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The Gospel Magazine

The loving nature of our Lord Jesus Christ • New Covenant Theology—Part 3

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1766–2015

*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 39 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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Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God.
Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.***

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EDITORIAL

THE Psalmist declared, ‘I will go in the strength of the Lord GOD: I will make mention of thy righteousness, even of thine only’. Those who know their weakness understand the necessity of finding strength elsewhere. It is to be feared that many look for strength in things which are weak, and Israel was guilty of this. The prophet Isaiah described those ‘that walk to go down into Egypt, and have not asked at my mouth; to strengthen themselves in the strength of Pharaoh, and to trust in the shadow of Egypt’ (Isaiah 30:2). Human agencies can appear powerful and secure, but we know that the hearts of kings are in God’s rule and governance, and both Hannah and Mary confessed this. The former said, ‘The bows of the mighty men are broken, and they that stumbled are girded with strength’ (1 Samuel 2:4), while the latter sang, ‘He hath shewed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts’ (Luke 1:51). This is how the Lord has revealed himself, for ‘He delighteth not in the strength of the horse: he taketh not pleasure in the legs of a man’ (Psalm 147:10).

Elijah learned to live in the strength which the Lord provides, 1 Kings 19:8, and

the Apostle Paul revealed the lesson he had learned, that those who learn to trust in divine grace are never disappointed. ‘My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.’ He confessed, ‘Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me’ (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Our great strength is our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom it was prophesied long ago, ‘he shall stand and feed in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God (Micah 5:4). That is, like the faithful shepherd to whom he compared himself in the Gospels, our Lord provides for all the needs of his weak, fearful, wayward people. If we would know the strength to bear the burden and heat of the day, if we would know such spiritual refreshment as would cause us to remain faithful, Christ-honouring, God-glorifying people, let us seek it where it is to be found. It was our blessed Saviour who said, ‘Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest’. We desire rest. We need rest. Our enemy is ever awake, and we tire. Seek Christ’s strength, and live in it day by day.¶

THE LOVING NATURE OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

A SERMON BY THE EDITOR

'I will: be thou clean' St Matthew 8:3

THE character of our blessed Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ is perhaps the clearest motivation to sinners to trust him. When we begin to see something of his nature, his personality, and when we begin to understand that he seeks only good for those who are needy and desperate, we are encouraged to lay aside our doubts, to put off our pride, and to humble ourselves before him. This was the experience of the leper whose case is being described, and this has been the case for countless numbers of sinners in this world, who, having felt the weight and burden of their sins, have come at last to Christ.

We will begin by considering some of the statements made in the Gospels about our Lord Jesus, in order to encourage us to continue with this subject.

1. Gospel statements of Christ's nature

We see, firstly, the *compassion* of Christ. So Matthew 9:36 and 14:14. Compassion and pity are facets of the same emotion, for it is an emotion. It is the sharing in the misery of another, sometimes called empathy. It may seem strange to us to think of our Lord empathising with those who had no shepherd—that is, those who lacked spiritual leadership and pastoral care. The history of the Church is very full of examples of men in positions of spiritual authority and leadership who have been utterly devoid of a pastoral concern. They had been more like wolves among the sheep, tearing and biting, satisfying their own carnal pleasures, and doing nothing to assist their charges into the kingdom of heaven. On the other hand, there have been many, like Jan

Hus, who hazarded their own lives, and lost them, for the sake of their congregations. The Lord Jesus Christ came to save such as these, and he was full of compassion towards them. How different the Christ of Scripture from the Christ of Rome, who can only be approached through his mother, since we have angered him by causing his death! How unscriptural is such a view. Let us give thanks that our Saviour is full of compassion to those who lack spiritual help.

We see, secondly, the *love* of Christ. So Mark 10:21. It is recorded here that one came and knelt before our Lord and asked, 'Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?' We know Christ's answer, that the young man was to keep the Law. 'Master,' he replied, 'all these have I observed from my youth.' Some take his words as implying confidence that he had done sufficient to obtain his desire, but our Lord's answer suggests otherwise: 'Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest.' Our Lord saw before him one who, having done all in his power, entertained a doubt, and perhaps more than a doubt, about the sufficiency of his all. He wanted that peace and security which belongs only to those who know that they are right with God. He sought assurance, and came to the one Teacher whose opinion he valued. No doubt he had asked many other rabbis, but none had given him confidence that they knew the answer. The Lord Jesus was different, not least because, hearing his question, and his first answer, he knew that he was dealing with a genuine seeker. Thus he looked upon him and loved him. The Lord Jesus loves all who earnestly and

seriously desire to know the way of life. Thus all who would know that way are to be encouraged and exhorted to come to Christ for it. He loves such people.

We see, thirdly, the *mercy* of Christ. It was for this that Bartimaeus called, saying, 'Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me' (Mark 10:46ff). He obtained mercy in that the Lord Jesus granted his request, and restored his eyesight. On what ground was this requested, and granted? Very simply, on the same ground as that which we see in the Ethiopian eunuch, who confessed, 'I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God'. That is, both men understood and believed that Jesus is the Christ, the Anointed of God. They believed that Jesus is the One who fulfils Old Testament prophecy concerning the promise of a deliverer. Jesus is the One spoken of in 2 Samuel 7:14, of whom God said, 'I will be his father, and he shall be my son'. This could only apply to a son of David, and specifically to the one who was to be crowned king of Israel. It is a description of the man Messiah. So, when Bartimaeus addressed the Lord Jesus as 'Son of David', he was giving voice to his faith in Jesus as the Messiah. For this he obtained mercy, since he was humbling himself before the rightful King. The Lord Jesus will have mercy upon all who come to him as their King, seeking from him that which he alone can give.

We see, fourthly, the *caring concern* of Christ. So John 19:26. Shortly before he died, as he hung on the cross, he made provision for his dear mother, and for the beloved disciple, John. It may appear at first glance that this has little to do with salvation. The Psalmist teaches us that 'God setteth the solitary in families', Psalm 68:6, and nowhere is this more true—or nowhere ought this to be more true—than in the Church. Congregations ought to be families to all who come. As with all families, there are some who are awkward, and who bring more problems than anything else. There are some who have much to say, and others who have little to say. There are some who do much for others, and there are

some who need to have much done for them. There are those who are obedient and helpful, and those who are wayward and in need of discipline. Our Lord Jesus, knowing the time of his death was at hand, made provision for two people who would be affected most severely, at the human level, by his death. Just consider the love to which such an act testifies, that, as he hung and suffered, he considered the loneliness and loss which would be felt by others. The Church is to consider the example set by its Head, in that he showed such caring concern for those he loved. Let us do likewise.

2. The full nature of love

There, is, however, another aspect to our Lord's character which must not be overlooked, namely his love for all that is good, holy and true. This is seen most clearly in his condemnation of all which opposes God's will.

The full nature of love is usually only ever seen when it can be contrasted with its opposite. Since it is beyond human nature to express love and its opposite without either reducing love or the opposite, this is probably not a matter we have considered very much before. However, when we come to a consideration of divine love, it is a different matter. Since there can be no fault, no sin, in anything done by the Godhead, it follows that we ought to see here true love contrasted with its opposite. In practice this means love for the objects of love, and hatred for anything else. Or, to put it another way, the Lord Jesus Christ loves that which accords with the Father's will, and hates anything which is contrary to that will.

We are to see the love of Christ displayed in, among other things, his condemnation of the Pharisees and Sadducees. There is in the Church today a spirit which says, 'At bottom, we all hope the same hope, we all believe roughly the same things. Let us not fight among ourselves, but let us get on with helping other people'. As one man put it to me years ago, our differences (in this case between Romanism and the Protestant faith) amounted to 'same meat, different gravy'. I begged to

differ. It is not loving to overlook or to downplay the serious errors being taught by some. It is not loving to be accepting of lifestyles and forms of behaviour which are condemned in the Bible.

The love of Christ is demonstrated in the condemnation of all that is opposed to God's will. It was the Father who sent the Son, and the Father's hatred of sin is written plainly on the pages of Scripture. The casting out of Adam and Eve from Eden, the curse on Cain, the coming of the Flood, and the confusion of languages at Babel, to look no further than the first eleven chapters of Genesis, demonstrate this point. By showing the same attitude towards sin, the Lord Jesus Christ shows his full agreement with the Father in these acts. He shows that he and the Father are indeed one, being fully agreed on the sinfulness of sin.

The love of Christ is also demonstrated to sinners in the condemnation of sin. It is only when we understand how seriously we are endangered by our sins that we begin to understand the vital necessity of salvation. A child may play with matches because he likes the bright flame, and is fascinated by the way it moves. No warning of danger makes any impression. Let that child once touch the flame, and no more warnings are needed; the danger is all too obvious. The Lord's condemnation of sin is, to those in whom the Spirit is at work, as the touch of the flame; it smarts, and causes us to draw back, and to begin to view sin as something altogether more deadly than we had thought before. This is an act of love.

The love of Christ is also seen in his condemnation of sin if we are believers. To what end have we believed the gospel, trusted in Christ, and turned from sinful actions and thoughts, if those who continue in them remain without condemnation? Time and again we are instructed by the apostles to live the Christian life, to be gracious, obedient, holy, and righteous. We are meant to be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, Philippians 2:15. If the crooked and

perverse nation is not under condemnation, how long will it be before the attitude among Christians becomes one of compromise, as they begin to live like the world? In condemning sin, the Lord Jesus Christ lovingly shows to his faithful people the importance of godly Christian living.

There is, of course, much more to the loving nature of our Lord Jesus Christ than his consistent condemnation of sin. We see that he has compassion on sinners, so that the condemnation of sin does not equal the condemnation of sinners, without hope. Rather, because he condemns sin, he sets before us the way of life. He is the way of life. He calls sinners to repentance, for his mercy and compassion are broad and deep. He forgives the repentant sinner, and the failing Christian who comes to him for restoration. He strengthens those who, confessing their own inability to resist temptation, cry to him for protection. He graciously supplies wisdom and understanding to those who, knowing their ignorance and their unprofitability, seek aid from him.

3. Our blessing in Christ's loving nature

We see, finally, the application of these things. In the words of our text, our Lord is addressing a man who is a leper. He is ritually unclean. None may approach him, nor may he approach any. Until his leprosy is gone, he must remain beyond the bounds of compassion, companionship and care. And yet he faces a great obstacle; how can his leprosy be cleansed? It is clear from the Old Testament law on the matter that such a condition could and would clear up by itself. This man, however—and several others of whom we read in the Gospels—came to Christ for the healing of their condition.

There are two things to consider here. The first is, the symbolic significance of leprosy, as a mark of that uncleanness which separates a man from God. This is, of course, a picture of sin. This is the reason why the law was so clear on the matter. So much of the Law was

designed to teach Israel that God had put a difference between them and the rest of mankind, in order to teach the difference he requires between sinners and the righteous. One of the sadnesses of the attitude of Jewish people today is that they look upon these differences as ends in themselves, and fail to understand their true purpose. It is even more sad when well-meaning Christians appear to encourage the Jewish people to maintain this error.

The second thing is the manner in which the Lord Jesus Christ treated the leper. He made no move to retain any distance between himself and this unfortunate wretch, but stood and waited while the man approached and worshipped, by which we understand that he prostrated himself before the Lord. When the poor man made his request, our Lord responded by putting forth his hand and touching him. One can imagine that this was the first human contact he had experienced in quite some time, and that simple gesture was an indication to him that he was before one who had, at the very least, the desire to help. In this, we have a picture of the wonderful grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, who, in taking on him the form of a servant, was made in the likeness of men. He came among his people. He shared in their sufferings, living in a fallen world, among sinners, and enduring the opposition of the world, the flesh and the devil.

So we have here the Lord Jesus Christ coming to those who are cut off from God. Sin is the disease, the corruption, which causes the separation. By being separated, sinners are placed beyond the reach of hope. They cannot come to the tree of life, to take and eat, but a

flaming sword guards the way. Thus their sin is fatal to them. And it is the judgment of God that this should be. It is he who has placed the guardians in the way, and it is he who has ensured that man is without hope in this world. And yet it is he who first declared the word of hope, in announcing the seed of the woman who would bruise the serpent's head. Thus we see that, at the very outset, the Lord God knew how he would overcome the effects of sin, both with regard to his hatred of it, and to the fatal consequences of it upon his creation.

Thus did Christ come, the seed of the woman, who bruised the serpent's head. Thus did Christ overcome Satan, and break his power, and the power of sin. Thus did Christ draw the sting of death, so that it is no longer the curse for those who trust in him, but is merely part of our preparation for the world to come. And all of this the effect of love, for we did not first love him, but he first loved us. He loved us while we were yet dead in trespasses and sins. He loved us while we hated him, and his righteousness. And he loved us effectually, so that his obedience unto death has opened the way of life for us, and has called us and saved us.

Let us then, knowing these things, demonstrate our love for Christ by holy living. Let us be men and women who study the Scriptures, that the love of Christ would be taught us afresh. Let us be those who pray, that we may show our dependence on Christ's love. Let us flee all that is contrary to such love, and especially those things for which that love became so necessary, as the disobedience of our first parents. Let us love as we are loved, for love is indeed of God. Amen.¶]

THE PERIOD OF GRACE

CARINE MACKENZIE

WE sometimes go to meet visitors at Inverness airport. Parking in the airport car park is free for twenty minutes. After waiting for about 10 to 15 minutes our friends arrived. On putting our

parking ticket in the pay machine, the following message came up, 'You are still in the grace period, make your way to the exit'. We were glad to read that message but it also made us think of a much more important message that we have from God.

We are all on a journey through time to eternity. While we are living in this world we are still on mercy ground, with the gospel of Jesus Christ offered to us. We are in the grace period today but on our way to the exit from this life—into eternity. The gospel is plainly stated to us in the Bible; 'Christ died for the ungodly' (Romans 5:6). 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved' (Acts 16:31). 'For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ' (1 Thessalonians 5:9), and many, many other wonderful truths.

While we have life, we are in the grace period—'Behold now is the accepted time,' we are warned, 'Now is the day of salvation' (2 Corinthians 6:2).

If we had arrived at the pay station after 20 minutes, the grace period would be over; a price would have to be paid.

There is a price to be paid for our souls too. For those who have not repented and trusted in Jesus Christ during that period of grace, the price is very serious. 'The wages of sin is death' (Romans 6:23). The awful outcome will be to hear the Lord say, 'Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels' (Matthew 25:41).

For those who trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, there is also a price to pay, but that price has already been paid by someone else—the Lord Jesus himself. His death on the cross has paid the price for our sin. He takes our sin and we receive his righteousness. God's grace to us means that we receive what we do not deserve—forgiveness, love, eternal life, salvation—all Gifts Received At Christ's Expense. (GRACE).

By God's mercy we do not receive what we do deserve—our sins are blotted out. God's wrath is turned away. David prayed that God would show him mercy and not the judgement he deserved for his sin.

'Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving-kindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies, blot out my transgressions' (Psalm 51:1).

God's mercy was most amazingly shown when he sent the Lord Jesus Christ to be the Saviour of sinners. 'According to his mercy, he saved us' (Titus 3:5).

BIBLE SEARCH

Find the missing words. The initials of your answers will spell out two words from the story.

1. For the LORD God is a sun and shield: the LORD will give grace and _____ . (Psalm 84:11).
2. Being justified freely by his grace through the _____ that is in Christ Jesus (Romans 3:24).
3. To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us

_____ in the beloved (Ephesians 1:6).

4. Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting _____ and good hope through grace (2 Thessalonians 2:16).
5. And by their prayer for you, which long after you for the _____ grace of God in you (2 Corinthians 9:14).
6. But though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the _____ of his mercies (Lamentations 3:32).
7. My mercy will I keep for him for _____ and my covenant shall stand fast with him (Psalm 89:28).
8. But God who is _____ in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us (Ephesians 2:4).
9. Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all _____ (2 Corinthians 1:3).
10. Jesus Christ the same _____, and to day, and for ever (Hebrews 13:8).

A SERMON ON MATTHEW 6:10

PART II

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)

1. We should understand then, that, to this submitting to God's will, a knowing and loving _____ of God's wisdom and pleasure is required; and a praying to God in love, that his will be done.

It is not enough that, when God giveth adversity, a man should say: I have suffered it. This the devils and the ungodly also do, and sooner heaven and earth should pass away or be overturned, than that something should occur that is contrary to God's will.

2. This being done of God's will is not only a suffering of God's will, because God wanteth it, which is good, but not enough. Because man should agree so much with God's decree, that man even desires it, thanks God for it, (Job 1:21; Isaiah 12:1) and therefore prays, and when it comes, glories and takes pleasure in it, (2 Corinthians 12:9, 10) and such even in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake.

For it is not an art to say in prosperity: The Lord is good and I will praise the Lord. But it is a more difficult lesson to praise and thank God in adversity, and a Christian should come to this if he rightly will pray: Thy will be done. Oh! where are they, who in such an occasion, go against their own will, so that they cordially do the Lord's will? Satan could understand this and therefore he asks: 'Doth Job fear God for nought? Thou hast made an hedge about him, and about his house, and

about all that he hath on every side? Thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land. But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face' (Job 1:9-11). Satan wants to say that man can only see whether a man is Godly or ungodly, when that man, in the heaviest adversary, steadfastly continues to do God's will. Job's wife could see this as well, when she said: 'Dost thou still retain thine integrity? Curse God and die' (Job 2:9). And even this great example of patience (James 5:11) endured various times the trial of self-denial, when he said: 'Naked came I of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither. The LORD gave and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD' (Job 1:19). So that he deserved God's testimony: 'In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly' (v.22). He behaved similarly during his second attack, when he rebuked his wife saying: 'Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh. What? Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?' (Job 2:10). But his reaction to what was an even heavier attack was not so good, when he cursed the day of his birth. (Job 3:1-26).¶

TO BE CONTINUED

JODOCUS VAN LODENSTEYN

Poet and Minister

THE Rev. J van Lodensteyn, a Dutch minister of the gospel in the seventeenth century, was born in Delft, where his father was a mayor and a deacon of the Reformed Church. He studied theology in Utrecht and Old languages in Leiden. He also wanted to go to England for study, but received a call from Zoetenmeer in 1624. In 1650 he went to Sluis, and in 1653 to Utrecht.

Utrecht was at that time a beacon of the Further Reformation, a pietistic movement in the Dutch Reformed Church linked to Puritanism. There were many godly ministers who ministered the Church of Utrecht and godly professors lectured at the academy. One who taught van Lodensteyn, the catechist Abraham Godard, translated various sermons of Francois Turretin from French. Later

van Lodensteyn would translate Pierre du Moulin's *The Anatomy of Arminianism* into Dutch. Many of his sermons were published and are even read today.

Because the Rev. van Lodensteyn found the city of Utrecht too busy, he lived outside the city. He was never married and did not use meat or wine, even though he supplied others with them. He often preached against the sins in the city and warned of God's wrath to come. God delivered The Netherlands from the Spanish papists, so that they could serve him in freedom, but what happened? This freedom and prosperity were misused, and God would visit for this. He saw the French occupation of Utrecht in 1672-3 as an act of God. Even more, when the French had just left, a part of the Dome of Utrecht collapsed in a storm. God was dealing with The Netherlands. At a

certain point he even refused to minister the Lord's Supper, because many came forward without signs of repentance.

But the Rev. van Lodensteyn is mainly known for his poetry. After preaching on the Sabbath he would write poems to relax. The poems are very experimental and have edified many. Some were even translated into German. God is everything and the creature is nothing.

To despise the honour of the world
I am able to do in this wilderness of glory;
Treasure and statures
I may leave my lusts without pain.
O blessed solitude and together with God
Were I live by heavenly wine.

May the remembrance of the just be blessed.¶

STUDIES IN EZEKIEL

P KING (HAILSHAM)

Chapter 37:1-14

A CERTAIN RESURRECTION

IT may come as a surprise to some that this vision is in such a difficult prophecy. Ezekiel is among the exiles, who, after all that he has told them, might well be in despair. They thought the stay in Babylon would be brief, but now realize it will be protracted. The doom and gloom of previous visions needs to be balanced with assurances of deliverance. What a gracious God we have, who always gives us a way of escape from all our distresses!

1. New life (vv.1-10). The incredible sight which met the prophet was of a huge pile of bones, parched with the sun, and beyond any hope of life. This is how the captives felt at the time, once despair had replaced hope. Would they ever see Jerusalem

again, and gather together as 'the house of Israel'? This is the question (in picture form) which God puts to Ezekiel—'Can these bones live?' He has no answer, but appeals to God himself for an answer—'O Lord God, thou knowest'. The command is given to speak to the bones, and in response, the bones 'live'. The Church today may seem to be beyond recovery, but God says, 'Preach the Word', and life will return. He also says, speak to the dead, and regeneration will be the reward. Why is the outcome so certain? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living. When God speaks through a person (notice that the prophet spoke) then the outcome is certain.

God can do no other than revive his people from a dead state, because the fact that he can means that he will; indeed, he must.

2. **New hope** (vv.11–14). Israel was disturbed and distressed by the situation in Babylon, and believers can fall into the same state. Various reasons can contribute to this condition, but the problem may be disobedience, as was the case with Israel.

God is faithful, and will not forsake his Church—new life will come. Pray that the life which came to those dry bones will come into our local churches, so that we are a light in a dark place, a city set on a hill which cannot be hidden.

Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.

A SERMON ON JOSHUA 24:15

BY THE EDITOR

Preached on the 116th Anniversary of Landford Wood Mission Hall, Wiltshire

WHEN Israel had rest in Canaan, Joshua gathered the people, and gave warning that disobedience to the laws and commandments of God would result in their being unable to overthrow the remaining occupants of the land, Joshua 23:1. Next, he gathered together the elders of Israel, 24:1, and rehearsed to them the history of the Lord's dealings with them. He began with Terah, the father of Abraham, and he showed that Terah and his sons had been idolaters when they lived beyond the Euphrates River. Once the Lord brought Abraham over the river and into Canaan, he showed him all the land, and began to fulfil the covenant he had made, in giving him seed. Joshua went on to record the settlement of land made by God upon Esau, while Jacob and his family went down into Egypt. There, they were enslaved and oppressed, but the living God showed his power to such a degree that the nation was spared, and Egypt was destroyed. The Amorites were also destroyed, and their land given to Israel. When Balaam came to curse the nation, the Lord God caused him to bless instead, and so Israel was delivered out of his hand. Furthermore, the Lord drove out the two kings of the Amorites, Sihon and Og, after he had destroyed Jericho.

No victory came at Israel's hand, for it was the Lord who fought for them.

Having thus fed, led, and fought for Israel, the Lord settled them in the Promised Land, where, said Joshua, they now live in cities and houses they had not built, while enjoying the fruit of vine and olive tree they had not planted. Therefore, declared Joshua, be like your father Abraham. Put away the strange gods from among yourselves, and serve the Lord in sincerity and truth. But if it seem evil to you to serve the Lord, choose from the alternatives. Serve either the gods of your father Abraham, which he served when he lived yet in Haran, or serve the gods of the Amorites who once occupied the land. Choose either those gods who are far away, or those who are near to hand. As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.

In this, Joshua declared this truth, that if we would know whom to serve, let us observe and judge according to the benefits he bestows upon us. In particular, let us judge according to—

1. Revelation
2. Promise
3. Present deliverance
4. Future hope

1. Revelation

When Terah and his sons lived in Haran, having moved from Ur, they knew not the Lord. Instead, they worshipped the same idols as their neighbours. Ur was then the foremost city in the world, as far as we can judge. There lived the wisest men of the age, and there, so archaeology tells us, religion flourished, alongside agriculture and commerce. There were artists and craftsmen, musicians and medics, and the people of Ur enjoyed the benefits of a civilized and enlightened society.

But in this one matter, this most important of matters, they had no light. Concerning religion, they were ignorant. Rather than worship the true and living God, who had made himself known to Noah, and who had destroyed the world by the Flood, the God who had seen the wickedness of the people and had confounded their speech at Babel, the people of Ur chose to worship according to their own imaginations. And Abraham, and all his family, were caught up in the same idolatry. They did as their neighbours did. There was no difference between them. They were as blind as each other. Abraham possessed no natural advantages over his father Terah, nor over his brothers Nahor and Haran. He was an idolater like them, blind, ignorant, and perishing.

And yet he came to be a faithful, believing man, who trusted the Lord and demonstrated his faith by leaving house and home, family and friends, in order to travel to a far country promised to him and to as-yet non-existent descendants. What changed? What brought about this alteration in his attitude, in his believing? By what means was he given to make the change? In a word, revelation. The Lord God made himself known to Abraham. We do not know precisely how, for we are not told, but we know that the Lord had said unto Abram, 'Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee' (Genesis 12:1).

It was by revelation that Abraham separated himself, which is the burden of God's words to him. Once, the Lord separated

himself from man, when he cursed Adam for his sin. That separation was illustrated most graphically by the casting out of Adam from the Garden, and the way back was closed off by the Cherubim, and the flaming sword, which turned every way, Genesis 3:24. Now, he separates between man and man, and all of his own choosing. Then, he cast the man out of the kingdom, the Garden of Eden, the place where God's will was to be done in perfect obedience, and where the righteous—the obedient—dwelt under the blessing of their Lord. Now, he calls his chosen servant to be the father of a new people, a new nation, in a new kingdom. Had the Lord God not revealed himself to Abraham, that man could not have ever known what was intended. No logic, no inquiry into natural revelation, and no understanding of the wicked condition in which the mass of mankind live, could have made this known to Abraham.

Furthermore, the gods whom Abraham and his family, and all his friends and neighbours, worshipped in Ur and Haran could and did reveal nothing of this matter. It was the true and living God who revealed his will to Abraham, not the idols of wood and stone. The Lord revealed his will to Abraham unlooked for, and unexpectedly. And yet he chose to reveal himself, and our salvation is to be traced through that revelation.

How we depend on divine revelation, the revelation of God in his Word, and of the Lord Jesus Christ who is the Word incarnate. Had God not revealed to us the gospel, we would remain ignorant of all that is good and holy. We would be without hope here, and damned in the world to come. Abraham needed that divine revelation, and so do we. He had it, and so do we. Let this be a cause of praise and thanksgiving, even now, among God's people.

2. Promise

God's revelation of himself to his own is a mercy for which we must give eternal thanks. The reason is that, when the Lord reveals himself, it is always for a purpose. He may

reveal himself in order to instruct, or to bless, or to admonish, or to guide, or to comfort. And so that we do not have to be dependent on continued and continual revelation, we have the Scriptures. Here, the self-revelation of our God is fixed and settled. It is not to be added to, nor is anything to be taken from it. It is the same revelation throughout all ages. We are especially blessed to have the finished Book, whereas once, before the closing of the canon of the New Testament, the revelation was not final but ongoing. We do not live in such times, but have the whole Word of God. Praise the Lord for that!

In the Scriptures we have many great and glorious promises given to us. They are exceeding great and precious promises, 2 Peter 1:4. These promises are made to us in order that, among other reasons, we would have anchors for our faith, fixed points by which to climb ever higher into the glorious presence of our heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Abraham left Haran with all he had, never to return. He did so, in part, because the Lord God made promises to him. He promised him land, and descendants, Genesis 12:1,7, etc. He reiterated the promises from time to time, as Genesis 15:1ff., and he acted to show the truth of the promises. He gave Sarah notice that she would become a mother, Genesis 18, even though she was very old. He gave notice that the land would be Abraham's one day, in that Ephron, of the sons of Heth, was willing to give, and then to sell, a field and a cave for a burial plot.

These promises were repeated to Isaac, and to Jacob, and in the strength of these promises Joseph gave commandment concerning his bones. It was in order to fulfil these promises that Moses was sent by the Lord to demand of Pharaoh, 'Let my people go'. As we read on in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, we see how the Lord acted toward Israel, in order that his promises should not fail.

Of course, all of these promises are

premised on that earlier promise, that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head. For in calling Abraham, and in giving him seed, and in raising up Joseph, and in sending Moses to lead Israel out of Egypt, the Lord was preserving the seed of the woman. In the fulness of time the woman of God's choosing, the virgin Mary, was visited by the angel, and informed by an act of divine revelation that she would bear the Saviour of the world. And all that tended to the preserving of her line before her, and of Christ's people thereafter, rests upon the exceeding great and precious promises of God.

By contrast, declares Joshua, what have either the old idols of Abraham's early life, or the gods of the Amorites, ever promised and done? It was not the false gods of Ur and Haran that promised land and seed to Abraham, but the true and living God. It was not the gods of Jericho who gave the city into Israel's hand, but, as Rahab confessed, 'I know that the Lord God hath given you the land'. 'The Lord your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath' (Joshua 2:9-11).

Now, if Israel has received what was promised—which they most certainly had, for they were the seed, and they were in possession of the promised land—and if in receiving it the devotees of Amalek's gods had been overthrown, then it follows that the giver, the fulfiller of the promises, is the Lord God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the true and living God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Furthermore, it follows that anything promised to us by God is to be trusted. Since all promises are in and through the Lord Jesus Christ, and since all promises are made for Christ's sake, it follows that we must be in Christ, accepted in the beloved, if we would benefit from those promises. Thus Christ becomes to us both as the great proof of the promises, and is the greatest promise himself, as Mary, Simeon and Hannah confessed.

But to what end are those promises made?¶

TO BE CONCLUDED

NEW COVENANT THEOLOGY: PART 3

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IN the first part we looked at some of the tenets of New Covenant Theology (NCT), a theology and hermeneutic that opposes Reformed doctrine on the moral law, the covenant of grace, and the Church, and denies that the Ten Commandments have abiding validity. In the second part we introduced David Gay, a British proponent of New Covenant Theology (NCT). We now address some of the arguments advanced by NCT to deny the moral law.

Moral law and positive law

NCT claims that the conventional threefold division of the Mosaic Law into moral, ceremonial, and civil is a 'medieval gloss'.¹ Whether or not that is true has no bearing on the usefulness of such categorization. What cannot be denied is a *logical* twofold categorization of divine laws: universal, immutable laws that 'forever bind all ... to the obedience thereof ... commonly called moral';² and all other laws (conventionally called 'positive law'),³ which impose duties on certain persons, in certain places, at certain times.⁴ As God is 'unchangeable in his ... holiness, justice, goodness, and truth',⁵ there are behaviours in his rational creatures that are always inimical to his character, which are in their

1. D. Gay, *The Glorious New-Covenant Ministry* (2014), p8.

2. *Westminster Confession of Faith*, XIX, 5. This logical categorization cannot be denied as it is a definition of terms. It is an entirely different matter to determine which, if any, laws fit into each category.

3. Latin *jus positum* and *lex posita*, law that is 'positive' in the sense of being *posited*.

4. It is essential on matters of conscience to distinguish between 'things indifferent' (considered in themselves), and things that are morally right and wrong in themselves.

5. *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, Q4.

nature sin:

The source and basis of God's moral law is His own moral character; which is necessary and immutable.⁶

God's holy law is as immutable as his nature; and no change in relation whatever, can abrogate it as a rule of right action.⁷

It is therefore simply impossible that any dispensation, of whatever mercy or grace, could have the effect of abrogating righteous obligation over God's saints. God's mercy through a Redeemer satisfying justice, may lift off the curse for transgression; but it is impossible that it should abrogate rightful authority ... [T]he Law must remain, under every dispensation, the authoritative declaration of God's character.⁸

Positive law, however, is not directly based on God's character. Generally, it regulates outward practices, prescribing duties that God imposes on particular men at particular times:

[Since the ceremonial laws etc] were only positive, not eternal and natural precepts of morality; the obligation to keep them only arose from God's command to do so; and hence, when the command was retracted, there was no longer any sin in their omission. To retract such commands is far different from making that no longer sin, which is in its nature sin.⁹

6. R.L. Dabney, *Lectures*, p633.

7. *Ibid.*, p664.

8. *Ibid.*, p353.

9. *Ibid.*, p633.

In moral law, God commands duties on matters morally right and wrong in themselves. In positive law, God commands duties on matters morally indifferent in themselves. The Old Testament distinguishes between these two categories of law, using different words for what *in itself* is repugnant to God and what *is to be considered* as forbidden by his creatures. An example of the former is the following: ‘The graven images of their gods ... [are] an abomination to the LORD thy God ... For all that do these things are an abomination unto the LORD: and because of these abominations the LORD thy God doth drive them out from before thee’ (Deut 7:25; 18:12). Here the word *towebah* for moral disgust or immorality is used. However, the command ‘ye shall not eat of their flesh, but ye shall have their carcasses in abomination [*sheqets*]’ (Lev 11:11) is positive law: certain meat was to be reckoned *sheqets*, unclean, to them, though not unclean or morally disgusting ‘of itself’.¹⁰ Accordingly, God does not judge non-Israelites over specifically Israelitish *sheqets* laws. But *towebah* practices always offend God, and will never cease to be sinful and immoral in themselves.

NCT built on fallacies

NCT uses many fallacious arguments to reject the moral law. Three will be considered here:

1. Equivocation over the word *moral*, pretending that *all* of God’s law is moral but *none* of God’s law is moral law. Any deduction about the moral law based on such equivocation is formally invalid;
2. Attempt to demonstrate that the defined category ‘moral law’ is empty. This builds on the aforementioned equivocation to re-categorize positive laws as ‘moral’, and then shows that these laws are mutable. This is fallacious;
3. Invention of a category of law that mimics

10. ‘There is nothing unclean of itself; but to him that esteemeth [i.e. reckons, imputes] any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean’ (Rom 14:14). Thus when God enjoins a man to esteem something unclean, then it becomes unclean to him.

moral law under another name, whilst denying moral law and the Reformed confessions; this breaches the law of contradiction.

First, then, equivocation. NCT states:

There is no Biblical justification for the use of the term ‘moral law.’ Any law God gives in any era is moral in that to transgress any commandment of God that applies to you [sic] is by definition ‘immoral.’¹¹

This pitiable theology fails to distinguish the *moral obligation* of obedience to an applicable law from the *moral nature* of that law itself. From this flows the unsound proposition that:

All of God’s law is moral and based on the holy and righteous character of God.¹²

This is an assertion without proof, which should not be accepted without proper demonstration, and leads to the second method of attacking the moral law, based on the *mutability* of positive laws ‘re-branded’ as moral:

Wasn’t God’s law that said only Levites could become priests based on His holy character? Wouldn’t it have been immoral for a Benjamite or a Judahite to walk into the tabernacle or the temple and begin to perform sacrifices on behalf of the people?¹³

Answer: Firstly, to offer sacrifice on behalf of others is not of itself immoral, otherwise no one could have done it. But for an Israelite to countermand an applicable positive law was

11. *The New Covenant Confession of Faith*, <<http://ncbf.net/pdf/confession.pdf>>.

12. S. Lehrer, *New Covenant Theology: Questions Answered* (2006), p116. Italics original.

13. *Ibid.* There is even equivocation in the concept of ‘holy’—the consecration and separation of the Levites is a holiness different in meaning from the holiness of God’s character upon which it is said to be based. Additionally, it would be a fallacy of composition to argue from any particular case that ‘All of God’s law is... based on the character of God’.

rebellion against God, and this is the immorality, not the act of sacrificing *per se*. Secondly, the particular law corresponds with God’s sovereign *choice*, so the matter resolves on whether God was free to restrict the priesthood to any one or more of the tribes (the Reformed view: it was not a matter of moral necessity but positive law, which God could introduce, change, or abolish at his will),¹⁴ or whether God’s election was necessary based on his character. NCT’s assertion that ‘All of God’s law is moral and based on the ... character of God’ implies that God’s choice of the Levites was a *moral* choice determined by his *moral* character. When taken to its logical conclusion, this argument has profound implications for the doctrine of God and divine election. If all divine law is mutable and based on the divine character, then its mutable character reflects either mutability in the character of the one God (e.g. Process Theology, Open Theism), or a succession of divine characters from a plurality of divine lawgivers (e.g. Marcionism, Gnosticism). NCT proponent Steve Lehrer admits that if a law is based on immutable divine character then *logically* that law would be immutable.¹⁵ Given Lehrer’s presuppositions that all laws are based on God’s character and *mutable*, the conclusion that God’s *character* is mutable is logically inescapable. Lehrer’s miserable refuge is to assert that logic must be discarded in favour of paradox: that laws based on immutable divine character are nevertheless mutable. This is a most egregious example of special pleading, because Lehrer pretends to use reason (albeit fallaciously) to ‘prove’ that there is no ‘moral law’.¹⁶ He marshals *fallacies*

14. Christ was not a Levite, yet offered a perfect and acceptable sacrifice for others. This *necessitated* a change to the positive law (Heb 7:12). Since the law was positive, this was entirely possible, and had no effect whatsoever on the immutable moral law.

15. Lehrer, *op. cit.*, p115ff: ‘I want to say from the outset that it is a logical question. The premises and the conclusion that is drawn from them are logical...[T]he reasoning is logical’.

16. Lehrer asserts (without proof) that *all* laws are moral, and demonstrates that *some* laws were mutable, by

to attack sound arguments, yet insists that ‘No matter how logical an argument’ may be, ‘[a]lthough the reasoning is logical, I don’t think that it is biblical’ when it validly demonstrates that NCT’s presuppositions lead to heterodoxy.¹⁷ Such an approach is an attack upon the perspicuity of Scripture: it requires that at least some reasoning must be illogical or some doctrines must be irrational if they are to be regarded by NCT as ‘biblical’. But

Nothing...can be more derogatory to the Bible than the assertion that its doctrines are contrary to reason. The assumption ... that we must become irrational ... is, however it may be intended, the language of infidelity.¹⁸

NCT proponents are very keen to attach the labels ‘biblical’ and ‘unbiblical’ to arguments, but it is unclear what they mean by such terms.¹⁹ Since heterodoxy results from mere deduction from NCT’s presuppositions ‘by good and necessary consequence’, we have the clearest indication that some of those presuppositions are themselves false, so *truly* unbiblical. However, though irrationalism is a hallmark of NCT, not all NCT proponents are as comfortable as Lehrer to admit openly that a measure of irrationality is ‘biblical’. NCT proponent Gary D. Long is more subtle:

which he deduces that some *moral* laws are mutable, such that the immutability requirement for moral laws is not valid. This argument is worthless because he is unable to prove his major premise that all laws are moral. If some laws are positive, and those laws are the mutable ones, then any deduction from mutability is moot. In fact, his examples of mutable laws are not moral law at all, a fact which he all but admits in a footnote: ‘I am sure there are some who might not consider the laws I have chosen to examine as “moral law.”’ *Quite so!* The NCT argument is thus fallacious from first to last. To be taken seriously, Lehrer should have ‘chosen to examine’ laws that are indubitably considered moral law, e.g. idolatry, blasphemy, covetousness etc, and attempt to demonstrate the mutability of those.

17. Lehrer, *op. cit.*, p115.

18. C. Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3: 83-4.

19. As we will see, ‘biblical’ in NCT parlance cannot mean that which is certainly taught in Scripture, or having the authority of God.

The driving motive of NCT is *back to the Bible*. NCT emphasizes the inductive study of the Bible ... God's plan of salvation is ... not as explained through the theologically deduced system of C[ovenant] T[heology].²⁰

But the inductive method is not a 'back to the Bible' principle, for such would be the Reformed principle (*Westminster Confession*) that 'The whole counsel of God ... is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture ... The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself.'

Only the deductive method can validly bring out the truths that are within Scripture, and can do so infallibly where the premises are 'Scripture itself'.²¹ But no valid truth claim can be made via the inductive method, which can only lead to opinions that one dare not claim are 'biblical' in the sense of having divine authority.

NCT's third fallacious method of disposing of the moral law is by cloning it and reclothing it in NCT garb so that it can do some service, while keeping up appearances by fulminating against the Reformed original:

(i) NCT rejects Reformed teaching that the law 'commonly called moral' given to man

20. G.D. Long, *NCT: Time for A More Accurate Way* (2013), pp4-5.

21. Perhaps NCT does not consider that 'God's plan of salvation' is within that scope of 'all things necessary for [God's] own glory, man's salvation, faith and life', with which this section of the *Confession* deals in regard to perspicuity. But even beyond these things, the deductive method reaches truly biblical conclusions when its premises are biblical, and the argument valid. However, there is no such thing as a *valid* inductive theological argument: inductive reasoning cannot properly claim to arrive at authoritative biblical conclusions even when the premises are biblical. It is disturbing, therefore, to see NCT deprecating the only *valid* method of discerning biblical truth beyond what is 'expressly set down'.

at creation 'continued to be a perfect rule of righteousness' after his fall (*Westminster Confession*). Yet NCT asserts that

God's 'absolute law' is innate, written on the heart of man created in the image of God. It is God's unchanging standard of righteousness.²²

(ii) NCT rejects Reformed teaching that this unchanging law from creation 'for ever binds all' (*Westminster Confession*). Yet NCT asserts that

God's absolute law—His unchanging law ... binds all mankind by virtue of their being created in the image of God...[It] is ethically and morally binding upon all mankind forever.²³

(iii) NCT claims that Reformed theology has 'no biblical justification' for defining two distinct categories of divine laws: immutable law that forever binds all (moral law), and laws that bind specific people at specific times (positive law). Yet NCT asserts that

A right understanding of the principles of biblical law will and must entail a distinguishing between: (1) *that aspect of the law of God which is universally binding...* and (2) *that aspect of the law of God not universally binding ...* Biblical law may be rightly explained under two distinctive categories: the *absolute law of God* and the *covenantal law of God*.

God's absolute law— His unchanging law... [is] morally binding upon all mankind forever.

God's covenantal law ... is ... changeable.²⁴ God's covenant law binds only those ... according to the terms... in force at the specified time.²⁵

22. Long, op. cit., p5.

23. Ibid., p131.

24. Ibid., p5. Italics original. Note that 'absolute law' (immutable and universal) and 'covenant law' (mutable and non-universal) are mutually exclusive 'distinctive categories'.

25. Ibid., pp130-131. Italics original.

When NCT asserts the same categories that it denies in Reformed theology, they are wonderfully re-branded as 'right understanding' 'rightly explained' and 'biblical'. This is crass irrationalism since it breaches that most fundamental of logical principles, the law of contradiction: the same defined category can't simultaneously be both 'biblical' and 'unbiblical'.²⁶

Based on what Paul states in Romans,²⁷ it is unsurprising to find that pagans knew that they were under universal, eternal and immutable law that transcended their national, civic, and cultic laws.²⁸ In philosophy and jurisprudence this law is known as 'natural law'. NCT calls it 'absolute law'. The Reformed relate this to the category *moral law*. Universal, unchangeable, eternal laws are within the category of moral law *by definition*, and it is absurd for NCT to deny the category of moral law whilst affirming essentially the same category under a different name.

Summaries of moral law

Reformed theology holds that 'The moral law

26. The specific *composition* of the categories, i.e. which particular laws are in each particular category, is irrelevant to this point. If the *definitions* of the categories are the same, the categories cannot at the same time be both biblical and unbiblical.

27. The universal law with its penalties is still known to all men, for all know 'the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death', as they have 'the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness' (Rom 1:32; 2:15).

28. The concepts of natural (or moral) law and positive law are explored in the 5th century BC Greek tragedy, *Antigone*. Also, in the 1st century BC Cicero in *De Re Publica* recorded: 'There is a true law...universal, unchangeable, eternal, whose commands urge us to duty, and whose prohibitions restrain us from evil. ... This law cannot be contradicted by any other law, and is not liable either to derogation or abrogation. Neither the senate nor the people can give us any dispensation for not obeying this universal law of justice. It needs no other expositor and interpreter than our own conscience. It is not one thing at Rome and another at Athens; one thing today and another tomorrow; but in all times and nations this universal law must for ever reign, eternal and imperishable.'

is *summarily comprehended* in the ten commandments'.²⁹ Scripture and our Lord have further summarized the moral law into two 'great' commandments reflecting the principles of the two tables of the law: love to God and love to neighbour. The Ten Commandments and the 'Two Great Commandments' are *both* summaries of the moral law, but the latter is more summarized than the former, which is why the former can be said to be comprehended by the latter (Rom 13:9).

NCT proponent Gary Long classifies the commandments 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God etc' and 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself' as unchanging, universal laws, but *denies* that they summarize the first and second tables of the law respectively.³⁰ There are numerous problems with this position,³¹ not the least of which is Scripture's teaching (Rom 13:9) that the individual commandments of the second table of the law are 'summed up' in the very manner denied by NCT:

For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended³² in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

Instead, Long declares that the 'external commands' of NCT's 'law of Christ' (said to be 'the law of the NC people of God', i.e. non-universal, changeable 'covenant law' in NCT parlance) are the ones 'summed up

29. *Westminster Larger Catechism* Q.98, *Shorter Catechism* Q.41. Emphasis added.

30. Long, op. cit., pp5-6.

31. Long calls the 1646 *First London Baptist Confession* 'an accurate teaching for what NCT believes and affirms on the law of God'. That is incorrect, since this confession affirms what Long *denies*: that 'all the commandments of the First Table' are 'delivered to us ... in this epitome or brief sum, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, etc." Article X Appendix.

32. *anakephalaio*—'summed up into an organized head', 'gathered together under one head', as in Eph 1:10.

in the NC declaration: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”³³ Whilst changeable, non-universal laws may be gathered together and ‘summed up’, such laws cannot be gathered under the heading of unchangeable, universal laws. NCT is *logically* constrained to regard the commandments ‘summed up’ in Rom 13:9 as universal and immutable (the Reformed position) *unless* love for God and neighbour are mutable, non-universal positive law (‘covenant law’ in NCT parlance). But since Long claims that love for God and love for neighbour are universal, eternal and unchangeable, this in turn *logically* requires that the Decalogue and NCT’s so-called ‘law of Christ’ be the same species of law as the ‘Two Great Commandments’—a conclusion that Long denies, since such logical deduction would contravene NCT’s presuppositions. Accordingly, NCT again dumps reason for paradox: that a law in one category can be a summary of laws in a mutually exclusive category. All this, though Long had insisted that ‘A right understanding of the principles of biblical law will and must entail a distinguishing between ...two distinctive categories’.³⁴ Thus we are justified in drawing the conclusion as self-evident in its own terms that NCT does not have ‘a right understanding of the principles of biblical law’.

The uniqueness of the Decalogue in Scripture and practice

It is hard to imagine that a comprehensive, detailed law code would be delivered to the nation of Israel without inclusion of a prominent summary of the moral law. Since the Decalogue occupies a unique and prominent place among the laws delivered at Sinai, it must at least be considered a candidate as a summary of moral law. Only the Ten Commandments were spoken by God ‘with a

33. Long, op. cit., p5. Long calls this ‘the N[ew] C[ovenant] declaration’, having elsewhere declared it to be ‘absolute’ law, so not a covenant declaration at all. It is, of course, found in the ‘Old Covenant’, Leviticus 19.
34. Long, op. cit., p130. Emphasis added.

great voice’ in the hearing of all people, and they alone were written by the finger of God on stone and kept in the ark of the testimony:

These words the LORD spake unto all your assembly in the mount out of the midst of the fire, of the cloud, and of the thick darkness, with a great voice: and he added no more. And he wrote them in two tables of stone, and delivered them unto me, (Deut 5:22).

The other laws given in the wilderness were delivered through the agency of Moses by his communing with the LORD in the mount and in the tent of meeting. Ezekiel 20:10-26 is a commonplace among the Church Fathers to distinguish between the moral law summarized in the Decalogue and the laws subsequently delivered through Moses after the golden calf incident. It is impossible to miss the antitheses:

And I gave them my statutes, and shewed them my judgments, which if a man do, he shall even live in them. (v.11)

Wherefore I gave them also statutes that were not good, and judgments whereby they should not live (v.25)³⁵

The subsequent laws were not essentially *evil*, but in comparison with the Ten Commandments (which are *essentially* good), these laws could only be described as ‘not good’.³⁶ Likewise, in Nehemiah 9:13-14 the commandments given immediately by God are described in terms that differentiate them

35. In v.26 there is no mention of ‘the fire’ in Hebrew. The Hebrew expression is that used in Exodus where the firstborn were *presented* to the LORD (literally, ‘cause to pass over’, see AV margin at Ex 13:12).

36. No adjectives are attached to the Ten Commandments, and thus to highlight their incommensurability with the ceremonial laws, the ceremonial laws are distinguished as ‘not good’. They are similarly described in Hebrews as weak, unprofitable, faulty etc.

There is also antithesis between the former body of law ‘which if a man do, he shall even live in them’, and the later body of law ‘whereby they should not live’.

from the laws given mediately through Moses (v.15b):

Thou camest down also upon mount Sinai, and spakest with them from heaven, and gavest them right judgments, and true laws, good statutes and commandments: and madest known unto them thy holy sabbath. (v.13, 14a)

[A]nd [thou] commandedst them precepts, statutes, and laws, by the hand of Moses thy servant. (v.14b)

Only the Ten Commandments are described as right, true, and good—reflecting the character of the One who spoke to them from heaven, and came down in their sight.³⁷ No adjectives are employed with reference to the commandments subsequently delivered ‘by the hand of Moses’.³⁸ This is not to imply that those laws were not *in some sense* right, true, and good; rather, it suggests that the commandments ‘spoken from heaven’ and the commandments ‘by the hand of Moses’ are incommensurable, and cannot without equivocation both be described as right, true, and good.³⁹

37. The *Westminster Shorter Catechism* states that God is ‘unchangeable in his...holiness, justice, goodness, and truth’. The apostle Paul describes the law of God as ‘holy, just and good’ similarly. John Murray comments, ‘These are attributes which express what God is; and to characterize the law as holy, just, and good is but to claim in the most explicit way that the law is of God and bears the imprint of his character as holy, just, and good. Thus every lack of conformity to the law of God is a lack of conformity to God’s likeness, and all conformity to the law is but conformity to that pattern which is the primary and ultimate pattern of sanctification.’ *Collected Writings* 2, pp306-307.

38. ‘By the hand of’ is Hebrew idiom for ‘by means of’—it does not connote handwriting. Thus God is said to have ‘spoken by the hand of Moses’, but because this is apt to be misunderstood in English as a speaking hand it tends to be obscured in translation, e.g. Ex 9:35.

39. This is similar to when Jesus declared, ‘Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God’, yet Jesus could speak in another context of ‘a good man’ (Luke 6:45). Similarly, when comparing the goodness of God to that of men, Jesus uses the expression ‘If ye

The use of the moral law in the New Testament

Many New Testament passages demonstrate that the moral law summarized in the Ten Commandments continues to bind Christians to obedience, for example Ephesians 6:1ff, where Paul addresses children by reminding them of the fifth commandment:

Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honour thy father and mother; (which is the first commandment with promise) that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth.

Reference to ‘the first commandment with promise’ implies that the children had been specifically instructed in the entire Decalogue. Paul’s instruction that children obey their parents ‘for this is right’ appears to be grounded in moral law, in which duties are not ‘right solely because God has commanded them, but He has commanded them because they are right’.⁴⁰ The only law that sums up and holds together the moral rightness of the duties of all parties in vv. 1-9 is the fifth commandment.⁴¹

NCT proponent David Gay resists any use of the Decalogue in sanctification, yet he admits that the apostle’s teaching here is an ‘example of the apostolic call for sanctification’, a ‘call for godly children to be sanctified at home’ and ‘to encourage sanctified family-life among believers’.⁴² Thus, were Gay to admit that the fifth commandment was ‘informing then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father...’ When we say or infer that God is good, we cannot in the same breath without equivocation call men good.

40. Dabney, op.cit. p352.

41. Reformed commentators exegete the commandments following Paul’s example, showing that their moral force has wider application than the summary of each one. The fifth commandment not only outlines the sins and duties of children to parents (v.1), but also the sins and duties of parents with respect to their children (v.4), and then, more widely, the sins and duties of subordinates to superiors (vv. 5-8), and the sins and duties of superiors to subordinates (v.9).

42. Gay, *Christ is All*, pp288-289.

them of the will of God' or of any 'use to them' for sanctification,⁴³ then he will have conceded the argument, since such use would be the Reformed 'third use of the law'. Accordingly, he resists the notion by every possible means:

The New Testament occasionally refers to the commandments and applies them to believers ... but it is too great a leap to argue from this that the ten commandments stipulated these very applications.⁴⁴

According to Gay, the apostle 'simply reminded' the Ephesians that 'the Jews had this fifth commandment', so 'by no stretch of the imagination' was it to apply as a 'rule of life' or a 'rule under which believers live'.⁴⁵ Because '[t]he basis of new-covenant ethics is...not the ten commandments',⁴⁶ the fifth commandment merely 'stands ... as a piece of writing', describing a 'model of good behaviour' among unbelieving Jews for purposes of 'illustration'.⁴⁷

We invite the reader to judge how fanciful (indeed, how *farfical*) the suggestion is, that children under instruction in regard to sanctification are not to imagine that the commandment to 'honour thy father and mother' stipulates the application to obey them, or that it is binding on them, or that the moral rightness of obedience can be demonstrated from the commandment, or that the commandment is a 'rule under which believers live' because it is the will of God and morally right, or that the commandment provides an ethical basis for Christian obedience. Rather, children are to perceive that 'the apostle does not impose

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

44. Gay, *Christ is All*, p224.

45. Gay, *The Glorious New-Covenant Ministry*, p39.

46. *Ibid.*

47. *Ibid.*, p288.

the command on believers';⁴⁸ he merely alludes to the fifth commandment in the context of sanctification because it was an interesting historical 'illustration' about 'good behaviour' among unbelieving Jews.⁴⁹

Gay's second objection is only superficially more plausible, that since Paul includes the promise 'that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth',⁵⁰ then this evinces that the commandment cannot be in force because the attached promise does not apply to Christians, else 'we shall have to admit that we have made a serious mistake in dismissing the "prosperity gospel"'.⁵¹ But this proves too much, because the same objection can be made against the validity of the commandment in the Old Testament. How well did it go with those Israelites who fell in battle entering the Promised Land, and how long did they live in it? Should we infer that every mortally wounded combatant grievously dishonoured his parents? We think not. Neither can we entertain the notion that God was powerless or unwilling to keep his promises. Then, as now, for believers, 'The promises of it [i.e. the moral law] ... shew them God's approbation of obedience, and what blessings they may expect upon the performance thereof, although *not as due to them by the law as a covenant of works*'.⁵² ¶

48. *Ibid.*

49. *Ibid.*

50. Deuteronomy 5. Note: the Greek word for 'earth' and 'land' is the same: γη.

51. Gay, *Christ is All*, p288.

52. *Westminster Confession of Faith*, XIX, 6. Albert Barnes points out that 'obedience to parents is conducive to length of life, and that those are most obedient in early life, other things being equal, have prospect of living long ... No parent will command his child to be a drunkard, a gambler, a spendthrift, a pirate, or a murderer ... Obedience to parents is connected with virtuous habits that are conducive to long life.'

TO BE CONTINUED

STUDIES IN BRITISH CHURCH HISTORY

Thomas Cranmer 1489–1547 (Part 3)

EDWARD MALCOLM (Reading)

Cranmer's spiritual journey

WHEN Cranmer went up to Cambridge at the age of fourteen, nothing suggested that he would be responsible for the most far-reaching alterations of the doctrine and government of the Church of England. Information is scarce, but Diarmaid MacCulloch has undertaken a study of the marginal notes in the books from Cranmer's own library. By comparing editions it has been possible to take a reasonably educated guess at the years in which the comments were written. The picture which emerges is of great interest.

In one book, a critique of one of Luther's works, by John Fisher, Cranmer comments approvingly of almost all of Fisher's ripostes to Luther's arguments. He is particularly incensed when Luther dares to attack the office of the Pope. However, in one key respect, he follows Luther, albeit with caution. This is when Luther declares that a General Council of the Church has more authority than the Pope on his own. The note could not have been written before 1516 (the date of publication) nor after 1532 (when a new edition appeared, and Cranmer seems always to have had the latest editions). Indeed, given that Cranmer's suggestion to Gardiner and Foxe regarding the submission of the Great Matter to the universities of Europe, it may be that he was applying a position to which he had come some time before.

Of related interest is his support for Luther's contention that it is not heresy to argue against the Pope and the greater part of the Church. This, again, would work itself out in Cranmer's own thinking, when he was prepared to come

out from under his oaths to the Pope, and so to be at odds with the Church at large.

Cranmer's views are also visible in his response to some of the preaching taking place at the commencement of his archiepiscopacy. Although he had banned preaching on becoming Archbishop, since too much of it consisted of attacks on the King and on Cranmer, he had to allow some preaching. One man, who supported the Aragon camp, and so was arrested, had preached that one priestly paternoster is worth a thousand lay repetitions. Cranmer disagreed vehemently, and went on to attack the whole machine of priestly power. The form of his answer indicates that by 1536 he had rejected auricular confession. In February of that year he preached a sermon at St Paul's Cross, in which he identified the Pope as Antichrist, a position hitherto only taken by William Tyndale. He would not publish his treatise on the Lord's Supper until 1545, and yet even later, in 1548, he sponsored the printing of Justus Jonas' Catechism, in which transubstantiation was defended. In 1551 Cranmer confessed to a three-stage position on the mass. To begin with, he accepted the whole of medieval teaching on the subject—transubstantiation, the real presence, and the propitiatory benefit of the sacrifice when conducted by the priest. Later, he moved to what can only rightly be called a Lutheran position. During this phase, he annotated his books with quotations from Luther and Melancthon and Brenz against the opinions of the Swiss reformers, whom he read closely. This period included a spell of wavering between a Lutheran view—accepting

the real presence, but denying the propitiatory element of the mass, and the doctrine of transubstantiation—and a Swiss view. His treatise on the Lord's Supper, if not Swiss in its odour, is certainly not Lutheran; it is distinctly English. There is not time in this paper to examine the course of the reforming of the Church of England. Suffice it to say that, in time, Cranmer came to the third phase, in which he rejected the Lutheran teaching on the real presence in favour of a fully reformed doctrine of the Lord's Supper as a memorial meal which is also a means of grace.

Of his personal character, testimony abounds in the writings of friend and foe that he was humble, gracious, godly, studious, and almost impossibly slow to take offence at any insult. His own letters do occasionally reveal him to be more concerned by the opposition of fellow bishops than public utterances might indicate, but we should remember that he had much experience of diplomacy, and it may be that these comments need to be filtered appropriately, bearing in mind the delicate nature of negotiations with the continental churches; in short, it is far easier to lay the blame for a lack of progress on a faceless and vague group of 'bishops, priests and monks' than to enter into a detailed explanation of what is really holding up progress. Yes, following the Pilgrimage of Grace, and Henry's resolute if restrained suppression of it, Cranmer was able to say to Bucer that the opposition of his fellow bishops faded, but it is clear that the Archbishop had to carry through his reforms in the face of passive if not active resistance.

If this seems to be too brief a survey of Cranmer's changing position, let it be remembered that the written evidence either does not exist, or remains to be found, that will add the desired detail. What is clear is that Cranmer was no opportunist, but, as has been said by others before, a man who moved slowly and cautiously, but who, when he moved, did so with conviction and resolution.

Another question which may arise is this: Why did Henry choose Thomas Cranmer to

be his Archbishop? The man was, after all, an obscure academic at a new and unfashionable Cambridge College. His family was unremarkable. He was no public figure. Why was he chosen?

The immediate answer is that Cranmer provided Henry with a way out of the impasse created by Cardinal Campeggio's sabotage of the divorce hearing. As we saw earlier, Campeggio began the process, and then halted it almost immediately, using the pretext that papal courts did not sit during August and September. It was after this that the royal progress had come to Essex, where Dr. Cranmer happened to be residing, and it was here that Dr. Cranmer was drawn into a discussion of the King's Matter by his Cambridge colleague Stephen Gardiner and Edward Foxe. Cranmer appears to have been unaware that his suggestion, of submitting the question to Europe's universities, was particularly radical or helpful, but when the conversation was reported to the King, he found himself being employed in seeing the scheme through. From subsequent events it seems probable that Henry had already begun to doubt the ability of Cardinal Wolsey to complete the matter, and that suspicion would have attached to all of Wolsey's entourage. Cranmer was untainted. However, it soon became clear that Cranmer was loyal to Henry, and loyalty was one quality the King valued above all others. Indeed, it would not be unreasonable to say that Henry was fiercely loyal to those who were loyal to him. Cranmer never let him down. Whether it was because Cranmer liked Henry the man, or because he honoured Henry the King, is perhaps less clear. Cranmer also believed that the nation should be independent of outside influence, and this of course was in line with the position adopted by the majority of English monarchs since the Norman conquest. Rarely had a monarch succeeded in resisting papal or ecclesiastical power before Henry VIII, but the intention had been present on so many occasions.

We ought not to exclude one other matter.

Cranmer's own character helped him. He was, it seems, a man without guile. He appears to have taken no personal offence regarding the unkind things spoken against him. When he preached in public, there was a time when men would hang up bags of straw, to indicate his supposed former status as an

ostler. Quite where the notion arose that he had been an ostler, nobody knows, although a number of suggestions have been dismissed. It is clear that he was by no means accepted as Archbishop by clergy or laity, and it was only Henry's open support for him that preserved him on occasions.¶

TO BE CONTINUED

SOME THOUGHTS ON ACTS 4:34–35

Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, And laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need.

These words have long been a source of confusion in the Church. Some interpret them as being a peculiarity of early Jewish Christianity, having no bearing on the rest of the Church. Others—although perhaps not so frequently today—see them as advocating a form of early communism. Certain of the Anabaptists misguidedly took them as teaching that no true believer ought to hold property, and Article XXXVIII was written to answer this error. Many, one suspects, merely pass over the words, and give them no further thought. I suggest, however, that they are of very great significance, especially in light of much current opinion concerning the modern state of Israel.

The words do in fact pick up a point which was being made earlier in Acts. In 2:44 we are told that 'all that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need'. The life and character of the early Jerusalem church is described further, and is illustrated by the account of Peter and John going up to the temple to pray, healing the lame man, preaching to the assembled worshippers, and then facing the challenge

brought against them by the Sadducees. When the religious authorities showed themselves to be unable to move against the apostles, on the very reasonable ground that they could not gainsay what was clearly fact, the church assembled, and praised the Lord for his mighty acts, 4:24–30. Then, the description of the character of the Jerusalem church is repeated, a repetition rendered significant by that second Pentecost, 4:31.

So, on two occasions the Holy Spirit came down on the Jerusalem church in power, and his coming was manifested by signs. On both occasions one of the evidences of the coming of the Holy Spirit was the response of the believers to sell their possessions, and to share among their needy brethren the proceeds of sale.

Now, consider the significance of such action. Consider, first, who it was who was selling property. It was Jewish people. It was those dwelling at Jerusalem. It was the heirs of the covenant of Abraham, and the covenant of David. In order to see the significance of their action, compare their behaviour with that of, say, Naboth. We read in 1 Kings 21 that King Ahab desired Naboth's vineyard because of its

location. He made a fair and reasonable offer to buy the property from its owner. Note Naboth's response, v.3; 'The Lord forbid it me, that I should give the inheritance of my fathers unto thee'. In Naboth's mind, the vineyard represented his goodly heritage, that which the Lord had given to his family. It was the evidence of his rightful place in the kingdom of Israel, and so was highly prized by him. Again, consider the actions of Jeremiah, who bought a field from his uncle in the midst of the siege. Siege conditions made food prohibitively expensive, and the uncle sold anything he could in order to feed his family. What use was a field when he could not go out to tend it? Jeremiah, however, was willing to buy it, and to ensure that the sale was properly witnessed. He caused the sale to be recorded in the land registry, 32:12, so that his heirs would have no difficulty in claiming the land one day.

The significant point is that, to a faithful Israelite, possession of land in the promised land was evidence of faith in the Lord and his covenant. To sell the land was to display a lack of faith in God, and to despise his gift.

And yet the early Christians at Jerusalem sold their land. They divested themselves of all property. When they had liquidated their assets, they then parted with the proceeds. Thus they did not exchange one form of wealth for another, but they gave up their present, earthly heritage. The sin of Ananias and Sapphira was not that they lied about the sale price of their property, but that they, in the spirit of Lot's wife, looked back to the security of this present, passing world. To them, property and money represented security. Their fellow believers, on the other hand, looked to the Lord and his word for such blessings.

What were the Jerusalem Christians demonstrating? They were demonstrating their

understanding that they had exchanged a physical inheritance for a spiritual. Whereas the disciples had once asked, 'Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?' (Acts 1:6), the congregation of believers now looked for that eternal inheritance which is from above. The clearest demonstration of this hope available to them was to part with their inheritance in the land of Judah. It is a moot point whether Barnabas sold property in Judah or in his native Cyprus, but either way, he was of the same spirit.

What, you may wonder, has this to do with the modern state of Israel? By itself, nothing, but as it applies to the attitude of some Christians, very much. It is a great mistake to think that the physical land is somehow central to the promises of God in Christ. If the Jews must occupy a particular portion of land in the Middle East in order to fulfil the promises of God concerning them, such as those set out in Romans 9–10, then the actions of the early Jerusalem Christians were wrong. The testimony of the Holy Spirit is that they were correct, for the Holy Spirit revealed to Peter the sin of Ananias and Sapphira, and thereby commended the actions of those who sold and gave all. This is not to say that the modern state of Israel has no right to exist, or anything of the sort, although it could be argued that early plans to give them a home in another part of the world would have been preferable, especially in light of the near-constant warfare and suffering which has resulted from that United Nations mandate. The Lord Jesus warned his disciples that the time would come when believers would flee Jerusalem, Matthew 24:14ff. We look for the new Jerusalem, and we should teach God's ancient people, the Jews, to do the same. This is the city where Christ reigns, and this is the home promised to us.¶

A man would as soon embrace and hug in his bosom a stinking carcase, as grace [would] choose and delight in the perishing vanities of this polluted world.

John Brine

STUDIES IN I PETER

EDWARD MALCOLM (Reading)

IX The practical demands of Christian discipleship, 4:7–11

THESE verses contain a summary of the second main section of the Epistle. The previous section, 2:11–4:6, has dealt with matters of practical Christian living, as well as pointing us continually to the sufferings of Christ, both as examples of how we are to live, and as the source of our salvation and present hope. In this we have a style reminiscent of Paul's writings, where practical teaching is always brought back to the bedrock of Christ and his finished work.

Alan Stibbs sums up the content of this section under six points:

1. Christian life should be lived in the light of Christ's impending return
2. Christians ought, therefore, to keep their heads, and not be carried away by self-indulgence or excitement
3. They ought to preserve the mental alertness necessary to sustained and effective praying
4. They ought to give priority to active expressions of mutual love, especially in being hospitable
5. They should show faithfulness in stewardship, exercising God-given gifts in word or deed
6. They should thus seek in everything to glorify God through Jesus Christ.

This section begins with the word 'But', as if to suggest a contrast with what has just been written. The preceding passage has dealt with the reality of judgment on those whose lives have been lived 'to the lusts of men', v.2. It has spoken of the condemnatory nature of Gospel preaching to those who, having since died, will find themselves facing judgment without faith, v.6. Peter's concern, however, is

not to triumph over deceased unbelievers, but to provide comfort and exhortation to living Christians. Thus we might equally translate the particle here as 'Now', as if the apostle was saying that this judgment, being at hand, must concern us also.

He speaks of 'the end of all things'. All the while we look at the sins of those around us we risk falling into carelessness ourselves. This may seem surprising; surely, if we are observing the sins other people commit, it is so that we do not imitate them? Sadly, such is the weakness of our condition, if we do not guard ourselves we risk falling. So Peter issues this warning, based on the simple but inescapable truth that the days are not long before Christ returns. It has become fashionable to understand this to mean that either Peter was mistaken as to when Christ would return, or that we are to live as if each day were the day. Neither position is quite correct. In Matthew 10:23 Jesus said, 'When they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another: for verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come'. Again, in 16:28 he said, 'Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom'. Various explanations for these seemingly impossible statements have been put forward, but the most obvious—and the most overlooked—is that the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ fulfilled these prophecies. Given that there are a number of events which do the same thing, that is, they show the power of Jesus Christ in his ascended state, we can say that there are several occasions which also fulfil these words. These would include the rebellion of AD 66, and the destruction

of the temple four years later, as well as the rebellion of AD 133, and the destruction of Jerusalem two years after that. These events are all part of the same; they are all evidences of the consummation of those things spoken of by the prophets. The vineyard—that is, the kingdom—was indeed taken from Israel and given to others. The Gospel has gone out to the Gentiles, to a nation who knew not God, but who now do, as Hosea prophesied. The list goes on. So, when Peter speaks of the end of all things being at hand, he is saying that we are living in the time promised of old, in which the manifestation of Christ as the appointed Ruler over all the earth, would occur. Yes, there will come a day when Christ will stand again on the earth to judge the living and the dead. Paul speaks of that day, as does John in the Revelation. It is found in Daniel 12, and in other places; there will be such a day. In Peter's writing here, however, the emphasis is on the times in which we live, rather than on a day which is about to appear. In truth, the day has not appeared, and almost two thousand years have passed. But the time of Christ's reign is upon us. We are living in such days. Consider David, 2 Samuel 1, who ordered the death of the man who claimed to have killed King Saul, or who ordered the death of the brothers who killed Ishbosheth, 2 Samuel 4. Remember also how he mourned publicly the death of Abner, whose death at the hands of Joab delayed the unifying of the kingdom. What David was doing was instituting law and order. Gone were the days of a whimsical king who would use his power to avenge his perceived enemies. Now there was a king who would uphold the law, and would see that the people lived by it. So it is for Christians, who are to live under the lawful power of Jesus Christ as those who, knowing the times, understand that there is a new order in heaven and earth. The unbeliever does not understand this, as the earlier part of the chapter has made clear. But Christians are to live obediently. What Peter is about to do is to give some practical examples of how this should be shown.

First, he gives a general heading; 'Be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer'. Sobriety here is a state of mind, not an absence of alcohol. It is the having of a right mind, an attitude of thought which is moved and guided by the things of God. The moving and guiding principle is that the end of all things is at hand. These are the days in which we live, and so we must act accordingly. In times of austerity people cut back on their spending, if they are wise. In times of plenty they stock up against the thinner times, if they are sensible. We must discern the times, and live accordingly. Right thinking is vital. So is watchfulness, that alertness of mind which keeps us always ready to respond and react to what is going on. We ought never to be overtaken by spiritual events; we should see them coming. We should learn to judge the actions of others in such a way as to know the spiritual motivation behind them. The same must be true of our own actions. This is why he adds, 'unto prayer', so that both our right mind and our watchfulness lead us to fervent prayer. It is in prayer that we express to God our understanding of what is going on, and our confusion (if that is the case). It is in prayer that we seek and are given strength to bear up, to stand, in such days. Prayer ought to be our first resort, not our last, and must be connected to watchfulness, and to right thinking.

There will also be external evidences, v.8, which come under the general heading of love. The love we are to have for one another is described as fervent, or earnest. The reason why love comes at the head of the list is given in the quotation from Proverbs 10:12, 'Hatred stirreth up strifes: but love covereth all sins'. So he exhorts us to practical evidences of love, chief among which will be a willingness to be hospitable. Note that willingness is put ahead of the actual practice! The state of the heart is what counts. This is why John makes so much of the importance of loving the brethren; here is a practical demonstration of our no longer being ruled by the lusts of men, but by the Spirit of Christ.

Then there is his call to use the gifts we have been given, v.10. He does not indicate what manner of gifts each might have been given, for it is up to us to know in what way the wisdom of God in Christ has equipped us to serve him. This means we need to have considered the matter. Having done so, we are to exercise the gifts, for they have been given for the good of others under the direction of the Holy Spirit, not for our benefit. We are stewards of God's many good gifts, and as such we are answerable to him for the way we use them.

Having spoken of gifts and their use he names two; speaking, and doing. Speaking is taken here particularly for the preaching office by some commentators, and by any spoken service by others. If the former, it indicates that we who are called to preach are to use the gift for the good of the Church. If the latter, it indicates that all who speak to others, whether to comfort, console, exhort, admonish, teach or support, are to do it for the benefit of others. It is easy, perhaps, to speak in an unhelpful way, if moved by anger, jealousy, or some other base motive. But if our service in speaking is moved by love, as v.8 requires, it will be for the assistance of others. The same is true of service, that which we minister; whatever we do, let us do it as unto the Lord, that he would be honoured thereby, and those for whom we do whatever it may be will give thanks to God for that service. Thus in service we are not to promote ourselves, nor in any way seek to put ourselves forward for thanks, praise or glory.

TO BE CONTINUED

Let us run, let us run, but in the favour of thy ointment, not in the confidence of our merits, not in the greatness of our strength: we trust to run, but in the multitude of thy mercies; for though we run and are willing, "it is not in him that willeth, nor in him that runneth, but in God that sheweth mercy." O let thy mercy return, and we will run: thou, like a giant, runnest by thy own power; we, unless thy ointment breathe upon us, cannot run.

St. Bernard

All must be done to give Christ the glory. 'Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven'. We need to learn to serve in this way, and the key is love. Remember that God supplied the gift; it is not ours by our own power, wisdom or might.

Peter ends the section with a doxology. This has led some commentators to think the whole passage—and possibly the whole epistle—was originally intended either as a teaching manual for baptism, or even as the baptismal service itself. While we do not need to follow such ideas, we ought to acknowledge the place of doxologies, or hymns of praise to the Triune God. By using the gifts we have been given in the right way, and for the right purpose, God is indeed glorified. It shows the wisdom of his giving, and the love he has for his people. All this is through Jesus Christ, for he is the head, and we the body. The head is to be acknowledged as the source and fount of our being, and so our gifts, coming from God, are given through Christ Jesus. Since the praise and dominion are his for ever and ever it is only right that we confess his role as the One through whom the gifts come. This is not a temporary thing, but relates to what we said earlier, that the end of all things is upon us; Christ now reigns, and we are given the blessings of that reign. This reign is without end, even if the form of it may alter when Christ returns. In the mean time, we use the gifts, in love, for Christ's eternal glory!¶

BOOK REVIEWS

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.*

WHY ARE YOU HERE?

John Blanchard

EP Books 281pp paperback £9.99 ISBN 978 1 78397 068 1

This book, subtitled 'Searching for the meaning of life', seems to be written primarily for non-Christians who have begun to have serious concerns about their future. Similar in style and content to John Blanchard's smaller evangelistic booklets, eg *Ultimate Questions, Why the cross?, Why on earth did Jesus come?* etc. and his larger work *Does God Believe in Atheists?*, this volume is easy to read and clearly presents the Lord Jesus Christ as the only way of salvation.

Following the Foreword by Sinclair Ferguson, and a short introduction to set the scene, Chapter 1 contains a brief biography of the theoretical physicist, Stephen Hawking, followed by a discussion of his thoughts on the subject which amount to 'Meaning itself is simply another piece of the model of reality that we build inside our own brain ... The meaning of life is what you choose it to be'. John Blanchard states that this last sentence triggered the writing of this book.

The second chapter investigates the claim made by Hawking and other well-known atheistic scientists (eg Richard Dawkins and Peter Atkins) that science can explain everything and therefore there is no need for God. The author clearly shows the emptiness of this claim by discussing eight important areas where science is unable to shed any light (eg the reason for the existence of the universe and the laws of nature, the existence and function of the mind and of course the existence of God).

Chapters 3 and 4 deal with theories of the origin of the universe and the theory of evolution. Once again, in addition to his own logical and clearly-presented arguments, Blanchard uses many quotes from a wide range of scientists and philosophers, Christian and non-Christian, to show the fatal weaknesses of these attempts to explain life and the universe without reference to the Creator.

The purpose of these first four chapters has been to lead the reader away from the concept that everything came about by chance, since belief in this would negate any possibility that there is a reason why we are here. In Chapter 5, entitled 'The Restless Search', Blanchard begins to show, using many more quotes from a wide range of people from Solomon through Augustine of Hippo to Freddie Mercury, how achieving all the pleasures and satisfactions that this world could possibly provide ultimately fails to bring true contentment.

Chapters 6 and 7 then go on to show very clearly that human beings are unique within creation. We are made in the image of God and cannot therefore be truly happy unless we are living our lives according to his will. In demonstrating our uniqueness in terms of physical make-up, self consciousness, human dignity, rational thinking, our aesthetic, moral and spiritual dimensions,

Blanchard has assembled a fascinating array of facts and quotes which constitute a formidable argument against atheism.

Chapter 8, 'The gruesome invader', deals with the reality of death, and pulls no punches! The fact of physical death as well as the brevity of life and the reality of judgement is presented very powerfully.

Chapter 9, 'The Master', is the turning point in the book, presenting the facts about our Lord Jesus Christ, focussing particularly on his death and resurrection, and pointing to him as the one who brings meaning to our existence. The chapter ends with the following paragraph. 'One of the clearest statements about why Jesus came says "The Father has sent his Son to be the Saviour of the world" But how?—and why?—and to save us from what?' These questions are addressed at the end of Chapter 10, 'The Answer'. The first part of the chapter is a recap of the book up to this point and this is followed by a presentation of the gospel.

Blanchard begins the final chapter, entitled 'The end—and the beginning?' by quoting the familiar words from the Westminster Shorter Catechism, 'What is the chief end of man? To glorify God, and enjoy him for ever'. He then proceeds to challenge the reader, in the light of all that has been said to respond in repentance and faith to God's call to obey the gospel. This is made all the more powerful because it is written as much as possible in the second person singular—as John Blanchard puts it 'as if we were alone, talking to each other'.

The book concludes with a useful Appendix which is an edited extract from Blanchard's book *Why believe the Bible?* followed by endnotes detailing the references made throughout the book.

I enjoyed reading this book and I would highly recommend it for passing on to someone who is seriously concerned about the meaning of life.

DKM

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE ENGLISH REFORMATION FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

John M Brentnall

nd. 231pp pbk £8 inc. p&p from the Editor, 5 Rosier Cresc, Alfreton, DE55 1RS

This book is a study guide to the historical context of the English Reformation. It is written from a strong Protestant perspective, and aims to further young people's education in Church history. It also aims to remind us of the 'danger of forgetting who we are' and so once again reminds us of the roots of English Protestantism. Brentnall was the Editor of *Peace and Truth*, the journal of the Sovereign Grace Union, and has published previous articles on the Reformers, available on the Banner of Truth website.

The study guide is divided into 13 chapters, starting with an introduction on the basics of the sixteenth century and finalising with an overarching conclusion on why England needs a further Reformation in our present day society. The book is intended for young readers, mid-teenagers; however, the target audience is hard to define as some sections of the book are very simplistic whereas others are detailed in theology. The book accepts a large amount of historical assumptions, which a young reader approaching the Reformation for the first time may not know, making some paragraphs a challenge to follow.

The book follows England from the Henrician reformation to the Elizabethan settlement, which encompasses Cranmer's transformation in the Church of England, starting with its foundations, until the Book of Common Prayer became settled within the framework of the national Church under the religious stability and tolerance of Queen Elizabeth I. Brentnall begins the

book with a chapter debunking misconceptions of the English Reformation. For example, he clearly states that the Church of England was not solely a result of the infamous divorce of Henry VIII and Catherine of Aragon. The guide then progresses through the period, explaining the interlinking context of surrounding Protestant nations which became involved with the changes in England. The conclusion directs the reader to eight benefits England gained from the Protestant Reformation, including the sanctity of marriage and the Protestant work ethic. Key events and people are clearly listed in a bullet point format to engage younger readers with a straightforward approach of the instrumental concepts, allowing people to grasp a clear understanding of the Reformation. Some of the language used is very colloquial, allowing for an easy read.

Overall, Brentnall has clearly undertaken extensive research to compile a study guide for young people on the English Protestant Reformation. He is also undoubtedly presenting the history from a biblical point of view. It is a useful start to learning about the Reformation; however, there are also plenty of other helpful and informative works, also written from biblical perspectives, which are equally, if not more, profitable for young readers. Brentnall presents a concise accompanying guide to the English Protestant Reformation. However, I would recommend following up by reading other, well-known, histories of the Reformation to further one's knowledge.

GL

THE KOREAN PENTECOST

William Newton Blair & Bruce Finley Hunt

The Banner of Truth Trust 2015 (Re-set: 1st publ. 1977) 195pp pbk ISBN 978-0-85151-244-0

This book is divided into two parts. The first part consists of the eye-witness impressions of William Newton Blair, a missionary to Korea in 1901. He provides an insight into this distinctive nation, which has historically been the battle-ground between far stronger powers, and yet it has maintained a distinctive culture. He recounts the years, preceding the great revival of 1907, of the faithful preaching of the Gospel, starting at Pyengyang (which sounds a more authentic spelling than the modern 'Pyongyang') and fanning out to other places. He relates in detail the problems that he had with learning the Korean language, and the distinctive customs and contemporary way of life.

Given the state of North Korea today, it will undoubtedly surprise some people that a great revival broke out there over a century ago, which is recounted in Chapter 10. This 'spread till practically every church not only in North Korea, but throughout the entire peninsula had received its share of the blessing' (p88).

The second part concerns the sufferings of the Korean Church, between 1910 and 1945, and thereafter in the North. The Japanese annexed the country in 1910, and sought to impose their system of patriotic Shinto shrines. This increasingly became a defining issue, and numerous accounts are given of those Korean Christians who refused to conform. This is recounted by the second author, Bruce Hunt, who bases his information on that provided by William Blair and his own knowledge from 48 years as a missionary among the Koreans. As is well known, the Koreans' suffering did not end in 1945, because the Communists took over in the North, followed by decades of intense and brutal persecution of Christians by the leadership, which continues to this day.

Although written in 1977, this book is not dated. For instance, the North Korean Government regards being a Christian as being tantamount to hostility to the regime. This is not a new

phenomenon. Secondly, it is common knowledge that North Korea is the last Stalinist enclave in the world, closed and secretive; but this is merely a continuation of the culture discovered by the first missionaries. We simply do not know how many Christians there are now in North Korea; though there is undoubtedly a very faithful remnant. Frankly, these pages show what being a Christian can really mean. This may well encourage British believers to examine closely their steadfastness for Christ.

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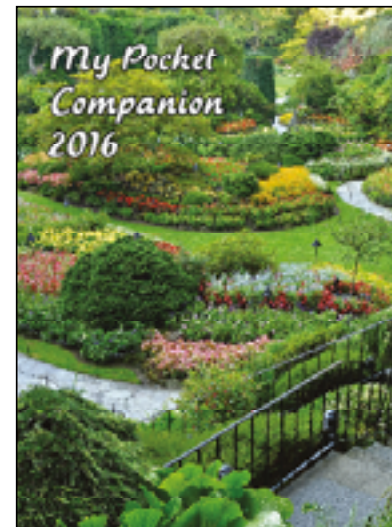
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