

Grace & Truth

“For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ”

Magazine
of
North Uist & Grimsay
Free Church of Scotland
(Continuing)

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Minister's Message: *The Grace of Christ*

The minds of many at the moment are devoted to money matters. We are certainly living in difficult times economically and the situation may get worse. People are already losing their jobs and even their homes. It must be said that for years as a nation and perhaps as individuals we have been living way beyond our means. We know from past experience however that these things tend to go in cycles: there is every likelihood that finances and bank balances will improve sometime in the future.

There is a more important 'balance' to consider however: our *spiritual* balance. The Bible tells us that Adam's sin and fall brought him and his descendants from a pure state into a sinful, miserable state. In Adam we all became guilty, naked and corrupt. We can no longer serve God and have been put out of our home in paradise. We are bankrupts and cannot buy our way back to God. Our prospect as sinners is eternal punishment in hell. Left to ourselves we shall never know anything but spiritual ruin.

The message of the gospel is that the Lord Himself has intervened in this calamity. Without this we would remain in our lost and sinful state forever. In love God sent His Son to deliver needy souls from their poverty. "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2Cor.8:9). What grace! Condescending grace, abounding grace, saving grace! How so?

Jesus Christ is *rich*. He is the only begotten Son of God, possessing all the attributes of deity. His dwelling is "the ivory palaces" of perfect blessedness (Psa.45:8). He brought the universe into being. He is the Lord of all creation and the Heir of all things. He is the Prince of heaven, adored by the holy angels. This was His home from all eternity.

Jesus Christ became *poor*. The Son of God put off the regalia of royalty as He came into this sinful world, assuming our manhood. He laid aside His divine glory such that His Godhood was hidden to the natural eye when He walked this earth as the man Christ Jesus. The 'poverty' of our blessed Saviour was His entering into His state of humiliation, from His conception in Mary's womb to His burial in Joseph's tomb.

Christ's incarnation meant two things. As man He was dependent upon God's help. "I was cast upon thee from the womb: thou art my God from my mother's belly" (Psa.22:10). As Messiah He was obedient to God's will. "And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death" (Phil.2:8). Think of it! The Lord of glory was mocked, buffeted and crucified in shame and yet He came willingly.

Jesus Christ makes His people *rich*. He descended into the depths of personal poverty and rose again for this reason – that the grace of God

might be lavished upon sinners. He finds us as paupers, clothed in rags, lying in the filthy ditch of our sins. Then He lifts us up, washes us clean in His blood and clothes us with His righteousness. But there is more. He introduces us to the friendship of God. He takes us into the palace of the King and sets us with “the princes of his people” (Psa.113:8)!

Our spiritual poverty as sinners before a holy God is very great. But see God’s marvellous grace is sending His own dear Son to bless sinners with everlasting wealth. The wise thing then for us all is to confess our sins to God and put our trust in the only Saviour, Jesus Christ. □

Helps to Devotion (Rev. James Smith)

PRESERVATION. *“Hold up my goings in thy paths, that my footsteps slip not....Keep me as the apple of the eye; hide me under the shadow of thy wings.”* (Psalm 17:5,8)

The psalmist felt his weakness and saw his danger. He was afraid lest he should dishonour God, wound his conscience, or grieve his saints; therefore he prays that God would lead him by the hand, and hold him up in every dangerous path. He desires to be kept carefully and comfortably, and therefore prays to be guarded as the apple of the eye, and to be protected like the bird beneath the warm and strong wing of its parent. How beautiful, how simple, how touching, the figures employed in Scripture,—so easy to be understood, and commending themselves to one’s judgment! Beloved, we need keeping too, for we are weak; we need careful keeping, for our path is often dark and slippery. Many have fallen from the spot where we stand; let us then pray as David prayed, and seek what David sought. Good and gracious Lord, thou knowest our weakness, and the difficult road we have to travel; therefore we appeal to thy mercy, and beseech thee to hold up our goings in our paths, that our footsteps slip not. Suffer us not to be drawn aside from them, or stumble in them; but help us to press on in the good old way, and to walk erect before our fellow-men. Keep us, we pray thee, carefully and constantly; setting a suitable and sufficient guard over us, as thou hast over the apple of the eye. Hide, O hide us under thy wings, and we shall not only be safe, but enjoy our safety, and daily make our boast of the Lord, that the humble may hear thereof and be glad. We, like young birds, are exposed to many dangers, and our safety is alone in thee. O cover us with thy feathers, and let thy wings be our defence! □

Parables of Jesus: 9. The Mustard Seed

(Please read Matthew 13:31,32)

This is the last of our Lord's parables concerning seed. Again it describes the development of the kingdom of God, from its small beginning to its great conclusion when every nation on earth shall be represented within it.

Jesus speaks of a man sowing just one mustard seed in his field. The mustard plant was cultivated annually in Palestine. Its seed was minute but it grew rapidly. In good, moist soil it would shoot up to become a "tree" ten feet in height, providing rest, shelter and of course food for a variety of birds.

Death

Likewise the sowing of a single seed has been responsible for a flourishing and valuable spiritual crop in this world. What is this seed? It is surely that seed which God announced after man's fall. Addressing the devil He said: "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel" (Gen.3:15).

Jesus Christ, the Son of God who became man, is supremely the Seed of the woman. He suffered for the sins of others. Through His death He destroyed the devil and brought life to the world. Of His own crucifixion He said: "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit" (John 12:24). Jesus rose again to reveal His victory over sin.

Growth

As it is sown a seed looks unattractive, insignificant and lifeless. There appears to be no potential for any good to come from it. So is the cross of Christ: "we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not" (Isa.53:3).

The growth of a seed is in God's hands and so is the church's growth. It is by His power alone. Those who were saved in the Old Testament were not better than others but, like Noah, they "found grace in the eyes of the Lord" (Gen.6:8). The Jews were "the fewest of all people" yet God loved them and chose them as special to Him (Deut.7:6).

Multitude

With most plants the early stages of growth are slow and unspectacular.

But after roots are put down there comes a period of strong growth leading to flowering and fruit.

When Christ came to the Jews they rejected Him and when He left the world there were but a hundred disciples (Acts 1:15). The increase came when the Saviour sent His Spirit. Thousands were converted on one day and many after that (Acts 2:41,47). Gentiles now entered the church. The preaching of the gospel “turned the world upside down” (Acts 17:6) and has done ever since.

From one mighty Seed comes all the precious fruit of God’s kingdom, “a great multitude...of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues” (Rev.7:9). Have we also believed to the saving of our soul? □

Sermon: Faith in God (Rev. Norman Campbell)

(Taken from The Free Church Pulpit published in 1927. At the time when the sermon was preached Mr Campbell was minister of Dingwall.)

“Therefore I will look unto the Lord, I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me.” – Micah 7:7

The prophet Micah lived in degenerate times. Religious life and experience in Israel were at a low ebb. A flood of wickedness and ungodliness inundated the land to an alarming extent. No place was considered sacred. The home, the sanctuary, the courts of justice were places of abounding iniquity. Infidelity, corruption, injustice, and violence universally prevailed.

Moreover the righteous were taken away from the evil coming on the earth. “The good man is perished out of the earth.” A few witnessing for God were left; but they were only as “the grape gleanings of the vintage.” Filled with the Spirit of Christ Who wept over Jerusalem, and in the spirit of the prophet Jeremiah, who could weep day and night for his people, and of Paul, who could wish himself accursed for his brethren, the prophet raises his voice in loud lamentation, crying, “Woe is me.” As he looks at the picture in its dark lurid colours, is he ready to fall into despondency and hopelessness with regard to the nation? He turns from man to his God, his never-failing help and strength. All about and around him may look black and dark, but as he looks up to Him Who sits on the Throne, the light of divine glory irradiates his spirit, strengthens his fainting soul, and brightens the future. He will look to the Lord, the Lord Who, in the history

of Israel, is the God of Salvation, Who answered prayer, Who can revive His work, and Who can make the wilderness as the garden of the Lord. The prophet is not the superficial optimist of modern times, who speaks of the evolutionary progress of humanity; who cannot, in his blindness of heart, see the sins and evils of his country and the world; and who never mourns over them at the foot of the Throne. On the other hand, he is not the pessimist, who in his fatalism gives the world over to despair, darkness, and destruction. He has firm confidence in God's promises. He envisages a future when the kingdoms of the world will be Christ's. Who is a God like unto Him! He is to turn again. He will perform the truth to Jacob and the mercy to Abraham which He has sworn unto our fathers from the days of old.

In the words of the text the prophet affirms his faith in God, and declares—

I. The Foundation of Faith is Jehovah, the God of Salvation

Jehovah, the uncreated, eternal, omnipotent God, of incomprehensible majesty and glory, of infinite love, and of boundless mercy and grace, is the foundation of the believer's faith. Jehovah is the great name by which God has revealed Himself as the God of redemption, the Covenant God of Israel; it is the name in which His glory is revealed.

He is the God of Salvation.—God, in His love and wisdom, is the Author of man's salvation. He laid the foundation of the work of redemption in the counsels of eternity; and in harmony with His eternal purposes God was manifested in the flesh. God incarnate, "Aman of sorrows and acquainted with grief," with His sinless life, His vicarious sufferings, and atoning death, finished the work. He is now a Prince and a Saviour. His is all the work; and His shall be all the glory.

He is the Believer's personal Saviour.—"God of *my* salvation." Man, who has sinned against God, and who has destroyed himself under the power and in the bondage of sin, must have a Saviour who is divine. To reflect on man's nature, his sins, the capabilities, and the immortality of his soul, is to see that none but God can save him; and the enlightened, awakened sinner cannot be satisfied with any other. Christ Jesus, the God of Salvation, is revealed to man in the glory of His Divine Person, in His suitability and all-sufficiency, is His grace and love. The soul believes, trusts, accepts Christ, the unspeakable gift of God, as his complete Salvation. God is now the God of *his* Salvation. The believer is in union with Christ, is accepted in the Beloved, and Christ, Who is God, is his complete Salvation.

He is also his Personal God.—He is man’s Creator, his Redeemer, Provider, and Preserver, but in His personal relation to the Christian, He is more, He is *his* God. By mutual choice God is his. God says, “I am thy God”; and with the disciple, when he beheld his risen Redeemer in His beauty and glory, he can say under the influence of the Divine Spirit, “My Lord and my God.” His is his God in a covenant in indissoluble union, a covenant ratified by the blood of Christ, a covenant as sure and as steadfast as the promises and the oath of Jehovah, God of Salvation.

The Christian’s delight, joy, and satisfaction are in God, his portion. He will trust and not be afraid, for “God is the strength of his heart and his portion for ever.” Observe the progressive steps of faith. He believes God is the God of Salvation, then the God of *his* Salvation, and finally, he rises to the highest altitude of faith when he says, “My God.”

What a beautiful name is “*the God of Salvation,*” by which God reveals Himself! It is a name which is music in the ears of the contrite sinner. Thousands have tested this name, and they can testify with Micah that He is the God of Salvation; for God is to them all that He claims to be. God not only saves, but He Himself is the Christian’s Salvation. Therefore the Salvation is great, glorious, all-sufficient, and everlasting. He saves from sin, the trials and tribulations of life, and all evil in this world, and ultimately the soul being sanctified is put in possession of the inheritance and the eternal glory. It is not what man is, or can do, or even his faith, that affords the solid ground of confidence, but what God is in His Deity, in His attributes, and in His glorious work of redemption.

II. Faith in Exercise is Looking unto the Lord

Faith looks to the Lord for complete salvation, for deliverance from sin, and all the evils of this life, and for grace and glory.

This act of faith, looking to the Lord, means renunciation of confidence in anything man can do, and absolute dependence on the Lord for all he needs. There is a danger to which the anxious sinner seeking salvation, and even at times the experienced believer is exposed, that of looking to himself for those graces which the Spirit alone can work in the soul, such as repentance, faith, and new obedience. He has to be taught that he must look to Christ for every gift and grace. He is justified by faith, and the just shall live by faith. There is a danger in limiting God in His grace by unbelieving thoughts of Him. “Grace abounding” is seen not only in justification with free pardon, and eternal glory for the chief of sinners, but also, and to an equal degree, in the sanctification of the believer, and

in the supplying of his daily needs. "Much more shall they who receive abundance of grace reign in life through Jesus Christ."

As long as a person is occupied with his own feelings and thoughts he cannot have peace; but as he forsakes and gives up everything and surrenders himself fully to Christ, he is led into the divine love, into peace and the full enjoyment of the divine favour. He is to look, and to continue looking to Christ for life, for strength in weakness, for light in darkness, for purity and for holiness. In all circumstances, and at all times, the believer is to look to the Lord: in times of abounding iniquity, in loneliness, in sorrow, in the trials of life, the eye of faith should be fixed on Christ. Man is encouraged to look to Christ alone for He is commanded to look: "Look unto Me." His name, His character, His mediatorial offices and work encourage him, for it is God alone Who can and Who shall supply *all* the needs of His people according to the riches of His grace in glory by Christ Jesus.

Waiting.—"I will wait for the God of my Salvation." Waiting on God in prayer implies the belief that God can and will supply the needs in His own time. The prayer of faith waiting on God is not a vague appeal for help and mercy, not an indefinite cry for blessing, but a distinct expression of need with purpose and expectation of getting an answer. The believing heart, waiting on God, hears what God speaks. His words are spirit and truth; and, the believer, finding God's Will in some promise of the Word, pleads and waits for the answer.

Faith sees the promise, embraces it, and waits for its fulfilment. "Through faith and patience they inherit the promises." Patience perseveres in prayer until the gift is bestowed. There must be calm patience and joyful confidence in waiting.

This waiting on God is a mystery, a mystery indeed, that God Whose love is infinite, Who delights in giving more than we in receiving, Who gives promises, and Whose gracious purpose it is to bestow the blessing, may delay for a time His answer to the earnest prayer. But delay on the part of God is not refusal. The result of delay often is that faith, tried, appeareth more precious than gold. But the waiting believer must not faint, for the promise is that they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength, run and not be weary, walk and not faint. The persevering prayer is heart-searching. The suppliant seeks to discover and confess sins and whatever hinders the blessing; and this leads to closer fellowship with God and greater earnestness in prayer.

III. Assurance of Faith in Prayer

(1) The assured confidence of faith is grounded on God's character and

revealed truth, His Godhead, His love, His all-sufficiency, His grace and power. It pleased Him to reveal Himself, especially in Christ Jesus, as Jehovah, God of Salvation. The sinner is commanded to believe in the Divine Person and pray in His name: "Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith."

(2) God's promise and God's commandment are the measure of the believer's prayer and expectation. His promise is the pledge that what the believer asks will be with the greatest certainty received. Faith in the promise says, "We know that He heareth us." Some, from ignorance and false humility, may think that it is presumption to expect the fulfilment of a great and gracious promise. True humility always accompanies the strong faith which seeks to know the mind of God in the Word, and then calmly claims, and waits for the fulfilment of the promise. Faith may even be strong enough to praise God for what it expects, even though not then actually possessed in experience. "And all things, whatsoever ye ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive."

The believer is in union with God by the closest and tenderest relationship. "My God," he says; and therefore he has a right to His love and power and all the fulness of the Godhead. He has a holy boldness in asking what is in accordance with God's mind, and in expecting the blessing for himself or for others. Doubts and fears are most unworthy in one who stands in this relation to God.

The prophet must have got a vision of his God in His incomprehensible majesty, unapproachable holiness, and also in His boundless grace; of Christ in His Mediatorial Glory and Intercession, sitting on the Throne of Mercy, waiting to be gracious, commanding to ask, saying, "Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in My name He will give it you. Ask, and ye shall receive that your joy may be full."

The Spirit of grace in the heart, the Spirit of adoption, inspires confidence in prayer. The Father in secret is waiting for His child, He will recompense him. The child's cry will move the Father to help him, and the confidence of the child is in his Father's living presence and power to help.

The prayer of faith is in the name of Christ. We must have a clear understanding that all the Three Persons in the Holy Trinity have a place in prayer. We pray to the Father, the "God of all mercies," but it is through Christ "we have access by one Spirit to the Father." Prayer must be in the name, the Person, the life, and the infinite merits of Christ, and by the Spirit, Who is the Spirit of intercession in the believing heart. In the parting words of the blessed Saviour no less than six times does He give His name in connection with unlimited promises in prayer to God.

“Whatsoever ye ask it shall be given you.”

He who prays in His name, prays in union with the exalted Redeemer, in His Spirit; and possessing Him in whom all the fulness of the Deity dwells, he pleads all that Christ is to God. Christ—His Divine Person, His life, sufferings, and death—is the all-prevailing plea in prayer. In Christ, and in His name, the believer approaches the footstool of the Throne of Mercy, and he may have the assurance that his prayers are heard. Christ’s worth and the Father’s delight in Him are the measure of the believer’s confidence and assurance of faith.

The essential element in a believer’s prayer is that God may be glorified. The glory of God must be the aim and end of prayer. The Son came to earth to glorify God, to show forth in its light, purity, and beauty, the glory which has been hid from men by sin. Jesus glorifies God in the work of His redeeming love. As He approaches the hour of unparalleled sufferings He addresses the Father, saying, “Father, glorify Thy name,” and immediately, He had the assurance that He is accepted by God: “I have both glorified it and will glorify it again.” In Christ’s intercession in heaven in asking and in bestowing gifts on men God is glorified. The mightiest power and plea in prayer is God’s glory.

When the believer is fully convinced that what he asks—such as increase of grace, knowledge, and holiness in his own soul, love for God’s work, and the coming of Christ’s Kingdom, and the power of the Spirit with divine grace working in connection with the preaching of the Gospel for the conversion of sinners—is all in accordance with the divine mind, as revealed in His Word and for the glory of God, he, with self-sacrifice, surrenders himself to the Father’s will and glory, and becomes a true intercessor, who can approach the Throne, not only with his own needs, but also for others; and he has the assurance that “God will hear him.” We see that there is a living fellowship with the Intercessor in heaven, whose unceasing intercession gives power to the believers on earth, and through whose intercession their prayers are accepted. “Father, glorify Thy name,” is their prayer, and their God will hear them, notwithstanding the difficulties which may arise and perplex the believing heart.

Should any think that for God to hear prayer, to be influenced by the cry of His child, and to act on his behalf, are inconsistent with the immutability of God, we must remember that God, in His purposes, in His thoughts, in the harmony of His sovereignty with the freedom of the human will, far transcends human thoughts. God does not live in time with its limitations of past and future, but He inhabits eternity. With Him eternity is an ever-present *now* in which the past and future are always present.

In the eternal counsels of God, in His purpose of grace, there was a place for the intercession of the Son and for the prayers of His people on earth. In the bosom of God prayer is offered. The Son asks, the Father gives. There is a union in spirit between the Intercessor in heaven and His people on earth; and their prayers, which seek the glory of God in full assurance of faith in the name of Christ, with perseverance, are acceptable to Him, and will be heard.

Recollection of past mercies strengthens the believer's faith in God for the future. "He heard me already," he says. Confidence in God fears not the future with its mysteries, and may even be able to look forward and upward with a joyful heart.

IV. Faith in Adversity Leads to God in Prayer

The assurance that prayer in its power with God, however great a spiritual mystery, with trust in His faithfulness to His promises, will be heard, should encourage and strengthen every one in asking, and in persevering in asking, until his faith is crowned with success.

The wonder is that the believer, with God as his God, and with His great and precious promises, could have any doubts as to His gracious purposes, or His delight in giving and fulfilling His promise; a wonder that the Christian, having God for his God, and possessing the revelation of His Will and His Spirit, could have any doubts with regard to the success of the Gospel.

A day may come to the man of God which may be described as "a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and of thick darkness," and there is a danger that the faith of some of the greatest saints may faint under life's troubles; and look where they will, they can see nothing but a black horizon. Looking back there may only be for the Christian a memory of vanished joys; looking within, there is only a weary fainting spirit; and looking forward, only new trials looming in the future, until he looks up, and then seeing God on the Throne, the light of heaven shines upon him, and with faith, rejoicing, and adoration, he continues his intercession, for God will hear him.

The believer may feel at times as the prophet did, that he is alone, until he sees the footprints of fellow-sufferers in the Valley. He can see the footprints of Moses, David, Elijah, Paul, and many others, but especially the footprints of One greater than all of them, of Christ Himself, the Man of Sorrows, Who through faith obtained the promises. The prophet in his loneliness looks to God. He looks for a revival of religion in the land. Believing that God alone can revive His work, that regeneration, the

imparting of divine life, is a miracle of God's grace, he pleads with wholeheartedness in prayer and faith, for the Holy Spirit, for the advancement of the Kingdom of Christ—a Kingdom of righteousness and peace—for the salvation of men, and the manifestation of God's glory on earth. Therefore he looks unto the Lord.

Afflicted ones in all circumstances should look to the Lord for help and comfort. The design of God often in sending trouble is to bring His people near to Himself. He will remove their friends, wither their strength, and increase their burdens, until they come to have entire dependence on God Himself. Their faith glorifies God, and in this there is the best evidence that troubles are greatly blessed to them.

In these critical times, when the very foundations of the Christian faith are fiercely assailed—not, however, so much by infidels outside the pale of the Church of Christ, as by theological teachers and authors, poisoning the wells of truth, and by ministers from their pulpits—when many are deceived by “philosophy and vain deceit,” the opinions of false teachers, who, as in the time of the Apostle, posed as great intellectualists, and presented “their gospel” as something highly spiritual, but congruous with the methods of the world; when the moral law and the precepts of the Gospel are no longer the criterion in private or public life; when empires, kingdoms, and the foundations of civilisation, with revolutions, upheavals, and earthquakes, are shaking and are in danger of crumbling into ruin, the believer looks to God in prayer. In the midst of the surgings of human pride, rebellion against God, changes and commotions in Churches and nations, in the tremendous conflict between light and darkness, between good and evil; when almost every conceivable form of evil, error, delusion, and iniquity disfigures the fair face of Christendom, there remains no refuge and no power to the believer but God, Who is unchangeable in His Word and promises, and Who answers prayer. Therefore he looks unto the Lord.

In the stupendous changes and events of our times, the man of God sees the precursors of the happy day, when His glory shall fill the whole earth, when the kingdoms of darkness, colossal systems of infidelity and idolatry, when Rome, for centuries exercising tyrannical power over nations with her idolatries, the beast, and the false prophet, shall be destroyed for ever; and when the nations of the earth, still under the darkness and shadow of death, shall be blessed in Christ, until the knowledge of the Lord shall cover the whole earth.

In the confident assurance that God is working to accomplish His purpose in answer to the prayers of His believing people, they continue in

earnest intercession on behalf of Christ's Kingdom, "prayer shall be made for Him continually"; and as they pray, they can even bless His glorious name in songs of praise, for the fulfilment of His promises to them, saying—

“Now blessed be the Lord our God,
the God of Israel,
For He alone doth wondrous works,
in glory that excel.
And blessed be His glorious name
to all eternity:
The whole earth let His glory fill.
Amen, so let it be.” □

Christian Doctrines Explained: 9. Providence

Q.11. *What are God's works of providence?*

A. God's works of providence are his most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing all his creatures, and all their actions.

We have seen how God performs His decrees with regard to the work of creation, especially in the making of man. We now look at the works of providence, which are also the outworking of His decrees.

Purpose

Our term “providence” comes from a Latin word which means “to see before.” In what sense does God “see before”? Some imagine that God created the universe and then withdrew, leaving it to run by itself, rather as one might wind a clock and then let it run down. Instead we find that God is intimately involved in His creation. He has a purpose for it which He fixed in eternity and the works of providence are the steps He takes in pursuit of that goal.

Preservation

Providence includes the *preservation* of things, or the sustaining of things in being. Regarding the material universe God is “upholding all things by the word of his power” (Heb.1:3); we read that by Christ all things “consist” or “hold together” (Col.1:17). Concerning living things God makes provision of what is necessary to maintain life. “Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing” (Psa.145:16).

Government

Providence also includes the *government* of things, or the directing of things in action. God is the supreme Sovereign so “his kingdom ruleth over *all*” (Psa.103:19). Natural or general actions, those integral to life itself, are governed by God (Acts 17:28); so are casual or accidental actions, which men commit on occasion (Exod.21:12,13). Moral actions are under God’s hand too. Without His grace we can do nothing good (John 15:5). Sin can only be committed if God permits and then it is limited by Him and directed to good ends. “Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain” (Psa.76:10). God is never the author of sin.

Character

Providence is *universal* in scope, extending to every creature and action. Our thoughts, words and deeds are governed by God. “The preparations of the heart in man, and the answer of the tongue, is from the Lord” (Prov.16:1). Providence is *holy*: it rewards obedience and punishes sin (Psa.145:17). Providence is *wise*: it overrules everything for the good of believers (Rom.8:28). Providence is *powerful*: it is never thwarted by either angels or men (Dan.4:35).

In His ordinary providence God works after the natural order. So we must work the land to produce our food. But in His extraordinary providence God works above or against this order, as when He sent ravens to feed Elijah during a famine (1Kings 17:4-6). These events we term ‘miracles’. God’s general providence oversees all things but His special providence takes care of His church.

We could not worship a God who did not or could not control what He had made. To know by faith the God of providence is a comfort indeed. □

The Reformation in Scotland: 9. The First Covenant

(The articles in this series are taken from “History of the Church of Scotland” by William M. Hetherington, first published in 1842.)

In the mean time matters were rapidly maturing in Scotland. Notwithstanding the discouraging letters which Knox had received at Dieppe, the chief of the nobility who invited him were still prepared to stand by their invitation; and, in fact, renewed it, in a letter sent to Geneva by a special messenger. And although the return of Knox was

delayed, yet his letters from Dieppe seemed to have little less influence than his presence might have had. The lords and chief gentry, devoted to the reforming interests, resolved to meet at Edinburgh, and, by a general consultation, to determine what was now best for them to do. They came to the noble resolution that they would persevere in their defence of the reformed religion; and, that they might have the confidence and strength of confirmed union, they resolved to frame a common bond or covenant, engaging them to mutual support in defence of each other and of the gospel. This very remarkable document, which has been commonly called THE FIRST COVENANT, was subscribed at Edinburgh, on the 3rd of December 1557; and on account of its great importance, both in its own time, and as setting the example of similar covenants, we shall present it to the reader entire, merely modernising the spelling.

“We, perceiving how Satan, in his members the antichrists of our time, cruelly doth rage, seeking to downthrow and destroy the evangel of Christ and his congregation, ought, according to our bounden duty, to strive in our Master’s cause, even unto the death, being certain of the victory in Him: the which, our duty being well considered, we do promise before the Majesty of God and his congregation, That we, by his grace, shall with all diligence continually apply our whole power, substance, and our very lives, to maintain, set forward, and establish the most blessed Word of God, and his congregation; and shall labour to minister Christ’s evangel and sacraments to his people. We shall maintain them, nourish them, and defend them, the whole congregation of Christ, and every member thereof, at our whole power, and wairing [expending] of our lives against Satan and all wicked power that does intend tyranny and trouble against the foresaid congregation. Unto the which holy word and congregation we do join us; and also do renounce and forsake the congregation of Satan, with all the superstitions, abominations, and idolatry thereof. And moreover shall declare ourselves manifestly enemies thereto, by this our faithful promise before God, testified to his congregation, by our subscription at these presents. At Edinburgh the third day of December 1557 years. God called to witness.”

This bond, or covenant, was subscribed by the Earls of Argyle, Glencairn, and Morton, Archibald, lord of Lorn, John Erskine of Dun, and a great number of other distinguished men among the lesser barons and influential country gentlemen. From the repeated recurrence of the word *congregation* in this document, the chief subscribers were after this called Lords of the Congregation; and the people who adhered to them were called the Congregation.

Though they had thus both ascertained and confirmed their strength, the Lords of the Congregation were desirous to act in the most temperate manner, and not to provoke an actual conflict, unless it could not possibly be avoided. They resolved, therefore, to rest satisfied with requesting the Queen-regent to cause all country curates and pastors to perform the services of religion in the English language; consenting that the reformed preachers should teach in private houses only, till permission should be obtained for them to preach in public. This petition was presented to the Queen-regent by Sir James Sandilands. To this she returned a plausible answer, promising to grant the prayer of the petition as far as might be practicable, and, in the mean time, granting protection to the Protestant preachers till some uniform arrangement might be established by Parliament, provided there should be no public meetings held in Edinburgh and Leith. In consequence of this interim arrangement, the chief Protestant preachers were received into the houses of the Lords of the Congregation, and restricted their teaching in a great measure to the households where they resided.

The Popish clergy being now unable to wreak their vengeance on the chief Protestant preachers, determined to show no mercy to any whom they could get within their power. There was an aged priest, named Walter Mill, who had been accused of heresy in the days of Cardinal Beaton, but had contrived to escape at that time from his murderous hands. Mill had continued to live in comparative concealment for several years, occasionally preaching in public, but more commonly in private, in different quarters of the kingdom. Being lately discovered by one of the Archbishop's spies, he was seized and brought to trial at St Andrews. The venerable man, bowed down with the weight of years, for he was upwards of fourscore, defended himself on the day of his trial with great spirit and ability. He was, nevertheless, condemned to be burned at the stake; but so great was the compassion felt for him, and such the horror awakened by this barbarous outrage of all that man holds sacred in the hoary head of drooping human nature, that no person could be got to aid in the execution of the sentence, till the Archbishop commanded one of his own domestics to perpetrate the crime. On the 28th of April 1558, Mill expired amidst the flames, uttering these words, "As for me, I am fourscore and two years old, and cannot live long by course of nature; but a hundred better shall rise out of the ashes of my bones. I trust in God, I shall be the last that shall suffer death in Scotland for this cause." □

Precious Psalms: 9. Trusting in the Lord

“And they that know thy name shall put their trust in thee: for thou, Lord, hast not forsaken them that seek thee.” (Psalm 9:10)

Names in the Bible are full of significance, none more so than the names and titles of God. A name is that by which a person is known and understood. The God of heaven has revealed Himself to us under many titles, each one showing a different aspect of His glorious character and encouraging us to rely upon Him.

Faith

What is faith? Some view it as a “leap in the dark.” Like the Athenians they look to “the unknown God” (Acts 17:23). But true faith is not a leap in the dark but a step into the light. We put our trust in God because of what we know of Him from His inspired and infallible word. Rome says that *ignorance* is the mother of devotion and she keeps the Bible from the people but we trust and serve a God we *know*. Like Paul we say concerning the Lord Jesus Christ, “I know whom I have believed” (2Tim.1:12).

Experience

Believers also trust God because of what they know of Him from their experience. Although they have had their low points they can honestly say God has never abandoned them. In all his many years David had not seen “the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread” (Psa.37:25). The church is called “Sought out, A city not forsaken” (Isa.62:12). In Christ we have “a friend that sticketh closer than a brother” (Prov.18:24).

In a secular age we are tempted to think that God has left us and that we should admit defeat. The church in our land will continue to decline and soon be no more. It is easy to succumb to this thought and cease to cry to the Lord to revive His work. May we trust His promises and pray!

Covenant

If one of God’s names stands out it is *Jehovah*, as used here. It speaks of His salvation and faithfulness. “He sent redemption to his people: he hath commanded his covenant for ever: holy and reverend is his name” (Psa.111:9). Let us look to *Him*. □

For Young People: *Birds of the Bible*

9. The Turtledove – Bird of Love

“O deliver not the soul of thy turtledove unto the multitude of the wicked: forget not the congregation of thy poor for ever” (Psalm 74:19)

We have already looked at the dove, the bird of salvation. The dove represents God’s redeemed people, the church. To them Jesus says with loving voice, “O my dove” (Song 2:14). Jesus delights in his people and they in him. To believers Jesus Christ is “altogether lovely” (Song 5:16).

In love Jesus died on the cross for the sins of his people, to save them from the hell they deserve. Now he lovingly seeks and finds each one of his people by the gospel. And when he brings them to himself in conversion he lovingly cleanses them and makes them holy like himself. Then he has great joy in them.

The turtledove is a special sort of wild dove with a gentle nature and a soft, cooing voice. It gathers in flocks and because of its pleasant character these birds have often been kept as favourites. The turtledove can teach us about the love between Christ and his people.

First there is the *call* of love. God’s people are sinners just like others. We have no life in our souls. Though we may read the Bible and hear the gospel preached plainly and with much pleading, we will not turn from our sins if left to ourselves. Spiritually everything is dead, just as it is in the winter. What Jesus said to Nicodemus is true for us all: “Ye must be born again” (John 3:7).

Spring is the season of new life. What are its signs? In the Bible we read: “The flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land” (Song 2:12). Among the many voices which we sinners may hear there is one which speaks from heaven and is sweet and inviting like the turtledove. It is Jesus calling us by his Spirit. Have you heard his voice?

When the Holy Spirit speaks to our hearts through the gospel it is with a powerful, irresistible voice that wakens us from our sleep in sin. Our souls live again. *Then* we realise we are sinners. *Then* we see how suitable a Saviour Jesus is for us. And we repent of our sins and embrace Christ in the arms of faith. It is “the time of love” (Ezek. 16:8) and we begin to walk hand in hand with Christ.

Then there is the *cost* of love. We know what it cost for Jesus Christ

to save us, but do we understand that there is also a cost in following him? Jesus said: “Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me” (Mark 8:34). We cannot buy salvation, but if we are saved then there will be a change in our lives. We will want to show how grateful we are to God for his mercy and grace.

Paul wrote to the church at Corinth: “Ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s” (1Cor. 6:20). There is only one way to glorify God and that is by obeying him. “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15). What does our Lord Jesus Christ expect to see in the lives of his people?

He wants to see the likeness of the turtledove. It is known for its *purity*. It is careful in its habits and how it looks in the sight of others. It is known for its *modesty*. It is shy in its appearance and does not parade itself proudly. It is known for its *beauty*. Its gentle voice and character draw the admiration of many. All in all it is an innocent bird and a threat to none. Are we like this in our lives?

Finally there is the *commitment* of love. In this world there is much false affection and little real love. True love includes a determination to persevere with those we love, through bad times as well as good. Christ and his people have covenanted or made promises to be faithful to each other.

Could anyone hate the turtledove? Hardly – yet there are many who hate Christ’s turtledove, the church. Because sincere Christians lead holy lives others may feel uncomfortable about their sins. Often they will oppose the true church strongly. Like believers before us we may begin to feel something like a defenceless dove, very weak against its powerful enemies. Then we will cry to the Lord in the words of Scripture, “O deliver not the soul of thy turtledove unto the multitude of the wicked” (Psa. 74:19).

What a wonderful discovery the Christian makes when he looks upward in faith! He finds that in Jesus Christ he has “a friend that sticketh closer than a brother” (Prov. 18:24). Though we fail so often to serve God as we should we are in the tender care of a loving and faithful Saviour, who is able to overcome all our foes.

John says of Jesus, “We love him, because he first loved us” (1John 4:19). When we truly love Christ we will want to follow him and please him in all things. The turtledove is faithful to its mate even until death. Will we be that faithful to our true Friend, Jesus Christ? □

**Gàidhlig: Cò a sgaras sinn o ghràdh Chrìosd?
– Ròmanaich 8:35 (Seonaidh Mac'ill Eathainn)**

Nach iomadh suidheachadh ann an beatha duine anns a' faic sinn atharraichean a' gabhail aite a' dh'fhàgas sinn le mòran cheistean mu thiomcheall an t-sligh' air adhart. Tha seo fìor gu cinnteach anns an latha anns a' bheil sinn bèò an diugh. Tha e an cluasan gach aon mar tha pòsaidhean a' briseadh sìos. Cluinnidh sinn mar a' chailleas dàoine an dreuchdan. Cluinnidh sinn mu dhaoine a' fagail an duthaich fhèin airson beatha ùr a' thòiseachadh thàll thairis. Tha è cho furasda thuigsinn a' bhuaidh a tha aig bàs ann an teaghlach nèò ann an coimhearsnach an uair a' bhuaileas e gun dùil ris. Anns gach eiseamplair a tha sinn air a' thogail tha buaidh mhaireannach na chois a dh'fhàgas an cuid theaghlaichean le cridheachan goirt agus am beatha air a' chuir bun os cionn. Tha ionndrainn agus bròn a' cruthachadh sàrachadh leantainneach do bhùill nan teaghlaichean sin.

Nach prìseil a charaid an neart tha aig an duine tha cuir a dhòchas ann an Crìosd! Tha chaibteal seo ag innse dhuinn anns an 28mh earrann: “agus tha fios againn gun co-obrach na h-uile nithean a chum maith, don dream aig a bheil gràdh do Dhia, eadhon dhaibhsan a' ghairmeadh a rèir a ruin.” Seall mar a tha a chaibteal a leantainn air adhart a' misneachadh a Chrìosdaidh anns an t-suidheachadh anns am bheil iad. Faic mar eiseamplair na trì earrannan mu dheireadh dhen chaibteal, 37-39: “Chan eadh, ach anns na nithean sin uile tha sinn a' toirt tuilleadh agus buaidh, tridsan a ghradhaich sinn. Oir tha dearbh-bheachd agam, nach bi bàs, no beatha, no aingil, no uachdaranachdan, no cumhachdan, no nithean a tha an lathair, no nithean a tha ri teachd, no airde, no doimhne, no creutair sam bith eile, comasach air sinne sgaradh o ghràdh Dhè a tha ann an Iosa Crìosd ar Tighearna...”

Nach biodh e iomchaidh a charaid gun ìarradh an duine glic a chuibrionn seo na bheatha. Ge be de a thilgeas an saoghal oirnn sa' bheatha seo neo de bhios a coinneachadh rinn nach biodh e na neart dhuit fhèin agus dhomhsa sealbh a bhi againn air a chuspair gràidh mun ro sinn a' labhairt. Co a dh'ìarradh a bhi air a' sgaradh airson na siorraidhachd tha air thoiseach air gach aon againn. Mar a' thubhairt mi, 'se an duine glic a bheir fainear. Cuir fhein do dhòchas ann an Crìosd agus biodh È agad mar d'fhear-sàoraidh anns a bheatha seo agus anns a bheatha ri teachd. □

Congregational News

Baptism

On Sabbath 19th April Finlay Donald, the son of Mr & Mrs Norrie MacRitchie of “The Meadows,” 18 Knockintorran was baptised in the congregation. As the mark of Christ has been placed upon this young child let us remember him and the family prayerfully before the Lord. “And they shall put my name upon the children of Israel; and I will bless them” (Num.6:17).

Fellowships

Our monthly fellowships this year are on the theme of ‘Truth and Error’ in which we compare the teachings of the major world religions and cults with the teachings of the Bible. The meetings are held in the manse after the Sabbath evening service and are open to all who are interested. At the meeting on May 10th we intend to look at Judaism, a religion which has links with the Scriptures and a presence in most countries of the world. On 14th June we hope to look at Roman Catholicism, which although dealt a mighty blow at the Reformation still seeks to supplant biblical Christianity everywhere. For more information visit our website: www.northuistandgrimsayfcc.org.uk

Induction

At a meeting of the Outer Hebrides Presbytery on 1st April the Rev. Graeme Craig was inducted to the Stornoway Congregation. The Rev. James Clark presided and preached and the charges to the minister and congregation were given by the Rev. Macaulay Macleod and the Rev. Donald MacDonald respectively. It was encouraging to see a good number of people present from the mainland as well as from the islands. We wish Mr Craig and his family the Lord’s richest blessing as they settle into their new location and sphere of service for Christ.

Assembly

The General Assembly of our Church is due to meet in Liberton Kirk, Edinburgh from Monday 18th to Thursday 21st May. Please bring the proceedings of the Assembly to the throne of grace, that the outcome of every matter considered may be to the glory of God and the good of His cause. We trust that the Moderator-Designate, the Rev. Bill Scott, will know the Lord’s help in his duties during the Assembly. “I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help” (Psa.121:1). □

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Services:

Sabbath: 12.00noon; 6.00pm

Wednesday: 7.30pm

Communions: 2nd Sabbath in April and September

All services are held in the church at Bayhead.

Website: www.northuistandgrimsayfcc.org.uk

Sermons preached in the congregation are recorded and may be downloaded from the website. Alternatively they are available in CD or tape format. Please contact the minister for further details.

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