

31/12/25

Who knows what will happen in the coming year? If we look back to what happened to us in 2025 it certainly will NOT be problem free. The question is: are we ready for the various trials that are coming so that we will act in a truly Christian way? Once again I base these thoughts on John Newton's 'Review of Ecclesiastical History' (available online, including audio). There is one example of personal trials, and one of the church difficulties.

(1) Paul's shipwreck (Acts 27). "There is little doubt but Paul's case and character had by this time engaged the notice of many of his fellow-passengers in the ship. Upon a superficial inquiry, they would learn, that he was a follower of one Jesus, who had been crucified; that he was esteemed a setter-forth of strange gods, and charged with having disturbed the public peace wherever he came. ... but no emergency had as yet occurred to manifest the solidity and force of his principles to full advantage, and to make it evident to all with whom he sailed, that his God was far unlike the idols of the Heathens; and that the religion which prompted him to do and suffer so much for the sake of Jesus, was founded, not in the imaginations and inventions of men, but in reality and truth. In prosperous circumstances, most people are easily satisfied with their own principles, and are ready to take it for granted, that even the notions received from no better source than tradition or custom, cannot be wrong, or at least will not be dangerous; but it is in a season of common distress that the truth and efficiency of vital religion appear with the most incontestable authority. The God who alone can deliver when all hope of safety is driven away, and the religion which can inspire a man with confidence and peace, when there is nothing but dismay and confusion around him, will then exert some acknowledgement, even from those who had before thought of them with indifference. From these considerations, we may collect one general reason why the Lord, who, by His divine providence, adjusts the time and circumstances of every event, and without whose permission not a sparrow can fall to the ground, permits His faithful people to be so often exercised with severe trials; it is to manifest that their hopes are well-grounded; that they have not taken up with words and notions, but have a real and sure support, and can hope and rejoice in God under those pressures which deprive others of all their patience, and all their courage; and, on the other hand, to evince that His power and faithfulness are surely engaged on their behalf; that He puts an honour upon their prayers, is near to help them in the time of trouble, and can deliver them out of their greatest extremities." May the Lord help us when we experience various trials in the days to come, trials of health, accident, or opposition (see James 1:2-4). We are being watched!

(2) Irregularities and offences in apostolic churches. Newton firmly believed that the doctrine of the Protestant Reformation was that of the New Testament. Yet he was aware of the problems in apostolic churches and refers to the Corinthians (1. 1:12; 3:3, etc.), Thessalonians (2. 3:10-11) and Philippians (3:18-19). Why such problems at the beginning? "..., it seems to be the Lord's pleasure, not so much to preserve them from mistakes and indiscretions at first, as to take occasion to humble them upon this account, and to show them how to correct them when made. Thus they are more confirmed in a sense of their own weakness and of His goodness, and are trained up, by time, observation, and repeated trials, to a more perfect exercise of every branch of Christian wisdom; by degrees their judgements are formed to greater maturity, they are more jealous of themselves, more

acquainted with Satan's devices, more capable of distinguishing the spirit and conduct of mankind, and especially more simply dependent upon God for His teaching and direction; and thus they grow into a participation of the spirit of the gospel, and are enabled to act and speak as become the servants of Christ." What an enlightening perspective this is on problems in our local churches!

23/12/25

The word of God tells us to imitate Paul as he imitated Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1). John Newton has a very insightful essay on 'The Character of St. Paul' in his 'Review of Ecclesiastical History' Book 2. He defends the inclusion of such an essay in a study of church history as he wants us to see "the genuine tendency of the gospel where it is truly received, ... and to show the impossibility of reviving practical godliness by any other means than those which were so signally successful in the first age of the church."

(1) "The characteristic excellence ... which was the spring or source of every other grace, was the ardency of the supreme love he bore to his Lord and Saviour." Lack of love is the greatest wickedness (1 Corinthians 16:22). For love of Christ he was willing to be accounted a madman (2 Corinthians 5:14). He considered what he had been saved from (1 Timothy 1:13-14), and how he had been saved (Romans 5:8).

(2) "The inseparable effect, and one of the surest evidences of love to Christ, is a love to His people." Everywhere in his writings this is obvious. "He so rejoiced in their prosperity, that, to hear of it at any time, made him in a manner forget his own sorrows, when encompassed with troubles on every side" (see 2 Corinthians 7:7,13 and Philippians 2:28). "In many instances, he did not meet with that grateful return he had reason to expect, yet he could not be discouraged" (2 Corinthians 12:5).

(3) His "attachment to the great doctrines of the gospel." As a result he could easily be labelled as 'uncharitable' and a 'hot-headed bigot.' He could not be indifferent to error, as is so clearly seen in his letter to the Galatians.

(4) At the same time "he exercised, upon all occasions, a great tenderness to weak consciences, in matters that were not essential to the faith, and when the scruples were owing rather to a want of clear light than to obstinacy." What a different attitude he had towards that "great controversy ... between Jewish and Gentile converts, about the distinction of meats, and drinks, and other rituals enjoined by the law of Moses" (see Romans 14). On the one hand he knew his liberty in Christ; but on the other hand he was willing to forgo this liberty rather than give offence to a brother.

(5) His life "demonstrates a disinterested spirit, and that his uncommon labours were directed to no other ends than the glory of God, and the good of men." So he usually worked with his own hands to support himself rather than rely on his coverts (Acts 20:33-34). "Nothing is a greater bar to a minister's usefulness, or renders his person and labours more contemptible, than a known attachment to money, a gripping fist, and a hard heart."

(6) He exemplifies "true Christian zeal." "Bold and intrepid in the cause of God and truth, unwearied in service, inflexible in danger, ... He cheerfully endured" (so Acts 20:24). "But at the same time, in all his intercourse with men, he was gentle, mild and compassionate..."

(8) "His unaffected humility. In the midst of his eminent and extensive services, he retained a deep sense of the part he once acted against the Lord" (so 1 Corinthians 15:8-10,

Ephesians 3:9). “The Lord of hosts has purposed to stain the pride of all human glory, and will honour none but those who abase themselves, and are willing to give all the praise to Him alone. If any man has ground to set a value on his knowledge, gifts, and services, St. Paul might justly claim the pre-eminence: but although he was an apostle, and an inspired writer; though he had planted churches through a considerable part of the known world; though he was received as an angel by so many to whom he preached, and, by a peculiar favour, had been caught up into the third heaven; yet he was, by grace, preserved from being exalted above measure, or from assuming an undue superiority over his brethren.”

16/12/25

In a previous Facebook post I emphasized that paying attention to our doctrine, making sure it is Biblical, is of the greatest importance. False teaching is the devil’s great strategy! A certain teaching may not seem of much significance, but on investigation it is found to undermine the very gospel itself. Think of the insistence of physical circumcision by teachers in the Galatian churches, that Paul so strongly calls “a different gospel” (Galatians 1:6-9). On the surface a cut in the flesh seems a very small thing.

John Owen, in 1653, wrote a lengthy dissertation on Divine Justice (Works, 10:484-624).

There were those called Socinians (followers of Socinus) who denied that vindictory justice is an essential property of the divine nature. They taught that justice is a decision of God’s will; He may punish sin, or He may not, as He chooses. He is under no necessity to punish sin. This may sound like trying ‘to split hairs’, but it has serious gospel implications. It may even sound reasonable, because it is written, “He has mercy on whomever he wills, and He hardens whomever He wills” (Romans 9:18). Why is this discussion so important? Was the atonement a display of God’s justice, as written in Romans 3:25b-26? Was the atonement necessary? Why did God not just forgive, as we are supposed to do? What actually happened when Christ suffered on the cross? Owen has four arguments to show that God must show ‘vindictory justice’ = God must punish sin, all sin, because it is His nature.

(1) The justice of punishing sin is natural to God. He references the following Scriptures: Habakkuk 1:13; Isaiah 24:19; Exodus 34:5-7; Psalm 5:4-6. At all times, all over the world, men know this, and so have offered even human sacrifices to avert God’s judgement. Even now God is punishing sin (so Romans 1:18ff.). Above all God’s justice is glorified in the cross, “that He set forth Christ as a propitiation, through faith in His blood. He spared Him not, but laid the punishment of us all upon Him.” The atonement (i.e. the death of Christ) is NECESSARY and displays His absolute justice (see Jn. 3:15, Heb. 2:17; 9:23).

(2) Because sin exists, the exercise of this justice is necessary. By nature God hates all sin and so cannot but punish sin. God is a consuming fire (Hebrews 12:29), which “cannot but burn and consume stubble when applied to it.”

(3) God must preserve the glory of His justice together with all His attributes. If it is a just thing for God to punish for sin then He is not glorified for His justice if the disobedient go unpunished.

(4) If God can simply will the salvation of any sinner without an atonement, then why did Christ die? If there was another more simple, easy way, why should Christ undergo such dreadful sufferings, unless it was necessary?

It might be objected, 'But God shows mercy to whom He will.' Owen often repeats that there is a difference between God exercising justice in punishment, and showing mercy to a sinner. God is the Creator, Law-giver and Judge. If a judge pardons the guilty we cry 'injustice'. How then can God justify the ungodly, which He does (see Romans 4:5)? God has dealt in justice towards sinners He has chosen to save, in two ways: (i) Christ bore their punishment on the cross (see Galatians 3:10-13) so justice is served in regard to their sin; (ii) Christ's righteousness is credited to their account so that God may justly declare them to be law-keepers (see 2 Corinthians 5:21). So God shows mercy to sinners on the basis of what He has done in Christ to satisfy His justice. The cross of Christ glorifies God, not only His love, but equally His justice (Romans 3:26). By this way the law of God is upheld (Romans 3:31). You have not understood the cross until you have understood this! And our response is to bow down in worship for so great a salvation.

9/12/25

I am about to finish a book by Iain Murray, *Evangelicalism Divided: A Record of Crucial Change in the Years 1950 to 2000* (published by Banner of Truth, 2000). 'Evangelicals' are those of us who believe the Bible is throughout the very word of God and so is to be totally trusted in what it records and teaches. For us the Bible is the final authority. But many others who call themselves Christians do not believe this. Catholics add tradition to the Bible. Liberal Protestants see the Bible as just another human book with many things we cannot believe because the writers were limited by their knowledge having written so long ago. The big question is: Are such who deny the Bible to be considered as Christians with whom we can fellowship? Or, How important is truth?

Murray points to three main influences for a change in many professing Evangelicals so that they came to accept that non-evangelicals are their brothers in Christ.

- The Billy Graham Crusades of the 1950s with the overwhelming emphasis on evangelism, later began to cooperate with Catholics and Liberals to get the widest possible support for the Crusades.
- The Anglican Evangelicals, starting in 1966, generally agreed that they would not have influence in their Anglican Church if they insisted that their evangelicalism is the only truth.
- The Charismatic movement was also more interested in experience than theology. It was the experience of the baptism and the gifts that united people, not so much their set of beliefs.

Together with this, "evangelicals ... have been tempted to seek success in ways which the New Testament identified as 'worldliness.'" "The interests and priorities of contemporary culture have become mirrored in the churches. The antipathy to authority and to discipline; the cry for entertainment by the visual image rather than by the words of Scripture; the appeal to the spectacular; the rise of feminism; the readiness to identify power with numbers; the unwillingness to make 'beliefs' a matter of controversy—all these features so evident in the world's agenda are now also to be found in the Christian scene."

Further, "worldliness is no accident; it is the devil's use of such idols as pride, selfishness, and pleasure. What he proposes for man's happiness is in truth the result of implacable malice towards the whole human race. He means to exclude God and to destroy men, and

the system he has devised to do this is so subtle that man is a willing and unconscious captive.” How does the devil accomplish this? “Satan works principally through doctrinal deception and falsehood.” Murray references John 8:44; Acts 5:3; 13:8; 2 Corinthians 11:3,14. “The idea that Christianity stands chiefly in danger from the forces of materialism, or from secular philosophy, or from pagan religions, is not the teaching of the New Testament. The greatest danger comes rather from temptations within and from those who, using the name of Christ, are instruments of Satan to lead men to believe a lie and to worship what in reality belongs to the demonic (2 Thessalonians 2:3-9; Revelation 13:11).” If we grasp this then we will understand the seriousness of error. So, why is there little opposition to error? “It is the way in which the instrumentality of the devil in corrupting the truth has been so widely overlooked.” Instead, we are to test the spirits (1 John 4:1); “for there are ‘deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons’ (1 Timothy 4:1); false teachers ‘who will secretly bring in destructive heresies’ (2 Peter 2:1). There are words that ‘spread as a cancer’ (2 Timothy 2:17).”

Lastly, because of devilish deception Murray exhorts us to learn to be suspicious. Many use words such as ‘salvation’ but mean something different than we do. Others profess to believe in a Creed but not whole-heartedly. Take note of what is not said, as well as what is said. Error and false teaching is not an innocent mistake (see 1 Timothy 4:1). “There is an irreconcilable enmity between Satan and Scripture.” But thank God, “demonic power can never finally prevail over the truth or the church of Jesus Christ.”

3/12/25

Absolute Certainty! Romans 5:9-11 is one of those passages in the Bible designed to remove all doubt about salvation from the Christian. This certainty, or what we call Assurance, is so important for confident Christian living for the glory of God. We must make sure that it not just ‘hoping for the best’ but is based on a solid, unshakeable foundation. We are warned that there will be many who think they will be OK, but will be shocked when they are rejected by God (see Matthew 7:21-23; 22:11-13; 25:11-12,41-46). This foundation is what God has already done for us as believers in Christ.

(1) What God has already done for us.

“We have now been justified” (verse 9). The God who dwells in the unapproachable light, before whom even the heavens are unclean, has declared that His law has nothing against us, that there is no condemnation that we are facing. How is this possible when we know we are “ungodly” (4:5), law-breakers? It is “by His blood”—the sacrifice of Jesus Christ upon the cross. He is the fulfilment of those animals who were sacrificed in the place of the guilty and whose blood was sprinkled as the only way of acceptance into God’s presence (see Hebrews 9:22). This justification is God’s declaration, so it is final, with no possibility of future condemnation (8:33-34). It is this understanding that led to the Reformation with its rejection of our works, prayers and confessions for justification; and rejection of prayers and candles to shorten the time in so-called Purgatory.

“We were reconciled to God” (verse 10). We were “enemies” of God, which is how He regarded us. We were living a life of rebellion against His laws. The amazing thing is that God, the offended One, has done all that was necessary to reconcile us to Himself! It is “by the death of His Son.” This is why Christ’s death is called a propitiation (see 3:25), a sacrifice

put forward by God Himself, to remove His anger from the sinner, by pouring it out on His Son. This has always been God's way. He provided skins for Adam and Eve, the Passover lamb in Egypt, and the priesthood and sacrifices under the old covenant.

(2) What God will certainly do for us. We can be sure because of past justification and reconciliation by God. It is so important to be sure of what GOD has done. If He has done this for us then "we shall be saved" (verses 9,10). This is a reference to the salvation on the last Day (see also Romans 13:11; 1 Thessalonians 5:8-9; Hebrews 9:28; 1 Peter 1:5). When God pours out His just wrath against sinners, it will not be upon the Christian (1 Thessalonians 1:10). We shall receive new resurrection bodies and be made like Christ. Note the language "much more." It is the argument from the greater to the lesser. If we have been justified and reconciled, then we shall certainly be finally saved. If God has justified one who is ungodly, how can He turn around to condemn this one He has justified? It would be injustice as Christ has already been condemned in my place. And if God has reconciled one who is an enemy, how can He reject this one who is now His friend? The Christian is "in His life" (literally), united to Him who was raised never to die again (6:9). The letter to the Romans is like an official letter from God Himself assuring the one who believes in Christ that the full inheritance in glory is certainly his. So if this is you, rejoice now (verse 11, see also verse 2)! It is God who is saying this, the God who cannot lie, who does not change, the One who is sovereign over all things. If God has justified you so that you are at peace with Him, what on earth, in heaven or hell can come between you and God to change your status?

25/11/25

Am I correct in thinking we assume we know what preaching is? How would you explain it? Is it just speaking, communicating a message, or is it more than this? It is a vital question as we can say that the history of the church down the centuries is the history of preaching. God's work has progressed through preaching. Think of the parable of the sower in Matthew 13 as about the kingdom of God and how it advances.

One great preacher of the last century confessed how difficult he found it to explain as it is "a great mystery... I find that I never know what is going to happen when I enter a pulpit. I am constantly being surprised—sometimes in the sense of being disappointed, but at other times surprised at the amazing grace of God." Bringing the word of God to people is a very great and solemn responsibility (see James 3:1). Paul went to preach in Corinth "in weakness and in fear and much trembling" (1 Cor. 2:3). A preacher must be sure that God has sent him (Rm. 10:13-15).

Explaining preaching is helped by stating what it is not.

(1) It is not lecturing. That is to take a subject such as justification, to prepare a message, and give it anywhere the need arises.

(2) It is not a running commentary on a passage of Scripture. "A man may take a verse or a passage, and he may give you his exegesis, he may tell you about its context, he may give you the meaning of the words, he may divide it and open it up," but that is not preaching. "One can deal with the words of Scripture and never get down to the doctrine"! The sermon must bring out the real message, "a particular message which leads to a particular end."

(3) But preaching is even more than a sermon. In preaching “something is happening between the man who is speaking and the congregation that is listening... The whole man is involved in preaching; ... It is not merely what the man says, it is the way in which he says it—the total involvement of the man; his body is involved, every part of him, every faculty is involved if it is true preaching... Here are spiritually minded people, they have come prepared and they are under the influence of the Spirit, and so these two things are blended together.” It is here that hearing a message over the media is lacking.

The preacher knows he is sent by God, that he is the herald of glorious good news, and that he comes with full authority from God. He knows he has been given the message by God. “He cannot preach in cold blood. A preacher is taken up; he is in this realm of the Spirit and God is giving a message through this man to the people (see 1 Thess. 2:13). There is freedom in utterance. “A sermon which is perfect in its form, its diction, and in everything else, is one that militates against preaching...” He continues, “... thoughts are given and expressions are given, ideas are given, the imagination is inspired and inflamed, and one is just aware that God is possessing one’s whole personality and using every little faculty that He has ever given us at the beginning... I am preaching, yet not I, but I am being used of God; I am being taken up, I am being employed, and God is using even me to speak to these people. I am an ambassador for Christ, I am a sent one, I am aware of this great responsibility—but it is all right, I am enabled to do it because of His grace and the power He is gracious enough to give me.”

Is this too high a standard? Or have we lowered the Biblical standard and become satisfied with something much less?

[Summary of an address given in 1967 by Martyn Lloyd-Jones at Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, found in ‘Knowing the Times’, pp. 258-277. In 1969 he gave a series of lectures at the same Seminary which can be found in the book, ‘Preaching and Preachers’]

18/11/25

One of the features of present day Christianity is ‘movements’ as opposed to churches. There are organizations for evangelism and missions, for holiness, for prophecy, for political involvement, and all kinds of ‘ministries’ started and run by individuals. We appreciate the need and focus upon such areas of thought and practice. There is no question that the Lord has used such movements in His grace, but there are big questions that need to be raised. Such movements began 150-200 years ago in the West and have come to dominate Evangelicalism. They arose “because of the new factor which had come into the denominations in the shape of ... Higher Criticism, liberalism or modernism.” This is basically a denial that the Bible is the word of God and is to be treated like any other book. Then there was also the rise of Darwinism and Marxism. “Our forefathers ... decided to meet this by forming movements. They did not meet it on the church level. They decided that the thing to do was to form movements in which like-minded believers could come together, movements and societies in which they could find the fellowship they could not find in their churches, in which they could strengthen one another’s faith and make protests against what was happening.” We must ask whether this was a biblical way of proceeding as regards challenges to doctrine.

(1) “Immediately you begin to defend the faith in terms of movements, ... you begin to

atomize the truth... To isolate any one doctrine and form a movement round it seems bound to lead to a dangerous lack of balance.”

(2) “There is no guarantee of progressive teaching.” The whole counsel of God is necessary for genuine Christian growth.

(3) The “testimony ... has inevitably been inconsistent.” The movements were started because of false teaching in their churches, yet the people involved have continued to belong to such churches. If someone replies that ‘I can do whatever I want in my own local church whatever the churches teach with which I am formally joined’ then that person is asserting independency while still belonging!

(4) “It renders discipline more or less impossible.” These movements are voluntary associations that cannot discipline. So, for example, a leader in one movement may be discredited, then you find that leader in another movement. “If you have the necessary gifts and influence and the kind of power which counts, you can do that.” How common this has been.

(5) “They have evaded, avoided, and bypassed the whole question of the nature of the church.” Surely matters of doctrine in particular should be determined in the churches. “From 1870 onwards, evangelicals more or less retired from the church situation, and became only concerned about themselves and their own experiences... They avoided the question of the church for the obvious reason that they were afraid of causing disharmony and disagreement in the movement.” Those in the movement come from different backgrounds, with different views of the church. “The church is ‘the pillar and ground of the truth’ (1 Tim. 3:15); all activity should be church activity, and if we are uncertain as to the nature of the church how can there possibly be a true unity, or a true activity?”

So what is the church? “It is a gathering of saints; it is an assembly of true believers; it is a gathering of men and women who have believed the preaching of the gospel’ More, it is a gathering of people who have been ‘born again’. It is the association of people who are the body of Christ and members in particular. It is those who are ‘in Christ’.” The three main marks of the church are: (i) the preaching of the gospel, or the true doctrine; (ii) the faithful administration of the sacraments; (iii) the administration of discipline. There is no visible universal church in the New Testament. All references to the visible church are to the local church.

[Summary of ‘Consider Your Ways’ in Lloyd-Jones, Knowing the Times, pp. pp. 170-193]

11/11/25

It was Reformation Day recently, commemorating when in 1517 Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses to the church door in Wittenburg as an invitation to debate issues over the sale of indulgences. Why should we remember it? There are those who think the past has nothing to teach us, especially something so long ago. There has been an increasing opinion that the Reformation was a tragedy, because it divided the church. In speaking to the Free Church in Scotland in 1960, Lloyd-Jones gave the following reasons for the vital importance of remembering the Reformation.

- The history of Scotland, for example, cannot be understood. Scotland became famous for education, for knowledge and for culture, as a result of the Reformation.

- Today there are serious social problems—vice, immorality and sin—just as before the Reformation. What a great societal change came through the Reformation!
- It is the same with the state of the church as before the Reformation, confusion and doctrinal indifference. The Church of Rome is increasing in influence, ceremonies and rituals are more common with the Word of God being preached less and less.

“The greatest of all the lessons of the Protestant Reformation is that the way of recovery is always to go back, back to the primitive pattern, to the origin, to the norm and standard which are to be found alone in the New Testament. That is exactly what happened four hundred years ago.”

So what happened? The entire course of the history of the world was changed, both in church and society. The foundation was laid for the democratic view of government. Why was there such a great societal change from a “dissolute, drunken, and illiterate country” to being a “sober, righteous, able, intelligent people”? It is Christian doctrine alone that produced Christian ethics. What did the men at the centre of the Reformation, such as John Knox in Scotland, believe?

1. The absolute authority of the Bible because it is the word of the living God. Everything in it is true. They did not sit in judgement upon the Bible; rather the Bible judged them.
2. The sovereignty of God, He is over all, to be worshipped and feared.
3. The perfect and finished work of Christ’s atonement.
4. Justification by faith only, about which Lloyd-Jones said: “As I see the contemporary situation, (this is) the greatest battle of all.” He references a well-known agnostic who was termed a ‘saint’ by a religious newspaper because he was such a good man.
5. Assurance of salvation, so that they could go gladly to their death knowing they would awake in glory.
6. The universal priesthood of believers, simplicity of worship and a pure church.
7. The power of prayer. Mary Queen of Scots feared the prayers of John Knox more than she feared the soldiers of the English army!
8. The power of preaching. Referencing 1 Thessalonians 1:5, Lloyd-Jones asks: “Who had the assurance? The preacher! He knew something was happening, he knew God was using him, he knew that he was the vehicle and channel of divine and eternal grace... It was prophetic preaching, not priestly preaching. What we have today, is what I would call priestly. Very nice, very quiet, very ornate, sentences turned beautifully, prepared carefully. That is not prophetic preaching! No, what is needed is authority! Do you think John Knox could make Mary Queen of Scots tremble with some polished little essay?”

The great message of the Reformation is to point us to the great hope we have in our time of declension. How can society be changed for the better? Is our hope in good governance, universal and free education? Rather our hope is in God who raised up men and so used them. Elisha asked, “Where is the LORD, the God of Elijah?” We might ask, where is the God of John Knox? He is still the same God in heaven who can give the power, the authority, the courage, and everything we need.

[Summary of Lloyd-Jones on ‘Remembering the Reformation’ in Knowing the Times, pp. 90-105]

4/11/25

This is a plea for balance in the Christian life. This is not the same as compromise. John Newton has a sermon based on Romans 14:16, "Do not let what you regard as good be spoken of as evil." It is in the context of the exercise of Christian liberty, where there may be compelling reasons for not doing what we are free to do, for example, eating meat and drinking wine (see verses 20-22). Newton broadens the principle to our Christian lives in general. He knows that "though it is impossible to stop the mouths of evil-minded men, yet they would not be able to talk so fast if the imprudence of believers did not so often afford them advantage. That such occasions should sometimes be given by those whose hearts and aims are in the main sincere, will not be thought strange to any person who is acquainted with the true state of human nature. Through inadvertence, want of experience, errors of judgement, sudden and unexpected temptations, and other evils inseparable from our present situation, persons, whose chief desire is to adorn the doctrine of their God and Saviour in all things, may, and do, in some instances, cause their good to be evil spoken of." He particularly thinks of young converts who, in the joy of their new found salvation, are for a season totally taken up with it, to the neglect of other responsibilities.

Newton presents 4 ways people "can be stumbled by the faults of professors" (i.e. those professing to be Christians).

(1) When there is not sufficient stress on good works. "The world will judge more by what they see in you, than by what they hear... Be upon your guard therefore, lest by any instances of a trifling, foolish, unkind, or unjust conduct, you let your good be evil spoken of."

(2) When we dispute in a contentious spirit. "This is one unhappy consequence of our many divisions and subdivisions, and the heat for which they are contended for by their respective partisans." He references James 1:19, and 1 Peter 3:15.

(3) When we are idle and careless with regard to the necessary concerns and business of life. "If this indifference about common duties continues very long, or is indulged to an extreme, it gives great and just offence. It causes the ways of truth to be evil spoken of, and we hardly know what to say, but this, that the fault is not owing to the gospel, but to the neglect of what the gospel teaches and enjoins. He gives 2 Thessalonians 3:10-12 as an example.

(4) When the bands of natural and social relation are weakened; "that it makes children and servants heady, high-minded, and disobedient, so that they presently think themselves wiser than all about them, and are obstinately bent to have their own wills." Newton notes that we cannot avoid situations where we have to choose between God or man and then our duty is quite clear. "But professors should take care to be assured that here is such a necessity, before they act against lawful authority; and especially when the point in dispute lies between children and parents. For though we ought to disobey and forsake father and mother when God's commands require it, yet next, under God, parents are, above all, to be honoured, consulted,, and obeyed; and the excepted cases are not near so numerous as persons in the warmth of their first zeal are apt to suppose."

Newton concludes by reminding us that the people of the world will judge us by our actions, especially when we are new Christians. "If you are imprudent, rash, and careless, if you either conform to the world, or neglect your acknowledged duty in it, you will cause your

good to be evil spoken of, bring difficulties upon yourselves, and put it out of your own power to be useful to others.”

[You may read the sermon at http://www.tracts.ukgo.com/newton14_romans14.pdf]

28/10/25

Over the past weeks I have brought to you what I hope have been helpful and challenging quotes about the ministry of Martyn Lloyd-Jones. One thing he decried was preaching lacking in application. So here is an outline of a sermon which is application from the start. It is entitled: ‘Don’t be afraid I am with you’. Our greatest need is summed up in these 4 words. It is what marked out Abraham (Gen. 21:22). Consider the following 10 scenarios.

1. What do you need when far from home, far from loved ones? Jacob as he leaves the land of his birth (Gen. 28:15).

2. What do you need when facing a worst case scenario? Joseph was falsely accused and thrown into prison (Gen. 39:21-23).

3. What do you need when facing a task completely beyond you, and you are overwhelmed? Joshua is to lead the nation in impossible task (Josh. 1:5,9).

4. What do you need when enemy breathing down your neck? David was being pursued by Saul (1 Sam. 18:12,14).

5. What do you need when young, inexperienced and facing a new and difficult responsibility? Young Jeremiah was called to be a prophet (Jer. 1:4-8).

6. What do you need when you are so discouraged and almost to give up? The people of Israel had stopped rebuilding the temple (Haggai 1:13, 2:4).

7. What do you need when you have the New Testament equivalent of PTSD, and you can’t face next challenge? Paul was tempted to give up in Corinth (Acts 18:9-10).

8. What do you as life is drawing to a close, and your brethren distance themselves from you in greatest challenge of life? Paul is on trial, facing execution, and is to appear before Caesar himself (2 Tim. 4:16-17).

9. What do you need when the church longs to see conversions and growth? There was impact in Antioch because the Lord with them (Acts 11:21).

10. What is needed when you are leaving the scene for the next generation of believers? Timothy will be on his own, Paul is leaving, but the Lord is staying (2 Tim. 4:22).

The preacher goes on to ask what is the first voice in our heads as we awake in the morning. Jacob’s voice that “You are all alone and far from home”? Joseph’s that “It is not fair”? Joshua’s that “I can’t do this, I can’t cope”? The enemy that “I will get you in the end”? Jeremiah’s that “I am only a youth, I am out of my depth”? Haggai’s groan of discouragement? Paul’s in Corinth that “What I am facing is too intimidating”? Paul’s in prison that “You have been abandoned by your friends”? Church’s that “There are so many difficulties, all is in vain, and I am wasting my time”? The old man’s that “It is up to the next generation and are they able”?

There is the further encouragement of Matt. 28:20 that His presence is with us always, for the whole journey of life, and Heb. 13:5 where His presence is emphatic.

The preacher gave 3 helps to conclude. (1.) Reject ‘gloomy thoughts’, that I am a great sinner, so why would Lord help me? The answer is in Rom. 8:31-32. (2.) Remember the ‘Father’s smile’, those providences when God showed Himself near. For example an

unexpected message or visit. (3) Be comforted by the words 'It is I/Me' (Mk. 6:50, Jn. 6:20), in the very storms of life, and you will quickly find you have reached your destination! [Sermon of Gerard Hemmings at Amyand Park Chapel, September 7, 2025]

22/10/25

The 1970s were the final decade of ML-J's life. He was now an itinerant preacher and devoted much of his time to editing his sermons and addresses for print. In the previous decade there had been the rise of the charismatic movement and, while he did not believe it was a true revival, he was troubled by "those of his colleagues in the ministry who appeared far too satisfied with existing conditions and whose churches were in little danger of excitement or excess." He believed there was need for change in orthodox, reformed churches. In 2025, 50 years later, it behoves us to consider the truth in these following words. Are there changes we need to make? Is it sufficient just to confess the true Biblical doctrine? Murray writes of ML-J's assessment: "In too many congregations all was left to one man and anything like the 'experience meetings' of the eighteenth century had disappeared. There was a general lack of full assurance, of the consciousness of God among the people and hence an absence of joy, rejoicing and true praise. There was too much formality and too little freedom. For this state of affairs he saw the preachers themselves as chiefly to blame. Sermons were lacking in exhortation as though preachers thought their one business was to convey information. Unction and authority were too often missing. 'It is a great grief to me to hear true words coming out of a pulpit that lacks authority'. Still more fundamental, the evidence of a consuming passion for the lost and perishing was too rarely to be seen: 'The Apostle Paul reminds the elders of the church at Ephesus of how he preached "with tears". And Whitefield used to preach with tears. When have you and I last preached with tears? What do we know, to use the phrase of Whitefield, about preaching a "felt Christ"? On another occasion he said the same thing in a different form in these words: The present state of things is a reflection of a defect in the preachers; it is great preaching that produces great believers and great listeners and congregations who rejoice. I heard of a preacher only the other Sunday. In the act of preaching he stopped and asked the congregation: 'Why are you not shouting?' The man did not realize he was condemning himself. When a man preaches under the influence of the Holy Spirit he does not ask people to shout—he tries to hinder them from doing so! The congregation is stirred by great preaching.

Issues raised by the charismatic movement were thus not to be dealt with simply by criticism of errors in theology and practice of those who recognized the need for change. A deeper analysis was needed. The upsurge of discontent which was in the movement was related to real deficiencies in the churches and the situation would not be remedied by simple opposition to the new ideas. Self examination and self criticism were equally needed."

[Murray, D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Vol. 2, pp. 693-694, published by Banner of Truth]

15/10/25

Many of us who are familiar with the ministry of Martyn Lloyd-Jones revel in the published expositions of the Sermon on the Mount (2 vols), Romans (14 vols), and Ephesians (8 vols). These are amongst the most prized volumes in my library! However, the Sunday evening

sermon was always evangelistic, and during the week he would be found using these sermons “preaching two or three times in almost any part of the United Kingdom.” At such times, “attention was focussed on such texts, or features of a text, as have pointed relevance to non-Christians. Not that such relevance was expected to be immediately apparent to his hearers; on the contrary he usually began (on Sunday nights) with the assumption that he was addressing those for whom Scripture might have no point or interest. It could well be some way into the sermon before the casual hearer began to come to the conviction that the text—perhaps from a book of Scripture that he could not even find—was speaking to him. Prior to that point, however, there was something in the preacher’s introduction that had led the hearer into a train of thought and argument that was patently important enough to demand his attention. Perhaps the introductory words had to do with some familiar problem of the times and then, after the examination of popular but superficial proposals for the solution of that problem, it was related to the text and to the fundamental question of man’s relationship to God.”

How did this work out in practice? He did not “suppose the exposition of any part of Scripture is as likely to be as effective as the preaching of any other part. Such a supposition he regarded as destructive of true evangelistic preaching. All Scripture is not equally profitable to the unconverted, rather there are certain primary truths which are essential to gospel preaching and which are most likely to be used in leading to conviction of sin and then to repentance and faith. The immediate purpose of evangelistic preaching is to drive men from all hope in themselves, and the scriptural means to that end is the proclamation of the truth about God and His holy law.”

There were three great truths that were the foundation of his gospel preaching. (1) “The certainty of divine wrath, wrath which is already upon the unconverted and which is yet to come in the punishment of sin in hell. Far from believing that because modern man does not like this truth it should not be preached, he regarded warning as an essential part of gospel preaching.” (2) “Human helplessness and inability in sin. To teach men that they possess the ability to turn from sin when they choose to do so is to hide the true extent of their need.” (3) A changed life is the only proof that a person has truly believed. “It means that an evangelist must exercise care lest by a mere appeal to self-interest he induces a ‘decision’ which, far from being saving, is perfectly consistent with a person remaining in an unregenerate condition. A presentation of the gospel chiefly in terms of its ability to fulfil man’s need of happiness and other blessings, and which fails to show that man’s relationship to God ‘is much worse than everything else’ in his condition, may well receive a considerable though temporary success. A salvation conceived ‘not as something primarily that brings us to God but as something that gives us something’ requires no real conviction of sin in order to its acceptance. ML-J was not surprised that such evangelism could be carried on with glibness and lightness and that its result was to add the unspiritual and careless to the churches. The true convert always wants deliverance from the power as well as the guilt of sin.”

You can listen to his sermons at <https://www.mljtrust.org/sermons/>.

[Murray, D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Vol. 2, pp. 323-328, published by Banner of Truth]

7/10/25

There is no doubt that the Lord mightily used the preaching of Lloyd-Jones. All his books, and there are scores, are his sermons and addresses in print. 'Preaching & Preachers' (1971) is a book of his lectures at Westminster Theological Seminary in 1969. I am going to use his biography to make observations about his preaching.

1. Introduction. "No title was announced beforehand and the opening sentence had liturgical uniformity, 'The words to which I should like to draw your attention this morning are to be found in ...' and there followed a clear and emphatic announcement of the text upon which he intended to preach." The emphasis is on the Word of God being brought to the hearers.
2. Preparation & Delivery. He largely preached consecutive series of sermons, for example, 6 sermons on Habakkuk in 1950 (in print as 'From Fear to Faith'). This meant that "his usual method of obtaining sermons ... consisted of hard and sustained work." However he believed that "no preacher should tie himself to a fixed schedule. Freedom to be directed by the Spirit is vital to preaching." So about delivery he stated, "the pulpit message which contains precisely what the speaker had prepared and no more, with nothing extemporaneous, is a message which falls seriously short of Biblical preaching."
3. Style. "In the 1950's ML-J was virtually alone in England in engaging in what he meant by 'expository preaching.' For preaching to qualify for that designation it was not enough, in his view, that its content be biblical; addresses which concentrated on word-studies, or which gave running commentary and analyses of whole chapters, might be termed 'biblical', but that is not the same as exposition. To expound is not simply to give the correct grammatical sense of a verse or passage, it is rather to set out the principles or doctrines which the words are intended to convey. True expository preaching is, therefore, doctrinal preaching, it is preaching which addresses specific truths from God to man. The expository preacher is not one who 'shares his studies' with others, he is an ambassador and a messenger, authoritatively delivering the Word of God to men. Such preaching presents a text, then, with that text in sight throughout, there is deduction, argument and appeal, the whole making up a message which bears the authority of Scripture itself." This emphasis on doctrine is what John Piper wished had been more part of his early preaching.
4. 'Unction.' "One could possess the natural ability and the understanding of the truth necessary to follow to expository method, yet still never be a preacher at all. The Holy Spirit must be active in true preaching, active not only in owning the truth as it is heard but active in anointing the preacher himself. Only then is his heart as well as his mind rightly engaged and the result is speech attended by liveliness, by unction and the extemporaneous element already mentioned."
5. Oratory. "He was very conscious of his gift of eloquence, and even afraid of it, ... An example of this is the fact that although he was a master of story telling, he was very spare in his use of illustrations, believing that their frequent use, instead of effecting spiritual good, 'panders to the carnality of the people who are listening.' At the same time, he knew that no subject was more worthy of true oratory than the Word of God and he believed that the truth needed to be presented in a form which could attract the interest of the non-Christian. Preachers are responsible for making people listen."

Here is a final comment on the worship at Westminster Chapel in those days. If we benefit from considering it, remember that ML-J was counter-cultural in the desire to be biblical.

“The form of worship at Westminster Chapel was not the result of conformity to a prevailing tradition; it was rather the result of convictions which had existed in an earlier age but which were already largely disappearing in the mid-twentieth century.”

[Murray, D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Vol. 2, pp. 258-273, published by Banner of Truth]

30/9/25

David Martyn Lloyd-Jones was the minister of Westminster Chapel in the heart of London from 1939-1968. He was one of the most influential preachers of his time with thousands gathering to hear him all over Britain, and in other parts of the world he visited. [You can hear him at <https://www.mljtrust.org/sermons>.] In a time when church attendance was declining the Chapel grew. Other churches were seeking to attract people. There was no such attempt at the Chapel, and this is exactly what explains its growth under God! Our Sunday services are to worship God, so we seek to do only what pleases Him. In his biography of Lloyd-Jones (ML-J), Murray describes a typical Sunday morning service. What strikes me is how deliberate ML-J was, whether or not you agree with him.

1. The start. The preacher came to the pulpit and “bowed his head momentarily in prayer. A note from the organ then brought the whole congregation to its feet for the unannounced singing of the doxology.” The people sat and with the opening words, ‘Let us pray,’ there was “a short prayer, addressed to God the Father.”
2. The first hymn. “The opening hymns were strong in their objective statements about God ... To the choice of hymns he always gave much care and they were chosen with reference to the unity of the service as a whole. The theme of the first hymn was one of praise, ... There was nothing in the way of a conductor ... During all worship his whole being was a study of concentration; he never used times of singing as an opportunity to look round the congregation or to glance at notes. ... If there were celebrities in the congregation he neither knew or cared. He was there to worship God and never raised his eyes from his hymn book. The idea that the minister should smile benignly at the people, or make them ‘feel welcome’ with some words of social greeting, was foreign to his whole conception of the grandeur of Christian worship. If the church were the minister’s home and the people his guests, then, he argued, it would be permissible to say, ‘Good morning folks; nice to see you, how good of you to come,’ but he regarded that whole approach as wrong; ‘It is not our service; the people do not come to see us or please us ... They, and we, are there to worship God.’”
3. Scripture reading. “He read (always himself) at moderate speed, in ordinary tones and with nothing resembling an affected elocution. But inflection of voice always drew sufficient attention to the sense of the words.”
4. The second hymn “was invariably part of a metrical psalm.”
5. The main prayer, “what many regarded as the high point of the early part of the service ... While only one voice was heard, it was unmistakably clear that Dr Lloyd-Jones was praying on the understanding that true public prayer is corporate prayer. He used no singular pronouns, but always the plural ... Yet there was not a phrase nor a sentence which each Christian could not regard as his own... There was both a consciousness of sin and a thankfulness for what God is... If the minister appeared to speak boldly with God it was clear that the most discouraged Christian in the congregation, or even one who was no Christian at all, might do the same, ... We never heard it commended for ‘eloquence’ or

criticized either for verging on preaching or for being too long. It was prayer which left the impression that there is such a thing as first-hand communion with God... Dr Lloyd-Jones' language in prayer was natural and unadorned. Although he had such a large command of both Scripture and hymnology, he did not regard quotation as appropriate in prayer. If occasionally a quotation was introduced, it was used as a plea to God or as a profession of trust in Him... As much as half of the long prayer was generally taken up with intercession, in which there was usually a similar pattern in the order of the petitions ... 'The aged and infirm,' those on 'beds of pain' and other groups were represented by the same terms week by week.

6. Announcements. "These all related to the next services of public worship at Westminster. No other notices were ever read, except for the intimation of the annual appeal for aid to various evangelical and missionary agencies."

7. The third hymn. "... its theme looking forward to the sermon either by invocation of the aid of God or by the relation of its subject matter to the subject about to be introduced."

All the above took about 35 minutes, and was thoroughly God-centred.

Next week I will write on his preaching.

[Murray, D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Vol. 2, pp. 253-258, published by Banner of Truth]

23/9/25

Hebrews 11 is a well-known and wonderful chapter about FAITH. Ignore the chapter division, because in 10:38 the writer has mentioned faith in quoting Habakkuk 2:4, and then writes that he is sure those to whom he is writing "have faith and preserve their souls." The new chapter is "for the illustration and enforcement of his exhortation" (see 10:35), and in it he "brings forward a great variety of instances, from the history of former ages, in which faith had enabled individuals to perform very difficult duties, endure very severe trials, and obtain very important blessings." Because faith is so necessary for perseverance in our Christian lives, it is vital to understand exactly what faith is. Many today think that faith is convincing yourself that you want something and then praying to God about it without any doubt. How often is it said to someone who is not healed, 'You don't have enough faith.'

The writer to the Hebrews explains exactly what faith is in 11:1. There are two parts:

(1) "It is a confidence (assurance) respecting things hoped for... A promise is made respecting future good. I am satisfied that He who promises is both able to willing to fulfil His promise. I believe it; and in believing it, I have a confidence respecting the thing which I hope for.

(2) "It is a conviction respecting things not seen... A revelation is made respecting what is not evident either to my sense or to my reason. I am satisfied that this revelation comes from One who cannot be deceived, and who cannot deceive. I believe it; and in believing it, I have a conviction in reference to things which are not seen."

The writer concludes: This faith is "the grand spring of dutiful exertion, and dutiful submission; it is this, and this alone, that can induce a man to persevere in doing and suffering the will of God, till in due time the promised blessing is obtained."

Of all the examples in Hebrews chapter 11, one of the most amazing is that of Abraham and Isaac (verses 17-19). God tested Abraham when He commanded him to offer his son as a burnt offering (Genesis 22:2). Brown makes it very clear that "the commandment was given

apparently in such a manner as left Abraham no room to doubt that it was the commandment of Jehovah. Without this, there had been no sufficient ground for faith, or for the trial of faith." Faith operates in response to what God has revealed. We do not decide something and then come to God in what we call faith; that is actually presumption, for God has not spoken. Brown shows how severe this trial was for Abraham. "He is commanded to do what is, apparently, equally inconsistent with the divine command and the divine promise." "He must not only consent to the death of a son, but he must with his own hand put him to death; and he must do this, not while his mind is warm and agitated by the divine communication, but after an interval of some days, during the whole of which the revolting deed, in all its horrors, must be before his mind. And then such a son—the son of his old age." "Had he been weak in faith, he would have doubted whether the two revelations (the command and the promise), apparently inconsistent, could come from the same God, or, if they did, whether such a God ought to be trusted or obeyed. But being strong in faith, he reasoned in this way: 'This is plainly God's command. I have satisfactory evidence of that; and therefore it ought to be immediately and implicitly obeyed. I know Him to be infinitely wise and righteous, and what He commands must be right. Obedience to this command does indeed seem to throw obstacles in the way of the fulfilment of a number of promises which God has made to me. I am quite sure God has made these promises. I am quite sure that He will fulfil them. How He is to perform them, I cannot tell. That is His province, not mine. It is His to promise, and mine to believe—His to command, and mine to obey—His to bestow blessings, and mine to receive them; but I am persuaded that, sooner than let these promises fail of accomplishment, God will reanimate the ashes of my Isaac, and that in him ... my seed shall yet be called.'"

Apply the same reasoning to the other examples in Hebrews 11.

Let us apply this to our own lives, to believe whatever God has said, and to do whatever He has commended, and leave everything to Him who possesses all wisdom and power.

[All the quotations are from John Brown's commentary on Hebrews; you may read it online.]

19/9/25

I am going to continue with Fairbairn on Ezekiel because it is so important for our understanding of all of Old Testament prophecy. For example, does the Bible prophesy the setting up of the state of Israel in 1948? We sought to answer that question last week. Another question concerns the temple that Ezekiel spoke about in chapters 40-48. A temple was rebuilt after the return from exile, but it is obviously not the one that Ezekiel wrote about. So are we to expect a temple yet to be built in Jerusalem? Many have this expectation. Are they correct? Fairbairn writes that the prevailing view has been "the 'Christian-spiritual', or typical view ... a grand, complicated symbol of the good God had in reserve for His Church, especially under the coming dispensation of the Gospel." He gives the following supporting reasons.

1. The description of the temple is given in visions (40:1-2). Such visions "presented a vivid picture of what either then actually existed or was soon to take place, but in a form quite different from external reality." He points to chapters 1-3 and 8-11 as examples.
- 2-3. "There are things in the description which, taken literally, are in the highest degree improbable, and even involve natural impossibilities." There is the great size of this temple

(42:20), and of the city of Jerusalem (48:35), for example. There is “the distribution of the remainder of the land in equal portions among the twelve tribes in parallel sections, running straight across from east to west, without any respect to the peculiar circumstances of each, or their relative numbers...” (47:13—48:29). There is “the supposed separate existence of the twelve tribes, which now, at least can scarcely be regarded otherwise than a natural impossibility, since it is an ascertained fact that such separate tribeships no longer exist.”

4. The literal understanding implies “the ultimate restoration of the ceremonials of Judaism, so it inevitably places the prophet in direct contradiction to the writers of the New Testament.” The sacrifices are for atonement (45:15,17,20) but this is what Christ has done once for all. He cites what Jesus said to the Samaritan woman (Jn. 4:21), and the teaching of Hebrews that the old covenant with its Aaronic priesthood has been done away with (e.g. 8:13).

5. “The representation of things to come is thrown into the mould of something similar in the past, and presented simply a reproduction of the old,... while still the thing meant was, not that outward form, but that the essential nature of the past should revive.” He gives a previous example of the iniquity-bearing (ch. 4), where “the judgements described as alighting ... on the houses of Israel and Judah, are represented under a return of the periods of time spent of old in Egypt and the wilderness; ... it was the return, not of those precise periods of time, but of similar afflictive and disciplinary methods of dealing that were there predicted.”

6. It might be thought that because Ezekiel gives specific details that it must be literal. But Fairbairn notes that Ezekiel is distinguished for his “numberless particularisms.” So we would expect that “when going to present a grand outline of the good in store for God’s Church and people, the picture should be drawn with the fullest detail.”

7. Fairbairn wants us to consider the purpose of the Jewish temple and ministry. They possessed no “independent value apart from the spiritual truths they symbolically expressed.” “It was one of the capital errors of the Jews, in all periods of their history, to pay too exclusive a regard to the mere externals of the temple and its worship, without discerning the spiritual truths and principles that lay concealed under them.” They relied on the presence of the temple believing it could never be destroyed.

8. We must remember that Ezekiel lived in Old Testament times and he spoke in the language of those times. He speaks of Gospel times and they are revealed in the language of our New Testament.

[Please do read for yourself: Fairbairn, An Exposition of Ezekiel, pp. 435-452]

10/9/25

The prophecy of Ezekiel in the Old Testament is not an easy part of God’s word to understand. This is because the style of writing is full of symbolism. One of the best commentaries is an old one, written by Patrick Fairbairn in 1855 (2nd. ed.). It is available online at <https://www.monergism.com>. In chapter 34:11-31 the future blessings upon His people Israel are described. There are many who insist on taking everything written literally, so the continue to look for fulfilment for Israel as a nation. Fairbairn rejects this as a way of interpretation.

(1) Fairbairn notes that when judgement is threatened, “it takes the form of a renewal of the old.” There is a prediction of “the return of the years of former troubles and desolations, ... even of the more peculiar afflictions of the Egyptian-state of bondage and oppression, and the dreary sojourn in the wilderness.” This is even true in the predicted experience of other nations, such as Egypt—“passing through Israel’s peculiar experiences of evil, her bondage, her dispersion, and even her forty years’ sojourn in the wilderness (see 29:11-13). So it is not to be taken literally. “Not that in any of these cases of threatened judgement there was to be the exact reproduction of the old, but only a renewal of its general character and design—a repetition of it in its essential moral features.

(2) He insists that the same principle of interpretation must be used for the blessings. He notes that Ezekiel promises “a recovered possession of the mountains of Israel, and a secure habitation there as in the best periods of the past, and a fruitful inheritance and a united people dwelling under the peculiar favour and blessing of Jehovah.” But what will we do with the promise that David will be their shepherd (vv. 23-24)? It is not “the literal David restored to life again, but a distinguished scion (descendent) of David’s house” (see 17:22; 21:27). Ezekiel “foretells simply the nature of the coming future under the form of the old landmarks and well-known relations. The best of the past shall revive again; more than revive, it shall appear free from the defects that formerly intermingled with it, clothed with a perfection and completeness hitherto unknown.” Fairbairn notes that when this ‘David’ came He was so much superior to David, and thus makes the following conclusion: “All the rest (i.e. the promises) must receive a corresponding enlargement: the region, the people, the inheritance of blessing, must severally be what the old but represented and typified; therefore no longer confined to the ancient landmarks and conditions, but found wherever Christ Himself is, and reaching as far and as high as the blessings of His great redemption extend. And what Canaan would have been with its David restored again, and all its covenant blessings enjoyed in richest profusion, such, in the new and higher sphere of the Messiah’s kingdom, shall the whole domain be over which He is Lord, when this promise of good things to come attains to its full and final accomplishment. Nothing shall be left in it that can hurt or offend; it shall be the inheritance of the saints in light.”

Fairbairn raises the question: “Could the promise of the Messiah, and of the affairs connected with His work and kingdom, have been unfolded to the Church beforehand, with any degree of detail, excepting under the form and shadow of Old Testament relations? We unhesitatingly answer, No; not unless the Spirit of God had violently controlled the minds of the prophets, and superseded the free exercise of their faculties.” He concludes: “In conceiving of the higher, and anticipating the future things of God’s kingdom, the mind must always serve itself of the objects and relations of the present... The future must always take shape in our minds from the present or the past, the unknown from the known.” He gives the example of the description of the glories to come under the pictures of present carnal delights, such as “rivers of pleasure, feasts of joy, pavements of gold, sceptres, crowns, thrones of glory.” See for example Isaiah 25:6ff.; Revelation 21 & 22.

May the Lord help us as we interpret His word, and especially Old Testament prophecy.

[please consult my paper entitled ‘Fairbairn vs. Fairbairn’ at <https://www.keithunderhill.com> under Resources/Seminary Papers]

2/9/25

Oliver Allmand-Smith has written a book on worship, yet to be published, titled 'Gathered for Glory: Why we Worship' (to be published by Broken Wharfe). One chapter is on 'Why do we Confess' and it has to do with the public confession of sin by the worship leader on behalf of the whole congregation. In my 50 years of ministry I think I have been weak here, and want to share with you why this element in our worship is so essential.

We are given four biblical reasons why confession of our sins every time we meet should be part of our worship.

1. God's Holy Presence. Exodus 3:2-6; Judges 13:22; Job 42:5-6; Isaiah 6:1-5; Luke 5:8; Revelation 1:17. We come to worship a God of 'holy and transcendent purity.' There is none like Him. "If we truly want to enter into God's presence in worship, we *must* acknowledge and confess our sinfulness, following the example set for us in God's word. If we do not, we are not coming before the God of transcendent purity, but an idol of our own making. This is so easy for us to do, replacing biblical priorities with our own man-centred forms. Instead of beginning our service with a fresh vision from Scripture of the true and living God in all his holy transcendence, we begin with positive, self-affirming songs about how much we are blessed and elevated by Christ. Not that such songs are entirely inappropriate, but they cannot come first. We need to begin where God begins, not with us, but with himself... And when we begin with God, our first response is never self-elevation, but the very opposite... (Isa. 6:5)."

2. God's Holy Law. "By means of specific commandments related to the details of our moral behaviour, the law exposes our specific sins and shows us the ways we have offended our sovereign Lord." This is the way the Lord dealt with the rich, young ruler. We constantly ask for forgiveness in the Lord's Prayer. "We should refer regularly to the law of God in our readings, hymns, sermons and prayers—it is God's holy standard of righteousness, which exposes our need as wretched sinners."

3. God's Holy Purpose. "The purpose of confession in worship is that we might be holy, even as God is holy" (Leviticus 19:2; 1 Peter 1:13-16). Daniel 9:4-7 is an example of corporate confession of sin. Many of our sins are corporate. "We can often have a misguided or a misplaced sense of privacy. We do not want to interfere and therefore allow one another to continue in sins. As we confess our sins together, we repent together and hold one another accountable for that repentance, as the churches in Revelation 2-3 were required to do."

4. God's Holy Son. "God's holy Son promises full atonement only to those who confess their sins. Only those who confess their sins are forgiven, receiving absolution from God, welcomed into the holy place, and enabled to abide under the shadow of the almighty." 1 John 1:9; Psalm 32:3-6. "We should frequently hear during worship, and especially in prayer, those comfortable words of absolution, pardon, cleansing, forgiveness, atonement, justification."

26/8/25

David Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981) is perhaps the most well-known preacher in Britain of the twentieth century. I have just completed reading a new book by Geoffrey Thomas, 'Letters to My Grandson' (DayOne, 2025), which is a very accessible introduction to Lloyd-Jones, his life and doctrine. It has spurred me to reread the two volume biography by Iain Murray (Banner of Truth, 1982/1990). Lloyd-Jones was at the top of his medical profession when in 1927 the Lord called him into the ministry and for 11 years preached in a very working-class town in South Wales. From 1938 he was the minister in Westminster Chapel in central London, from where the Lord gave him an international influence. These biographies are much more than interesting history. Why did he minister the way he did? His ministry was so different from much that went before, as he rejected the liberalism that had swamped the churches in Wales from the latter part of the nineteenth century. By God's grace He saw great blessing, with hundreds converted in Aberavon (South Wales). "Modern preaching, Dr Lloyd-Jones believed, had gone fundamentally wrong. He saw the main proof of that fact in the failure of the pulpit to recognise that the first work of the Holy Spirit is to convict of sin and to humble men in the presence of God. He knew that any preaching which soothes, comforts and pleases those who have never been brought to fear God, nor to seek his mercy, is not preaching which the Spirit of God will own. The truth is that he was going back to a principle once regarded as imperative for powerful evangelistic preaching, namely, that before men can be converted they must be convicted of sin. In 1883 C. H. Spurgeon declared: 'In the beginning, the preacher's business is not to convert men, but the very reverse. It is idle to attempt to heal those who are not wounded, to attempt to clothe those who have never been stripped, and to make those rich who have never realized their poverty...' Among the varied features of Dr Lloyd-Jones' preaching nothing was to be more prominent than his insistence that, before the gospel can do good, men must be brought to understand the radical nature of sin... Accordingly, a large number of his sermons were preached with the specific intention of awakening spiritual concern. 'The way to obtain salvation is to seek it, and what makes one seek from it is that one realises one's need of it.'" (pages 206-207)

Preaching for conviction of sin is not so that a person can try to change his life by himself. It is to show that he is helpless and needs Christ. "Are we to lecture him on his sins and to preach morality to him? No, we are to preach Christ to him and do all we can to convert him, for what he needs is a new nature, a new outlook, a new mind. It is no use our expecting to find figs on a thorn bush, however much we may treat and tend and care for it. The trouble is the root. We are wasting our time and neglecting our duty by preaching morality to a lost world. For what the world needs is life, new life, and it can be found in Christ alone." (page 160)

May God the Holy Spirit raise up such preachers, and use such preaching today!

[There are two volumes of evangelistic sermons of Lloyd-Jones, published by Banner of Truth: Evangelistic Sermons at Aberavon, and Old Testament Evangelistic Sermons]

22/8/25

I am back again to Hebrews as I continue to read through John Brown's commentary.

6:4-6 is infamous for the variety of interpretations. I wish to summarize Brown's exposition of Hebrews 5:11-6:8 as the verses can only be understood in their wider context. The

particular phrase that has caused much controversy is, “it is impossible ... to restore them again to repentance” (vv. 4,6). Brown lists 3 wrong approaches:

- In the early church, anyone who after baptism had fallen into open sin, especially the sin of denying the faith a time of persecution, would not be accepted back even if they professed repentance.
- True Christians may commit apostasy, that is, totally fall away from the faith and be lost.
- Two types of people often get greatly distressed by this statement. Those who are not true Christians fall into gross sin and doubt if they can ever be saved. Those who are real Christians, “who fall under the power of mental disease and so sink into a state of spiritual languor or are betrayed into great open transgressions of divine law as Peter and David,” doubt if they are Christians and can be saved.

(1) 5:11-14 refers to two kinds of readers of the letter—the child and the mature, those “unskilled in the word of righteousness” and those who have “powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.” The first had once been taught so that they now ought to be teachers, but rather they need to be taught again.

(2) 6:1-3. As so often we should not automatically think that a chapter division marks a new subject. The writer determines not to write the basics all over again, but to go on to “maturity” (see v. 3). This shows that not all the Hebrews were in the deplorable state of being “dull of hearing.”

(3) 6:4-6 gives the reason for going on to teach the “solid food”. These verses are about those who are unable to benefit from his teaching about Jesus being a high priest “after the order of Melchizedek” (5:10, which he does start in chapter 7). At first they received the foundation teachings and rejoiced in them (6:1-2). As part of “faith” these included teaching about the Son of God, that He is the Messiah, the Saviour from sin through the cross. They once professed faith in Him. What if they “fall away” and cease to have this faith, which is where their dullness will lead them? Brown writes, “It is not possible, by a renewed statement of Christian principles and their evidence, to bring back *these* apostates (= those who have fallen away). Nothing can be stated but what has already been stated, which they seemed to understand, which they professed to believe, but which they now openly and contemptuously reject. No evidence, stronger than that which has been brought before their minds, and which they once seemed to feel the force of, can be presented to them.” Turning away from the gospel of Christ is to say ‘He is not the Saviour; He claimed to be, but was a deceiver.’ The impossibility is not on God’s side, but on their’s; they will not repent, return. The list of their experiences (6:4-5) does not prove they were true believers, only professing believers, for the Bible is clear that true believers cannot totally and finally give up the faith (see Jn. 10:28-29).

(4) 6:7-8. These verses teach the same thing under figurative language. There are those who receive the word and bear fruit (v. 7). There are others who produce no fruit and are “near to being cursed” (v. 8) This is a warning to such Hebrews who have become dull of hearing. Let us beware lest our enthusiasm for the teaching of Scripture dulls.

If the above exposition is true, it shows how important it is, not to jump in at a verse and try to understand it by itself, but to consider the context both before and after. Let us also be quite clear that this passage does NOT teach that a true Christian can be finally lost.

14/8/25

'Am I sure I am a Christian?' is one of the most important questions I can ask myself. I must ask it because of the real danger of self-deception. There are two parts to the answer. First, I must be sure that I am coming to God in the way He has provided. Second, I must have the evidence in myself that I know God, that I am born of Him.

1. What is the sure way of acceptance with God? Those to whom the Letter of Hebrews is written were being tempted to go back from their Christian confession to their former religion. In chapter 10 the writer compares the Old Testament sacrificial system with the sacrifice of Christ, and ends by exhorting them "to draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith" (10:22). The OT animal sacrifices were but shadows, not the real thing, and they could never take away sins (10:1-4). God had no delight in those sacrifices in the sense that they could not themselves save anyone. What delighted God was the coming of His Son in a true human body to willingly submit to His will (10:5-10). Unlike the repeated animal sacrifices, He offered Himself up once, because He actually took away sins. How do we know that is what He accomplished? He "sat down at the right hand of God" (10:11-13) because He had completed the work. The writer argues that if something is only done once it is because the objective has been completed (10:14-18). Through Christ's one offering we have been "sanctified" (10:10), we have been "perfected for all time" (10:14). Your assurance is totally dependent upon Christ, His coming in a body on your behalf, and His once for all offering of Himself in that body on the cross. There is no other way of forgiveness. The Lord's Supper is not a sacrifice for sins. There is no place called 'Purgatory' where sins are purged after death. Our crucified Lord has done it, He has made purification. It is done! (see Hebrews 1:3; 9:14). Is this where you assurance lies?

2. How can you be sure you have true faith in Christ? This is why the letter of 1 John was written (see 5:13). False teachers had come and had sown doubt, first of all about Jesus Himself. They denied He was the Christ (2:22); they denied He had come in the flesh (4:2); they probably denied he came by "blood" (5:6), so not believing in His atonement. True faith has the proper object, the Lord Jesus Christ as revealed in the Scriptures. There are those who don't believe that Jesus was a real man, or He is not God incarnate, or that Jesus became the Son at His baptism. Such do not have true faith. These false teachers also denied that they were sinners, at least after they professed Christianity (1:8,10). Yet it is the mark of a true believer that being saved from sin we now want to be obedient to God's commands (2:3; 3:24; 5:3). And there are two that are emphasized in the letter – faith in Christ and love to the saints (see 3:23). You may not understand all that is written about Jesus in the Bible, but you must trust Him. Have you gone to Him like the tax collector and pled, "God be merciful to me, the sinner"? If so, you find yourself identified with others who also trust Him. You count them as brothers, and you will do anything for them (2:9-11; 3:11-18; 4:7-12). The false teachers had left these believers and had departed the local church (2:19). Such love is a great evidence of true faith (see also Ephesians 1:15), "We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers (3:14). These marks are not the way you become a Christian, but the evidence that you are born of God that God has worked in you. You have been grafted into the vine and the life of the vine is flowing through you.

[Summary of sermons preached in Belvidere Road Church, August 3 & 17, 2025]

5/8/25

One of the reasons for writing these weekly posts is to encourage you to read what I think are very helpful pieces of writing. One of my favourite Bible commentators is John Brown of Edinburgh (1784-1858). His published commentaries include, 1 Peter, Galatians, Hebrews, Romans, and Discourses and Sayings of Our Lord. They are all available online. I am presently reading his commentary on Hebrews, available from Banner of Truth, and online at <https://www.monergism.com/exposition-epistle-hebrews-ebook>. Brown was both a scholar and an “earnest preacher,” and both features are seen in his commentaries. I want to use his comments in his introduction to Hebrews 2:5-18 to illustrate the great value of his commentary, as well as the meaning of the passage!

“This paragraph is certainly one of the most difficult of interpretation in the whole inspired volume. A considerable portion of that difficulty originates in the uncertainty as to the precise object which the Apostle had in view in writing it. Nothing is of greater importance to the right understanding of an author’s particular statements, arguments, and illustrations, than a clear apprehension of the general object he has in view.” He proceeds to give two of the most plausible views, and the reasons why he favours the one he does.

(1) It continues the argument from 1:4-14 for the superiority of Jesus Christ to the angels. If this is the correct view then “the world to come” is subjected to Christ and the quotation from Psalm 8 proves that it is applied to Christ. Brown responds that Psalm 8 is not Messianic. Further, “man” (v. 8) is mankind in general (so v. 6), and is contrasted with Jesus (v. 9). He adds that this interpretation makes the statement about Jesus’ suffering unto death (v. 9) to introduce a new train of thought when he is sure that “from the 5th. verse down to the close of the chapter, there is but one subject of discussion.”

(2) It answers the objection to the doctrine of the superiority of Jesus Christ to the angels “from the consideration of his being a man—a mortal man...—a man who actually died.” Brown agrees with this view and explains the thinking: “That Jesus Christ, a man, a suffering man, should be placed at the head of the divine administration in the new economy, is not wonderful; for God has subjected the economy, not to angels, but to men. The design of that economy is to raise men to the highest place among the creatures of God; and this design is accomplished by His becoming a man, and submitting to suffering and death, and thus obtaining both for Himself and His people that state of transcendent dignity and honour which an ancient prophet (as in Ps. 8) predicted would be possessed by men in the world to come.” Note that he interprets ‘the world to come’ from the Old Testament perspective of the kingdom of God that came with Jesus, and not only of the final glory. You might ask yourself, Does it really make any difference? Surely there is nothing more important than a correct interpretation of God’s word!! Listen to Brown telling his students: ‘It is of radical importance to you that your views be not only consistent with, but derived from a careful exegesis of the words which the Holy Spirit teaches ... It has been my sincere desire to bring out of the inspired words what is really in them, and to put nothing into them that is not really there; impressed with the conviction that imaginary exposition is one of the worst ways of adding to the words of prophecy of this book, and that he who thus adds to God’s word, deceiving and being deceived, is in great danger of proving himself a liar.’ Paul

commands Timothy, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15). Brown exemplifies this diligence.

29/7/25

I would like to do one more post on Owen's book about 'for whom did Christ die?' It is often claimed that universal redemption (i.e. Christ dying for everyone) shows God to be far more gracious because it shows that God loves everyone equally. As a result it is thought that there is far more encouragement for the sinner to trust in Christ if sure 'Christ died for me.' So Owen poses the challenge, whether there is more 'consolation' in a universal redemption, or in an effectual redemption only for the elect. He gives four reasons for showing that only this effectual redemption has sure grounds for consolation.

(1) "The extending of the death of Christ into a universality, in respect of the object, cannot give the least ground of consolation." Those who believe Christ died for everyone, also believe there are many of them who will perish. The Bible declares so plainly that on the day of judgement there will be both the saved and the unsaved. So Owen asks: "What good will it do me to know that Christ died for me, if notwithstanding that I may perish forever?" He imagines this conversation between a believer in universal redemption and the sinner.

Be encouraged, Christ died for all sinners, and you know yourself to be a sinner.

Ans, But has Christ died for ALL the sins of sinners? If so, how can any perish? What about the sin of unbelief?

Don't exclude yourself, for God loves all sinners and excludes none.

Ans. But I have excluded myself by not believing. Will He then take me in? Has Christ died to give me the ability to believe?

God has opened a door for all to be saved who choose to go in.

Ans. Alas, it is vain to open a grave for a dead man to come out. Who lights a candle for a blind man to see?

(2) "The denying of the efficacy of the death of Christ towards them for whom He died cuts the nerves and sinews of all strong consolation." If Christ died for all, yet does not send strength to believe, then they will perish. If it depends on faith, then salvation is the work of faith and not the work of Christ. [Remember, faith is a gift of God (Eph. 2:8), and no one can come to Christ = to believe, unless drawn by the Father (Jn. 6:44).] From Romans 8:32-34 and 1 John 2:1-2 Owen shows that there is an inseparable connection between Christ's sacrificial death and His intercession at the right hand of the Father. Christ powerfully saves all for whom He died because He intercedes for them. He then makes a challenge: "Is this the consolation you afford us, to send us from free grace to free will (our faith)?" Since we have no power in ourselves to believe he considers this no consolation at all.

(3) "There is nothing in the doctrine of redemption of the elect only that is yet in the least measure to debar them from consolation." Owen denies that efficacious redemption is a hindrance to consolation. We believe in the sufficiency of the death of Christ to save every one who comes to Him, without exception. This is the encouragement in the gospel for the sinner to believe. When by grace they do believe they have the assurance from the Holy Spirit that Christ died for them.

(4) "The doctrine of the effectual redemption of the sheep of Christ, by the blood of the covenant, is the true solid foundation of all durable consolation." Owen concludes: "If there

be any comfort, any consolation, any assurance, any rest, any peace, any joy, any refreshment, any exaltation of spirit, to be obtained here below, it is all to be had in the blood of Jesus long since shed, and His intercession still continued; as both are united and appropriated to the elect of God, by the precious effects and fruits of them both drawn to believe and preserved in believing, to the obtaining of an immortal crown of glory, that shall not face away.

22/7/25

The book that I am reading by John Owen on the death of Christ, and those for whom He died, has a very important chapter on the interpretation of the Scriptures (Book IV, Chapter 1). He brings 10 'fundamental principles' from Scripture that must govern our understanding of indefinite expressions such as "all." We believe that Scripture interprets Scripture. The immediate context and the wider use of words must always inform us. For example, you read the word 'heaven'. How do you know whether it means the sky above, the starry expanse or God's dwelling place? Here are the 10 principles

1. The blood/death of Jesus Christ has infinite value (Acts 13:28; 20:28; Heb. 9:14; 1 Pet. 1:18). It is sufficient to redeem every person, if that is God's purpose. A universal redemption undervalues it, because it is not able to save anyone unless they choose to believe. In this case it is not the death of Jesus that saves, but the will of the sinner.
2. The new covenant is not established on the basis of personal or national distinctions (Col. 3:11; Joel 2:28; Rom. 1:5; Rev. 5:9; Jn. 11:52). "This gives occasion to many general expressions in Scripture." So for example, "all" often means 'all sorts/kinds', and not everyone universally (1 Tim. 2:1-6).
3. "The purpose and decree of God is not the rule of our duty; neither is the performance of our duty in doing what we are commanded any declaration of what is God's purpose to do, or His decree that it should be done." So our duty to preach to all does not mean that it is God's eternal purpose to save all, or that Christ died in order to save every single person.
4. The Jews were convinced that the Messiah was to come for themselves alone. So general expressions may mean 'Gentiles as well as Jews' (Jn. 11:52; 1 Jn. 2:2).
5. The indefinite words, such as 'world' and 'all,' do not necessarily imply universality. In fact, when you look at their use they rarely mean each and every person. For 'world' see Lk. 2:1; Jn. 1:1; 8:26; 12:19. For 'all' see Lk. 11:42; Acts 2:17; 10:12.
6. "The Scripture often speaks of things and persons according to the appearance they have," and not according to what they really are. Only God knows the heart. If someone claims to be a believer in Christ, we accept their profession and treat them accordingly.
7. Similarly to no. 6, what we speak "according to the judgement of charity" may turn out to be false. That someone we judged to be a Christian falls away from the faith does not mean that the elect might perish.
8. Only "believers shall certainly be saved." God's command to believe reveals our duty, and not His purpose. If the command to preach to all means that Christ died for all, then why do not all hear the gospel?
9. The reason why the gospel is preached to all is because of "the mixed distribution of the elect and reprobates, believers and unbelievers, according to the mind and purpose of God,

throughout the whole world, and in the several places thereof, in all or most of the single congregations,..." It is not because He died for all.

10. "The faith which is enjoined and commanded in the gospel has divers several acts and different degrees." Owen has five steps in faith. (1) Salvation is not in myself. (2) There is salvation in the promised Seed. (3) Jesus of Nazareth, the crucified One, is this Saviour. (4) Resting upon this Christ as a result of self-knowledge, conviction, a sense of sin, God's justice, free grace. (5) Faith in the power of the redemption in the blood of Jesus towards me in particular. All these are only possible by the help of God's Spirit. Owen asks, 'If Christ died for all, then why do not all have this faith?'

I hope Owen has demonstrated the carefulness needed in interpreting the Scriptures, that we do not jump to wrong conclusions based on a word or a verse. How much false teaching has entered into churches in this way!

15/7/25

Is this question really an important one, whether Christ died for absolutely everyone, or whether He died to save a specific people—believers, the elect, the church, His sheep? Knowing the truth is always important. I am going to use part of an article in *Reformation & Revival*. Webb writes this about an atonement for everyone: "Nothing could be further from what Scripture actually teaches about the atonement and nothing is so destructive to saving faith, or so misleading to the lost sinner!" Strong words indeed. He has three points.

(1) A limited atonement. "Unless you believe in universalism—the unscriptural notion that everyone will eventually go to heaven—you must limit the atonement in one way or another. You must either limit it regarding its scope (for whom it is offered) or in regarding its power (what it accomplished)." In other words, if Christ died for everyone, yet many are never saved, then the power of the atonement is limited. But if Christ died for a specific people, 'those the Father had given Him' (Jn. 6:37, 17:2), and they will all certainly be saved, then the scope is limited.

(2) A meaningful atonement. Webb gives this example. "Suppose I go to a man's wife and tell her, 'Oh, how your husband loves you! ... He is so thoughtful, caring and considerate towards you. And do you know what the very best thing there is about your husband's love? He loves every other woman ... just as much as he loves you.' The best way to make a husband's love meaningless is to extend it promiscuously to all women. It is the particular love that a husband has only for his wife that makes his love mean something. You may sing 'Power in the Blood', but if Christ's blood was shed equally and promiscuously for both those who will be saved and those who will perish, it is clear that the 'power' to save cannot be in the blood of Christ," but in the will of man. "Nothing is quite so destructive of saving faith as the teaching that Christ died for everyone. True, saving faith is a faith that turns its back on all other hopes and rests itself solely and wholly upon Christ and His work at the cross. If Christ did precisely the same thing for both the person going to heaven and the person going to hell, how, pray tell, can a sinner trust himself to the work of Christ alone? ... Whatever he perceives as making the difference (as to why one is saved and not another), that is what he must trust. And that is precisely why we have people trusting their decisions, trusting their having walked an aisle, trusting their prayers, trusting just about everything imaginable but the blood of Christ alone."

(3) What do you tell a sinner? “The modern ‘plan’ of salvation always assures a sinner that Christ has died for him, and then pleads with him to ‘accept’ what Jesus did for him at the cross.” Webb says that there is no example of such preaching in the Bible, and then explains why it is wrong. “Most will admit the very basic fact that Christ took upon Himself all the sins for those He died (whatever their number might be), and that He died to render a full and complete satisfaction to the broken law of God. Well, if God was satisfied in the death of His Son (and the resurrection was the proof that He was), how then can He justly put any person in hell for whom Christ has rendered a full and complete satisfaction? ... The question to be asked by the sinner seeking salvation is not whether Christ died for him. The question is this: Does that Man seated on that throne (at the right hand of God with all power) have the power to save a sinner like me?” Now read Heb. 7:25. “There is infinite merit in the work of Christ as Calvary.”

[Barry Webb, What Difference Does It Make? in Reformation & Revival, Volume 3, Number 1, Winter 1994, pages 55-60]

8/7/25

In his book ‘The Death of Death’, John Owen deals exhaustively with the subject, For Whom Did Christ Die?’ Probably most Christians respond, ‘Christ died for everyone’. Owen adds argument to argument how this cannot be true. So let’s begin. Very few who say that Christ died for all also believe that all will be in heaven. Some at least are lost. Owen asks how this can be if Christ died for them. The answer that usually comes is that there is a condition to receiving the benefits of Christ’s death, and that is faith. And we do all confess that without faith there is no salvation. Does this mean that Christ has done all He can to save us by being crucified, and that now it is up to us? Is this true then Owen argues that salvation depends on what we do, that we are really saved by our work of faith. Hear him reason. “If Christ died in the stead of all men, and made satisfaction for their sins, then He did it for all their sins, or only for some of their sins. If for some only, who then can be saved? If for all, why then are all not saved? They say it is because of their unbelief; they will not believe, and therefore are not saved. That unbelief, is it a sin, or is it not? If it be not, how can it be a cause of damnation? If it be, Christ died for it, or He did not. If He did not, then He died not for all the sins of all men. If He did, why is this an obstacle to their salvation?” (page 249).

Owen goes on to give the Biblical evidence that faith itself “is procured for us by the death of Christ; and so, consequently, He died not for all and every one, for ‘all men have not faith.’”

(1) The death of Jesus Christ purchased holiness and sanctification for us ... but faith, as it is a grace of the Spirit inherent in us, is formally a part of our sanctification and holiness (see Titus 2:14, Ephesians 5:25-26, 1 Corinthians 1:30, Romans 3:25).

(2) All the fruits of election are purchased for us by Jesus Christ, because we are chosen in Him (Ephesians 1:4, Romans 8:30).

(3) All the blessings of the new covenant are procured and purchased by Him in whom the promises thereof are ratified, and to whom they are made. Faith is one of the good things of the new covenant (Jeremiah 31:33-34, Ezekiel 36:25-27).

(4) That without which it is utterly impossible that we should be saved must of necessity be procured by Him by who we are fully and effectually saved. Faith is necessary to salvation

(Hebrews 11:6, Mark 16:16). Christ perfectly saves us (Matthew 1:21), procuring an eternal redemption (Hebrews 9:12), so faith must be included in that which Christ has procured for those for whom He died.

(5) The Scripture is clear, in express (clear) terms – Phil. 1:29, Eph. 1:3, Heb. 12:2.

This is Owen's conclusion (page 257). "If the fruit and effect procured and wrought by the death of Christ absolutely, not depending on any condition in man to be fulfilled, be not common to all, then Christ did not die for all ..."

[In a further post I will seek to show why this is important.]

1/7/25

I have started re-reading John Owen's great work, 'The Death of Death in the Death of Christ' (written in 1647). It is found in volume 10 of his Works and you can read it at <https://www.apuritansmind.com/>. I also direct your attention to J. I. Packer's very helpful Introductory Essay to John Owen's Death or Death at <https://www.monergism.com/> (34 pages). As Owen writes about the death of Christ, he believes that the most important thing is to know God's purpose, or the end, in His death. So near the beginning he reminds us that our redemption is not simply the work of Christ, but of all three Persons of the Trinity. What does each One do? We too often forget the Trinitarian nature of our faith. Here is a summary of Book One, Chapters 3-5, pages 163-179, in his Works.

1. The acts of the FATHER.

(1) The Father loves the world, and sends His Son to die (Jn. 3:16, Rm. 8:3-4, etc.). There are three parts to this. First, an authoritative imposition of the office of Mediator (Phil. 2:6-8). Second, the furnishing of Him in His sending with a fulness of all gifts and graces for the work, both the all-sufficient perfection of His Deity (Jn. 1:14), and a communicated fulness in His humanity (1 Tim. 2:5). Third, His entering into covenant and compact with His Son concerning the work to be undertaken: the Father's promise to protect and assist Him in the accomplishment of His work (Is. 49:2-3), and of success in it (Is. 49:6-12).

(2) The Father lays on Him the punishment of sins (Is. 53:4,6,10, 2 Cor. 5:21). Owen makes this observation: "It seems strange to me that Christ should undergo the pains of hell in their stead who lay in the pains of hell before He underwent these pains, and shall continue in them to eternity." He is thinking of those who teach that Christ died for everyone, yet some of those for whom He died end up in hell. If so, then the Father's purpose was not fulfilled, which is surely impossible.

2. The acts of the SON.

(1) His incarnation (Jn. 1:14, Gal. 4:4), taking our human nature into personal union with Himself.

(2) His offering of Himself to God ('oblation'), which includes all that He did in the days of His flesh, when He offered up prayers and supplications, with strong cries and tears until He had fully purged our sins in His death and sat down at the right hand of God (Heb. 9:14, Eph. 5:25-26).

(3) His intercession for all and every one of those for whom He gave Himself as an offering. He did not suffer for them and then refuse to intercede for them (1 Jn. 2:1-2, Jn. 17:9).

3. The acts of the HOLY SPIRIT.

(1) In the incarnation of the Son, being conceived by the Holy Spirit (Matt. 1:18).

(2) In the offering of the Son “through the eternal Spirit” (Heb. 9:14).

(3) In the resurrection of the Son (Rm. 8:11).

Conclusion. As the triune God works, each Person doing His part for accomplishing the one purpose of eternal salvation, “as they began it, so they will jointly carry along the application of it unto its ultimate issue and accomplishment.” God’s work cannot fail to accomplish its purpose. All for whom Christ offered Himself must be eternally saved!

25/6/25

In his book, ‘But for the Grace of God’, Philip Hughes, an Anglican, explains the Anglican view of grace as found in the Church’s standards, the Thirty-Nine Articles. He writes much against the sacramental view of grace that was being pushed by a segment of the Church, which is also the Roman Catholic view. This wrong view claims that grace is “automatically conveyed through the sacraments”, so independently from the preaching of the word. Let us see how he traces the results of this teaching. It “encouraged people to put their faith in sacraments instead of in the word... The priority of preaching was abandoned for the priority of priesthood. The dispensation of grace was placed to all intents and purposes in the hands of the priest, regarded, in particular, as the offerer of the so-called eucharistic sacrifice. The Christian table of fellowship was replaced by the altar of the mass. The teaching of transubstantiation focussed attention on the ‘consecrated’ elements and induced the practice of ‘reservation’ and adoration of an inanimate object the substance of which, it was taught, had been changed into the very substance of the physical body of Christ. Baptism, priestly absolution, and the sacerdotal (priestly) offering of masses, for both the living and the dead, became the prime necessities in the scheme of salvation.” The implication is that grace is tied to receiving the sacraments, which in turn must be received from a priest who “should have been ordained by a bishop standing in the historic succession ...”

If human beings are essential in the dispensing of grace, then it is just one further step to the exaltation of Mary as the one “who mercifully mediates grace to those who call upon her.” Thus the constant repetition of the ‘Hail Mary’. It is believed that Luke 1:28 teaches that she is full of grace in order to bestow it. It actually clearly means only that she has received such grace. It is claimed that “she is qualified to mediate all graces to men” because of her “co-operation in the work of redemption” (Luke 1:38). “It is commonly taught, firstly, that Mary is the channel of all graces in that she gave the Redeemer, who is the source of all graces, to the world, and, secondly, that since her assumption into heaven no grace is conferred on man without her actual intercessory co-operation.” In 1854 the dogma of Mary’s immaculate conception (i.e. without original sin) was promulgated, and then in 1950 her bodily assumption into heaven. These are official Catholic doctrines binding on all the faithful. Consider the following statements in papal encyclicals. “As no one can come to the Most High Father except through the Son, so, generally, no one can come to Christ except through Mary” (1891). Mary is the “mediatrix of the Mediator” (1896). Mary is the restorer of a fallen world and the dispenser of all the gifts of grace won for us by the death of Christ (1904). Hughes concludes: “The cult of Mary has indeed introduced another saviour and another gospel. It is a cult which makes nonsense of the apostolic affirmation that there is salvation in none other than Christ... It overthrows the

whole doctrine of grace so plainly delineated in the New Testament, which tells us that grace and truth came alone by Jesus Christ..."

[Philip E. Hughes, *But For the Grace of God*, 1964]

18/6/25

Nehemiah 13:15-22 records what Nehemiah did to re-establish obedience to the 4th commandment. This had already been agreed to by the people in a covenant (10:31). I want to bring to you what Davis has written in his commentary about the sabbath. "Exodus 31:12-17 indicates that the sabbath is a 'sign'. It marked out Israel as unique, for other peoples did not have the sabbath ... Note Exodus 20:8-11. The sabbath is a gift because God's people *shabat* on it, they *stop* work (Ex. 34:21)... Only a free people can do that. In Egypt they dare not have stopped work! But when Yahweh frees from bondage he enables them to cease from incessant work. Every week! The sabbath is a sign of grace and freedom, not of bondage. Slaves work all the time, but free people have the liberty of rest – including servants and livestock and sojourners! Here is the social benefit of the commandment. So when you insist on cluttering the sabbath with work ...

1. It is a failure of faith, because by your working and not 'stopping,' you are saying that you cannot trust Yahweh to provide for you but must keep working because all your life rests on your efforts.

2. It is a failure of compassion, because then your dependents (family, servants, livestock) will not enjoy rest. See Deuteronomy 5:14 for this social argument.

3. It is a choice of bondage, for you are deifying work, subjecting yourself to a continuous treadmill which Yahweh meant to interrupt weekly. But you are saying, 'No, I want to be a slave, I want to return to Egypt; I want to run, frustrated and exhausted, to Walmart and Target, to the grocery store and pharmacy, on the Lord's Day. I want to pay bills then, I want to complete seminary assignments then, I want to wash my car and mow my lawn and work on my income tax and go to the car dealership – I want to be a slave! I do not want rest or quietness or solitude – I might meet God.' (he is saying that it is as if you do not want to meet with God)

Yahweh's pattern is: work six days and stop. It is a way of saying that work is not god. These principles remain for the people of God, even though our culture and government is non-covenantal and pays no attention to them."

[Dale Ralph Davis, *Ezra & Nehemiah* (Christian Focus, 2025), 196-197]

9/6/25

Recently I got hold of a small book by the famed Bible commentator, Matthew Henry (1662-1714). It is titled, 'The Young Christian', and is an exhortation to sobriety. Personally, I have never before seen a treatment of this subject. Reading Henry made me realize what an important and neglected subject it is. Just consider the repeated references in the small letter of Paul to Titus. Elders must be "self-controlled" (1:8, "sober-minded" in NKJV). Older men are to be "sober-minded" and "self-controlled" (2:2, "sober" and "temperate" in NKJV). Older women are to train young women to be "self-controlled" (2:5, "discreet" in NKJV). Younger men are to be urged to be "self-controlled" (2:6, "sober-minded" in NKJV). God's grace in Christ trains us to live "self-controlled" lives (2:12, "soberly" in NKJV). By the

various translations you can begin to understand what is involved in the word 'sober'. It is to be self-controlled, sober in mind, temperate, even discreet. Other verses are Mark 5:15, Luke 8:35, 2 Corinthians 5:13 ("right mind", this and the following are from the ESV), Romans 12:3 ("sober"), 1 Timothy 2:9,15 ("self-control"), 1 Timothy 3:2,11, 2 Timothy 4:5 ("sober-minded"), 1 Peter 4:7 ("self-controlled & sober-minded").

Matthew Henry uses the following words to describe sobriety – considerate, cautious, humble, self-denying, gentle, chaste, composed, content, serious. Under the heading of considerate he writes to the young Christian: "You must be considerate and thoughtful, and not rash and heedless. To be sober-minded, is to make use of our reason, in reasoning with ourselves and in communing with our own hearts – to employ those noble powers and capacities, by which we are distinguished from, and dignified above the beasts, for those great ends for which we were endued with them, that we may not receive the grace of God in them in vain, but being rational creatures, may act rationally, as behoves us, as becomes us. You learned to walk when you were children, when will you learn to think – to think seriously – to think to the purpose? Floating thoughts your heads are full of, foreign and impertinent ones, when will you be brought to close and fixed thoughts, to think with concern and application of the great things that belong to your everlasting peace and welfare? ... Learn to think not only of what is just before you, which strikes the senses, and affects the imagination, but of the causes and consequences, and reason of things; to discover truths, to compare them with one another, to argue upon them and apply them to yourselves, and to bring them to a head; not to fasten upon that which comes first into your minds, but upon that which should come first, and which deserves to be first considered. Multitudes are undone because they are unthinking; inconsideration is the ruin of thousands, and many a precious soul perishes through mere carelessness. ... retire into your own souls, begin an acquaintance with them; it will be the most profitable acquaintance you can fall into, and will turn to the best account. While you are coveting to see the world, and to be acquainted with it, be not strangers at home."

[you can access it at <https://archive.org/details/youngchristian>]

28/5/25

O for more writers (and preachers) like Booth who seek to aim at the whole man, not just informing the mind, but stirring up our whole being.

Consider what he writes about grace reigning in our pardon.

"It is an absolutely perfect pardon; and to make it so three things are required. It must be full, free, and everlasting. That is, it must extend to all sin; it must be vouchsafed without any conditions, and it must be absolutely irreversible...

That forgiveness which is equal to the wants of a sinner, must be FULL; including all sins, be they ever so numerous; extending to all their aggravations, be they ever so enormous. Every sin being a transgression of Divine law, and every transgression subjecting the offender to a dreadful curse; if the guilt of every sin be not removed, if the penalty due to every sin be not remitted, the curse must fall upon us, and wrath must be our portion. Hence appears the necessity of a full pardon in order to happiness. And as it is essentially necessary, so it is granted. The Scriptures declare, that when our offended Sovereign pardons any of the human race, He forgives all their sins." He proceeds by bringing to our attention Jeremiah

33:8, Micah 7:19, Psalm 103:3, and forgiveness extended to the likes of Manasseh, Saul, and the dying thief. Then he addresses us directly: "Come, then, poor trembling sinner! though conscious that the number and magnitude of your sins are inexpressibly great: come, let us reason together, and contemplate the riches of grace. What though you are by nature an apostate creature and a child of wrath; ... yet still there is relief to be had... For, behold! there is full forgiveness with God; and such is His mercy, He waits to be gracious in bestowing the invaluable blessing."

"This forgiveness is ... absolutely FREE to the pardoned sinner. It is dispensed according to the riches of divine mercy, and is received in a way of grace... The death of Christ is the meritorious cause, and the glory of God is the ultimate end that Jehovah has in view when He bestows the blessing." He appeals to Ephesians 1:7, Isaiah 43:22-25, and refers to "some few of those eminent and everlasting monuments of grace as it reigns in the free pardon of sin," such as Saul, Zacchaeus, the Samaritan woman, the Philippian Jailer, the dying thief. For example, Booth reminds us how deeply wicked this man was even into his being crucified. Yet just a few hours before he died he was pardoned. What had he done? He had called on Jesus to 'remember' him. "How shamefully then do those persons injure the grace of God, and veil its most shining excellencies, who teach, or imagine, that pardon of sin is not to be expected, nor can be received, till the sinner is prepared for it by a course of humiliation, or self-denial, or of holy conversation?"

This forgiveness is EVERLASTING and irreversible. Referring to Hebrews 8:12, he writes: "If the Lord, whose royal prerogative it is to punish, or to pardon the criminal, declare that He will remember his iniquities no more, we may rest assured, that it is an everlasting pardon, a forgiveness never to be reversed. This declaration is not simply a promise; though a mere promise, from the God of truth, is irrevocable; but it is a promise in a federal form – an absolute promise, which faithfulness itself is engaged to fulfil. The continuance of a pardoned state, not depending on conditions to be performed by the sinner, but on the perpetual efficacy of our Lord's atonement, and on the inviolable faithfulness of the eternal God, there is all possible security that a full and free pardon, once granted, shall ever abide in its full force, and in all its glory." He further references Psalm 103:12, 32:1, Micah 7:19, Jeremiah 50:20, Romans 8:33.

He concludes: "Is my reader sensible of his want, and longing for the matchless blessing? Then look to the dying Jesus. Your iniquities, it is true, abound; but pardoning mercy, through His atonement, superabounds. Be of good cheer take encouragement: for the favour you so earnestly desire is a free gift..."

20/5/25

I am reading Abraham Booth's, *The Reign of Grace*. He has an inspiring chapter on 'Grace, as it reigns in our Justification.' He points out that Justification is more than pardon. It is a judicial declaration of righteousness. Because it is God who justifies He can only do so justly to one who has a perfect righteousness. But it is ungodly sinners that God justifies (Romans 4:5)! How is this possible? Where is that perfect righteousness to be found? He explains three false grounds of confidence.

- Works of the law. This is expressly denied in Scripture (Galatians 2:16). The law only shows us our sin (Romans 3:20), because we must keep it perfectly to be justified by it (Galatians 3:10).
- Faith as righteousness. There are those who teach that because none of us can keep the law, God under the new covenant accepts faith as the condition to be justified (they would appeal to Romans 4:3). But this makes faith a work to be rewarded and this is exactly what the Scripture denies in verses 1-2 before. Faith and works are always contrasted (as in Ephesians 2:8-9, Romans 3:28).
- Infused righteousness. A further error is to think a person is justified because of the work of the Holy Spirit in us making us holy. But this would be our righteousness and it is not perfect in this life. In Ephesians 2:9-10, Paul distinguishes between being saved by grace through faith and not by works, and the works a Christian does having been saved.

The true ground of confidence is “the finished work of Jesus Christ.” We need the righteousness of another imputed to us, put to our account, our heavenly Surety’s “spotless obedience, bitter sufferings, and accursed death.” Abraham was counted righteous through faith in God “who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification” (Romans 4:24-25). David proclaims that the blessed man is the one “to whom God counts righteousness apart from works” (Romans 4:6). Paul’s trust was not in any works he had done, but in that righteousness “which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith” (Philippians 3:9). Booth argues in this way. “It has been proved that the subject of justification is an ungodly person. His pardon and acceptance, therefore, cannot be the result of his own obedience: and it is equally clear, that as ungodly he cannot be justified. He must stand right in the eye of the law, and unprovable before his Judge, before he can be acquitted in judgement. It must, consequently, be the righteousness of another. But, what, or whose, righteousness can it be? Not the obedience of our fellow-mortals who are already justified; that would be to adopt the exploded doctrine of supererogation. Not the sanctity of angels; because they never became responsible for us. Not the essential rectitude of the Divine nature; for that is absolutely incommunicable. It must therefore be the righteousness of Christ; or His complete conformity to the holy law, as a voluntary substitute for the ungodly. Now, in what way can His obedience be applied to us, except by imputation? This argument, I am persuaded, will remain conclusive till it be proved, either the subject of justification is not in himself ungodly; or that the Judge of all the earth can justify without a righteousness. The former is expressly contrary to the Divine testimony, and the latter involves a palpable contradiction” (page 175).

14/5/25

There is no more glorious truth than being justified on the basis of the imputed perfect righteousness of our dear Lord Jesus Christ (so 2 Corinthians 5:21). This is our only hope to enter the eternal glory of God’s holy presence. However, I am concerned lest we so emphasize ‘imputed’ that we ignore ‘imparted’ righteousness. Catholics believe that those are justified who are made righteous in baptism by the washing away of original sin. The Bible teaches that the life of one who becomes a Christian turns from sin to righteousness. This is not the basis for justification, but is the evidence of it. John’s first letter makes it very

clear that one of the tests of being born of God is 'practising righteousness' (1 John 2:29, 3:7,10). See also the following verses that refer to the righteousness of our Christian lives: Ephesians 5:9, Philippians 1:9, 1 Timothy 6:11, 2 Timothy 2:22, 3:6, Titus 3:12, Hebrews 12:11.

I want us to focus on the righteousness of Matthew 5:20, and whether it refers to our righteous life, or to the imputed righteousness of Christ. Jesus is teaching about His kingdom. What is its relationship to the "Law" and "the Prophets" (5:17)? He neither changes the Law, nor does He lessen its requirements (5:17-19). Rather, He makes the standards of conduct in His kingdom more rigorous! Our righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees (5:20). As they were known as very strict in their obedience (so Paul in Philippians 3:6), how is it possible to be even more strict? This is why in the rest of chapter 5 Jesus goes on to contrast what 'was said', that is by these scribes and Pharisees with His authoritative teaching, "But I say to you, ..." (5:21,27,31,33,38,43). Let us take the first example of Jesus teaching on the sixth commandment, "You shall not murder". The scribes and Pharisees restricted breaking the commandment to the act of murder itself. Jesus says that to be angry, to utter words of contempt and abuse, are all condemned under the commandment. Sin is not only acts of disobedience, but also our words, and the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. When God saves us He gives us a new heart, so that our daily lives are changed from the inside out. It is true that our righteousness will never be perfect in this life, and only the perfect righteousness of Christ can open our way into heaven. But our seeking to live a righteous life, however far short we fall, is the necessary evidence that we are truly Christians.

A further reason why this righteousness refers to our every day life of righteousness is found in the practical instructions Jesus gives. "Be reconciled to your brother" (5:23-26). "If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out ..." (5:29-30). "Everyone who divorces his wife ..." (5:32). "Don't take an oath at all, ..." (5:34-37). "Do not resist one who is evil" (5:39-42). "Love your enemies ..." (5:44-47). The standard to be aimed at is nothing less than perfection, even as God is perfect (5:48). Out of gratitude for God's grace in Christ, and by the power of the Spirit, we must pursue this righteousness (holiness) "without which no one will see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14).

10/5/25

Each evening this week there was a meeting to present 'Creation Matters' in various Liverpool Churches. Wednesday was on Climate Change, given by Joseph Hubbard of Creation Research (www.creationresearch.net). These were his main points.

1. God controls the climate. Jesus spoke to the wind and the waves and they ceased. Drought was one of the curses of the old covenant (see Deuteronomy 28:23-24). This curse was applied in Elijah's day (1 Kings 17:1).
2. There is climate change in the Bible. "While the earth remains, seed time and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease" (Genesis 8:22). There was drought and famine in Abraham's day (Genesis 12:10), and Jacob's day (41:53-54), and both went to Egypt for food. Later Canaan was "a land flowing with milk and honey" (Exodus 3:8). Jesus predicts famines in various places (Matthew 24:7).
3. The climate has always been changing. This is true long before 'cars, cows and industry'. Fossil plants show that climate has changed. There are coal deposits in Greenland, which is

now covered with ice, the remains of tropical forests. Within recorded history there have been changes. 500 years ago the River Thames in London was regularly frozen in winter, but never today, nor hundreds of years before. After the Medieval period the average temperature in England dropped, and now it is rising again, but it is still not up to the pre-Medieval level. There is a record of the Okjokull glacier in Iceland that started about 700 years ago, was declared 'dead' in 2014 but is now growing again.

4. The changes in climate correspond to the changes of the magnetic field of sun spots, which shows there are at least multiple factors in climate change. The most effective 'greenhouse gas' is water vapour, so nights are colder when there is no cloud cover, yet this is rarely considered in climate change.

[Don Batten has written a lengthy and technical article on the Creation website at

<https://creation.com/en-gb/articles/climate-change>]

[Andy McIntosh at <https://foclonline.org/talk/what-are-real-lessons-concerning-climate-change>] denies that human made CO₂ emissions are the main driver of climate change and considers the correlation of two sun cycles]

1/5/25

I think you will profit from the outline of a sermon I preached at the Gospel Missions Agency church in Mumias last Sunday. It was based on Ephesians 1:3-14, with a focus on verse 3. The key word is 'bless'. God is 'blessed' for the 'blessings' He gives us. The word 'bless' comes from a Greek word from which we get 'eulogy' and means to say 'a good word'. To bless God is to say good things about Him, to praise Him. His blessings are the good things we can say He has done to us.

1. What are these Blessings?

(1) Our blessings are "spiritual". They are of the Holy Spirit and not of man, and are listed in verses 4-14. The old covenant blessings were largely earthly and material by contrast (see Deuteronomy 28:1-14).

(2) Our blessings are "in the heavenly places". This where Christ is (1:20), and where we are (2:6). This is the unseen world of spiritual activity where the real battle is being fought (6:12). Non-Christians put all the emphasis on things they can see, things here and now. Our citizenship is heavenly (Philippians 3:20) and it is the things of Christ that we love and desire.

2. Our Blessings are the Gift of the Triune God.

Paul begins by blessing "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ". It is GOD who chose us (4), predestined us (5), whose purpose is fulfilled (5), whose glorious grace is revealed (6), who lavished His rich grace on us (7-8), who made known to us His will (9), who works in everything to accomplish His will (11), who sealed us with His Spirit (13). Paul erupts three times to praise God for what He has given (6,12,14).

"In CHRIST/HIM" occurs 9 times in this passage. We receive all the blessings through Him as we are united to Him by faith, as a branch is united to the tree.

The HOLY SPIRIT is the seal that guarantees our receiving the inheritance (see 4:30).

The Father plans and carries out the plan through His Son and Spirit. The Son comes to carry out the plan by giving Himself to redeem sinners. The Spirit comes to change us, to indwell us, and so to guarantee that the plan will be completed.

3. We have Every Blessing!

We do not lack one blessing that we need. We have all of them in Christ, stretching from eternity to eternity.

(1) We were chosen by God (4). We are the elect, chosen before the world was made, in order to make us “holy and blameless”.

(2) We were predestined by God for adoption as sons (5-6). God is our Father, we bear His name, we have a new family, we are being made like our older Brother, and have full share in the inheritance. This is only because of His love and grace.

(3) We have redemption in Christ (7-8a). He has set us free from our bondage to sin, by His “blood” = sacrifice on the cross. All our sins are forgiven.

(4) We have come to know the mystery of His will (8b-10). He has taught us to know that salvation is the same for all, Jew and Gentile (so 3:5). Jew and Gentile are reconciled in Christ on the basis of grace alone (2:14-16).

(5) We have obtained an inheritance (11-12). We are heirs (see 1 Peter 1:4), and the reception is sure because God is working out all things as He has willed them.

(6) We were sealed with the Holy Spirit (13-14). The Spirit Himself is the seal (for ‘seal’ see Matthew 27:65-66). This is not an experience after conversion that some enjoy, but is a blessing for ALL Christians. Receiving the Spirit is the guarantee of the inheritance! How important it is to be sure the Spirit dwells in you.

22/4/25

I am in Kenya for the next 10 days, with the Gospel Missions Agency brethren, and its pastor Elly Achok. Wednesday-Friday is the annual Reformation Conference, the name identifying its purpose. There were a few hundred people present today, many of whom have a Word of Faith background (this is Elly’s background). The theme of the 11 sessions is ‘This is our Faith’ and the aim is to summarize our Christian faith from a soteriological perspective. The first is entitled ‘The Manual of our Salvation’ – the Bible and the way of salvation. The second is for me on ‘The God of our Salvation’ – its Trinitarian nature. I thought I would share with you what I said.

1. The Triune God has a Plan. We call this God’s ‘decree(s)’ as in Eph. 1:11, which includes absolutely everything, including salvation (Rm. 8:28, 9:11, Eph. 3:11, 2 Tim. 1:9). This plan was made before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4) and is not based on foreknowledge of what people will do. The word ‘foreknowledge’ refers to God’s knowledge of people (see Rm. 8:29, 11:1). Jesus’ prayer in John 17 reveals much to show there is this plan.

- Jesus was ‘sent’ by the Father to do a work that had been planned for Him (6 times).
- Jesus faithfully accomplished that work (v. 4, Jn. 19:30).
- Jesus was specifically given words to speak by the Father (v. 8, Jn. 14:24).
- Jesus had been given a particular number of people to come and save (“you have given” 6 times, see Jn. 6:39, 10:29).
- Scripture prophecy was fulfilled (v. 12, Ps. 41:9 & Jn. 13:18).

2. Each Person in the Godhead has a Part of the Plan to Fulfil. This part of the plan we call ‘The Covenant of Redemption’. Titus 3:4-7 very clearly speaks of the work of the Trinity in salvation.

The FATHER is the source of the work in His “goodness and loving kindness”, and “His own mercy”. If salvation is like a building He is the architect. It is all of His “grace” as we do not deserve it (v. 3), and He has no need to do it.

The SPIRIT is written about next, because His work is what begins to fulfil the plan in our experience. He applies the salvation planned to us, He completes the building. Note that He is poured out by God. This must be so because we are unable to do anything to save ourselves. This is the “washing of regeneration and renewal”.

The SON has accomplished the work to enable the Spirit to be poured out (Acts 2:33). We may say that our Lord brings the materials for construction of the building. It is through what He has done in His life of obedience for us, and in His death for our sins, that we can be justified.

It is this that makes our salvation so secure. The Father has elected us; the Son has redeemed us; and the Spirit has regenerated us. If you tell how you have been saved, you should say, ‘God had mercy on me, Christ died for me, and the Holy Spirit has worked powerfully in me!’

15/4/25

[Part of a sermon by C. H. Spurgeon on Matthew 8:11-12. It clearly shows that the doctrines of grace are an encouragement to the free offer of the gospel.]

Oh! I love God’s “shalls” and “wills.” There is nothing comparable to them. Let a man say “shall,” what is it good for? “I will,” says man, and he never performs; “I shall,” says he and he breaks his promise. But it is never so with God’s “shalls.” If he says, “shall,” it shall be, when he says, “will,” it will be.

Now he has said here, “many shall come.” The devil says, “they shall not come” but “they shall come.” Their sins say, “you can’t come;” God says, you “shall come.” You, yourselves, say, “we won’t come;” God says, “you shall come.” Yes! there are some here who are laughing at salvation, who can scoff at Christ, and mock at the gospel; but I tell you some of you shall come yet. “What!” you say, “can God make me become a Christian?” I tell you yes, for here in rests the power of the gospel. It does not ask your consent, but it gets it. It does not say will you have it, but it makes you willing in the day of God’s power. Not against your will, but it makes you willing. It shows you its value—and then you fall in love with it, and straightway you run after it and have it. ... The gospel wants not your consent, it gets it. It knocks the enmity out of your heart. You say “I do not want to be saved;” Christ says you shall be. He makes your will turn round, and then you cry, “Lord, save, or I perish.”

Ah, might heaven exclaim, “I knew I would make you say that;” and then he rejoices over you because he has changed your will and made you willing in the day of his power. If Jesus Christ were to stand on this platform to-night, what would many people do with him? “O!” say some, “we would make him a King.” I do not believe it. They would crucify him again if they had the opportunity. If he were to come and say, “Here I am, I love you, will you be saved by me?” Not one of you would consent if you were left to your will. If he should look upon you with those eyes, before whose power the lion would have crouched, if he spoke with that voice which poured forth a cataract of eloquence like a stream of nectar rolling down from the cliffs above, not a single person would come to be his disciple; no, it wants the power of the Spirit to make men come to Jesus Christ.

He himself said, "No man can come to me except the Father who hath sent me draw him." Ah! we want that; and here we have it. They shall come! They shall come! ye may laugh, ye may despise us; but Jesus Christ shall not die for nothing. If some of you reject him there are some that will not. If there are some that are not saved, others shall be. Christ shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hands. Some think that Christ died and yet that some for whom he died will be lost. I never could understand that doctrine. If Jesus my surety bore my griefs and carried my borrows, I believe myself to be as secure as the angels in heaven. God cannot ask payment twice. If Christ paid my debt shall I have to pay it again? No.

They shall come! They shall come! And nought in heaven, nor on earth, nor in hell, can stop them from coming...

Go and try my Savior! Go and try my Savior! If he casts you away after you have sought him, tell it in the pit that Christ would not hear you. But that you shall never be allowed to do. It would dishonour the mercy of the covenant, for God to cast away one penitent sinner; and it never shall be while it is written 'many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven.'

10/4/25

I am going to continue with Spurgeon, and the subject of Evangelism. One objection that is often raised against Calvinism is that if you believe that God has chosen beforehand who will be saved then there is no reason to do evangelism. But all recognize that Spurgeon was such a great evangelist as a preacher and he was a Calvinist! Was he just inconsistent? No, rather he insisted that his Calvinism was the greatest reason and encouragement for his evangelistic zeal. He did not try to solve the problem of reconciling the absolute sovereignty of God with the responsibility of man, believing it to be impossible. He believed both because both are clearly revealed in the Scripture. "It is one of the axioms of theology that, if a man be lost, God must not be blamed for it; and it is also an axiom of theology that, if man is saved, God must have all the glory." Arminians, because they believe man is commanded to believe and therefore must be able, have developed their own way of evangelism. Listen to how Murray shows the danger in this as the conversion looked for is not the Biblical one. 'Arminianism in by-passing ... the offensive truth that all saving experience must begin with regeneration, and because it implies that men come to faith and repentance without the direct and prior work of the Holy Spirit, sets up a pattern for conversion which is below the Biblical one. The sinner is instructed, under Arminian preaching, that he must begin the work by becoming willing and God will complete it; he must do what he can and God will do the rest. So if a firm 'decision for Christ' is made, he is at once counselled to trust that the divine work has also been done, and to regard such texts as John 1:12 as describing his own case. But the truth is that Arminianism has erected a pattern of conversion which is sub-Scriptural and which unregenerate men can attain to. By representing repentance and faith as something possible to unrenewed men it opens the way to an experience in which the self-will of the sinner and not the power of God may be the main feature. The Scripture everywhere represents the will and power of God as first, not second, in salvation, and a teaching that promises that God's will must follow our will may have the effect of causing men to trust in a delusion – an experience which is not

salvation at all. It is against such a delusion that Scripture frequently warns us. And the urgency of the warning arises in part from the fact that there is a 'faith' which can be exercised by unregenerate men, and the exercise of it may even lead to joy and peace. But Arminianism, instead of cautioning men against this danger, inevitably encourages it, for it throws men, not upon God, but upon their own acts. The impression is distinctly given to the gospel hearer that the choice is not God's but his and that he is able there and then to decide the time of his rebirth ... On this basis a man may make a profession without ever having his confidence in his own ability shattered; he has been told absolutely nothing of his need of a change of nature which is not within his own power, and consequently, if he does not experience such a radical change, he is not dismayed. He was never told it was essential, so he sees no reason to doubt whether he is a Christian. Indeed the teaching he has come under militates against such doubts arising. It is frequently said that a man who has made a decision with little evidence of a change of life may be a 'carnal' Christian who needs instruction in holiness, or if the same individual should gradually lose his new-found interests, the fault is frequently attributed to lack of 'follow-up', or prayer, or some other deficiency on the part of the Church.'

I will finish with Spurgeon himself who lamented the neglect of emphasis on the necessity of the Spirit's work in conversion. "Do you know why so many professing Christians are like the thorny ground? It is because processes have been omitted which would have gone far to alter the condition of things. It was the husbandman's business to uproot the thorns, or burn them on the spot. Years ago, when people were converted, there used to be such a thing as conviction of sin ... We shall never get rid of thorns with ploughs that scratch the surface." May the Lord grant genuine conversions where the Spirit works in conviction of sin and changes the heart of the sinner!

[The quotations are from Iain Murray, *The Forgotten Spurgeon*, ch. 4]

2/4/25

After many decades I have picked up a book to reread, 'The Forgotten Spurgeon'. Most of us have heard of Spurgeon as a preacher and the great success the Lord gave him. There are a number of things that are 'forgotten', or not known, about him. Although he knew amazing success when he started his ministry in London at the age of 19 (!), he encountered the fiercest opposition from both the world and the established churches for many of the first years. Why? Because he was fully open and fearless in preaching the doctrines of grace, what is often termed 'Calvinism'. In doing this he publicly decried its alternative, Arminianism. The book gives three reasons why Spurgeon considered that Arminianism is against Scripture and Calvinism is the Biblical truth and must be boldly preached.

(1) "Arminianism truncates Scripture and it militates against that wholeness of view which is necessary for the glory of God, the exaltation of Christ and the stability of the believer." That 'wholeness of view' is that God has an eternal plan of salvation. History is the outworking of that plan. This is how he says that a young believer will make progress. "Let him clearly understand the meaning of election, as showing the purpose of God, and its bearing upon other doctrines which shew the accomplishment of that purpose, and from that moment he is on the high road to become an instructive believer. He will always be ready to give a reason for the hope that is in him with meekness and with fear." Christ came to fulfil this

plan, to save the elect (see John 6:38-39). The Holy Spirit is sent to fulfil this plan, to bring to faith those for whom Christ died.

(2) “The Spirit of that system (Arminianism) leads directly to legality.” This may seem surprising as Arminians clearly proclaim that salvation is through faith and not works. The problem is that they make faith a work. “This is the logical outcome of a system which regards the human decision as the crucial factor in determining who is saved, and which represents faith as something which every man may call into exercise if he so chooses.” You may have heard it preached something like this: ‘God has done His part in sending His Son to die for you, so now it is up to you to do your part and accept Him into your heart.’ Spurgeon says why he cannot preach like this. “What the Arminian wants to do is to arouse man’s activity; what we want to do is to kill it once and for all, to show him that he is lost and ruined, and that his activities are not now at all equal to the work of conversion; that he must look upward. They seek to make the man stand up; we seek to bring him down, and make him feel that there he lies in the hand of God, and that his business is to submit himself to God, and cry aloud, ‘Lord, save, or we perish.’ We hold that a man is never so near grace when he begins to feel he can do nothing at all.”

(3) “It contains errors which lessen the gravity of the position of the unconverted.” “The Scripture represents us, by nature, as not only in need of salvation from the guilt of sin, but in need of an omnipotent power to quicken us from being dead in ‘trespasses and in sins’. We are not only under condemnation through our offences, but we are under the dominion of a fallen nature which is at enmity against God... Arminianism preaches the new-birth but it preaches it as a consequence of or an accompaniment to human decision; it represents man as being born again by repenting and believing, as though these spiritual acts are within the ability of the unconverted.”

May the Lord be pleased to raise up more voices to proclaim with confidence these Biblical truths for the blessing upon sinners and for the glory of the triune God. It is these truths known as Calvinism that the Lord used to bring thousands upon thousands to salvation in Christ through Spurgeon’s ministry.

[Iain Murray, *The Forgotten Spurgeon*, pp. 69-96]

27/3/25

Those who know me well know that I often refer to the ‘p-word’, patience. It originated when I lived in Kenya and would receive visitors from the airport. Because of the terrible traffic of Nairobi I would tell them they must remember the p-word, and that if they cannot be patient here then they can never learn patience! Let me use this to write about three things that I often find myself repeating these days.

1. Be patient. We live in a fast moving world and want quick results. So we need to learn more and more patience with people, just as our Lord was so patient with his disciples, and as He has been so patient with us. We would not be saved if the Lord had not been so patient with us (so 2 Peter 3:9). We did not learn things in a day, and only often after repeated teaching. Typically we did not change in a day but had to be exhorted over and over. Consider 1 Thessalonians 5:14, 2 Thessalonians 3:5, 1 Timothy 6:11, 2 Timothy 2:24, and Titus 3:2. I have made it a principle that if someone is willing to talk with me I will

continue to talk with them even if now it seems to be making no difference. Just think how slow the disciples were and yet our Lord bore with them (Luke 24:25)!

2. Do what is right. I have found that so many Christians determine what to do, especially in a difficult situation, by what they think will be the result of their action. I remember instructing one to do what Matthew 18:15 says and, while agreeing that this is what the Lord says, refused to do it because 'I might lose their friendship'. This is wrong for two reasons. First, we do not know for sure what the result will be. It has often proved to be the very opposite of what we expected! Second, our path ahead is to do what the Lord says, whatever the consequences may turn out to be. This principle has helped me in many situations where it seems difficult to know what to do. Surely we can leave the results to the Lord. The Lord does not so much want us to be 'successful' but to be faithful. So 1 Corinthians 4:2. If we love the Lord let us keep His commandments.

3. Keep a clear conscience. This is much emphasized in Scripture: Acts 23:1, 24:16, 2 Corinthians 1:12, 1 Timothy 1:5,19, 2 Timothy 1:3, Hebrews 13:18. Where we know something to be wrong, even where we have serious doubts, let us avoid going in that direction. A guilty conscience always drags us down and makes us ineffective. All this demands that we hide the word of God more and more in our hearts that we might not sin against Him.

18/3/25

In all discussions where there are disagreements it is essential to define our terms. I may use a word in one way, but you are understanding it in another. Let me illustrate with the great word, 'Grace'. Is our salvation by grace alone? We say, 'Yes!' And we read, "By grace alone, in faith in Christ's saving work and not because of any merit on our part, we are accepted by God and receive the Holy Spirit, who renews our hearts while equipping and calling us to good works." And we respond, 'Amen.' By itself "this sentence could be a relevant and pointed summary of the Biblical message concerning the mode of justification (by grace only and not based on merits), the means of justification (by faith alone), the grounds of justification (the saving work of Christ) and the consequences of justification (divine adoption and the gift of the Holy Spirit, the renewal of the heart and the activation of the Christian life." Yet, the quotation starting with 'by grace alone' is part of a joint declaration on justification by Roman Catholics and the World Lutheran Federation in 1999. Are we then united with Catholics in this all-important doctrine? We "must take into account the immediate and more general context, the meaning of the words used and the consequences of what is being claimed." We must understand that both Catholics and Lutherans have a sacramental understanding of grace. They claim that "the grace of Jesus Christ is 'imparted' in baptism. According to this view, grace is not received by faith alone but is granted by God through the church, which administers it in baptism." Sadly we must not assume that by using the same words we mean the same thing.

[quotes are from Leonardo De Chirico, Same Words, Different Worlds, 47-49]

However, this grace received in baptism does not guarantee eternal life. The Council of Orange of 529, that Roman Catholics follow, refers to "the cooperation which Christ grants to those who have received baptism, so that they may attain salvation 'if they will themselves work to achieve it'." "If grace and free will are understood ... as independent factors which

cooperate with each other, then human merit is taken into account, alongside the divine initiative. Rome sees them as two independent factors which complement each other. But it becomes very clear that if this is the case man must therefore be able to work for his salvation by his own efforts. This idea of personal ability always rears its ugly head sooner or later! Oh, how hard it is to be willing to depend on grace alone and nothing else! We are by nature far too proud to admit that we are totally depraved. One way or another, we want to keep part of the credit for ourselves." May the Lord give us spiritual wisdom to discern truth from error, for it has eternal consequences.

[quotes are from Vanhuyse, The Gift Of Grace, 12]

11/3/25

2 Samuel 6 is a study in contrasts. Uzzah is struck dead by the Lord for touching the ark of God which was expressly forbidden (see Numbers 4:15). It ought not to have been carried on a cart, but on the shoulders of the Levites (so 1 Chronicles 15:12-15). Then with great joy David was "leaping and dancing before the Lord" (verse 16). Michal thinks this was totally unbecoming for a king, but David doubles down on his conduct (verses 21-22). So we ask ourselves, 'How should we come before the Lord? With trembling because of His holiness? With joy because of His presence among us?' The answer is, of course, with both!

(1) "Uzzah was only trying to help – was he to allow the oxen to bounce the ark right off the cart (verse 6)?" If they had not disobeyed God's clear instructions about how to carry the ark this problem would never have arisen. We often sin because we have taken a step in the wrong direction. Note the language about God 'breaking out.' "In 5:20 Yahweh 'breaks out' against David's enemies; in 6:8 against David's friend. Yahweh may break out against the Philistines – or Israel. God's lethal holiness levels both pagans and churchmen ... The application of the text is clear: you dare not trifle with a God who is both real and holy. Yahweh is not your neat, warm, fuzzy friend in the sky." If the response is that the God of the New Testament is somehow different, then read Acts 5:1-11, 1 Corinthians 11:30-31 and Hebrews 10:26-31....

(2) David firmly defends his leaping and dancing. "Michal is concerned with royal dignity, proper decorum, outward appearances. A king has a certain image to maintain ... (David) did not think the slave girls were the audience. 'It was before Yahweh' (verse 21a). He was the audience. It was not performance for people but worship for Yahweh... Not only does David have a different view of the audience but a different view of dignity... (verse 22). David does not see himself so much as Israel's king but as Yahweh's servant; and humility is appropriate for servants. For David humility *is* dignity. To him there is nothing servile about grovelling before God!"

Consider the following challenging application. "In our churches there are any number of folks who are very concerned with services and externals and procedures and mechanics and meetings and decency and order who really can't understand anything of the joy of the Lord. There are some who can muster enthusiasm and gusto over professional sports but who somehow cannot fathom anything but professional detachment over Jesus Christ. Exuberant praise and tears of repentance are strangers to them. W. G. Blaikie has carefully drawn the bottom line: *There are, doubtless, times to be calm, and times to be enthusiastic;*

*but can it be right to give all our coldness to Christ and all our enthusiasm to the world?
Does the presence of God ever move us?"*

[The quotations are taken from Dale Ralph Davis, 2 Samuel, pages 63-68]

4/3/25

It is possible that what I have to write may not interest many people. I have been reading a book on the history of the church in Africa describing the effect of the First World War on society. Now, I have lived in Kenya for more than 40 years and I cannot remember hearing anything much about that war. Its one distant memory is the part of Nairobi known as Kariokor, a corruption of Carrier Corps. Here are some quotes from the book.

"Many thousands of Africans were sucked into the maelstrom of this war of Europeans fought out in part on African soil. There were volunteers and there were pressed men; some served in Africa, some beyond its shores; casualties were heavy whether by act of war or through disease; and those who eventually returned came back different men."

"Impressive as the participation of African combatants in the campaigns (was), even more significant, if only from the standpoint of the numbers involved, were the various Carrier Corps essential to maintain supplies." "British East Africa had a force of 7,500 in the early period of the war, but after the formation of the Carrier Corps the figure exceeded 162,000." I am staggered by the sheer numbers involved if it is correct that there were less than 3 million inhabitants in Kenya at the time.

"For the second time within a generation the white man had stamped his mark on black Africa, and once again had stamped it to some purpose. If the first occasion had shown him as a superman the second revealed his Achilles' heel: he was vulnerable after all with his own weapons – as vulnerable when these weapons were in the hands of black men as of white. And the fighting men were the first to find it out."

"With the outbreak of the world war the white rulers who had frowned upon the fighting prowess of the tribes now sought the co-operation of the chief in encouraging his young men to enlist. But more: they were to fight, not only against other black men, which was no new thing to them, but against white men too. This was revolutionary and at first went sorely against the grain."

"It was the economic pressure that war brings in its train which most disturbed the villager at home. With the disruption of trade exportable produce often enough lay on their hands, while shortage of stock and loss of shipping inevitably forced up the prices of all imported goods."

"The specific effect of the war on the African attitude to the Christian religion can only be stated with reserve. Why intertribal war should be wrong and yet international should be right baffled his comprehension." Albert Schweitzer wrote, "We are, all of us, conscious that many natives are puzzling over the question how it can be possible that the whites, who brought them the Gospel of Love, are now murdering each other, and throwing to the winds the commands of the Lord Jesus."

"There was a positive aspect in the new African outlook which was nothing less than the reinforcement of African confidence and the will to survive in a changing world. This upsurge of self-assurance, now that the legend of the white man's innate superiority had been exploded by himself, was the index of a new and lively hope. The African has been

taken backstage, so to speak, and had himself appeared on the boards to play his part in world events and had played it worthily. He was after all, by any measure, a man.”
All this must have had a profound impact on society and thus the progress of the gospel.
[C. P. Groves, *The Planting of Christianity on Africa*, Volume Four 1914-1954, pages 73-81]

25/2/25

Matthew, Mark, and Luke all record the institution of the Lord’s Supper in their Gospels. But John does not do so although chapters 13-17 all take place in that very evening. Therefore, some have thought that chapter 6 is John’s account of the Christian celebration of the Supper. He refers to eating His flesh and drinking His blood (verses 53ff.). Is this the true meaning? Morris has the following strong arguments against this interpretation.

1. The setting. “Jesus is speaking in the synagogue at Capernaum to a crowd which includes opponents and lukewarm disciples. It is difficult to hold that John intends us to think that to such an audience Jesus gave teaching about a sacrament whose instructions lay well into the future.”

2. The strength of the language used, for example verse 53. “This language is absolute. No qualification is inserted. No loophole is left. But it is impossible to think that Jesus ... should have taught that the one thing necessary for eternal life is to receive the sacrament. Those who think of the discourse as referring to the sacrament usually do not face the logic of their position at this point, but introduce some qualification.”

3. “The consequences of eating and drinking spoken of here are also said by John, both elsewhere and in this very context (see verses 35,40,47), to follow from receiving Christ and believing on Him.”

4. “The words, considered as the utterance of a first-century Jew, would most naturally have quite a different meaning. The metaphor of eating and drinking was quite common among the Jews ... It points to a taking within one’s innermost being.” “Eating Christ’s flesh and drinking His blood point to the central saving act described otherwise in, say, 3:16. Christ’s death opens the way to life. Men enter that way by faith. So in this chapter Christ speaks of giving His flesh (verse 51), which points to the same act as God giving His Son. But men must appropriate this gift by faith (verse 47). Eating the flesh and drinking the blood represent a striking way of saying this... Men must take Christ into their innermost being if they would have the life He died to bring them.”

However, Morris thinks there could be a secondary reference to the sacrament, “to show us how we should receive the holy communion. It is not at all impossible that Christ should have had some thought of the sacrament in His mind. He certainly did not institute it on the spur of the moment, and we have no means of knowing how long He premeditated it. John, moreover, may have had in mind some who gave undue emphasis to the externals of sacramental religion. So he left out all formal mention of holy communion, which would certainly discourage over-emphasis. But communion is important, so he included a discourse of the Lord Jesus that sets out the principles governing worthy reception.”

Why have I written this? The Lord’s Supper is an important part of our faith, but it must not be viewed as a guarantee of receiving God’s grace, a converting ordinance. Further, Morris shows how to deal with divergent views of Biblical texts.

[Leon Morris, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, pp. 352-355]

18/2/25

Thomas Chalmers (1780-1847) is a well-known Scottish theologian and pastor of whom it has been claimed that he was "Scotland's greatest nineteenth-century churchman." He wrote a lengthy introduction to Abraham Booth's (1734-1806) 'The Reign of Grace'. In this introduction he explains the gospel.

(1) God relates to us through covenants. God makes promises, and requires responses if that relationship is to be enjoyed and continued. We call the statement God made to Adam in Genesis 2:16-17 'The Covenant of Works'. Today, God has established a New Covenant. Chalmers challenges us to ask if we relate to God on the basis of this new covenant.

(2) Sadly, the universal hope to be in a right relationship with God is not on the basis of the new, but of the old covenant. We think, "It is by our own doings that we have forfeited our claim upon God; and it is by our own doings that the claim is to be re-established." "It is not peculiar to Jews, who wanted to make a righteousness out of their Mosaic law. It extends to men of all countries, and of all colours, who, out of the law of conscience, or the law of conventional propriety in their neighbourhood, or the law to which tradition, and revelation, and custom, have made their respective contributions, still want to rear a righteousness of their own, ..."

(3) The new covenant is established on the basis of God's mercy alone. "There is not one more obvious or prominent characteristic of the Gospel, than just the way in which it meets and encounters the spirit of legality at the very outset, and must either conquer it into entire submission, or decline to treat with it altogether... Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He hath saved us."

(4) God's mercy is in conjunction with righteousness. "It is not a proffer of bare mercy, but of propitiated mercy, that is held out for our acceptance. God does not set forth Himself with a general declaration of pardon to the sins of mankind. But He sets forth His Son a propitiation for the sins of mankind. And what we have to look at, is not the mercy of God unguarded and unqualified; but the mercy of God in Christ, and through Christ, reconciling the world." "The whole character of heaven's jurisprudence hangs upon the question, Whether man shall stand before God, upon his own righteousness, or the righteousness of Christ? ... On the one ground he will never meet with acceptance, and on the other ground, he will never miss it."

(5) Knowing this relationship with God is only through faith. We must renounce the plea of our own righteousness. We must plead before God the righteousness of Christ. We do this knowing that God is faithful to His word. "We shall never obtain any secure or legitimate rest to our minds, till we have found it in Jesus Christ, as the Lord our righteousness – till we have come to trust wholly in His merit, and not at all in our own, as our alone plea of meritorious acceptance with the righteous Lawgiver – till the free offer of a title to eternal life, through the obedience of another, be met by our faithful acceptance of it; ..."

(6) This faith not only "puts peace and joy into the heart of the believer, it is no less fitted to produce purity and holiness... This is the main and ultimate design of the Gospel." This is why Chalmers wrote this introduction to Booth's book, because "it so nobly vindicates the doctrines of grace as doctrines according to godliness." Far from grace making people careless, it is the ONLY way to come to live a godly life.

11/2/25

1 Samuel 14 is a fascinating chapter. One young man, the king's son Jonathan, is the hero, while his father the king (Saul) imposes a foolish oath upon his soldiers so lessening the victory (verse 30). Dale Ralph Davis, in his commentary on the chapter entitles it 'Sad Success'. The Lord wrought victory through one man and his armour-bearer. "It may be that the Lord will work for us, for nothing can hinder the Lord from saving by many or by few" (verse 6, see verse 23). This has always been the Lord's way – think of Joseph the prisoner, Moses the fugitive, Gideon the weakest of his clan and the least in his father's house (Judges 6:15), David the shepherd boy, and our Lord Jesus Christ who died forsaken being "crucified in weakness" (2 Corinthians 13:4, see Philippians 2:8).

Davis explains what he calls the 'imagination' of Jonathan's faith. "The beauty of Jonathan's faith is its imagination ('Come, let us go ... perhaps Yahweh will act for us'); and the beauty of that imagination is its balance ('perhaps'). It is as if Jonathan says, 'God can do mighty works with very small resources, and God may be glad to do it in this case; and how can we know, dear armour-bearer, unless we place ourselves at His disposal?' How refreshing to hear Jonathan's 'Who knows' – who knows what Yahweh will do? There is no limit to how He can save! He has no need of at least 600 trembling men" (see verse 22). "And how refreshing to hear Jonathan's 'perhaps'... Many in our day think otherwise. They think that to say 'perhaps' cuts the nerve of faith, that if faith is faith it must always be certain, dogmatic, and absolutely positive. Faith, however, must not be confused with arrogance. Jonathan's 'perhaps' is part of his faith. He both confesses the power of Yahweh and retains the freedom of Yahweh. Faith does not dictate to God, as if the Lord of hosts is its errand boy. Faith recognizes its degree of ignorance and knows it has not read a transcript of the divine decrees for most situations."

Davis says that the narrative forces us to ask the question as to why Jonathan was not the king. He was obviously better fitted to be king than his father. He gives this very insightful answer. "Such questions are normal. They are also revealing... In our minds self-fulfilment is a right. If we've ingenuity and discipline our efforts should be crowned with success. Should we be of a religious bent we happily acknowledge that 'God and/or Jesus' assists us in our quest... But Jonathan seems to know better. The kingdom was not Saul's or Jonathan's; it was Yahweh's kingdom. For Jonathan, then, the kingdom was not his to seize, not his to rule, but his to serve... Maybe a tragic life (Jonathan's) isn't tragic if it is lived in fidelity to what Christ asks of us in the circumstances He gives to us.

Davis has one further point to make, for the chapter concludes with a positive assessment of Saul (verses 47-48). Which should we believe, the negative or the positive assessment? "If we want the truth, we must believe both. Verses 47-48 constitute what we may call the judgement of history,... that way that people have of assessing a man's achievements, contributions, and relative success (or lack of it). History's judgement is that external human calculation of a person's life and work... By such a standard, Saul had made his mark and made it well." "But Judge History does not have the decisive verdict... The vital assessment cannot come from the applause of men within history but only from the God who reigns over history. What matters then is not success (whether political or military) but covenant. Yahweh is not looking for winners but for disciples... Saul has begun to fail at the point of

the covenant in that he did not submit to the covenant God. And for the Bible covenant obedience matters far more than vocational achievement.” “One can be a historical success and a covenant failure.”

[Dale Ralph Davis, 1 Samuel, pp. 111-119]

7/2/25

I spent the last week of January in north-west Kenya, in the northern part of West Pokot County. One highlight was to talk with a few old men in Wasat at the place where they sit most of the time. I started by asking if they remembered the first time I came to Wasat in 2008 when I met them under the trees. They had wanted to know why we had come to visit them and I preached on John 3:16 to a large number. Yes, one of them replied, I remember, but of course he could not remember what I said. I told him that we are getting older and asked what happens to all of us old men. It took a little while to get the response that we all die! Knowing that they have fuzzy views on life after death, I asked what happens after death. I was surprised by the reply, that we go to ‘the good life’. I wanted to know how he knew this to be true and he said it is because God made the heaven and the earth. I thought this to be a very interesting answer, showing the impact of general revelation. It was now time to introduce the subject of sin, and he had no problem of acknowledging it given the prevailing older culture of cattle raiding. There is probably not an extended family where there is not a member who has been killed in such raiding or by raiders. I remember an early visit when the fatherless children were brought out for me to see. Notwithstanding such sin this old man was still sure of the good life to come as God had blessed him in this life. He had not been killed, but has long life, with all that goes with it. Taking up the issue of sin I told him that sin separates us from God as the clouds separate us from the sun, and that the only way to God is through His Son Jesus Christ who gave Himself as a sacrifice for our sins. This was the message I brought to you at first, I said. I challenged him as to why he has not believed this message which is his only hope. There was no reply so I thought I would give him an extended example of how to be justified before God.

These respected old men form a local court dealing with such things as accusations of stealing. I put before him a case where someone has been accused of stealing a cow. He told me that they would first listen carefully to the witnesses to see if they knew the exact details of the cow. If they found the man to have been guilty and refused to confess he would face ‘mob justice’, i.e. the community to punish him. If he confessed but stealing had been a habit he would be severely punished; if it was the first time it would be lighter. I imagined that the fine for stealing a cow to be paying two cows, and that the man stole because he had no cows. Then a friend came to the court with two cows to be paid on behalf of the thief. What then happens to the thief? He is set free. The debt has been paid. Christ has paid it all through His death so that we may go free.

Such old men have lived a life immersed in their traditions and have only heard the gospel very recently. They are totally illiterate yet can have a wisdom that surpasses those who have gone through education. It is far easier to preach to women and children and these men are ignored. May the Lord be pleased to open their hearts to receive this gospel. He is able.

21/1/25

Probably the best known verse in the Bible is John 3:16. But what is “the world” that God so loved? There are many interpretations. Hendriksen is very helpful here. This is what he writes about the various meanings of the word in John’s Gospel.

The root meaning is ‘order’, whence ‘ornaments’ in 1 Peter 3:3. This leads to the following significations:

- (1) The (orderly) universe (17:5), and perhaps the earth (21:25).
- (2) By metonymy, the human inhabitants of the earth; hence, mankind, realm of mankind, human race, theatre of human history, framework of human society (16:21).
- (3) The general public (7:4, perhaps 14:22).
- (4) Ethical sense: mankind alienated from the life of God, sin-laden, exposed to the judgement, in need of salvation (3:19).
- (5) The same as (4) with the additional idea that no distinction is made with respect to race or nationality; hence, men from every tribe and nation; not only Jews but also Gentiles (4:42, probably 1:29, 3:16,17, 6:33,51, 8:12, 9:5, 12:46, 1 John 2:2, 4:14,15). Such passages should be read in the light of 4:42, 11:52, 12:32.
- (6) The realm of evil. This is really the same as (4) but with the additional idea of open hostility to God, His Christ and His people (7:7, 8:23, 12:31, 14:30, 15:18, 17:9,14).

When he comes to John 3:16, he gives his reasons for adopting signification (5).

- a. The words “that whoever believes” clearly indicate that the reference is not to birds and trees but to mankind (see also 4:42, 8:12, 1 John 4:14).
- b. However, here mankind is not viewed as the realm of evil, breaking out into open hostility to God and Christ, for God does not love evil.
- c. The term world, as used here, must mean mankind which, though sin-laden, exposed to the judgement, and in need of salvation, is still the object of His care. God’s image is still to a degree, reflected in the children of men. Mankind is like a mirror. Originally this mirror was very beautiful, a work of art. But, through no fault of the Maker, it has become horribly blurred. Its creator, however, still recognizes His won work.
- D. By reason of the context and other passages in which a similar thought is expressed, it is probable that also here in 3:16 the term indicates fallen mankind in its international aspect: men from every tribe and nation; not only Jews but also Gentiles. This is in harmony with the thought expressed repeatedly in the Fourth Gospel to the effect that physical ancestry has nothing to do with entrance into the kingdom of heaven (1:12,13, 3:6, 8:31-39).

[William Hendriksen, The Gospel of John, page 79, note 26, and page 140]

In conclusion, ‘world’ does not mean every person, which is what so many people assume. Rarely does the word mean this, as is seen in the 6 different significations (above). The words ‘so’ loved emphasize the amazing quality of God’s love not its extent. It is beyond our understanding how God could love even one member of the fallen race! Further, if God is said to love all then it is a love which has failed in its objective as so many have refused Him and have perished. Rather, God’s love is so strong that it brings all whom He loves into salvation, so that Christians are known as the ‘beloved ones’ (for example, Colossians 3:12).

14/1/25

I am reading through a wonderful commentary on the Gospel of John. The writer believes in infant baptism, that at least children of parents of whom one is a believer ought to be baptized in infancy. The connection is obviously blood lines, physical children. Baptism is often seen as the New Testament rite corresponding to the Old Testament rite of circumcision that was applied to all male children on the eighth day. So I was taken aback (pleasantly) to read the following statements in Hendriksen. Commenting on John 1:12, “The Jew was very slow to learn that in the new dispensation there are no special privileges based upon physical relationships” (page 81). On John 3:16, where he interprets ‘world’ to mean “fallen mankind in its international aspect,” he adds, “This is in harmony with the thought expressed repeatedly in the Fourth Gospel ... to the effect that physical ancestry has nothing to do with entrance into the kingdom of heaven: 1:12,13, 3:6, 8:31-39” (page 140) If these statements are true, which they are, then what spiritual benefit can we expect babies today to receive if they have some water sprinkled upon them?

The answer often given is that Abraham’s children (even house servants) were all to be circumcised and thus they entered into the covenant blessings (Genesis 17:9-14). This is true, but was the blessing that of salvation? Ishmael was circumcised, but was he numbered among the people of God (17:23-26)? No, it was Isaac, not Ishmael. It was Jacob, not Esau (Romans 19:6-13). “Not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel.” There are two Israels, the children of the flesh and the children of promise. Only the latter are counted as Abraham’s true offspring. This is clearly written (verse 8)! The fundamental error is to confuse the covenants. The Abrahamic covenant is NOT the covenant of grace, the new covenant. The new covenant is new and not a copy of any other covenant (read Jeremiah 31:31-34). In the new covenant, ALL experience a heart transformed by the law being written on it, God being God to them, a (saving) knowledge of God, and the forgiveness of sins. Who is prepared to claim that these covenant blessings are experienced by every baptized baby? If not, then what is the purpose of this so-called baptism?

Maybe you ask, Why is this important? Walker deals with a baptismal controversy that took place in the 1690s, between an Anglican (Burkitt), and a Baptist (Keach). “For these men the matter concerned two fundamental questions – what is a Christian, and what is the nature of a true gospel church ... Burkitt had declared that infant baptism was the door into the church of Jesus Christ. Keach was persuaded that those who practiced infant baptism and believed in baptismal regeneration were subverting the Scriptures, by effectively opening another way into the kingdom of God ... In contrast the new covenant way called those who believed to be baptised. When Paul wrote to the church of God in Corinth, he spoke of ‘those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours” (page 46). I have not written this just to engage in controversy. Is it not true that all around us there are multitudes, countless multitudes, who if we ask, ‘When did you become a Christian,’ will answer, ‘I was baptized as a baby.’ Such are deceived and still on the broad road that leads to destruction.

[William Hendriksen, *The Gospel of John* (Banner of Truth, 1959)]

[Austin Walker, *Hot Water* (Broken Wharfe, 2024)]

7/1/25

Today the Carey Conference begins in England (<https://reformation-today.org/carey-conference-2025>) on the theme 'To the Ends of the Earth'. There is a focus on the need to take the gospel especially to the unreached peoples of the world, which are many. I recently read, "An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens". This is a paper William Carey gave in 1792!! Carey is known as 'The father of modern missions'. There were those Christians who were saying that if God wants to save the heathen then He will do it as and when He wishes. But Carey emphatically said No! We have a responsibility for God has commended US to do it in the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20. He begins by showing that this Commission remains binding upon God's people even today. He then outlines what has been done from the apostolic era until his time. Thirdly, according to the knowledge he had, he sought to outline 'The Present State of World' as regards the spiritual situation. This was one of his conclusions: "What a vast proportion of the sons of Adam there are, who yet remain in the most deplorable state of heathen darkness, without any means of knowing the true God, except what are afforded by the works of nature; and utterly destitute of the knowledge of the gospel of Christ, or of any mans of obtaining it." Despite modern developments in the past 200+ years there are still so many in this situation. [You could consult the Joshua Project, <https://joshuaproject.net>.] He continues by outlining the difficulties in seeking to fulfil the commission.

(1) The distance from England – We now talk about the world as a 'global village' as it is relatively easy to travel almost anywhere. The problem is governmental restrictions.

(2) Their 'uncivilized, and barbarous way of living' – We now think of different cultures, including religions, many of which forbid proselytizing, even conversion.

(3) The danger of being killed – A book, 'By Their Blood' claims there have been more martyrs than ever in the 20th. century. Well know examples are in the Boxer Rebellion in China, and the Five who were killed by the Aucas in Brazil.

(4) The difficulty of procuring the necessities of life.

(5) Learning their languages – These last two are not nearly so difficult, with the Bible now translated into so many languages.

This was all before the car, the train and the airplane. It was all before the telephone, the radio, and the internet and satellite phone.

He finally gives an outline of the means to be accomplished: fervent and united prayer, formation of a society, and financial contribution.

What is hindering us today? May I suggest possibilities?

- The Great Commission does not apply to me.
- Fear of disease and opposition, especially where there are children.
- Only a head knowledge of the fact that without Christ there is no possibility of salvation.
- Unwillingness to leave behind the prosperous way of life, and one's family members.

[Daniel Weber, William Carey and the Missionary Vision, pp. 55-100]

1/1/25

On New Year's Eve many in our local church gathered for a meal and fellowship. There was a time devoted to testimonies, but time ran out before I could speak. I thought about why

generally Christians don't give testimony so eagerly. In Kenya, those from the East African Revival background give their testimony every time they meet you. We say, 'Good day, how are you?' They say, 'Praise the Lord, He is my Saviour, ...' I wonder if one of the reasons is because we cannot think of something memorable enough to say. For the most part our lives are fairly ordinary, and this is actually something to thank God for. But our lives as Christians are NOT ordinary! God has saved us and made us a new creation in Christ. He is powerfully at work in us day by day (Ephesians 1:19, 1 Thessalonians 2:13). I suggest that there are at least three things for which we can give testimony that God has done for us in 2024. The first two Paul prays for the Colossians in 1:9-11.

(1) Knowledge of His will. "Asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,..." We have the Bible in our own languages, preached to us faithfully in our local churches; we have access to a vast amount of literature and the ever increasing resources of the internet; we build one another up as we fellowship together. What an abundant provision!

(2) Strength to do His will. "May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy,..." It is one thing to know His will, and another to do it, especially when there are trials and temptations. That we have reached the end of 2024 is sufficient testimony to His power in me. Without Him we can do nothing. His strength has enabled us to endure with patience and joy.

(3) His providence. God has been graciously ruling in all the affairs of our lives. He has provided those opportunities of ministry and witness. He has given health and sickness, strength and weakness, safety and difficulties in travel. We will never know all the dangers, especially spiritual, from which He has rescued us. We can confess with the Psalmist, "The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance" (16:6).