

JANUARY–FEBRUARY 2016

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The Gospel Magazine

'Meet to be partakers' • New Covenant Theology—Part 5 • The Greatest British Value

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1766–2016

Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.

Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God.

Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

These texts, which have been associated for so many years with *The Gospel Magazine*, give some indication of what this bi-monthly stands for. We seek to present the Lord Jesus as the only Saviour for a lost world: to edify the people of God; and to promote unity among believers, ‘the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace’.

The Gospel Magazine is believed to be the oldest religious periodical still being published. One distinguished former editor was the Rev. Augustus Toplady, whose famous hymn, ‘Rock of Ages cleft for me, Let me hide myself in Thee’, was first published in these pages.

The Trust Deed of *The Gospel Magazine* is defined in terms of the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion of the Church of England, but the magazine itself is non-denominational. We aim to provide variety in unity, publishing articles from a wide diversity of past and present writers committed to ‘the faith once delivered to the saints’.

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THE GOSPEL MAGAZINE

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Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.

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EDITORIAL

THIS year marks the 250th anniversary of *The Gospel Magazine*. It is quite a landmark, not least because, in that time, a number of Christian publications and societies have come and gone. The state of true religion has ebbed and flowed. There have been huge national upheavals, and laws and social attitudes have altered so much that our forebears would hardly dare to recognize us as being citizens of the same country. The long-held principles of Christian worship, as something formal and reverent, have given way in far too many cases to self-indulgent emotionalism. The common translation of the Scriptures, which was read at church, home, and school, and which was taught and learned in portions by heart, has given way to a multitude of new translations. These have not helped but hindered understanding, since they are less and less known by professing Christians, as well as suffering the insurmountable obstacle of being translated from corrupt texts.

The doctrines of the churches—arguments over which saw this publication come into existence—are more confused than ever. Everyone truly believes what is right in his own mind, and changes it as often as he

changes his socks. The only heresy today, it seems, is to believe that the Christian gospel ought to challenge people—unless that challenge is to become more involved in ‘social justice’ and to raise awareness of environmental concerns. The fact that the greatest source of social injustice is the outworking of sin in the human heart seems to pass by many today. Indeed, to speak of sin is to become unnecessarily offensive.

As we survey the world scene we observe the rise of false religion to a point where it has become once more a political force. We see Christianity persecuted almost to the point of extinction in some countries—countries which have a very long history of being homes to Christians. We know of appalling suffering and brutal murders, as those who name Christ are martyred for their faith. The more liberal we become, the less they become. And in a sense, who can blame them? For what does our liberality amount to, beyond the active promotion of sin in many vile forms?

What can we do about it? Is there any way in which we can turn back the tide? We certainly cannot turn back the clock, even though some speak as if this were the answer.

Trying to live in the past is an utterly futile exercise.

Let us instead hold on to the same hope which moved the men who founded this publication. They did it because they had supreme confidence in the Lord and his Word. That confidence was expressed in the Preface to the first edition, which spoke of ‘the necessity and advantages of divine revelation’ over ‘the deficiencies of the light of nature’. The holy Scriptures were to be made ‘the standard of our divinity’. The stated intention was ‘to promote religion, devotion, and true piety’. It is the lack of these three things which characterizes the professing Church today.

How should we understand the promotion of religion? Ought we to aim at getting people to attend church, to take part in our services, and to discipline their lives around attendance? It would certainly be a start, but that is not what is meant. The promotion of religion refers not to increasing church attendance, but to spreading the gospel. Unless men and women are called upon to repent of their sins, and to have faith in Jesus Christ, their attendance or otherwise at church is of secondary importance. The gospel must be preached and taught, regularly, faithfully and clearly.

‘MEET TO BE PARTAKERS’

A Sermon by THE EDITOR

Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: in whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins. Colossians 1:12–14

WE have here another of Paul’s prayers for his readers, this time for the congregation at Colosse. The Colossian Christians were commended by the Apostle for the love they bore to their fellow believers, and for their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, verse 4. They held on to the true Christian hope of

The promotion of devotion is not aimed at getting people to join in our services, with all the right postures, Amens, and notes. It is not about adoration of objects or places. The promotion of devotion aims at teaching believers to love the Lord Jesus Christ more and more. Love for Christ is the heart desire of all truly converted people. Let this be taught faithfully.

The promotion of piety is not aimed at getting people to go through a series of religious exercises, or to adopt a particular form of dress or speech, even if such things would be an improvement on what society accepts today. Rather, the promotion of piety aims at teaching and encouraging Christians to live holy lives. As the churches become more and more full of people who are indistinguishable from the unbelieving world, so this need becomes ever more important.

So, how can we do any of this? By ourselves, with the greatest difficulty. We have no voice to convince the crowds. But we can set an example to those around us. And we can pray. ‘The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.’ Let us pray that the Lord will be pleased to revive his church in our day, and to his glory.¶

the world to come, verse 5, through a right receiving of the gospel. That right receiving was shown in their living fruitfully, in common with all who receive the gospel aright, verse 6. Knowing these things of them by report, Paul prays frequently for them, in the terms described, beginning in verse 9.

The prayer itself ends at verse 14, but there is no clear break between his recounting the content of his prayer, and his going on to explain a key element of it. Given that the key element concerns the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, verses 15 to 18, and the Father’s will concerning Jesus Christ, verses 19 to 20, it is wise for us to spend a little while considering the matter for which he prayed, as given in verses 12 to 14.

Paul prayed according to knowledge. That is, his prayers were informed, specific, and doctrinally correct. When he prayed, he reflected the revealed will of God. Such prayers, being not contrary to God’s will, are favourably received. How we need to learn to pray such prayers, that we may avoid many of the disappointments we meet in prayer.

In the verses before us, Paul speaks of giving thanks to the Father, who is God. God is our Father, as we pray in the Lord’s Prayer. He is our Father because he made us, and because he makes us heirs of his promises by faith. All the world, and everyone in it, was made by him; but God is not Father to all. He is Father only to those who can be called sons, having been adopted by grace. God is also the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ because, for the purposes of salvation, the relationship between them is that of father and son, as the prophets foretold—that is, the relationship is only revealed in the economy of salvation. Thus Jesus was obedient to God’s will in all he said and did, rather than acting alone, without reference to the Triune Godhead. It is through his perfect obedience, particularly his obedience unto the death of the cross, that he is our Saviour, and we may be inheritors of the blessings of faith. And this is the first point the Apostle makes:

1. The Father’s intention for his people

Which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light. This is spoken of the Father, and so describes what God has done for those to whom the Apostle writes.

Since he writes to those who have ‘faith in Jesus Christ’ and ‘love ... to all the saints’ through hearing and receiving the gospel, this statement is applicable to all who may rightly be described in this way.

i. Note, first, that Paul speaks of what God has done; *who hath made us...* This is something we have not done to or for ourselves. This is not something which is natural to us. This was not something that any human agency can accomplish. This is of the same order as what the Apostle John wrote concerning those who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, John 1:13, ‘which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.’ So we read here of something for which we owe the Father a debt of gratitude, it being impossible for us to have received this by any other means.

Such a statement declares a vital truth to us, that the true and living God, as opposed to the imagined deities of many theologies, ‘Christian’ and non-Christian, is the God who intervenes in the affairs of men, overruling their wills and lives, in order to give them something they could not otherwise have. Modern man complains at being told of a God who intervenes, for he professes to possess free will. It is perfectly true that we have free will, in that it is our choice as to which tie we put on before coming to church, or whether we put a chicken or a piece of beef or pork in the oven before coming out. It will be our choice whether we mow the lawn tomorrow—depending, of course, on the weather—and we can add many more mundane matters in which we have free will. Except, of course, it is not an entirely free will. We may have wanted to have one thing for lunch, but must settle for another, because opportunity or means were lacking, and we could not get what we wanted. Our free will is limited by all kinds of things, and those things, so very often, are in the will and power of God. Therefore, within the limits of our reasoning and hoping, we consider ourselves free. And,

foolishly, we go on from this apparent freedom in small things to think that we have free will in all things, whereas the Bible teaches that our wills are bound, and ‘the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do’ (Romans 7:19). Truly we have no freedom of will in the higher, moral, decisions we must make, and this is true also of what we would and would not believe concerning the Lord God and his revelation of himself to mankind.

And so we give thanks to God that he overrules, to do for us what we cannot and would not do for ourselves.

ii. But what is it that he does? He makes us *meet*. That is, he makes us suitable, he causes us to be adequate or sufficient for a particular purpose or end. This teaches us that, by nature, we are neither adequate nor sufficient for the end in view. There is something lacking. We are imperfect, incomplete, corrupted. The only other occurrence of this word in the New Testament is in 2 Corinthians 3:6, where it is translated ‘able’, with reference to the way in which God has made Paul and his fellow workers fit or able ministers of the new testament—the new covenant, or gospel. So, when Paul writes here that God has made us ‘meet’, he means that God has made us fit or able for a particular thing.

That we are not fit for it, or able to have it, without God’s intervention, shows that we are less than we probably think. God’s view of us differs very much from our view of ourselves. The Old Testament provides us with a number of illustrations of this truth. Perhaps the most obvious of these is the requirement for the high priest to cleanse himself before daring to enter the holy of holies, the innermost part of the temple, to offer the required sacrifice, Leviticus 16:4. He had to wash himself with clean water, and he had to put on clean linen garments. Unless he did so he would be considered contaminated, and his sacrifice would be rejected, and the sins of the nations would not be atoned. And the requirement

to wash and to put on clean clothing was not an invention of the high priest who did it, nor even of Moses who decreed it, but was of God who revealed what should be done. He dictates how we come before him, and how our shortcomings are to be made up. So, when we read that ‘he makes us meet’, we should take serious notice, for what we have here is a plain revelation of the means used by God to do for us something we cannot do for ourselves.

iii. The reason why we must be made meet by God is next revealed; *to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light*. By which is meant that, whereas Israel of old was made, through the giving and receiving of the Law, meet to be partakers of the earthly inheritance, we are made meet to be partakers of the heavenly. To simplify this, consider the following;

In the Old Testament, God called a man, Abraham, and made a covenant with him. The terms of the covenant were few; God would give him many descendants, and, in time, they would inherit the land in which he currently lived as a nomad. Now, that land was Canaan, and would, one day, be called Israel. When, in the fulness of time, Abraham’s descendants—the people of Israel—were led out of Egypt, they were not meet to inherit the land. They did not know God, or his will. They did not know how to worship him acceptably, or how to live in ways that would not offend him. They were ignorant of everything concerning true religion. So God taught them. He gave them the Law, and Moses, and the beginning of the Bible. He gave the Levites to teach them, and priests to offer sacrifice on their behalf when they failed to obey as they should. And when the generation which left Egypt disobeyed God often enough, and seriously enough, God left them in the desert until the whole of that generation had died. It was their children who, learning obedience, were deemed fit to enter the land.

God does not condemn us to a lifetime of wandering in the wilderness before permitting us to enter his glory. He makes us meet, or suitable, to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. That is, he does something for us, so that we can know, beyond all reasonable doubt, that God has promised us heaven, and we shall, by his grace, enter it one day.

At this point a question may arise. Why is this necessary? Why could God not simply give us the inheritance without the need to make us fit to inherit it? After all, he is God, and surely it is within his power to do so. Indeed it is, but such is his nature and character, that he does everything in an ordered manner, so as not to contravene his own holiness or majesty or justice. So we consider secondly,

2. The reason why the Father brings this about

Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son. This speaks to us of our condition, that we are not a free people who gain something better, but an enslaved people who need to be rescued.

i. God has *delivered us from the power of darkness*. That is, he has rescued us from the authority or control of darkness. Again, the Old Testament shows us how this was done for the Israelites, when God saved them from the power or authority of Pharaoh, when Moses was sent to command him, ‘Let my people go’. The signs and terrible things which followed, culminating in the death of the first-born in every house, were the evidences of God’s power to deliver. The initial refusal of Pharaoh to obey was, in time, turned to a strong urge to see Israel go, and the Egyptians shared this urge and heaped the departing Hebrews with gold, silver, precious stones, and changes of clothing.

In the Gospels, the picture is a little different. There, it is individuals who are delivered from darkness; in some cases, quite literally,

for the Lord Jesus healed them of physical blindness. In other cases, it was lives which were being destroyed by demon-possession, and the Lord Jesus cast out the evil spirits, thus causing the poor sufferer to be rescued from a living hell. For others again, the darkness was the despair of loss, and the Lord Jesus raised up to life the dead man Lazarus, the dead girl whose father was Jairus, ruler of a synagogue, or the only son of a poor widow woman, and so on.

But all of things stand only as a picture of what is really intended. The power of darkness is not slavery, or blindness, or even the despair of death, but sin and its consequences. Given that we lack free will in moral matters, and given that we are corrupt in our nature, so that we are incapable of doing good by habit; and, given that God is holy and just and pure, it follows that there must be a judgment awaiting us for our sinfulness. Indeed, we are at this very moment (unless the children of God by faith) citizens of a very different kingdom, the kingdom of Satan. He is the power of darkness; sin, corrupting us, brings us under the judgment of God, and makes us objects of his wrath. Satan, the father of lies, loves to have it so, and misleads and tempts us with all sorts of promises of pleasures and joys, which we are to have through behaving in ways which are absolutely contrary to God’s revealed will for us. And when we foolishly and wickedly do the things Satan tempts us to, we find that the promised joy is far less than we were led to expect, and the pleasures we derive quickly lose their appeal. And yet, such is the corruption of our nature, we readily believe Satan when he says, ‘Do it again, and it will be better; do some more, and the pleasure will increase’, even though experience tells us that this is not so. We cannot escape, for we are bound to act according to our corrupt and sinful nature. And all who do these things come under the judgment of God. So, we are in the power of darkness by nature. But God has something far better for us.

ii. God rescues us. He has *translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son*. This word, ‘translate’, sounds very odd to our ears, but is in fact very simple. Do not think of school French or Latin, but of Israel and her citizenship. There was a time when the Israelites lived in Egypt. They were not citizens, for they had no rights, no representation at the highest level of society, and no voice among people. They were, in a word, slaves, and had to do the will of those who had power over them. But God translated them. He rescued them as if he had been an army commander who had taken charge of a captured people, and led them into a different location. He led them through the wilderness, protecting them from various enemies and obstacles, until he should give them the Promised Land. Again, this land was given to them through military victory, but it was God who fought for them, and not the Israelites themselves.

There is another example of this in the Old Testament. In Isaiah 36 we read of the offer made by the representative of King Sennacherib of Assyria, who reminded the Jews that every other nation had fallen before their military might, and therefore they should surrender. He went on, in verse 16, to say, ‘Hearken not to Hezekiah: for thus saith the King of Assyria, Make an agreement with me by a present, and come out to me: and eat ye every one of his vine, and every one of his fig tree, and drink ye everyone the waters of his own cistern; Until I come and take you away to a land like your own land, a land of corn and wine, a land of bread and vineyards.’ Sennacherib was putting himself in the place of God, to dictate who should live where, particularly the chosen nation. Sennacherib failed. But what Sennacherib promised wickedly, God has done righteously. He has translated us from the kingdom of darkness, into the kingdom of his dear Son.

iii. Whose kingdom is it. *The kingdom of his dear Son*. This is a righteous kingdom, with a righteous King. It is a place where justice

and peace have kissed each other, and where the old enmity, raised by the coming of sin, is done away. God is pleased to dwell with man, and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. This is the kingdom which Jesus came to receive, and which is his by right, for he is of the house and lineage of David.

This kingdom is the exact opposite of the kingdom of darkness. Indeed, that kingdom may rightly be called the antithesis of this; Satan’s kingdom is a corrupted and twisted parody of the kingdom of Christ. His is a kingdom of death, whereas in Christ’s kingdom is eternal life. His is a kingdom of sin, whereas Christ’s is of righteousness and truth.

But what surely concerns us most is, how we may be removed from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God’s dear Son. How has the victory been won? Where was the battle? What were the weapons employed?

3. The means by which this has been accomplished

In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins. Paul comes now to the heart of the matter, the means by which we have access into Christ’s glorious kingdom. Note three things.

i. *In whom*. The blessings and benefits of which Paul speaks, the subject of his thankful prayer to God, is ours only in and through the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ is not part of our blessing, but is our blessing. It is not a matter of Christ and... but Christ alone. In Christ we have everything, and outside of Christ we have nothing. Now, when he says ‘in Christ’ he points us to the key to the whole matter; to be in Christ is to have faith in him, such faith as causes us to give up every other possible hope for any other possible form of happiness. We trust the Lord Jesus absolutely, and without exception, to be the giver of every grace and blessing. And, to be ‘in Christ’ means to be living in harmony with his will and nature. Since Christ was without sin, we must flee all sin, which,

after all, is a character trait of those who are in the kingdom of darkness, not the kingdom of light. So, we have these things ‘in Christ’.

ii. *We have redemption through his blood*. That is, Christ has bought us at a price. Once more, look back to the Old Testament, to Israel in Egypt. What made the difference between the Hebrews and the Egyptians, when it came to the death of the first-born in every house? Did the angel of death take notice of ethnicity? Did he consider the parentage of each first-born, and spare those who claimed descent from Abraham, and kill those who did not? No; a price was paid for the lives of the first-born who were spared. A sacrifice was offered, the lamb, from the sheep or the goats, a lamb without spot or blemish, of under a year. The blood of the lamb was caught in a bowl, and was then painted on the door-frame of the house, as a sign that those within believed the command of God, and sheltered under the blood of the sacrifice. Its carcass was then roasted, and the people ate their last meal in Egypt, before leaving. In the strength of that meal they went on their way to freedom.

The Lord Jesus Christ is our sacrifice, our Passover lamb, beneath whose blood we must hide if we would escape God’s wrath. His blood was not painted on a door-frame, but onto the cross, in the words of Paul, ‘blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us’, Colossians 2:14. That is, the shed blood of Jesus Christ, being spilt over the list of our sins, has rendered them unreadable. That list of our sins has been nailed to the cross, so that we can say with all confidence, that Christ died for my sins. He died in my place, as that Passover lamb died in the place of the first-born. He died so that I might live, and the charge-sheet which was against me is accounted as having been paid by him, granting,

iii. *The forgiveness of sins*. Here is the great benefit granted to us as a consequence of Christ’s atoning death. Here is the actual ground

of our being delivered from the kingdom of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of God’s dear Son. Here is the actual event which makes us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light. Sin is the problem, the matter which keeps us in the kingdom of darkness by nature, the reason why we are unfit to enter Christ’s glorious kingdom. Sin is the reason why we are justly condemned. And sin is what is forgiven us through faith in Jesus Christ and his finished work.

The effect of this is to show us that God, in sending forth Jesus Christ, has accomplished the very purpose of sending him. Jesus did not come in the hope of saving sinners, but to save them. He did not come to try to help them but to actually do what they cannot do for themselves. Here is salvation, full, complete, and free. There is nothing for us to do! That is, we contribute nothing to our salvation. The work has been done by Jesus, and there is nothing we are to add.

So, what is left for us to do? Anything? Yes, one thing; believe on him, and be saved. Just as no Hebrew was spared when the angel of death came who had not painted the blood on the door-frame, so none of us shall be saved who do not show that we believe God in this matter. Faith is the key, the means by which we share in the finished work of Christ. We must cry out to him to save us, in the sure and certain knowledge that there is no other Saviour. We must see in him all hope, joy, beauty and happiness, and know that there is no hope, joy, beauty or happiness to be compared with him. We seek Christ, and Christ only, and do so because we know how great is our need of him. This is why Paul prays in this way for the Colossians, and why he is at pains to tell them what he prays for. He delights in the gospel, and so will we, when we by faith see the goodness, wisdom and justice of God in declaring to us the true way of salvation. May we all know the Lord Jesus the only Saviour, and rejoice that our sins are forgiven in him. AMEN.¶

THE RIGHT CLOTHES

CARINE MACKENZIE

ON a recent visit to London, we were invited out for dinner. Our friend was staying in a London club which is very formal and traditional.

We arrived in good time and reported to the reception. The lady was very pleasant but she said to my husband, 'I'm sorry, I'm afraid you can't get in here without wearing a jacket and tie.' What were we going to do?

We sat in the hallway for a few minutes.

'Could you tell our friend that we are here?' my husband asked, 'and that I have not got a jacket.'

Very soon our friend arrived in reception, carrying with him a spare jacket. The jacket was quickly swapped for the casual jumper, a tie put on and we were welcome in the dining room where we enjoyed a lovely meal.

How do we get into heaven? By being good? No. All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags. (Isaiah 64:6).

We need to get a garment from someone else. Our Friend and Brother provides us with the robe of righteousness and without that we cannot get into heaven.

The Lord Jesus, the Son of God, came down from heaven to deal with our sin on the cross. He became a man and lived a perfect life. He died for the sins of his own people, providing them with forgiveness and eternal life. He gives 'garments of salvation', 'a robe of righteousness' (Isaiah 61:10). Without that robe we are not fit for heaven.

Jesus told a story once about a wedding feast. At weddings in the East at that time, the host always provided a special wedding garment for each guest. As the king was walking round his guests, he spotted one man without a wedding garment. 'How did you get in here without the wedding garment?' he asked. The man could not utter a word. He had thought his own clothes were good enough. He was immediately thrown out of the feast into the darkness.

Jesus told the story to show that his salvation is like the wedding garment—suitable clothing that will cover all our sins of thought, word and deed. Only if we trust in him for salvation, will we be fit to enter heaven.

In John's vision which we read in the book of Revelation, he speaks about 'those arrayed in white robes'. One of the elders told John that their robes had been 'made white in the blood of the Lamb' (Revelation 7:14). They could then serve God continually in heaven because Jesus, the Lamb of God, had shed his blood to pay the price of sin in our place.

We are not fit for heaven of ourselves but if we know our need of a Saviour and trust in the perfect Lord Jesus, then we can look forward to eternal life with him because of his righteousness.

BIBLE SEARCH

Find the missing words. The initials of the correct answers will spell out something from the story.

1. What are these which are arrayed in white robes? And _____ came they? (Revelation 7:13).
2. For he put on righteousness as a breastplate, and an _____ of salvation upon his head (Isaiah 59:17).
3. Behold, I have caused thine _____ to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment (Zechariah 3:4).
4. But we are all as an unclean _____, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6).
5. And this is the record, that God hath given to us _____ life, and this life is in his Son (1 John 5:11).
6. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the _____ of saints (Revelation 19:8).
7. So Christ was once _____ to bear the sins of many (Hebrews 9:28).
8. These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the _____ of the Lamb. (Revelation 7:14).
9. How shall we _____ if we neglect so great salvation (Hebrews 2:3).
10. He hath clothed me with the garments of _____, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness (Isaiah 61:10).

THE CERTAINTY OF SIN FINDING US OUT

The Rev EDWARD COOPER (1770–1833)
Supplied by PETER MURCOTT (Douglas, Isle of Man)

‘Be sure your sin will find you out’ (Numbers 32:23)

THERE is nothing which proves more ruinous to the souls of men than the hope of being able to sin without incurring punishment. It is this hope, which first tempts them to commit sin, and afterwards keeps them from repenting of it. Were they to feel that punishment would *certainly* follow the offence, fear would prevent them from committing it, or they would at least be anxious to avert it. Yet though liable to be called to judgment, they feel no concern; or if a serious thought arises in their minds, they speedily dismiss it, with the presumptuous idea that *they shall escape at last*.

The greatest kindness, then, that can be done to such persons is to destroy their vain hope, to show them their mistake, and to make them feel that, continuing as they are, they most assuredly shall not escape at the last. Yet it is the Lord alone who can work these things. He only can convince of sin (Jude 15). He only can open the heart and fix any deep impression there. He employs, however, his word as an instrument in his hand for accomplishing this gracious purpose. In a humble reliance, therefore, on the teaching of God’s Spirit, we may proceed to the consideration of this passage, addressed by Moses to the Israelites: ‘Be sure your sin will find you out’. The better to explain and enforce this solemn declaration, I shall show

1. What is meant by sin finding us out, and
2. The certainty that it will do so

1. The meaning of sin finding us out

By the expression ‘our sin’, we may understand any particular sin of which we may have been guilty; any gross and single act of injustice;

profanity, licentiousness, falsehood, or the like, which we may at any time have committed. But we must not confine ‘our sin’ to that meaning; for it more properly signifies all the sins of which we have been guilty. It includes:

- All our early and habitual transgressions of the Divine Law;
- All our offences committed against God or our neighbour;
- The evil words which we have spoken;
- The wicked thoughts with which we have been entertained;
- Our lack of proper use of the talents entrusted to us;
- Whatever we have done that we ought not to have done, or have left undone that we ought to have done.

These things taken together form ‘our sin’.

Understanding the expression

Now, in what sense is it said, that this *our sin* will find us out? To understand the force of this expression we must remember that sin necessarily brings with it, in its train, certain evil consequences. It casts them on the sinner. For a time he may not experience them; he may seem to have avoided them, to have put himself out of their reach, and to have escaped from their power; but, at length, they will overtake him, and seize him. His retreat will be discovered, and he will feel the consequences. More clearly, then, to see the meaning of this expression, we must enquire what these consequences are. We shall then more distinctly perceive what is meant by sin ‘finding him out’.

Three consequences

Now there are three consequences; fear, shame and death. When our first parents broke God’s commandment, and had eaten the forbidden fruit, they were *afraid*, and hid themselves from the presence of God. They were *ashamed* and made themselves aprons (Genesis 3:7). They became mortal, and subject to *natural* death. They lost their *spiritual* life; they passed under the sentence of *eternal death* (Genesis 3:19). Thus their sin ‘found them out’. It found them out speedily. It overtook them and seized them without delay. But this is not necessarily always the case. Men do not always *feel* the consequences of sin as soon as they have committed it. They may sin, and yet have no immediate alarm. Their consciences may not be roused. Their fears may not be excited. They may entertain no apprehension of their guilt, not be terrified at the judgment to which they have exposed themselves. Again they may not at once be *ashamed* of what they have done.

Shame generally springs from the idea that our sin is known to others. But men may have sinned so secretly; they may have taken such pains to hide their sin from other people, and, for the present may successfully prevent it from being discovered, as on this account to have no unpleasant feelings. Further, they may not immediately feel any of the punishment for sin. Not only are their lives preserved, but their health and strength are continued; their worldly affairs prosper; no particular calamities befall them; no peculiar marks of God’s displeasure against them appears.

A day will come

But because their sin has not yet found them out, will it never find them out? Will it never overtake them? Far otherwise will be the case. ‘Evil pursueth sinners’ (Proverbs 13:21), and whatever they may think or feel, their sin will one day find them out. A day is coming in which their conscience will be aroused, and their fear excited. Their sins, however long forgotten, or habitually unnoticed, will

be placed before them, and will strike terror in their soul. A day is coming when they will be filled with *shame* and confusion. Their sins, however artfully concealed or secretly committed, will be brought to light; and, conscious of their wickedness, they will long to hide their guilty heads. A day is coming when the sentence against transgressors will at length be executed. Their judgment, though for a long time it linger, will linger no longer; their damnation will slumber no more. They will have their part in the second death. This, then, is what is meant by our sin finding us out. It will bring on us fear, shame and death.

I go on to show,

2. The certainty that it will do so

I have already noticed the proneness of men to presume that their sin will *not* find them out, as well as the ruinous consequences that flow from this presumption. They think that they shall escape at last: therefore they sin without fear. They have no anxiety on account of the sins already committed, nor any apprehension about those which they are going to commit. But what ground have they for this vain and wicked presumption? Nothing can be more certain than that their sin will find them out. That it will do so, we have the strongest possible assurances.

In the first place, the perfections of God absolutely forbid that any sin should go unpunished. God is present at all times and in every place. He filleth all in all (Ephesians 1:23). Nothing, therefore, can be hidden from him. No sin, however secretly committed, or studiously concealed, is hidden from him. He is also perfect in knowledge, and knows all things. He therefore remembers all things. Men forget their sins; but they cannot be forgotten by God. God also is holy. He is of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look upon iniquity (Habakkuk 1:13). As such, he must hate sin. Further, God is most just. He loves righteousness, and executes judgment (see Psalm 103:6). As a righteous judge, he cannot but be concerned to punish sin: for

not to punish it would be unjust. Besides, God is true and faithful to his word. He is truth itself, and cannot lie (Titus 1:2). How is it possible, then, that he should not punish sin, for he has declared that he will punish it, and that he 'will by no means clear the guilty' (Exodus 34:7). Put all these things together:

- God sees sin;
- He remembers sin;
- He cannot be just without punishing sin;
- He has said he will punish it

With what certainty do these perfections of the Almighty declare that a man's sin will find him out. Only let us consider, that to entertain the contrary presumption, to suppose that sin will escape unpunished, is in fact to strike at the very root of the Divine character. To say that our sin will not find us out is to say that either God does not see sin, or that he forgets it, or that he does not hate it, or that he is unjust, or that he will not keep his word. And which of these things will a man presume to say? Or which of them, if he did presume to say it, would be true?

In the second place, the many remarkable instances of sin being detected and punished in this world strongly confirm the truth under consideration. We have a very striking instance in Joshua 7. At the taking of the city of Jericho by the Israelites, a certain man among them, named Achan, contrary to the express command of God, had taken to himself a part of the spoil of the place, and had buried it in the earth in the midst of his tent (Joshua 7:20–21). He had conducted the matter with great secrecy and art; had used every precaution to prevent a discovery; and doubtless presumed, even if the commission of the theft should become known, that among so many thousands of people he should not be detected. But his presumptions were utterly vain. The Lord saw his iniquity, and brought it to light. Achan was identified as the offender, and was instantly put to death.

Look at the example of Ananias and Sapphira in the New Testament. They

secretly joined together to make it appear that they had sold their possessions for less than they really received. But did not their sin find them out? Did not God, through Peter, in a most awesome manner, testify his knowledge of their sin, and his abhorrence of it? They both, one after the other, fell dead at the Apostle's feet (Acts 5:9–10). These are some of the instances recorded in Scripture in which sin has sometimes been found out, detected, and punished. Can we not recollect instances in which God, in a very unexpected and even wonderful manner, has brought to light sins which had been committed, perhaps even many years ago, and when every seeming probability of detection was at an end?

Now what do these things prove, but that God will certainly 'bring to light the hidden things of darkness?' (1 Corinthians 4:5). He thus directs sin to find out *some* sinners here, to convince us that it will find out *every* sinner hereafter.

In the third place, God 'has appointed a day in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained' (Acts 17:31) It will be a day when 'he will render to every man according to his deeds' (Proverbs 24:12/Romans 2:6). O how can God deal with sinners according to their deserts, without bringing their sins to light, and inflicting the punishment which they deserve? The secrets of all hearts shall be revealed (see Romans 2:16); every covering shall be swept away; and sin shall receive its just recompense.

On the whole, my brethren, let us weigh well the force of these arguments:

Sin will be punished—for the perfections of God forbid it to be otherwise. The many instances in which sin has already been detected and punished prove it.

The appointed day of judgment confirms it. Whatever other things, then, we may be ignorant of; whatever other things we may doubt of; yet let us know this for a certainty: Be sure your sin will find you out.

A suitable application

With this great truth, then, deeply impressed on your hearts, I would now proceed to make a suitable application of it. Call to mind your own sins. Try to remember how many and how great they have been. From the day of your birth to the present day, how often have you offended the Lord in thought, word and deed! What provocations have you been guilty of! How great has been your unbelief of his word, your disregard of his gospel, or your unfaithfulness to your duties! Hither, perhaps, you have taken little notice of your sins. You have studiously concealed them from others. You have endeavoured to forget them yourselves, feeling little or no concern for them. But God has not forgotten them. He sees every one as distinctly as on the day in which they were committed. You may, perhaps, have thought that your sins were few and little. You may have flattered yourself that there had been something special in your case, which made your sins excusable, and greatly reduced their guilt. But God does not see them in that way. He knows that they are neither few nor little. He sees them in all their aggravations.

Confession and contrition

What, then, will you do? Will you any longer try to hide them? Will you persist in excusing them? Rather seek to find them out; for otherwise they will find you out at the last. Rather, with penitent, contrite hearts, confess them to the Lord; and with unreserved acknowledgement of your guilt, cast yourselves on the divine mercy. Embrace with thankfulness that way of escape, which is provided for you in the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is not the sin which you have hitherto committed that will prove your ruin, if you will but *now* repent of it, forsake it, and seek forgiveness through the blood of Jesus Christ. This blood cleanses from all sin (1 John 1:9). Wash in this fountain, and 'though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow;

though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool' (Isaiah 1:18).

Flee to the Saviour; and your sins, though many, shall be forgiven you. They shall never find you out. Of this truth we have as full assurance as of the one we have been considering. The same perfections of the Almighty, which requires the punishment of every impenitent sinner, are equally pledged to pardon every penitent believer in Jesus Christ. We have the most authentic and astonishing instances of God's mercy in Christ, and of his readiness to pardon even the chief of sinners (1 Timothy 1:15) through this precious blood-letting. The appointment of the day of judgment abundantly confirms the same truth; for it is appointed no less for the complete justification of believers in Christ, than for the final condemnation of every unbeliever (so John 3:16–18). Let this blessed assurance then dwell richly in your minds. Confess, lament and forsake your past wickedness. Believe in Jesus Christ for the removal of your guilt. Lead a new life in dependence on his grace; and be sure your sin will not find you out. The Lord will be faithful and just to forgive you your sins, and to cleanse you from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).

If you have effectually been brought to Jesus Christ, though grievous have been your provocations, God forbid that the recollection of these things should cast a gloom over your present hopes, or prevent you from rejoicing in your present privileges! Only see that you rejoice with trembling! Be not high-minded, but fear (2 Peter 1:9, where Peter's words are a sequel to a positive call to holiness). See that you do not relax your watchfulness and strivings against sin. See that it does not get an advantage over you (2 Corinthians 2:11).

- Beware of presumption (Psalm 19:13);
- Beware of sinning that grace may abound (Romans 6:1);
- Trifle not with temptation;
- Keep your hearts with all diligence (Proverbs 4:23)

Warnings and wisdom

Do not think that because you are a child of God that you may venture safely on forbidden ground. If you thus tempt the Lord, you have no security of being kept from falling. Remember David's sin. It was secretly committed. It was artfully concealed. But it found him out. A special messenger was sent on purpose to detect it (2 Samuel 12:1–14). And though it was pardoned, yet it was

attended with a most signal and afflictive correction. Fear then, lest you offend. Watch and be sober. Bear in mind that you are compassed with enemies. Remember where your strength lies. Live by faith. Walk in the Spirit (Galatians 5:16 & 25). Touch not the unclean thing (Isaiah 52:11 & 2 Corinthians 6:17). Give diligence to make your calling and election sure; for if you do these things, you shall never fall (2 Peter 1:10).¶

THE GREATEST BRITISH VALUE: OBEDIENCE TO GOD'S WORD

An Address by PETER MURCOTT
at the September 2015 Penn Free Methodist Church Conference

AMIDST the mounting moral and spiritual chaos in the British Isles today, a new expression has been coined, called 'fundamental British values'. These include democracy, the rule of law, and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs. If a nation is to survive, there has to be some sort of agreed standard of conduct. The one propounded is said to be historically based.

This begs several questions: 'What is meant by "the rule of law"?' 'Can legislators do as they like as long as they follow the Parliamentary process?' 'What is "toleration"?' 'How far back do we go to find these fundamental values?' To this, one might add: 'What is the greatest British value?'

Alfred the Great

Where shall we begin? Maybe an appropriate place is with King Alfred of Wessex, who reigned from 871 to 900. Firstly, he is acknowledged as establishing the foundations for England to become a unified nation; and secondly, by common consent, he bears the title of 'the Great'. Alfred lived at a time when the

nation was in dire peril. The Vikings had invaded Britain, and had pursued their conquest until it seemed only a matter of time before Wessex would fall. At the lowest point in his life, he was on the run; and to all intents and purposes, the invaders seemed to be unstoppable. Inevitably, several stories have persisted about him, but the important point to observe is that, in an age of increasing darkness, he was completely faithful to God. Indeed, the more you read of him, the more that Micah 7:8 comes to mind: 'Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy: when I fall, I shall arise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me.'

Eventually, the tables were turned. Alfred drove back the Vikings, and secured a period of peace by the Treaty of Wedmore (AD 878). In the years that followed, he used the time wisely to improve his kingdom's defences, including the establishment of a navy, so that when another attack came, he was well-prepared. However, for our purposes, we would note that he was first and foremost a Christian ruler. This led him to encourage learning, but most of all, he is said to have drawn up

a law-book of good government, prefacing it with the Ten Commandments on the grounds that, being God's law, they were far better than man's. In that, one sees the origin of the principle of the supremacy of Scripture, which is acknowledged by the Coronation Oath Act 1688 that survives to this day.

The Defender of the Faith

Moving forward some six hundred years from Alfred the Great, we come to the reign of Henry VIII (1509–47). He was a man of great intellect and power, which he greatly abused. Although he had a decidedly religious disposition, he cannot remotely be regarded as having been either just, or having ruled in the fear of the Lord, such as King David declared in 2 Samuel 23:2 to be the standard of kingship. Nevertheless, an incident occurred in his reign that is important in determining what the greatest British value is. It was from Henry VIII's reign that monarchs bore the title *Fidei Defensor*, often shown as *Fid. Def.* or even *F.D.* on the coinage.¹ In English, it means 'the Defender of the Faith'. This title was originally conferred upon Henry by Pope Leo X on 17 October 1521, in acknowledgement of a book that he had written, entitled *In Defence of the Seven Sacraments*.² After the break with Rome in the 1530s, Pope Paul III withdrew the title in 1538; and yet all monarchs to the present day have continued to use it.³ Its statutory recognition stems from an Act of Parliament of 1543, which is still in force.⁴

The 1543 Act Analysed

When this Act is studied closely, its wording raises some most interesting points. To

1. Strictly speaking, the Queen is *Fidei Defensatrix*. The title was first used on the coinage in 1714 at the start of George I's reign

2. Its Latin title was *Assertio Septem Sacramentorum*.

3. It fell into abeyance under Oliver and then Richard Cromwell (1649–1660), but it was revived under Charles II (1660–85).

4. Anno 35 Henry VIII, Cap. III. (*The third act in the 35th year of the reign of Henry VIII*)

begin with, it is described as a Ratification Act concerning the King's titles or 'stile' (sic). 'Ratification' is a formal acknowledgement, endorsement or approval of something that already exists. A common instance of ratification is of a treaty, when it is translated into an Act of Parliament. Secondly, the 1543 Act is not simply about the title of 'The Defender of the Faith', since it deals with Henry's other titles as well. Thirdly, Acts of Parliament in those days usually contained a preamble, or introduction, which not only explained the reason for the Act's content, but it also provided a brief historical summary of the previous state of the law. In this case, had the Act been primarily concerned with the title 'The Defender of the Faith' one would have expected the preamble to have said so. What it did was to confirm how the King had previously been 'justly and notoriously known', and to place all his titles on a statutory footing, without distinguishing one from the other. Thus it described him in Latin and then in English as 'Henry the Eighth, by the Grace of God, King of England, France, and Ireland, Defender of the Faith, and of the Church of England, and also of Ireland, in Earth the Supreme Head'.

By 1543, Henry was just four years away from death, having been King since 1509. He had been known as Henry the Eighth from the very outset, who ruled, or claimed to rule, over the various nations, including France. As for being the head of the Church of England, that was traceable to an Act of 1533. Therefore, neither the extent of his kingship, nor his supremacy over the Church of England was anything new; but what about the title of 'The Defender of the Faith'? To which date in his reign, or to which Act of Parliament was it traceable? Some say that it was granted by Parliament in 1543, but when read carefully there is absolutely nothing in the Act about granting Henry that title, any more than it granted him any other. It simply declared and thereby recognised that he was 'The Defender of the Faith'.

Various Questions

This raises the questions:

- When and from whom did Henry acquire that title? *and*
- Was it in 1521, when Pope Leo X granted it?

The Act makes no mention of this, nor does it allude to the title having been later withdrawn—a matter that one would have expected to have been recited in the preamble. In that case, the Act's title, its wording and its whole tenor, seem to imply that Henry became 'The Defender of the Faith' when he became King in 1509. If so, from whom did he inherit it? The answer must be: from his father, Henry VII. Seen in that light, the Act seems to be saying that Pope Leo X did not so much award Henry VIII that title in 1521; rather, at most, he simply acknowledged a title that Henry as the King already possessed. In other words, to be 'The Defender of the Faith' was, and always had been, part and parcel of English kingship. The strong inference from this was that the Pope had had no power whatsoever to deprive him of that title any more than he could have deprived him of being the King. If that, indeed, is the true meaning of the 1543 statute, it would undoubtedly have greatly appealed to Henry VIII.

Delegated Power

What are the ramifications of being 'The Defender of the Faith'? 'Defender' denotes the Monarch's responsibilities, rather than his or her rights. In turn, it is a reminder that, as Romans 13:1 declares, all political power is delegated to earthly rulers by God, meaning that they must be just and rule in the fear of the Lord. That is a most important point, since the Stuart Monarchs in the seventeenth century were far more attentive to what they saw as their Divine rights as opposed to their Divine responsibilities. Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany suffered from a similar mindset a century ago, with disastrous results.

TO BE CONCLUDED

As for the definite article 'the' before the word 'faith', it is of crucial and monumental importance. It acknowledges that there is but one true faith—as Paul wrote in Ephesians 4:5: 'One Lord, one faith, one baptism.' In short, it means the Christian faith alone.

George II's Declaration

C H Spurgeon once said: 'Liberty to hold our opinions but not to spread them is no liberty, for one of our main opinions is that we should bring all around us to Jesus.' Therefore we may conclude that the expression 'The Defender of the Faith' means that both Christian belief and practice should be protected. In the eighteenth century, at least one monarch, King George II (1727–60), seems to have regarded his title as 'Defender of the Faith' as actively including this function. Thus, at a time when the Methodists were suffering persecution, the King famously declared his determination that no one should be subject to such treatment whilst he occupied the throne.

There is a further point. Parliament's declaration in 1543 that the monarch is 'The Defender of the Faith' must mean that Parliament regards the Christian faith as being of unique importance and value. Therefore, given the present constitutional arrangements, if Parliament wants the Head of State to safeguard the Christian faith, it must mean that the Legislature should be actively assisting the Monarch in that grand objective. In other words, no law should be passed that is contrary to the Christian faith, or is likely to impair a Christian's liberty to practise his faith, or which may deter him from obeying God. Seen in that light, many recent provisions on the statute book ought not to be there. Moreover, the considerable number of cases that have been fought out in court at very great expense, to establish the conscientious rights of Christians, should never have arisen.¶

STUDIES IN EZEKIEL

P KING (HAILSHAM)

Chapter 38 & 39

MORE THAN CONQUERORS

THESE chapters are one vision, explaining and confirming that Messiah will come, not to release the Jews from captivity as some thought—to establish a kingdom on earth—but to spread the gospel through the world in a universal Church.

1. **God and Magog** (1, 2) a hostile regime reaching beyond the named borders to the furthest coasts. It represents an indefinite territory, ie. the whole world.
2. **The nations** (3–6). All the nations mentioned are far apart, from Asia to Europe and Africa; lands most distant from Israel in the then-known world. It is a picture, not a reality, of the extent the influence of the new dispensation will have in the coming of Messiah.
3. **Large numbers** (7–16). Large numbers of people are figured as setting themselves against Israel, coming from all directions. The reality is difficult to grasp if so many warriors are crowded into tiny Israel, so, again, it is pictorial.
4. **Defeat**. The result of the conflict is amazing (chapter 39) when the wood from the enemies' weapons is enough to supply Israel for seven years (9), and such will be the slaughter that it will take seven months to bury the dead (12). Fairbairn estimates this to mean that some 360 million corpses are to be disposed of! It must be a picture of some great victory, not a literal event.
5. Referring to other accounts from different prophets, there is no consistency about

the location of this showdown between Israel and her enemies. Ezekiel speaks of the mountains of Israel, yet Isaiah writes of the mountains of Edom; Joel, the valley of Jehoshaphat, and Zechariah, the immediate area around Jerusalem. Four different locations for this great battle between God and evil (Satan) again confirm the whole is symbolic and not literal.

6. **Messiah will prevail**. This extraordinary event looks forward to the days of Messiah (the last days). In Old Testament times, God's people defended themselves with swords and spears, but when Messiah came all this changed. Now it is a spiritual conflict, not a holy war. It is a stand for Truth as Christ demonstrated in his life, saying, 'I am the ... truth', and Christians are given the whole armour of God to fight against wickedness in high places.

Lessons for today

The battle of evil against good will come, and this picture of conflict is happening around us today, as Christians face personal and communal difficulties every day. The forces of evil may not want to battle with God, but have no choice, for God will confront evil every day. The whole world is involved in the conflict, not just Israel and her neighbours.

**When we shall see him,
we shall be like him.**

TO BE CONTINUED

A SERMON ON MATTHEW 6:10

PART IV

BY J. VAN LODENSTEYN (1620–1677)

SUPPLIED BY A W DE LANGE (Scherpenzeel, The Netherlands)

‘Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven’ (Matthew 6:10)

BUT also here it worked against his will, and he has to complain about it, ‘For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me. My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness’ (2 Corinthians 12:8, 9). And how did the hero behave himself in this matter? He comes above himself and all other difficulties, and submits himself to will as God will. Concluding, ‘Most gladly therefore I will rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake’ (2 Corinthians 12:9, 10). This was the same Paul, who said: ‘I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus’ (Acts 21:13). And O, that we could understand this virtue in a right way, so that we could seek to follow it.

In order to free this part of doctrine from difficulties, I shall answer some of these difficulties, which are brought in against these statements:

1. Someone might say: You say that I should not only be content, but also desire such as God desireth. But how could this be, as the Lord hath created in me a will to do good things. How can I resist that?

Answer: The desire unto good which the Lord hath created in us you should not resist, but follow. Because it would not be a virtue that you would take away the desire unto virtue, mercy, comfort etc., because you would take away a great part of God’s image, but by our statements above we would want to say

that on the one side we should have a great desire unto virtue, holiness and comfort. But the other side we should learn to submit, when the Lord decrees otherwise, so that we should have a pleasure in infirmities etc. in order to make our will the same as the Lord’s will. This distinction man clearly can find in the forsaking of Christ’s will: ‘O My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt’ (Matthew 26:39).

Thus he prayed that God’s wrath would come over him, because he knew that this was his Father’s will, that the Ransom had to bear God’s wrath against sin. And he did this with love to God’s will. Thus man should not put away the desire, but put that desire under the will of God, because God’s will is independent, absolutely good and without contradiction holy. And although this is often in our eyes not so, this is because of our foolishness, because we do not know, and, when we do not know, not think rightly that we should submit to God’s will and voluntarily say: ‘Lord, because it is thy will, therefore I also want it, and my desire is nothing else than to do thy will.’

2. *Objection:* Besides the mentioned difficulty, there comes a second difficulty, which is taken from the command to increase in sanctification. And it is not without ground that it is asked: ‘How can I deny myself and not increase in sanctification?’ where the Lord commandeth so clearly grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord. (2 Peter 3:18; Matt 5:48; 1 Peter 1:16; 1 John 2:6; Eph 4:12–15 etc.)

TO BE CONTINUED

NEW COVENANT THEOLOGY: PART 5

KEVIN MCGRANE (Bury St Edmunds)

AS we saw in the first four parts, the teaching of New Covenant Theology (NCT) on the moral law runs directly counter to the Reformed faith, and to the creeds and councils of the Church throughout the ages. Prominent NCT proponent David Gay admits that his doctrine is against the ‘creeds, the Confessions, the systematic theology’s [sic], the writers, the preachers’:¹

I know I’m going against the Reformed teaching and the evangelical teaching, the great mass of the teachers, I know I’m going against them!²

Gay *contra mundum* quotes Bucer, Calvin, Thomas Watson, Samuel Bolton, John Gill, R.L. Dabney, Louis Berkhof, A.W. Pink, Donald Macleod, Walter Chantry, The *Westminster Confession of Faith*, the *Baptist Confession 1689*, the *Strict Baptist Affirmation of Faith 1966* and several others to give a ‘fair representation of the Reformed system on the law’, which he deprecates as ‘A grim ... and unbiblical system’.³ But no one familiar with the Reformed faith would recognize Gay’s caricature of it.

Mischaracterization of the motives for sanctification

The *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, which many Reformed teach their children, is very clear that sanctification is a work of grace:

Q.35 What is sanctification?

A. Sanctification is the work of God’s free grace...

However, Gay would have us believe that This doctrine—that sanctification comes by the grace of God and not the law of Moses—is feared and resented by many.⁴

To suggest that the Reformed fear and resent the work of God’s free grace, and that they would rather be under a covenant of works, is uninformed, to say the least. The degree of misrepresentation is truly staggering. Gay states that the Reformed positively embrace fear, punishment, and guilt as the very *motives* for sanctification:

[F]or the majority of Reformed and evangelical believers ... *fear* is the motive for sanctification.⁵

They think that ... fear, punishment, guilt ... will enable them to live in this present evil age. I know the creeds say that. I know the great Confessions say it. I know the pastors and teachers say it. I know the writers write it. I know the systematic theology’s [sic] say it. I know! I know!⁶

He knows nothing of the sort: the *Westminster Confession* devastatingly repudiates the charge of ‘slavish fear and resentment’ since it declares that

The liberty which Christ hath purchased for believers under the gospel, consists in their freedom from the guilt of sin, the condemning wrath of God, the curse of the moral law ... and their

1. D. Gay, *Grace Not Law! The Answer to Antinomianism* (2013), p39.

2. Ibid., p64.

3. Ibid., p21.

4. D. Gay, *Christ is All: No Sanctification by the Law* (2013), p324.

5. Gay, *Grace Not Law*, p27.

6. Ibid., p54.

yielding obedience unto him, not out of slavish fear, but a child-like love, and willing mind.⁷

The *Confession* also speaks of the believer's will 'freely and cheerfully' yielding obedience to the will of God revealed in his law.⁸ Likewise, Ursinus, the author of the *Heidelberg Catechism* common among the continental Reformed, states in his commentary upon it that the godly 'willingly and cheerfully' yield obedience, and he helpfully distinguishes servile (i.e. slavish) fear from filial fear:

Servile fear, such as the slave has for his master ... differs greatly from that which is filial ... [It] is the fear of devils and wicked men, and is the commencement of eternal death, which the ungodly experience already in this life. 'I heard thy voice in the garden and I was afraid.' 'The devils believe and tremble.'⁹

Servile fear arises from the fear of judgment, and cannot be the motive when obedience is yielded freely, willingly, lovingly, and cheerfully. There is no shortage of evidence through the centuries of true piety in the saints who have found God's moral law a great delight, and 'of great use to them' instrumentally in their sanctification.¹⁰ But as an advocate for NCT, Gay cannot fathom the usefulness of the moral law for sanctification because he views all free, willing, and cheerful obedience to the will of God displayed in his moral law as so much bondage and flagellation. He especially finds fault with Calvin:

Too many believers today are in bondage. The Reformed, of course, are credally so—being whipped by the law, as Calvin taught them.¹¹

If we sin, there is punishment, so there's an element of fear in it; there's more than an element ... And this system, Calvin's system, has dominated the evangelical and Reformed world for these past hundreds of years.¹²

One wonders how Calvin can be so misrepresented, who clearly states in his *Institutes* that the law

does not now perform toward us the part of the hard taskmaster, who will not be satisfied...[I]t does not by terrifying and confounding their consciences, condemn and destroy ... that we might not be, all our lifetime, subject to bondage, having our consciences oppressed.¹³

Calvin sees the use of the law in the life of believers (the 'third use') such that 'by teaching, admonishing, rebuking, and correcting, it may fit and prepare us for every good work'¹⁴ which was none other than the charge laid upon Timothy by the Apostle in preaching the inspired Word, which we cannot suppose enjoined fear, bondage, and guilt in the redeemed. Yet, Gay states time and again that Calvin 'described believers as lazy asses',

And to make us holy, as lazy asses, as he called us, we need to be whipped with the law ... And underneath it all, fear is the motive. The whip makes the lazy donkey cower ... [T]he lazy ass cowers at the whip.¹⁵

On the contrary, Calvin never described believers as lazy asses, but said,

In this way must the saints press onward, since, however great the alacrity with which, under the Spirit, they hasten towards righteousness, they are retarded by the sluggishness of the flesh, and

make less progress than they ought. The law acts as a whip to the flesh, urging it on as men do a lazy sluggish ass.¹⁶

The saints desire to press on, but their 'sluggish flesh' holds them back. In the corresponding figure we have 'men', a 'whip', and a 'sluggish ass'. Given that the whip corresponds to the law, even a child will comprehend that the 'men' represent the saints, and the 'sluggish ass' represents sluggish flesh.¹⁷ We are only lazy asses, therefore, when we take Gay's word for it.

A mere two sentences further on,¹⁸ Calvin says that the psalmist had the 'third use of the law' in view:

David had this use in view when he pronounced this high eulogium on the Law, 'The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes' ... to celebrate the advantages which the Lord, by means of his law, bestows on those whom he inwardly inspires with a love of obedience.¹⁹

But Gay is incredulous that psalm-singing Christians can delight in the law of God to their profit:

They who sing only paraphrases of the Psalms do sing about the law, yes, but

16. Calvin, op.cit., bk II, chap. VII, sec. 12. Similar statements are found in the Canons of Dort, e.g. Head 5 Article 2, where Christians are 'to mortify the flesh more and more by the spirit of prayer and by holy exercises of piety; and to press forward to the goal of perfection'.

17. The misrepresentation is all the more surprising because in *Grace not Law!* p19 Gay quotes Samuel Bolton using a similar figure in his *The True Bounds of Christian Freedom*: 'The flesh is sluggish, and the law is ... a spur or goad'.

18. Which we know Gay has studied since he removed the relevant passage by ellipsis in a quotation in *Grace not Law*, p17.

19. Calvin, op.cit., bk II, chap. VII, sec. 12.

I seriously question whether they have Calvin's third use in mind when they do.²⁰

Mark Jones addresses the issue directly regarding this third use of the law:

In speaking of the law—that is, the so called 'third use' of it—we who are believers are faced with the inescapable reality ... that Psalm 119 is something we can sing not only about Christ and to Christ, but also about ourselves because of our union with him—and enjoy doing so!²¹

Calvin's own remark is particularly apposite:

David specially shows that in the law he saw the Mediator, without whom it gives no pleasure or delight. Some unskilful persons, from not attending to this, boldly discard the whole law of Moses, and do away with both its tables, imagining it unchristian to adhere to a doctrine which contains the ministration of death. Far from our thoughts be this profane notion.²²

Since Gay claims that the Reformed church has been duped by Calvin's 'system', let us hear Calvin himself on his 'third use of the Law' (and as Calvin reminds us, 'I still mean the Moral Law'), to see whether his uses are contrary to the grace of the gospel. Calvin outlines 'two ways in which [believers] still profit in the Law':

[It is] the best instrument for enabling them daily to learn with greater truth and certainty what that will of the Lord is which they aspire to follow.

By frequently meditating on it, he will be excited to obedience, and confirmed in it, and so drawn away from the slippery paths of sin.²³

7. *Westminster Confession of Faith*, XX, 1.

8. *Ibid.*, XIX, 7.

9. Z. Ursinus, *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism*. The Canons of Dort describe 'filial fear' as 'filial reverence'.

10. *Westminster Confession of Faith*, XIX, 6.

11. Gay, *Christ is All*, p433.

12. Gay, *Grace Not Law*, p39.

13. J. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, bk II, chap. VII, sec. 12–15.

14. *Ibid.*

15. Gay, *Grace Not Law*, p27.

20. Gay, *Christ is All*, p432.

21. M. Jones, *Antinomianism* (2013), p55.

22. Calvin, op.cit., bk II, chap. VII, sec. 13.

23. Calvin, op.cit., bk II, chap. VII, sec. 12.

Now, we must ask: are forsaking sin, discerning the will of God, and being obedient to the Lord ‘contrary to the grace of the gospel’? We think not. Andrew Woolsey is to the point:

The truth is that in neither Calvin nor the *Confession* was there anything ‘legalistic’ about the believer’s duty to obey the law of God. All legal requirements in the sense of penalties and punishment had been fully met in the justifying grace of the covenant in Christ. Nor was there anything ‘oppressive’ about it, since the believer’s obedience was entirely within the framework of the covenant of grace. It arose from, and was made possible, by the operation of the Spirit of God, and was accepted and rewarded again only through the justifying grace ... For Calvin the law ... was no ‘petty casuistic legalism’ which was mediated through the commandments. It was rather the will of a gracious God, who having reconciled his disobedient and ungrateful people to himself, was to be known in a living personal relationship through obedience to the demands of his character and will.²⁴

Likewise Ernest Kevan points out that for the Puritans,

[T]he grace that led them from Law-keeping for justification led them to Law-keeping in sanctification. They were occupied with obedience to the Law as the way of the believing man and with the fulfilment of the Law as the end for which he was saved. The Law of God thus connoted for the Puritan nothing but blessedness and delight: it belonged to the doctrine of salvation.²⁵

24. A. Woolsey, *Unity and Continuity in Covenantal Thought*, PhD thesis (Glasgow, 1988). RHB edition (2012), pp304–305.

25. E. Kevan, *The Grace of Law* (1964), p265.

Mischaracterization of the law’s role in sanctification

Gay asserts that

John Calvin ... taught that the believer is sanctified by the law.²⁶

Calvin and the vast majority of Reformed and evangelical believers ... argue that believers are under the law for sanctification.²⁷

Calvin said that ... we produce sanctification—by the Law of Moses ... [T]he vast majority of Reformed and evangelical people are convinced that sanctification is by the law.²⁸

Now I know your creeds and your Confessions and your theological books will tell you it is the law, the law, the law that will sanctify.²⁹

In comparison with Reformed writers, Gay is so careless and imprecise that he fails to define what he means by such expressions as ‘the law will sanctify’ or ‘sanctified by the law’ or ‘under the law for sanctification’. Does he mean that Calvin and the Reformed teach that the law is the source, or the agent, or the means, or the imparters of sanctification; or that the believer is under the law as a covenant of works? The Reformed faith teaches none of these. One will look in vain in Calvin’s *Institutes* concerning his ‘third use of the law’ for any suggestion that believers are ‘under the law’, which term usually connotes a works covenant. And as the Puritan Francis Roberts made clear:

No Christian believer is said to be *υπο νομον* under the Law, nor is he *ανομος*, without Law to God; but he is *εννομος* in the Law, or within the Law to Christ.³⁰

26. Gay, *Christ is All*, p13.

27. D. Gay, *Psalms 119 and the New Covenant* (2014), p12.

28. Gay, *Grace not Law*, p27.

29. *Ibid.*, p34.

30. F. Roberts, *Of God’s Covenants* (1657), p729.

Unless Gay is being equivocal, we can infer what he means by ‘under the law for sanctification’ and ‘sanctified by the law’ from his following statements:

Well, your teachers were wrong when they told you to go under the law for sanctification ... You’re not sanctified by the law! You’re sanctified by Christ!³¹

I assert that the believer is under the law of Christ...[for] sanctification.³²

Mainstream new-covenant theologians hold that believers are under the law of Christ.³³

Since being ‘under the law of Christ’ in order to be ‘sanctified by Christ’ here means that Christ is the source of sanctification and the sanctifier, then to be ‘under the law for sanctification’ in order to be ‘sanctified by the law’ would correspondingly mean that the law is the source of sanctification, and ‘the great sanctifier’.³⁴ But the Reformed faith does not teach that believers are sanctified by the moral law, or that the moral law has power to sanctify, or that the law is the source or agent of sanctification, or the great sanctifier, but rather that by the aid of the Holy Spirit the moral law is ‘of great use’ (*Westminster Confession*) when used properly. But Gay fails to understand how the moral law can be useful as a perfect rule of life when it does not have power in itself to sanctify:

This simple though crucial point, if firmly grasped and fully worked out, would go a long way to sorting out the issue of the believer and the law. The law does not sanctify. The law cannot possibly be the believer’s perfect rule of life.³⁵

31. Gay, *Grace Not Law*, pp61–62.

32. D. Gay, *Believers Under The Law Of Christ* (2015), p14.

33. *Ibid.*, p81.

34. Gay, *Grace not Law*, p27.

35. Gay, *Christ is All*, p127.

We are all agreed that the moral law does not sanctify, but it can still be of great use for sanctification. A mirror does not shave a man, nor is it his agent for shaving him, but many will own that it is of great use for shaving. Not to know or understand the difference is poor indeed.

Reformed view of the moral law in sanctification

We can turn to R.L. Dabney as a representative for the Reformed teaching on the law in sanctification, cited as such by Gay. We note that in Dabney’s lectures on sanctification, which span 28 pages of printed copy, there are only four sentences on the law:

The standard set for the believer’s sanctification is the character of God expressed in his preceptive law. This rule is perfect, and should be sufficient for our guidance.

The advantage of having the holy law teaching by example is obvious.

But was he not made under our law?³⁶

Four short sentences within two comprehensive lectures on sanctification is hardly being ‘heavy on the law’, the charge made by Gay against the Reformed. As to whether the moral law is the source, or the agent, or its own means of sanctification, we find no support whatsoever for any such notions in Dabney:

The proper and immediate Agent is the Holy Spirit ... Christ is our Sanctifier ... The Father is also spoken of as our Sanctifier.

While the agency in sanctification is supernatural ... yet He operates through means usually. And these may be said comprehensively to be God’s truth, His ordinances, and His providence.

36. R.L. Dabney, *Lectures in Systematic Theology* (1878), pp660–687.

While truth has no adequate efficiency to sanctify by itself; yet it has a natural adaptation to be the means of sanctification in the hand of the Holy Ghost.³⁷

Gay would do well to study the chapter *Of Sanctification* in the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, the Reformed confession he singles out for particular opprobrium. What does this classic statement of Reformed doctrine say about the notion of ‘sanctification by the law’, which Gay claims it teaches? It states that the regenerate are ‘farther sanctified really and personally ... and so the saints grow in grace, perfecting holiness in the fear of God’.³⁸

But how? By the law? By ‘going under the law for sanctification’? No,

through the virtue of Christ’s death and resurrection, by his word and Spirit dwelling in them ... [and] through the continual supply of strength from the sanctifying Spirit of Christ.³⁹

There is not a single word or allusion to the law, or sanctification by the law, or being under the law for sanctification, in the whole chapter on sanctification,⁴⁰ and there is no means to be ‘farther sanctified’ apart from the Spirit of Christ. Gay therefore grossly misrepresents the Reformed faith by saying that the Reformed hold to ‘sanctification by the law’, and that the Reformed desire to bring believers ‘back under the law for sanctification’, as though the Reformed teach that the law is the great sanctifier, or the agent of sanctification, or even its own means of sanctification.

On the *Westminster Confession’s* chapter *Of the Law of God* the moral law is defined as

a perfect rule of righteousness ... [that] doth for ever bind all, as well justified persons as others, to the obedience thereof.⁴¹

37. Ibid.

38. *Westminster Confession of Faith*, XIII, 1.

39. Ibid.

40. Neither is there in the Westminster Larger or Shorter Catechisms.

41. *Westminster Confession of Faith*, XIX, 2.

That is a standard definition of moral law, and we can hardly object to the *Confession* defining its terms, nor can we deny that there must be some ‘perfect rule of righteousness’. However, the *Confession* teaches that true believers are ‘not under the law as a covenant of works’ in respect of justification;⁴² and as far as its usefulness in the Christian life is concerned, believers are ‘freed from the curse thereof threatened in the law’, and any promises therein are ‘not as due to them by the law as a covenant of works’.⁴³ For the Christian, then, the moral law is not to be used or thought of as within a covenant of works, but only in a way that comports with ‘the grace of the gospel’.⁴⁴ Thus, a Christian’s willing obedience to God’s perfect rule of righteousness, since it has no covenant of works component, ‘is no evidence of his being under the law, and not under grace’.⁴⁵ Indeed, his obedience is wrought by ‘the Spirit of Christ subduing and enabling the will of man to do that freely and cheerfully which the will of God revealed in the law requireth to be done’.⁴⁶

The proper uses of the moral law for the believer are never ‘contrary to the grace of the gospel, but do sweetly comply with it’.⁴⁷ Accordingly, any proposal to use the moral law in the life of the believer ‘contrary to the grace of the gospel’ must be firmly rejected. But as can be verified by examining the text of the *Confession*, the very uses proposed therein are not contrary to the grace of the gospel, and are very similar to those given by Calvin a century earlier. These are: informing of the will of God and one’s duty; discovering sinful pollutions through self-examination so that one can hate sin; giving a clearer sight of the need of Christ and the perfection of obedience; restraining corruption; and showing God’s approbation of obedience. Are any of these uses contrary to grace when done in

42. Ibid., XIX, 6.

43. Ibid.

44. Ibid., XIX, 7.

45. Ibid., XIX, 6.

46. Ibid., XIX, 7.

47. Ibid.

the power of the Holy Ghost? Which of these uses should a Christian wish to be rid of for sanctification?

A summary of the Puritan view of the moral law is given by Ernest Kevan:

The Puritans held that Christian liberty freed the believer, not *from* the Law, but *for* the Law; so that although he is no longer ‘under’ the Law, he is, nevertheless, still ‘in’ the Law. This, they taught, was freedom itself. The Puritans believed that this freedom in the Law—a freedom dependent on the Law—was effected by the Holy Spirit who applied the saving merits of Christ’s death to the believer and then wrote the Law within his heart. Love for the Law thus gave power to keep it.

The Puritan doctrine, therefore, takes note of the gracious ability that God gives, and looks for the manifestation of that grace in the liberty of obedience which is the true life and heritage of the Christian.⁴⁸

NCT proponents may dislike Reformed doctrine, but that does not give them the right to misrepresent what the Reformed faith teaches. After all, the Reformed have been extremely careful, precise, and detailed in setting down their doctrine in confessions of faith and catechisms, which is more than can be said of the writings of NCT. David Gay’s approach evidences that he has never breathed the pure air of Reformed theology, but chokes on polluted versions of it by the Remonstrants, and later neonomians such as Richard Baxter *et al*, who sought implicitly to put Christians under the law as a covenant of works for salvation and sanctification. But such views the Reformed churches of Europe comprehensively repudiated at the Synod of Dort in 1618–19.

48. Kevan, *op.cit.*, p267.

NCT’s impious view of Sanctification

Augustine, around AD 400, stated concerning the moral law:

Assuredly no one will doubt that that law of God ... is now necessary for us for the right ordering of our life ... especially the Decalogue ... [W]ho is so impious as to say that he does not keep those precepts because he is a Christian and is established not under the law, but under grace?⁴⁹

Many are so impious in our day, it seems. Since Gay will not have the moral law as a rule for the Christian life, and he collapses the so-called ‘law of Christ’ into the person of Christ,⁵⁰ then his answer to every question resolves on ‘look to Christ’:

Look to Christ! And this is the way of sanctification ... this is the answer to all fear! This is the answer to lack of assurance! This is the answer to doubts! This is the answer to all questions! I can’t answer the questions—Christ can! I have my doubts—there is no doubt with Christ! My works are feeble—Christ’s are perfect! Do you lack assurance? Look to Christ! ... your doubts and fears will melt away.⁵¹

Superficially, this all sounds very pious, but in truth it is unedifying to gaze where God’s moral law is denied. When we look to Christ as he is revealed in his Word we see one whose moral perfection as God is reflected in his moral law; and we see one who perfectly kept the law of God. But this does not take off our duty of obedience. If we produce no evidence of good works and merely rely on Christ’s perfect works, should that give us

49. Augustine, *Contra duas epistolas Pelagianorum libri quatuor*, bk III, ch. X.

50. See Part 4 of this series, *The Gospel Magazine*, Sept–Oct 2015, pp170–178.

51. Gay, *Grace Not Law*, pp63–64.

assurance of salvation—should all our doubts and fears melt away because ‘there is no doubt with Christ’? Absent good works of our own, ought we not rather to doubt our salvation and fear the consequences?

The Puritans were familiar with the problem:

There are many that make a great noise about Evangelical truths ... and they think this doth wholly take away their obedience to the Law of God, and that it must not be so much as a rule of life. Certainly there’s nothing holds forth the excellency of the Law more than the knowledge of Jesus Christ (the only Law-giver) being subjected to the Law ... But we never read that this subjection to the Law was to make void our obedience to it, so that it should not be any rule of life unto us...⁵²

The perfection of Christ’s work *for us* is indeed essential for our justification, and we ‘look to Christ’ objectively for that. The work of God *in us*, our sanctification, is also a perfect work. But as we work *out* our salvation, our good works, though prepared before by God, are *our* works, not Christ’s works, or ours by imputation. Rather, God is pleased to accept our imperfect works because he looks upon them in Christ. A.A. Hodge put the Reformed position well:

While the law in its relation of a covenant of works has been fulfilled by our Surety, so that they who are under grace are no more under the law in that capacity (Rom. vi. 14), nevertheless the law as a rule of action and standard of character is immutable, unrelaxable, and inalienable, in its personal relations. Christ fulfilled the law for us vicariously as the condition of salvation, and on that basis we are justified. But no one can be

52. J. Burroughs, *Gospel-Conversation* (1653), p79.

vicariously conformed to the law for us as a rule of conduct or of moral character. Therefore, while Christ fulfilled the law *for us*, the Holy Spirit fulfils the law *in us*, by sanctifying us into complete conformity with it. And in obedience to this law the believer brings forth those good works which are the fruits though not the ground of our salvation.⁵³

A doctrine of sanctification that opposes Christ to the moral law of God overthrows the gospel of Christ and the doctrine of Christ, and is typical of the doctrine of the Antinomians whom Gay attempts to ‘vindicate’. But as The Puritan Anthony Burgess warned:

How vain a thing it is, to advance grace and Christ oppositely to the Law: nay, they that destroy one, destroy also the other.⁵⁴

And as John Murray further warns,

The law of God is the transcript of God’s perfection ... the law of God is the revealed will of God for us; it regulates our thought and behaviour in ways consonant with his perfection. And this is why every depreciation of the law of God as the pattern in terms of which sanctification is fashioned invariably leads to the adoption of patterns which impinge upon the unique prerogatives of God in the transcendent and inimitable glory that belongs to him. There is one lawgiver.⁵⁵

Quite so; and we turn in the next part to the most destructive effects of New Covenant Theology.¶

53. A.A. Hodge, *The Confession of Faith* (1869), p251.

54. A. Burgess, *Vindiciae Legis* (1646), p16.

55. J. Murray, *The Pattern of Sanctification*, in *Collected Writings of John Murray Vol. 2* (1977), p307.

TO BE CONCLUDED

STUDIES IN I PETER

EDWARD MALCOLM (Reading)

XI The responsibilities of elders, 5:1–4

THE previous section, with its teaching on the certainty of judgement for the righteous and unrighteous alike, leads us to ask, how has the Lord provided strength and help for us? When the enemy attack begins the new recruit looks to the veterans in the ranks for stability and encouragement. When a crisis hits a business those who have lived through such events are leaned on for their wisdom and advice. What provision is there for Christians? In this short section Peter shows what the Lord has done, and how those appointed to help are to carry out their duty. This will lead into a more general section on the need we all have to stand firm in the face of various trials and dangers.

Peter begins by exhorting the elders which are among his readers, v. 1. The word ‘elders’ means originally those who are more mature in years. Ezekiel 8:11–12 shows that age alone is no guarantee of wisdom; here were elders, ancients, who engaged in idolatry in the temple. Rather, the term ‘elders’ means those appointed to positions of leadership, not necessarily through age, but also through being recognised as having special gifts. The transliteration of the word is ‘presbyter’, which, in Anglo-Saxon, was given as ‘prester’, the word ‘priest’ in the BCP. So Peter is addressing, not old men, but the leaders of the churches.

He exhorts them as a fellow-elder. Thus he does not stand upon his apostleship—far less on his being the rock on which the Church is founded, nor the one to whom the keys of the kingdom were given—but upon his being one like them in the service of the Lord. And yet he is not entirely like them, for he was a witness to the sufferings of Christ, meaning that he saw the crucifixion and has borne testimony to the fact, and will be a

partaker of the glory to be revealed. This last part has been a theme in the epistle. In 1:11 and 1:21 the sufferings and glory of Christ are mentioned, and in 4:13 he adds that this glory will be made known openly. Some suggest that Peter has in mind here what he saw at the transfiguration. It seems better, however, to take this phrase in keeping with the general teaching of the epistle, meaning that Peter looks forward to being a partaker of Christ’s glory in the day of his appearing. So Peter knows what he speaks, in that he both saw Christ suffer, and he saw something of his glory. More than that, as one who has told others what he has seen, he lives in the faith of the coming again of Jesus Christ with glory. He knows that present suffering will give way to that weight of glory which shall be revealed, II Cor 4:17.

The exhortation is probably the most obvious one Peter could have made; ‘feed the flock of God’. This of course recalls the thrice-asked question on the shore of Galilee, John 21:15–19. It is worth noting that the final words of Jesus to Peter as recorded in John’s Gospel are of suffering before death. Peter was charged with feeding the lambs of God, and it is this charge which he passes on to the elders, of whom he is a fellow-elder.

The word translated ‘feed’ encompasses all the duty of a shepherd; the necessary care of the sick, protection of the weak, and seeking the lost. Nothing pertaining to the role of a shepherd is omitted. This is not just a charge to presbyters to prepare and preach sermons, but to be true pastors to the flock.

But how is this to be done? First, with a right attitude. The same is said of giving, II Cor 9:7. It means that those who take on the role of presbyter are to do so in submission

to God's will, as willing and joyful servants. The alternative is to have a presbyter undertaking duties grudgingly. It should never be too much trouble for the presbyter to speak to any of Christ, to offer comfort and direction, or to engage in any aspect of his ministry. His duties are not a list of grievous tasks given to punish him, but are meant to be the means by which he serves the Lord, demonstrating the Lord's goodness and love to his people.

Secondly, it is to be done for the right reason. The motivation for service is not pay, but a ready mind, or attitude. In the Middle Ages the Church got to the point where the laity had to pay for any aspect of ecclesiastical attention. This is one of the reasons why there is no fee for baptism today, nor has there been since the Reformation. The clergy had become fat off the labours of others, and so becoming a parish priest was akin to being a tax collector in first-century Judea; it was a licence to print money for the unscrupulous! Such an attitude must not be that of the true shepherd; he must labour for love of Christ, and his people. Financial reward is not his aim, but the crown of righteousness which fadeth not away.

Thirdly, v. 3, the type of leadership is not to be that of lords over servants, but of fellow-sheep who must typify the right way of being sheep! This might sound strange, but we must remember that, although we are called sheep in Scripture, we were not born as sheep. We were born as goats, and we must learn to act as the sheep we have become through grace. How will we learn this? By following the example of the Lord Jesus Christ. But how can we follow his example, whom we have not seen? By following the example of those who most nearly exemplify his gracious nature, the presbyters he has appointed to feed his sheep. So this is a very serious charge, and echoes to some extent the words of Ezekiel 33:1–6.

Those who rightly carry out their calling as presbyters are finally encouraged with this word, v. 4, that when the Chief Shepherd

shall appear, they will receive that crown of glory that fadeth not away. This points us to two things; first, the fact of Christ's appearing. The word carries the same root as 'epiphany', or manifestation. Christ's appearing will be something the whole world will see. It will not be some secret matter, hidden from sight, but will be a public setting forth of Jesus Christ. That day will be the day of his glory, when he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. All presbyters who have faithfully discharged their duty in the spirit Peter has described will receive their reward. This, then, is a great motivation to presbyters to be faithful, and to act according to the grace of God working in them.

Secondly, we have a word about the reward itself. A crown that fades not away is a reference to the laurel wreath awarded to the athlete for winning his event. It is also the mark of the victor or the king, or of anyone who is held in high regard. Such a wreath would fade, being perishable. In the ancient world kings had their wreaths fashioned from gold, in order to last. Peter uses a word which has as its root the name of a flower, the amaranth, a flower which was said not to fade. Thus it becomes an everlasting crown, as befits those who look to an inheritance incorruptible, that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for them, 1:4.

So Peter's instruction to the presbyters is simple enough, but requires much grace to fulfil. It is important that the presbyter is faithful for the sake of the flock with whom he lives. It is therefore in the interests of the sheep to pray for their presbyter, that he would be kept by grace in his calling, to discharge faithfully the will of God. This is especially true in days of trial and danger, but since such days are certain, both flock and presbyter must be instructed aright in Christian living, so that they are equipped in the day when they must bear witness to the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

TO BE CONTINUED

STUDIES IN BRITISH CHURCH HISTORY

Thomas Cranmer 1548–1554 (Part 1)

PETER RATCLIFF (London)

OUR subject is, the work of the Protestant Reformation during the short reign of Edward VI from 1547 to the death of Edward in 1553, the middle six years of the sixteenth century, with a particular focus on the Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranmer.

Jeremiah was told, 'See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant.' Jeremiah 1:10. Cranmer had a similar job to do to dismantle the false Roman Church and establish the Protestant and Reformed Church of England.

What has that got to do with us today? In the time we are considering, the Church was greatly transformed, probably more than in any period since Pentecost. It changed from being a Roman Catholic one to a biblical one. Today one might well ask, what was the point? We are as backslidden as ever and Rome has a wide influence in our church and nation. May this account inspire us with a godly jealousy for another period of reformation.

Matthew 12:43–45 says, 'When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth none. Then he saith, I will return into my house from whence I came out; and when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept, and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first. Even so shall it be also unto this wicked generation.'

I trust you will all agree that the changes taking place in our land would have been much better had they come about through an evangelical awakening and reformation rather than through atheism and secularism. Yet in England, in the middle of the 16th Century, such a great change did occur. Only by God's grace could we repeat it today, but we should at least learn some lessons so that we know how to do our best.

While every Reformed Christian will not agree with every detail of doctrine and practice of the English Reformation, sadly many today are totally unaware of our common heritage. Furthermore the Protestant Reformation really is far bigger than our denominational divisions so there is far more to learn than there is to argue about.

Background

When Thomas Cranmer was only twelve years old his father died. Then in 1503, aged fourteen, his mother sent him to Cambridge where he studied medieval writers. He only started devoting himself to studying the Bible thirteen years later in 1516 when Erasmus's Greek New Testament was published.

In time Cranmer came to the attention of King Henry VIII. Indeed Cranmer is often remembered for helping Henry with divorces and breaking from the Papacy. Cranmer's conversion seems to have been quite late on. He was made Archbishop of Canterbury in 1532 but in 1533 was unable to save the reformer John Frith from being burnt at the stake for the so-called heresy of denying purgatory and transubstantiation. Cranmer does not appear to have been a very

vocal Protestant at this time, otherwise he too would have been killed or fled to Europe. Such situations are inevitably tough. What would we have done?

Although Henry VIII died in 1547 holding Cranmer's hand and even squeezed it to indicate that he was turning to Christ, in his life Henry had opposed the spiritual reformation. He eventually allowed English Bibles but the Mass remained and the church was almost unchanged.

Like Henry, many today are glad to turn away from the tyranny of Rome, but the last thing they want is true Christianity.

Great and hugely beneficial changes happened in the time of Edward VI. At the outset we might ask ourselves, how do those of us who have been saved from false religion encourage others in the right direction? Can we pray that we might see in our day some of the reforms that happened in the time of Edward VI? For example, there was the reform of worship to conform it to biblical doctrine. Out went the Mass and superstition and in came true Gospel worship. Out went fairy tales and in came biblical preaching and saving faith. Altars were turned into tables, religious imagery destroyed and religious orthodoxy was enforced by Acts of Uniformity. Church services changed from ritual to evangelical reality. Unintelligible Latin was replaced with plain English and an English Bible was read and preached. Ministers were transformed from sacrificing priests into ministers of the Word of God.

Even this six-year period is a vast subject so we will focus largely on the discernment with which this radical overhaul of the church was accomplished and especially the role of Archbishop Cranmer. Cranmer was only a vessel used by God. He was not the only one used but for simplicity we focus on him with the theme, 'Wise as serpents, harmless as doves'.

We cannot deal with all of this so I will concentrate on where I can see some relevance for us today.

Cranmer and a Child King

Aged only nine, Edward VI became king under the guidance of tutors or protectors with a Council and his uncle Seymour, Duke of Somerset as Lord Protector. At the coronation service, Cranmer called Edward a 'second Josiah', urging him to continue the reformation of the Church of England, 'the tyranny of the Bishops of Rome banished from your subjects, and images removed'. Despite the anti-Protestantism of his father, Edward had been educated by true Christian teachers and was keen to press ahead to reform worship. Edward wrote on the Pope as Antichrist in 1549 when he was only around 11 years of age. Can we even imagine having a king, president or government like this? How far our nation has fallen from such a state. Yet we are taught to pray. Great changes can happen and all the more so as God's people pray.

While we are told in Psalms 118 and 146 not to put our trust in princes, we are commanded to pray for them! Why might we not be given such leaders again?

We also note that while Edward was only the tender age of 9, by contrast Cranmer was now 57 years old, yet they were able to work together to undertake this great work. Today much is made of generational differences in the church! Mostly it is an excuse for the young to abandon the old and establish worldly-style churches. Yet the mix of ages in our churches is one of our natural strengths. It was no hindrance to Cranmer and Edward. While the world fights between generations, may the church set a better standard as young people are cared for and they learn and prosper from the teaching and experience of their elders. 'Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head, and honour the face of the old man, and fear thy God: I am the LORD.' Leviticus 19:32. Let young King Edward be an example to young people today.

Cranmer also respected the king under God. 'Honour the King' is the text (1 Peter 2:17) and the Bible also demands care of orphans which Edward essentially was. He was

also a child. On all four counts Cranmer respected the king and adopted the attitude that with an infant king he should move the reformation quite slowly. Cranmer respected Edward appropriately with reference to all these circumstances.

Ecclesiastes 10:16 warns of danger if a child is king but God can overrule with godly help such as Cranmer and even make the child wiser than his elders.

The mutual respect between the mature Cranmer and the zealous boy king is a great example. How do we learn from elders and encourage the young?

Let us go on to consider some of the ways that Cranmer was able 'to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant'.

Cranmer cuts ceremonies

Cranmer was certainly a doer of the word. The new Parliament under Somerset wasted no time in bringing Cranmer's agenda forward in 1547, repealing the Six Articles that were introduced under Henry against the Protestant Reformation. They had reaffirmed traditional Catholic doctrine on the key issues of:

1. transubstantiation,
2. the reasonableness of withholding of the cup from the people during communion,
3. clerical celibacy,
4. observance of vows of chastity,
5. permission for private masses,
6. the importance of auricular confession, ie, private confession of sin to a priest.

Worst of all, the punishment for rejecting these teachings was first imprisonment and if continued after that, death and confiscation of goods. Scrapping this law was vital for reformation. It is hard to imagine such laws, but it is a tragedy that laws against the truth are also being passed in our own day. We should pray for their repeal.

While Cranmer was cautious in his reforming, in some ways he was radical or what today would be called 'extreme'!

We too need to distinguish between vital and less important goals and work. We can only do so much, or so little, in our short lives!

Having changed this terrible law, Cranmer could reform church order. First to pull down, second to build up.

During January 1548 Lord Protector Somerset and Cranmer began suppressing certain practices: candles at Candlemas, ashes on Ash Wednesday and palms on Palm Sunday.

In February the Council ordered Cranmer to remove all remaining images. Most ceremonies were abolished by the end of the year except the sepulchre at Easter and two lights before the high altar. More of the service was now in English. While fasting in Lent was still to be enforced, no one was to be punished for refusing to creep to the cross on Good Friday! Holy days were not suppressed but it was now laudable to work on them rather than not. This again was a gentle way to change the system, by changing attitudes. That Fasting was not abolished, illustrates one of our headings which we will come to later, Cranmer's Christian Kindness.

A new Chantries Act was introduced which went further than Henry VIII. Chantries were trust funds, generally large ones, to pay priests to say or chant (hence chantries) services of masses for the dead. They made a good fortune and were full of idols and valuables. Nevertheless some of the priests used their time to teach the poor. Some people had given money for the mass to be said in perpetuity after their decease. Superstition aside, you can imagine the distress caused to families if such activity was banned.

Henry wanted the money for his supporters. Cranmer also wanted this terrible fraud stopped but he wanted the money used well.

TO BE CONTINUED

BOOK REVIEW

Editor's Note: We live, regretfully, in a day when most evangelicals, and most publishers, have abandoned the Authorised (King James) Version of the Bible. Rather, therefore, than ceasing to review most books, we try to warn readers by stating if the book uses other versions of the Bible. The position of The Gospel Magazine is that the AV is the best translation, from the true text, possessing beautiful and formative English, and that it has been an instrument of blessing to the English-speaking church for over four hundred years. That we name another translation does not mean we endorse it.

Introducing Major Theologians

Michael Reeves

Inter-Varsity Press 336pp paperback £14.99 ISBN 978 1 783592 72 2

The complete title of this book is *Introducing Major Theologians from the Apostolic Fathers to the Twentieth Century*.

In the Introduction, Michael Reeves explains the value of reading about and studying the works of theologians from the early days of Christianity up to modern times in order to: 'keep the clean sea breeze of the centuries blowing through our minds' (a quote from C S Lewis).

The following chapters deal with the Apostolic Fathers (Papias, Clement, Ignatius, Polycarp) Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Athanasius, Augustine, Anselm, Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Owen, Jonathan Edwards, Friedrich Schleiermacher, Karl Barth and J I Packer.

Michael Reeves demonstrates the ways in which these theologians overlap in their thinking and also how they build on or differ from the thoughts of their predecessors.

The author makes it clear that he does not necessarily agree with everything that has been written by his chosen subjects but his purpose is to give a factual summary of their thinking. This makes the book a useful reference resource.

The layout of each chapter is more or less the same; a brief biography and background to the times in which the particular theologian lived followed by a short description of their thought. Following this, the main works of the theologian are discussed and then a very helpful 'Going on with...' section which explains the best way of beginning to study the theologian in greater depth. In this section, Reeves suggests the best starting point and evaluates various editions of their works as well as mentioning the best biographies. Each chapter concludes with a 'Timeline' of significant events in the theologian's life.

In the final chapter, 'Back to the Sources' the author states again his conviction of the importance of studying the theologians of the past as well as those of today. 'If a tree is to grow great, its roots must go deep. It is when those roots are cut that they die. It is no different in the church: without good roots into the past, we will be blown around by the assumptions of our generation, overly sensitive to petty changes in our immediate environment.'

I found this book fascinating and stimulating. It was probably written for people, like myself, who, whilst we may be familiar with these great names from the past, know little about their lives and times and even less about their writings. In my case, Reeves has certainly achieved his objective of giving me a new insight into areas outside my usual thinking and of encouraging further study and I would heartily recommend this book.

DKM

MINISTRY

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Providence Baptist Chapel. Lord's Day services, 10.30 am and 6.30 pm. Bible Study and Prayer Meeting, Wednesdays 7.30 pm. Use AV and *Christian Worship*. Pastor: Mr Pooyan Mehrshahi. Tel. 01242 245116.

FRISTON, SUFFOLK: Baptist Church, Mill Road IP17 1PH (4 miles from Aldeburgh, 3 miles from Snape Maltings). Lord's Day services: 10.45 am and 2 pm. Bible Study Tuesdays 7.30 pm. AV and *Gospel Hymns*. Reformed Evangelical worship. Pastor: Michael Harley. www.fristonbaptistsuffolk.org.uk. Tel 01728 602657.

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Open House and Thanksgiving Service

An Open House and Thanksgiving Service will be held, God willing, on Saturday, 13 February 2016, at our new International Headquarters:

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Open House – from 11.30 a.m. – Includes guided tours of the building; refreshments provided

Buffet Lunch – from 12.30 p.m.

Service of Thanksgiving – commences 2.00 p.m.
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If using satnav please use SW19 3TL.

Some car parking is available on site.

The Morden Hall Park National Trust property is adjacent to William Tyndale House should anyone wish to take a recreational walk as part of their visit to our new premises.

All friends and supporters of the Society are welcome.

It would be appreciated if friends could indicate their planned attendance by contacting the Society either by telephone (020 8543 7857) or by email (contact@tbsbibles.org).

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