

**26/12/23**

I am old which I suppose is why this paragraph caught my eye (Dale Ralph Davis on 1 Kings, p. 113). He is commenting on the fact that Solomon was unfaithful to the Lord when he was old (1 Kings 11:4). "We must take a moment to be frightened. 'When Solomon was old...'" How that text ought to goad older believers to pray the last petition of the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:13a). Is there not a warning to churches as well, who have a fixation on youth ministry and a love affair with young marrieds and/or young families? Need we not exercise far more vigilance over our over-sixties crowd, many of whom will doubtless meet the major troubles in their lives in their final years?" The text does not put the problem down to his affluence and position that allowed him to have so many wives, but to his *heart* condition. He loved many foreign women. He clung to them in love. His wives turned his heart away after other gods.

Old age brings its peculiar problems with the spiritual dangers being the greatest. If Solomon could depart from the Lord in his older age we must take notice. We tend to focus on the physical problems of old age, but it is the heart problems that are the really dangerous ones. As departing this world draws nearer there may be the problem of assurance of salvation. The devil is the accuser of the brethren. He reminds us of failures, wasted opportunities, even of situations that were never resolved. He gets us to focus on present problems in order to doubt God's love, and even if there really is glory to come. Whatever else you say, please encourage the older ones to persevere to the end through whatever trials they may experience because the Lord has gone to glory to prepare a place for all His people. Don't assume that because we have been Christians for decades that we are not liable to even severe temptations and that we can simply cope with everything on our own.

**19/12/23**

One of the reasons for writing these posts every week is to encourage you to read good literature, including the Puritans. You might think that what they wrote centuries ago is far too difficult and even irrelevant. Yet you will so often find them, such as John Owen, so down to earth and practical. They can be such helpful spiritual doctors, as I hope you will see today.

His sermon is based on Psalm 141 verse 5 and has the heading, 'How we may bring our hearts to bear reproofs.' It was actually a lecture at 07.00 hours called Morning Exercises, established in 1672 after Dissenters (non-Anglicans) were finally given permission to meet for public worship having been forbidden after the restoration of the monarchy in 1662. Having examined the text in its context, he makes this observation: "Reproofs, though accompanied with some sharpness, if rightly received and duly improved, are a mercy and advantage incomparably above all the satisfactions which a joint consent with others in sin and pleasures can afford." He is concerned that we so behave ourselves when we are reproofed so that it will be to our spiritual advantage because, he writes, "in the state of weakness and imperfection, of mistakes and miscarriages, ... there is no outward help or aid of more use and advantage unto us than seasonable reproofs." That is a strong statement! In the Kenya culture, 'beating around the bush' can often be an excuse for failing to reprove. In the British culture there may be an unwillingness to reprove through fear of offending. Giving a reproof always has to do with 'a fault, and evil, a miscarriage, or a sin' in the one reproofed. Under fraternal reproofs Owen references Romans 15:1, 1 Thessalonians 5:14, Hebrews 3:12-13, 12:15-16, and says of the neglect of such has "lost us not only the benefit,

but also the very nature of church-societies.” “There is no sign of greater degeneracy from the law and all the end of our creation, than an unwillingness to receive reproofs ...” You can access the sermon at <https://audiosermon.net/sermon-xiii-psalm-1415-john-owen/> [The Works of John Owen, 8, pp. 474-493]

### 12/12/23

There is an identity crisis today, as least in the West. People are searching for who they are, and many identify themselves by their sexual orientation, for example, ‘I am gay’. It is believed that we are what we feel ourselves to be. A man who feels he is a woman trapped in a man’s body is ‘really a woman’, we are told. The authentic self is when a person is free to live out what he/she feels within.

In his book, *Pride: Identity and the Worship of Self*, Roberts takes us back to Genesis 1:26-29 to show two basic truths about our identity in opposition to this:

(1) Male and female is what it means to be in the image and likeness of God. In the words of verse 27, “God created man in His *own* image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them,” ‘image of God’ and ‘male and female’ are parallel statements. Roberts concludes that there is no image of God which is not either male or female. That is what we *are*. This includes our bodies which are the medium in which God displays His image.

(2) It is male and female together that makes up the image of God. There are two things about the image of God in man: his dominion over all the earth (verses 26,28), and the demand to fill the earth and subdue it (verse 28). Only male and female together can fulfil these things. That is obvious with filling the earth with offspring. But dominion can only continue to be exercised as there are offspring. Roberts points out that the male is more closely associated with dominion (“to tend and keep the garden”), and the female with multiplication (“a helper comparable to him”).

Roberts draws a conclusion about why God created the two, male and female. He forcefully states that God is **always** revealed to us in the Bible as male. Male and female reflect God’s relationship with His creation: “He is to creation as male is to female; creation is to Him as female is to male.” God brought the first male and female together in marriage (Genesis 2:24). This is to display the union of Christ and the church (Ephesians 5:32). This is the great purpose of the creation of the two sexes, male and female, by God. It is in the marriage union that male and female show the image of God as rulers and fillers of the world.

[This is a suggestive summary of a very helpful section in Roberts, *Pride*, pp. 90-97]

### 5/12/23

Jeremiah 32-33 is an amazing passage! Jerusalem is being besieged by the Babylonians and Jeremiah is imprisoned. The Lord has already revealed to Jeremiah that Jerusalem will be destroyed and the people will go into exile, so that they should give themselves up to serve the king of Babylon beforehand (ch. 27). But despite this Jeremiah is told to buy a field from his relative. Who needs a field when destruction and exile are at hand? It was a practical demonstration of the certainty of return from captivity after 70 years. Such a future event looked totally impossible at the time. Babylon was a seemingly unstoppable super-power. Today we also face such enemies which threaten to destroy God’s people – false religion,

anti-Christian governments, widespread apostasy – and for many of us the preaching of the gospel seems to have little effect, and our Lord continues to delay His coming (from our perspective). Let us note well how God encouraged Jeremiah and the true people of God. (1) By God's power. Nothing is too hard for the Lord (32:17,26)!! He is the One who "made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm." How important is the doctrine of creation. The God who made all things out of nothing is able to do whatever He wishes, everything He has promised. "You have shown signs and wonders in the land of Egypt, and to this day in Israel and among all mankind, and have made a name for Yourself" (32:20). Don't forget all that God has done from the redemption from Egypt, to the death and resurrection of Christ where He defeated Satan, and to the world-wide establishment of His church. And He has not changed.

(2) By God's faithfulness. Twice God's "steadfast love" (= faithful covenant love) is referred to (32:18, 33:11). He gave them the land as He had promised with an oath (32:22). He will restore them to the land "in faithfulness, with all my heart and with all my soul" (32:41). The re-establishment of the Davidic kingship (King Jesus), and of the Levitical priesthood (fulfilled in Jesus) is as sure as the covenant with day and night that unfailingly come at their "appointed time" (33:20,25). Many times it has seemed God's promises cannot come to pass, but they always have. It took a long time, with many times the promise hanging on a thread (for example, the time of Esther), but at the right time Jesus came. The devil did his worst, but Jesus rose from the dead as He said He would. He is building His church, and there will be those redeemed from every people, and He will come again exactly as He promised.

### 28/11/23

William Cunningham was not a man given to unguarded statements. So the following quotation is striking. "It is impossible however to overstate the importance and advantages of a careful, patient, and persevering examination and comparison of **parallel passages** in order to a correct and thorough knowledge of the meaning of Scripture. Indeed, we may say that except through the diligent, unwearied, and habitual prosecution of this process, no real certain and well-grounded knowledge of the word of God can be acquired." What does he mean by 'parallel passages? "Difficulties that may arise about the meaning of particular passages are to be removed chiefly by an examination and comparison of other passages of Scripture, where the same or similar words, phrases or constructions occur, and where the same or similar subjects are treated of, and are perhaps more clearly expressed." He concludes on the subject of comparing parallel passages as a means of interpretation with these very strong words: "The process is indispensably of imperative obligation, and that its advantages are so great that they cannot be exaggerated, and can be appreciated fully only by those who have tried it."

[Cunningham, *Theological Lectures*, pages 594-596]

Let me seek to give you three examples.

(1) Colossians 1:15, "the *firstborn* of all creation." It might appear that the Lord was the first to be created, so that He is not God but a created being. We look at parallel passages where the word 'firstborn' is used. Of course the word may mean the first born in a family (Joshua 17:1). But because the firstborn had special privileges and was given a double portion (Deuteronomy 21:15-17), the word comes to denote status as well as order of time. As

regards status David is called “the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth” (Psalm 89:27). So as firstborn Jesus is the supreme King over all creation.

(2) John 1:1. The Jehovah’s Witnesses, in their New World translation, have “... and the word was *a god*.” They point out that in the original Greek there is no ‘the’ before god. They show their great ignorance of the Greek language, and are inconsistent as often they translate the same anarthous (without the definite article) phrase as ‘God’, e.g. John 8:54. The translation ‘a god’ would imply there are many gods, polytheism. John goes on to write that He was with God “in the beginning” (verse 2), and that He is the creator of everything (verse 3).

(3) 1 Corinthians 12:13, “*in one Spirit we were all baptized*” (ESV). The KJV and NKJV translate “*by one Spirit*” as if the Spirit is the One doing the baptizing. This exact phrase is found in 6 other parallel passages, where the Spirit is that into which we are baptized, like the water in water baptism (see Matthew 3:15 and Gospel parallels, Acts 1:5, 11:16). There is no doubt that it is our Lord who baptizes us in the Spirit.

### **21/11/23**

The word “mystery” is commonly used by Paul, and especially in Ephesians (1:9, 3:3,4,6,8, 5:32, 6:19). We know it does not mean what it usually means in English, a problem that we are unable to solve. We usually say that a mystery in Paul’s usage is something that is secret and so cannot be known until God reveals it. Gaffin examines the use of the word mystery in Romans 16:25-27 and concludes that “the revelation of the mystery is an *event*, in the sense that the mystery in view is not what was not known (unknown information) but what had *not happened*.” He gives the following reasons from these verses:

(1) The revelation of the mystery is the content of his gospel, the preaching of Jesus Christ. It is not just a doctrine about Christ that is preached, but the events of His death, burial and resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:3-4).

(2) There is a distinction between “has now been disclosed” and “has been made known.” Being disclosed refers to the event of Christ’s coming into the world, and being made known refers to its being preached to all nations.

(3) It is not true that the Old Testament has nothing to reveal about all nations receiving the gospel. Read Isaiah 42:6, 49:6, and note Luke 24:45-47. So the knowledge was not hidden. It is Christ who was hidden, to be revealed when He was born of a virgin.

Gaffin also references 2 Timothy 1:9-10 and Colossians 1:26-27.

This understanding of the mystery shows that the end-times have arrived, the age to come is upon us. After “long ages” of waiting for the promise, there is the “now” of fulfilment in the coming of the Saviour. All that God had promised finds its realization in Christ Jesus.

[from Gaffin, *In the Fullness of Time*, pages 261-267]

### **14/11/23**

Which verse of the Old Testament is the equivalent of John 3:16? Robertson claims it is Zephaniah 3:17, and may be you are not even familiar with it! He writes: This is “one of the most moving descriptions of the love of God for His people found anywhere in Scripture...” Consider the following things about the love of God revealed here.

(1) The nature of God's love. Love "is not a soft, sentimental emotion that has no strength to act on behalf of its object. For this God who loves is *Yahweh*. He is God. He is a mighty hero who saves." He not only wants to deliver His people; He accomplishes it!

(2) The depths of God's love. Zion, God's people, are exhorted to sing, shout and rejoice (v. 14). Likewise God Himself rejoices over His people with gladness and loud singing (v. 17). "... that the Holy One should experience ecstasy over the sinner is incomprehensible." Further, God is said to "be quiet in His love." "God the mighty saviour, quietly contemplating, contented in His love" for the sinner. God is love (1 John 4:8). If that seems too much, then "how could the Sovereign Creator concentrate His whole being in the love of the temporal creature of dust? ... satisfy Himself contentedly in the loving contemplation of the unholy?" Yet He does so.

(3) The objects of God's love. It is "over you". Who are the 'you'? Not everyone, but His chosen people. In the context it is "Zion", "Israel", "Jerusalem" (v. 14), the chosen people of God who He loves because He loves (Deuteronomy 7:6-8). It is not all Israelites, but those who are "humble and lowly", who "seek refuge in the name of the Lord" (v. 12). It even includes non-Israelites, from "the peoples" who come "to call upon the name of the Lord and serve Him with one accord" (v. 9). They come from the farthest places, "beyond the rivers of Cush" (v. 10). This began to be fulfilled from Pentecost onwards, centuries after Zephaniah. But it was so certain that God's people were commanded to shout aloud in that day, and so are we to do for all that is yet to certainly come.

[based on Robertson, *The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, pages 339-343]

### **7/11/23**

William Cunningham lived in Scotland in the 19<sup>th</sup>. century. At the end of his *Theological Lectures*, he instructs his students how they could usefully use their summer when not having college lectures. Because he was addressing men preparing for the ministry, he did not spare them by encouraging them to relax from their studies. He wanted them to make the very best use of their time to prepare for the work to which the Lord had called them. We could learn much from this bygone time when standards were so different, so much higher. "... I would strongly advise you to devote your time during the vacation to revising the studies of the past session, ... by careful reflection upon some of the more important and difficult questions, and by an attentive perusal of some of the principal works which have been recommended to you." He goes on to recommend "in the course of this summer the introductory books or chapters of some one or more of the systematic works which have been mentioned." Then it blew my mind when he added: "I am also much inclined to recommend to you as a useful exercise, ... to read through the four volumes of Horne's Introduction." Don't think that the summer in Scotland goes on endlessly!! It makes me feel that I have been playing, not really serious. He is referring to what we might call 'spare time'. May the Lord help us to devote ourselves, even unto weariness, to the Lord and His Word, that we might be "a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15).

[Cunningham, *Theological Lectures*, page 619]

### **31/10/23**

There is a movement today called 'Acts 29', as if the 'Book of Acts' is incomplete. Not so. Acts is structured on the programme of 1:8, witness-bearing from Israel to the nations. Gaffin calls our attention to three things:

- (1) This is specifically an apostolic programme, as they are the ones addressed.
- (2) It is a universal task. As the work expands there is a definite ethnic focus, from Jew (Jerusalem-Judea), to part-Jew (Samaria), to non-Jew/Gentile (ends of the earth). This is made clear when Paul announces that he is turning from the Jew to the Gentile (13:46-48). See also Colossians 1:5-6,23, 2 Timothy 4:17.
- (3) As far as Acts is concerned, it is a finished task. It finished in ch. 28 with the apostolic witness having reached the ends of the earth – Rome – where the very last words are “without hindrance”. This does not deny the worldwide missionary mandate of the church “to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:18-20). Acts is a record of the apostolic worldwide witness, the foundation-laying era of the church (as Ephesians 2:20). What the church has been doing since apostolic times is a “filling in and expansion within the worldwide closed-circle completed by the apostles.” Matthew 24:14 has been fulfilled, prophecy has been fulfilled, so our Lord may return at any time.

[from Gaffin, *In the Fullness of Time*, pages 51-56]

### **24/10/23**

Habakkuk 3:2 is a prayer that I have often prayed. Robertson literally translates: “In (the) midst of (the) years make him live; in (the) midst of (the) years make (him) understand; in (the) time of) trembling remember mercy.” I found three things of significance.

- (1) ‘Midst of years’ “most likely ... refers to the time between the two acts of judgement revealed to Habakkuk.” The first is the coming of the Chaldeans (Babylonians) to judge His people Judah (1:5-11). The second is the destruction of Babylon itself (2:6-19).
- (2) “Make him live.” This refers back to 2:4 where Habakkuk is given the reassurance that the one justified by faith shall live by his steadfast trust. This is a wonderful example of pleading the promises of God. While God is chastening His own and before the final judgement upon the oppressor, the cry goes up, ‘Lord, keep your promise, keep life for the one trusting you, make him live, make him understand your plan.’
- (3) It is a time of wrath, making people ‘tremble’. God’s people will go into exile and only the mercy of God will sustain them. We live in a similar time today when judgement begins with the house of God (1 Peter 4:17). We must plead the promise that in these circumstances the Lord will mercifully preserve life, before the final judgement.

[based on Robertson, *The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, pages 217-218]

### **17/10/23**

I have been reading about our inner desires and whether they are sinful or not. This is hotly debated today with some teaching, in the context of homosexuality, that same sex feelings are not sinful as long as they are not put into practice. I have often thought that having such desires are just temptation so long as they are rejected and not fed. It is quite sure that we sin in our desires/lusts/passions (see Matthew 5:27-28). But I have sought support for the distinction between desires and temptation from the verse that says, Jesus “in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15). True, but He was only

tempted from without, because there was no indwelling sin in Him desiring what is sinful from God. We must sadly admit that the very first desires that are against the commandments of God are sinful. Is this not what Genesis 6:5 teaches? And Jesus in Matthew 15:19 with “evil thoughts”? This is what the Westminster and 1689 Baptist Confessions teach: *“During this earthly life corrupt nature remains in those who are born of God, that is to say, regenerated. Through Christ it is pardoned and mortified, yet both the corruption itself, and all that issues from it, are truly and properly sin”* (ch. 6, sect. 5). If we had no indwelling sin we would never even have the beginning of such desires. This shows us how wicked we are before God and how gracious He is towards us in Jesus Christ. (see Roberts, *Pride*, pp. 71-81 on ‘concupiscence’)

### **10/10/23**

The three chapters of Nahum are probably some of the least known in the Bible. How many Christians even know where Nahum is to be found? Yet it is as much the word of God as the Gospel of John. It is not even about the people of God. One complete book of the Bible is devoted to the destruction of a single heathen city (Assyrian, see 3:18). In the days of Jonah this city turned to the Lord, but centuries later it was ripe for total judgement. Judgement is certain, inevitable and terrible. Robertson writes why this is an important message for Christians. “... this unbroken note of judgment may provide a ministry today that is greatly needed by those who put their trust in the one true God... A recognition of the reality of divine vengeance provides a sobriety that always ought to characterize the relations of human beings and nations.” What good news it was when God’s people heard the news of Assyria’s destruction (1:15)! So when the “great prostitute” is cast into hell, heaven erupts in praise (Revelation 19:1-5)! Praise the Lord that our Lord Jesus is putting every enemy under His feet and we can be sure of His ultimate triumph. But what if there is no divine vengeance and the wicked triumph? What then?

[based on Robertson, *The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, pages 56-57]

### **3/10/23**

[I am thinking to post regularly something significant I gain from my reading which I trust will be of spiritual value. I further hope it will be an encouragement for you to read for yourself.]

Using Ezekiel 17:24, John Owen asks why God so often uses the ‘low’ tree and the ‘dry’ tree, i.e. those who are of little account in this world. He gives three reasons with Biblical examples:

- (1) The problem is with us, our corrupt hearts which think God works according to our fleshly reasonings, corrupt interests and principles. He gives the example of the Jews who thought of the Messiah in fleshly terms, Pharaoh and Sihon (Ammonite king) who oppressed God’s people using the ‘good’ principle of protecting their own people.
- (2) God does this so that His presence may be more obvious in the world. [We could cite 1 Cor. 1:26-31, 2 Cor. 4:7]
- (3) It is so that many false and empty professing Christians, and others in the world, might be hardened, so that the judgments appointed may come upon them to the uttermost. This is most surprising but Owen writes, this “is one of the most eminent acts of the providence

of God in governing the world." He gives the example of Pharaoh (Ex. 9:16), Jeroboam (1 Kn. 13:11-34), and the Jews who expected the Messiah to come in earthly glory and then having rejected Him were utterly destroyed 40 years later.

[from *The Works of John Owen*, 8, 329-332]