element that renders this refuge to the Spirit-taught unspeakably more desirable. And what confidence does it afford them in drawing near, when the eyes of their understanding are opened, to perceive that the redemption, which is in Christ Jesus, the forgiveness of sins, which is in His blood, was provided in the infinite love of God even the Father? “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.”

God justifieth the ungodly, He waiteth to be gracious, He is in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them. He is thus surely become the high

tower of those whose chief regret it is that they are ungodly, and that all the ungodly have incurred His just and unspeakably heavy displeasure. This surely ought to be news replete with graciousness to a lost world. To the consciously ungodly it is glad tidings of great joy. It is the hope set before them.

III. – How then, we inquire in the third place, do the consciously ungodly come to this refuge? The answer is, by faith. It is to him that believeth on God who justifieth the ungodly that righteousness is imputed. What, although a refuge from the storm and a covert from the tempest be provided, shall it avail those that in their worse than brutish indifference refuse to stir themselves up, or seek an entrance into it?

The consciously ungodly come by faith to this high refuge. How are we to think of this act of faith? for that without it no one can be acceptable unto God is frequently stated in the Scriptures. We should seek, on this account, to form correct views of what saving faith means. Let us, at the outset, lay down some things which saving faith presupposes. On the one hand, as we have already seen, it is presupposed that the individual believer should have a sense of personal ungodliness, and consequent personal ill desert. On the other hand, saving faith presupposes that there is revealed in the Scriptures of truth an object of faith. The object of saving faith is God by Christ Jesus, for by Him, that is, by Christ Jesus, saith the apostle Peter, we believe in God who raised Him from the dead, and gave Him glory that our faith and hope might be in God. If God were not in the Scriptures said to justify the ungodly, it were impossible that any consciously ungodly creature could trust in Him for justification. Faith presupposes a sense of need. It presupposes that the mind has been enlightened concerning Him who is the object of faith. It presupposes a willingness to come to this object. But it is more than all this in itself – it is a receiving of and resting upon God in Christ for our salvation. The faith of God's elect cometh by hearing – hearing the Word of God, and when the set time to favour those who have found themselves in a horrible pit and in the miry clay is come, rays of light from the word of our salvation are by the Spirit made to pass through and penetrate all the faculties of the soul, and are made the instruments whereby we receive the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. By the living energy that is thus imparted we are drawn, as by cords of love, out of the fearful pit, and out of the miry clay, and our feet are placed on the Rock. A new song also is given unto us, even praise to our God. Thus does the awakened sinner have an access into that grace wherein the whole Church of God for ever stand secure. Thus does the Psalmist say, "In God is my salvation and my glory; the rock of my strength and my refuge is in God."

We have said that they who thus by Christ draw near unto God are justified, and shall never any more come into condemnation. Is God then who justifieth the ungodly no further their object of faith, no further their resort in times of trouble? He is. In proof of this let the significance of the apostle's reference in the third verse of this chapter to the case of Abraham be observed. Abraham was a believer, and by consequence, a justified person when he left Ur of the Chaldees to come to Canaan. He was a believer when, in a time of great famine, he went down to Egypt. He was a believer when, on returning from the slaughter of the kings, Melchizedeck met him and blessed him. And it was only after all these times had passed over his head that the instance here quoted by the apostle as illustrative of the nature of saving faith took place. "Look now," it was said unto him in a vision, "toward heaven, and tell the stars if thou be able to number them. And He said unto him, So shall thy seed be. And he believed in the Lord, and He counted it to him for righteousness." Abraham, although for many years a justified person, draws near unto God on the ground that He justifieth the ungodly, and his faith was counted unto him for righteousness.

It is true that the state of those who are now in Christ is unspeakably far removed from that of those who are still Christless. It is also true that they who are once by living faith united unto the Lord Jesus never cease to stand in that gracious relation to Him. He giveth them eternal life, and they shall never perish. Yet we should mistake the nature of a life of faith upon the Son of God if we were to suppose that believers live only by an act that is past. If they have tasted that the Lord is gracious, they must ever be coming to Him as to “a living stone disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God and precious.” Let these things, therefore, be observed.

(1) The Lord’s people attain to a much deeper knowledge of what they are by nature after they are in Christ than they ever did before they were savingly united unto Him. In the light of that law which is written upon their hearts they have now a much more profound sense, a more soul-humbling sense of the heinousness of sin, and of the depravity of their nature.

(2) If they who are in Christ were to say that they sin not, or that their sins are not hell-deserving, they would only be deceiving themselves. God multiplies to pardon, even after their first acceptance, in order to their eternal salvation. The Psalmist was long in a gracious state, long a child of God when in Psalm 130 he said, “If Thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?” and also when in Psalm 143 he pleaded, “Enter not into judgment with thy servant: for in thy sight shall no man living be justified.” “If any man sin,” says the apostle John, “we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.” That is to say, they who are in Christ must needs resort to the same blood of atonement to which, if they who are still children of wrath would only by faith resort, it would put them in possession of eternal life.

(3) As the children of God in this world find their need of coming to the blood of atonement only increasing as the griefs of their heart enlarge, so is it of importance to observe that their abiding right to come to God by Jesus Christ, and the promise of acceptance when they do come, are in the Scriptures put with a “much more.” If “while we were sinners Christ died for us, much more then being now justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.” Yea, in one word, God justifying the ungodly who believeth upon Jesus is the wisdom of God, and the power of God unto salvation, and is that heavenly sun in the bright beams of which the redeemed shall rejoice throughout the endless ages of eternity.

IV. – We enquire in the last place what is the privilege of “the poor” upon their coming to this Refuge. Their faith is said to be counted unto them for righteousness. Or as it is put in the following verse, “God imputeth righteousness unto them without works.” “Faith,” as one has well said, “rests upon Christ alone. It in effect excludes itself as a work, in the matter of justification. It is not a thing upon which a sinner rests – it is his resting on the Surety. Therefore, that man who would bring in his faith as a part of his justifying righteousness before God, thereby proves that he has no faith in Jesus Christ.” Faith justifies, not as it is an act which one must perform or die the second death, but as it is an instrument whereby Christ is apprehended, received, and rested upon. It is Christ Himself who of God is made unto us righteousness. Christ in the mystery of His adorable person, the seed of David, and the Lord of all; Christ through His obedience and sufferings unto death satisfying the law, and thus making an end of sin; Christ set apart to do this for those who could do none of those things for themselves; these are the elements which enter into and constitute that righteousness which is the end of the law, the righteousness of God without the law, but witnessed by the law and the prophets. “I will,” says the prophet, “greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God, for He hath clothed me

with the garments of salvation, He hath covered me with the robe of righteousness." In this righteousness they are accepted, they have forgiveness of sins. Through this righteousness also they have eternal life, for life is the reward of righteousness. And thus, as their ungodliness was the root of bitterness which yielded them all their deepest sorrows, so this righteousness which is imputed unto them, shall be the fountainhead and spring of eternal, never-ending blessings, eternal, never-ending happiness.

**Application. –**

(1) Art thou yet a child of wrath? Is not peace with God something unspeakably desirable? God justifieth the most ungodly who come unto Him by Jesus Christ. Will you not seek Him while He is to be found, will you not call upon Him while He is near? This day are life and death set before you, therefore choose life.

(2) Or hast thou tasted that the Lord is gracious? Seek to realise more and more profoundly how great is your privilege. If God be for us, who can be against us? When He justifies there is no appeal from His decision. Does the love of Christ constrain you, leading you to seek to live for Him who manifested Himself so graciously to you? The springs of Christian activity are to be found in beholding the glory of God in justifying the ungodly.

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