

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: *Balancing the Books*

As we all know the recent General Election led to the formation of a Coalition between two of the three main political parties in the United Kingdom, the first since the Second World War. It remains to be seen how long this agreement will last, particularly when it was entered into more out of convenience than conviction. Such is often the way in politics.

The greatest task facing the new Government is the economy. We have been told repeatedly that our country's finances are in a parlous state and must be sorted out. The solution will not be easy or painless but if things are not put right then we are headed for disaster.

There is an obvious parallel between our national situation and our individual lives as they are lived out before the face of God. We would do well to consider this.

Firstly we have all contracted a massive *debt* to God. It is from God that we have our being for "he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things" (Acts 17:25). He has been good to every one of us, providing for our needs and showing us kindness and forbearance. In return we owe Him perfect obedience in worship and service. Yet what have we done with our lives?

We have surely dishonoured God in every way. We have broken His laws and perhaps denied His very existence. Even when outwardly we have done what the Lord requires we have not sought His glory but our own. Each of us has a multitude of sins which are all on record and a mountain of guilt which needs to be removed, as the Psalmist was only too aware: "If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?" (Psa.130:3). Yet we quite unable to pay off our debt!

Secondly we are all running a huge *deficit* before God. We not only have a bad record but also a bad heart. The carnal or unregenerate mind we inherited from Adam is "enmity against God" and is not subject to His law (Rom.8:7). This means that each day, in thought, word and deed, we "add sin to sin" (Isa.30:1). We cannot do otherwise.

Many are hoping that in the long run their good deeds will outweigh their bad deeds. They accept that they have done wrong in the past and are resolved to do better in the future. They have now added religion to their lifestyle. Yet we all 'spend' more by our sin than we 'earn' by our uprightness for there is in reality "none righteous, no, not one" and "none that doeth good, no, not one" (Rom.3:10,12). We are bankrupt!

Finally we are all facing a fearful *destruction* from God. What will a holy and righteous God do to sinners? We are not left in any doubt when we turn to the Bible. There will be "indignation and wrath, tribulation

and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil” (Rom.2:8,9). We shall be “punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord” (2Thess.1:9), suffering eternally in hell because of our sins.

Praise God, there is a way to balance the books! It is not by our own doing but through the sinner’s glorious Substitute, the Lord Jesus Christ. By His obedience in life and death He has provided a full salvation for all who repent of their sins and believe on His name. In Christ our spiritual debt is cancelled, our deficit made up and our destruction averted. All by His grace! Be sure that you do not ignore this the only remedy for sin. □

Helps to Devotion (Rev. James Smith)

LOVE. *“The Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you: To the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints.”* (1 Thessalonians 3:12,13)

This is unquestionably a prayer presented to the Holy Spirit, who is here distinguished from God, even our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. Besides which, it is a prayer for that which it is the Spirit’s office and work to produce. Love is a fruit of the Spirit, and the prayer is for a great increase of love, in order that we may have our hearts established in unblamable holiness at the last. Precious prayer! let us adopt it, and make it our own. It is for the blessing which we and the Church of Christ in general most need. Holy Spirit, we worship thee, we adore thee, as one with the Father and the Son—God over all, and blessed for evermore. Let it please thee, in thy sovereign goodness, to increase our spiritual and fraternal love. Fill us with love to all who love Jesus, irrespective of their opinions or views of church government. Wherever Jesus looks and loves, may we look and love; and may we love with fervour, intensity, and constancy. Let us love all men, compassionating their circumstances and seeking their salvation. O that we may so live and so love that our hearts may be established in holiness! May we now be unblamable in our spirit and conduct before our fellow-men; and when Jesus comes to receive his people to himself, may we be found of him unblamable in holiness, that so we may be found without fault before the throne of God for ever. Holy-making Spirit, make us holy. Fill us with love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, and faith; in one word, make us like Jesus. □

Parables of Jesus: 16. The Good Samaritan

(Please read Luke 10:25-37)

Here is perhaps Christ's most famous parable. It was told to a man who enquired about eternal life. Though a 'lawyer', one learned in the law of God, he appeared hopeful of gaining heaven by his own deeds. A great mistake. Moreover it seems that his motive was not right. It is likely he was tempting Jesus to say something which could be used against Him. Our Saviour teaches him a necessary lesson about salvation. It is one we need to learn too.

Scripture

It is instructive to see how Christ deals with this enquirer. He does not answer his question directly but points him to the Word of God. He challenges the man: "What is written in the law? how readest thou?" (v.26). We see that the Bible is sufficient to answer the queries and to remove the difficulties in the way of every true seeker. It has an authority greater than any church or minister. It is the only rule of faith and life.

The lawyer gives a good reply when challenged. He repeats the two great commandments which sum up our whole duty – to love God and to love our neighbour. But though he has head-knowledge he has no heart-knowledge, for when Jesus tells him to do the same he pretends not to know who his neighbour is!

Neglect

The parable concerns a man on a journey who is beaten, robbed and left to die by the roadside. A priest travelling sees him but avoids him. Then a Levite comes by and takes a close look, but also carries on.

Now both these individuals acted shamefully. As servants of God they of all men should have been willing to help someone in obvious need. They were too busy, selfish or otherwise unconcerned. It shows us that the grace of Christian love is a rare thing and does not always exist where we ought to find it.

Surprise

Another person going that way stops immediately, touched by the the victim's plight. He is a Samaritan, but though "the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans" (John 4:9) this is of no concern. He tends to the man's wounds, takes him to a place of rest and pays for his care.

This individual did what was right. With no thought for himself he showed genuine love, even to an enemy. Perhaps his knowledge of God's law was not very great but his heart was good. A true disciple may not always be recognised as such.

Neighbour

Even the lawyer has to admit that the kind Samaritan was the true neighbour to the one in need. Jesus tells him and us to follow his example.

Remember that Jesus Christ is the great Good Samaritan. He takes pity upon those who have been ruined by the fall and fully restores them, by dealing with their sins. He "healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds" (Psa.147:3). Do we know His mercy in our salvation? □

Sermon: Christ's Care for our Joy (Rev. J.H. Evans)

(A sermon preached on May 31st 1846 as part of a series on Christ's high-priestly prayer in John Chapter Seventeen. Evans was pastor of John Street Chapel, Bedford Row, London.)

"And now come I to thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves." – John 17:13

There are two or three points connected with our present subject that I would desire to lay some stress upon. Oh! that the blessed Spirit, whose holy anointing we so much want, and without which even His own truth is powerless, may bring them near to our consciences and lay them deeply upon our hearts this day.

The first subject for our thought is, that the Lord Jesus Christ designed the joy and happiness of His people. Secondly, that this very verse is signal proof of it. And that shall lead us, in the third place, briefly to consider the character of that joy, that is the peculiar blessedness of the true disciples of Christ.

I. That our Lord designed the joy and happiness of His people on earth, is manifest to all those who prayerfully and sedulously and diligently read the Word. Even if we travel no further than this very Gospel, we shall see clear proof of it. I will just place before you a few instances. You see in the fourteenth chapter how careful our Lord was that His sorrowing disciples should be comforted:—"Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God,

believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." Observe in the twenty-first verse, how He leads them up to the great source of spiritual joy:—would that you and I studied it more, and experienced the truth and power of it more:—that it is the manifestation of Christ in the truth and by His Spirit in our hearts and consciences that shall gladden our souls in this world, and that in the pathway of holy obedience; this is the true spring of all spiritual joy. Observe in the twenty-first verse, "He that hath My commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me: and he that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father, and I will love him, and will manifest Myself to him." And again, in the twenty-third verse, "If a man love Me, he will keep My words; and My Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." It is the true spring of all high, holy, and spiritual joy.

Observe in the twenty-seventh verse, He speaks of "peace," as if it were their bequeathed property, their legacy; as if it were their own. "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you."

Again, not to multiply instances, or to enlarge too much upon each of them, you will find in the fifteenth chapter how our Lord there connects much fruitfulness with fulness of joy. In the eleventh verse: "These things have I spoken unto you, that My joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full." And that clearly in the way of their bearing fruit, and in no way seeking for more joy but in the way of greater fruitfulness, devotedness, and spirituality.

Observe, too, in the sixteenth chapter, how He connects this high and holy joy, this precious treasure of the Gospel, with asking the Father in His name. "Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in My name, He will give it you. Hitherto ye have asked nothing in My name: ask and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full." As if our Lord had said, 'Regard not your own worthlessness, plead the promises of God in Me, and in My name "ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full."'

And in this very passage, beloved, how great stress is laid upon it! "Now come I to Thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they might have My joy fulfilled in themselves."

One sometimes thinks how surprised the disciples must have been when they heard the Lord pray—for He evidently prayed audibly before them. How surprised they must have been, when their hearts were discouraged, when they were in great trouble, when they were so cast down, and they were ready and prepared to lose Him,—for He had in the twenty-sixth of Matthew told

them, “Ye know that after two days is the feast of the passover, and the Son of man is betrayed to be crucified”—when they had all this before them, that their Master should have been praying for their joy, and for their fulness of joy, when they were in the deepest trouble, it must have been a great surprise to them. And how much more marvellous must it appear to you and to me, who know, because God’s Word tells us, all that our Lord did endure, and the bitter sufferings that were before Him, which He went to with the full knowledge of the minutest detail of them; that, notwithstanding it all, He should feel concern, not merely for their final safety, not merely for their ultimate glory, but that He should feel all this concern for their present happiness, their present peace, and their present joy!

My dear hearers, it was but a few hours after our Lord uttered this very prayer, that He went into the dreadful scene of Gethsemane. It was perhaps but a few minutes—think not of the division of the chapters—ere He went into the garden. Observe, “when Jesus had spoken these words, He went forth with His disciples over the brook Cedron, where there was a garden,” where all this dreadful trial was to be met. Yet in the midst of it all He was so concerned for their peace, and comfort, and joy and happiness! Oh! how doth it show to us how unlike the world, and how unlike, alas! is He to His saints! How apt are we to be swallowed up with our own trials as if there were no other sufferer in the world! Our Lord looked off His own trials, that He might pray for the joy and comfort of His sorrowing disciples.

And whence was it, beloved, that our Lord laid all this stress upon their joy? He loved to see His people happy; He loved to see them living on that Gospel, that has in it all the elements of happiness. And He would have them to show to the world that lieth in darkness that which the world can judge of—for the world cannot enter into the higher elements of the believer’s true peace, but it can see somewhat of the happiness of a believer’s life. I believe, many of you have been wrought upon in your families, just by remarking this of some one in your family—‘He knows that happiness that I am a stranger to.’ And, above all, it was to exemplify this truth, that though our Lord Himself was about to leave them, yet the Holy Spirit was to be the great spring of all true joy. He can give much more in the way of communicating happiness, than if we were to see our Lord present with us for all our days. The Holy Spirit is the source and spring of all the true joy of the saints of the living God.

II. Observe, now, secondly, that this passage specially declares the same truth.

It is as much as if our Lord had said, ‘Now come I to Thee; “these things

have I spoken in the world” ’—I do not think “these things” refers to His addresses to them—the word “speak” has rather an awkward sound with us; but “these things have I uttered”—that is, taking the whole passage together, it means His intercession on their behalf: ‘These things have I spoken for them, though I am now in the world, that their joy might be full in themselves.’

Oh! there is a majesty, beloved, in these few words, “Now come I to Thee!” It is as much as if He had said, ‘I know what is before Me; I know that dread garden of Gethsemane, where I shall have to sweat great drops of blood; I know the mock trial; I know the judgment court, where I shall have to undergo all scorn, ignominy, unfairness, contempt, and cruelty—I know all this; and I know that tomorrow I shall be led as a malefactor, and have to endure a painful and agonising, yea, an exquisitely agonising death—I know all this. And all this is as nothing, compared with what I yet know; for I shall have to cry out upon the cross tomorrow, “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?” But notwithstanding all this, My people are dear to Me—if I grieve, may they be led to rejoice. All this takes Me not away from them; I still think of those that Thou hast given Me, “for they are Thine, and all Thine are Mine;” and if it be My grief, it shall also issue in their joy.’ These is a majesty in those words, “I come to Thee!”

Neither is it confined to this view; it seems as if our Lord did say, ‘I know that I shall soon be clad with glory; I shall soon be at Thy right hand; I shall soon ascend to Thee as My Father and their Father, as My God and their God; and I know that angels shall bow, and seraphs pay their homage; but even heaven’s glory cannot eclipse the love I have to My saints. Seraphs and their homage, principalities and powers, hide not My disciples from My heart; they are dear to Me as the apple of Mine eye; I pray for them, that they may have fulness of joy in themselves.

Neither does this embrace the whole of the subject. It would seem as if our Lord had said, ‘Because I am going, there I pray; because I am going, I know how their hearts will be cast down; therefore may My joy be fulfilled in themselves!’ Nay, it embraces more than that; for it seems to take in this—‘I go to Thee for this express object; for if I ascend as their Head, and sprinkle the mercy-seat with My blood,—if I am as their representative, their substitute, and great High Priest, I am, too, as Thy representative, to give unto them of the fulness of Thy Spirit, to administer unto them out of the abundance of Thy grace, that they may have every joy, and peace and love, in all fulness, and in inexhaustible fulness.’

My dear hearers, I would only make a few remarks upon this part of my subject. Our Lord had been interceding audibly for them—for this was an

audible intercession; it did not make the thing prayed for more certain, but it was an act of immense tenderness to them that they should hear all these things specified before them, and have all the blessings laid before them. He wrote out, as it were, His will, and He read His will, that will that was written in His own heart's blood; and He now sealed it with His own intercession. And a wondrous exhibition it was of His love that it was so. Not only did He intercede for them in heaven, not only did He often spend whole nights in prayer for them, while on earth, but at this time He laid before them audibly, so that they might hear, all the blessings interceded for by Himself.

III. But this leads us on, thirdly, to the character and nature of the joy just spoken of: "that they might have My joy fulfilled in themselves."

There are many ways in which the subject may be viewed; and there is always a difficulty when the senses seem so good, to choose: and when so many of God's saints take such different views of the subject, to select one of them from all the rest. Some consider this joy as that of which the Lord Jesus is the real subject. He is the main source of all joy; there can be no joy to our souls, but as Jesus is the subject of it. The moment we begin to rejoice in anything out of Christ, we begin to find that we are building on that which has no foundation. Therefore it is most true, that our rejoicing is "in the Lord;" and we "rejoice in Christ Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh." This is most true. Some understand by it, that joy of which He is the source, the giver, and the bestower: and a very blessed sense it is, for the true source of all peace is the Holy Spirit, and He is the giver of the Holy Spirit. Some understand by it the joy which His disciples have in obedience, which obedience always brings a reaction of holy joy in the soul. But I confess that what my own mind is led to is this, that it was the very joy that our Lord Himself had—that they might in their measure enjoy it by the power of the Holy Ghost. So do I read the passage: "now come I to Thee, and these things I speak in the world that they might have My joy fulfilled in themselves"—that they may have the very joy that I have, in their measure, fulfilled in themselves.

Now, beloved, what was this joy? No one can read, prayerfully read, this prayer of our Lord, but they must be struck with astonishment at the majesty, the sublimity, the dignity, and the exalted character of His mind as He uttered it. There seems nothing earthly in it. It seems to maintain all blessing in it; it seems to contain in it all that the covenant of grace contains; it seems to contain in it all that earth can receive, or all that a child of God can receive upon earth; nay, it seems to contain in it all that can be received in heaven itself. Our Lord was so directly in the purlieu [haunts] of heaven when He uttered it, that it seems to be the unfolding of the very bosom of God.

That which David, His type, knew and felt in his measure, “God, my exceeding joy,” our Lord did feel in fulness and in perfect measure: that which was the joy of the Redeemer’s soul was God Himself. There was another source of joy too,—that was, the prospect of being with Him for ever. You observe how much stress our Lord lays upon this very point in the fourteenth chapter of this same Gospel and the twenty-eighth verse—there you find how He solaces Himself with the prospect of being with the Father. “Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away, and come again unto you. If ye love Me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father.” And again, in the sixteenth chapter, and the twenty-eighth verse: “I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again I leave the world, and go to the Father.” And in this very chapter, observe He thrice speaks of it: as in the fifth verse, “And now, O Father, glorify Thou Me with Thine own self, with the glory that I had with Thee before the world was”—that is, with the glory that I had with Thee as Thy co-equal Son, before the world was. But still the desire of His soul was to be with the Father, and to be glorified with the Father; as we observe in the eleventh verse, which I have already spoken upon, “I come to Thee”—and again in the thirteenth verse, “and now I come to Thee”—at first implored, and twice repeated. It was the true joy of the Redeemer’s soul. He rejoiced in being a victim; it was His “meat and His drink,” it was the “baptism He was baptised with,” and He was “straitened till it was accomplished;” it was the “joy that was set before Him,” and for that joy He counted the cross, and all the shame “nothing,” and “despised” it; but His great joy was to be with the Father. It was as much as if He had said, ‘I have had enough of the world; I come now to Thee. I have finished the work Thou gavest Me to do; now I come to Thee. The world is a world of sorrow, and a world of sin, and I gladly turn My back upon it, and come to Thee. It is true I love My sorrowing disciples in it; but I will love them still with Thee; and I come to Thee. I know the sea of trouble through which I shall pass; but it is the way to Thee; and it is My glory to travel in it, and I am contented that it should be in that way—I want no other.’

Ah! if we are what we ought to be as disciples of Christ, it will be our chief desire too—our one desire, our morning desire, our noon desire, and our night desire. And if we were living upon Christ, living in Christ, and living for Christ, as through grace we should, and as through grace we might, I believe that it would be our desire. When it is not so, when we cannot say, “I come to Thee,” how little are things with us as they ought to be! Ah! it would be well if this were deeply felt, and deeply searched into, and deeply prayer over! What did the apostle mean when he said, “Give all diligence to make your calling and election sure?”—“all diligence;” not to say, as some do, “oh! God is

a sovereign”—who denies it? but it is a pleasing opiate to a sleepy head and a sleepy soul, administered by the great deceiver, as I believe. “I come to Thee,” it is the covenant privilege of every child of God, and, comparatively, but of few of them. But what wisdom were it, if many of you were led to inquire, ‘Why is it?’ and ‘wherefore is it?’ Let me tenderly and affectionately commend to your reading the Acts of the Apostles; pray over it; and read over the Epistles, and just mark out those instances in which the apostle gives consolation and encouragement with especial view to believers in Jesus always standing in doubt of their own safety—and I would ask you, where are they? I believe, beloved, from my very heart, that if our views of Christ were more simple, and if our living upon Christ were more direct, if there were the aim, the unreserved aim, the honest aim, to walk unreservedly with God, it would not be so. Complaints, ceaseless complaints, ending in little or nothing, are but poor substitutes for true humbling, true confession, true pleading of God’s promises beneath the cross of His dear Son, and thorough forsaking of the detected sin.

I am quite aware, that some here may be ready to say, ‘this “coming to God” belongs not to me.’ My brother, until a man knows what sin is, until a man knows the plague of his own heart, until he is ready to part with his sins, and lay them low at the foot of the cross, and until he is brought by God the Holy Spirit to true acquaintance with Christ, he never can draw nigh to God. God is, in a measure, an “unknown God” to him; and although I do not altogether assent to that as the meaning of the passage, yet, God, out of Christ, is as a “consuming fire;” God, out of Christ, is a source of dread, and we do not love to draw nigh to such a God. But bear with me, my brother, if I say, “Now come I to Thee” will be felt by every soul that hears me at this moment. It must be. Ay, and some of you will have to say, ‘Here I come, Lord, and I have trifled with my body, I have trifled with my soul, I have trifled with my mercies, I have trifled with my Bible, I have trifled with entreaties of friends, with the lives of friends, with the deaths of friends, I have trifled with my conscience, I have trifled with Christ, I have trifled with Thee.’ Oh! that it never may be my misery to see hundreds or thousands that have united with us in prayer, outward prayer—stood up and sat down with us when we drew nigh to God—and yet seem to have come here for no other object than to say, “We will not have this Man to reign over us,” or “when a more convenient season shall come, then I will send for thee!” Oh! that I may never, never hear the dreadful dismissal, “Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire!”

The words have a sweetness in them, as it regards the most tried and the most harassed of God’s believing family. If you consider the instance of our blessed Lord, there everything was dark with Him, as it regarded their

outward aspect. He was derided, He was scorned, He was reproached, He was deserted; His enemies taunted Him, His friends left Him, and His Father forsook Him. But no doubt crossed His mind, not a shadow of hesitation; He had full confidence; He rested upon a faithful God; He said "I come to Thee," I know it shall be so, "for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it." His ground of confidence, my brother, was on that truth that cannot lie, and on that veracity that cannot deceive; and I would say to the very weakest, and the very feeblest of all God's believing family, may you never rest till you are able through grace to say too, "I come to Thee." You have all encouragement. See the very words of Jesus,—are they not full of consolation? See Him exalted at the right hand of God for poor sinners, for whomsoever shall put his case into His hand.

Let me give one word of tender advice here. Remember there is the order of administration. Remember that the intercession of Jesus never supersedes the mighty operation of the Spirit of God. Our Lord says, "sanctify them through Thy truth:"—unfolding this to us, that it is by the truth that we are sanctified; and that diligent readers, and prayers, and men that wait upon God, studying His Word, meditating on His Word, honestly reading His Word with much prayer for the teaching of the Holy Ghost,—these are the men that shall be sanctified by the Spirit. Observe the mode of the intercession of the Son of God; it by no means supersedes the mode of the operation of His Spirit. Our Lord interceded that His joy might be fulfilled—are you willing to have that removed that hinders your joy? How many are just moved by a sermon? I oftentimes think that I am thankful that the Lord has not given me the power of an orator; because I have seen so many affected by mere natural feelings, and they have run away under the influence of mere effect. But I would just ask, are you and I seeking earnestly to have that removed that hinders our spiritual joy? As long as there is love of this world, as long as there is sin tampered with, as long as there is a mass of duty neglected, as long as you are cumbering yourselves with the creature, and resting in the creature, and forgetting that you are strangers and pilgrims upon the earth—then, I would say it in tenderness and in love, faithfully and honestly, according to my creed you may go on for fifty years asking for more joy, but it would be as great a miracle as when the Lord stayed the sun at the bidding of Joshua, did you receive it. You are not to expect it out of the order of grace; and by no means to look for it till you have been made willing to "lay aside every weight," that you may "run with patience the race set before you." Oh! happy, happy state, when you are brought to this, "I come to Thee," I shall soon be with Thee, I am a poor sinner, vile and worthless, but I am chosen and accepted, and redeemed by the blood of the Lamb, wrought upon by

sovereign grace; my hands hang down and my knees are feeble, when my hands ought to be lifted up and my knees straight and strong—but I love Thy ways, and I have walked in them, and they are the joy of my soul; and the desire of my heart is, that I may walk in them unreservedly; but my confidence is this, “I come to Thee,” in Jesus, in His blood and righteousness and in that alone; but in that I come—“now come I to Thee.”

My dear hearers, there may have been those of God’s saints that have dreaded the parting pang—that thought, ‘how can I leave that dear object of my heart’s affection?’ Yet instance upon instance has been found of those who, when brought to that issue, have been enabled to say with simplicity, “I come to Thee”—“even, so, come, Lord Jesus; come quickly!”

May God graciously grant it to me and to you to say, you that have fled to Jesus for refuge; and the glory shall be His. □

Christian Doctrines Explained: 16. The Incarnation

Q.22. *How did Christ, being the Son of God, become man?*

A. Christ the Son of God became man by taking to himself a true body, and a reasonable soul, being conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost in the womb of the Virgin Mary, and born of her, yet without sin.

Our Redeemer Jesus Christ, the Son of God, became man to save His people from their sins. This is known as the *incarnation* of Christ. What was involved in this event? There are certainly four things.

Humanity

Christ *truly became man*. He has a real human nature. The two essential parts of man are the body and the soul. Christ added these to Himself, to His divine Person, for He was always God.

Jesus had a body like ours. After His birth His body grew (Luke 1:80). Later He was hungry in the wilderness (Matt.4:2) and thirsty at the well (John 4:7). He wept over the city (Luke 19:41) and slept in the boat (Matt.8:24). His hands and feet were nailed to the cross, His precious blood was shed, and He died.

Jesus had a soul like ours. The soul is that part of man that thinks, feels and wills. As a boy Jesus increased in wisdom (Luke 2:52). As a man He knew both joy (Luke 10:21) and sorrow (Matt.26:38). He was tempted (Heb.2:18). He loved (John 11:5). Above all He worshipped God and prayed (Luke 4:16; 11:1). In all these things Jesus Christ is like us.

Conception

Christ was *conceived in a special way*. Life ordinarily begins with conception involving a man and a woman. The angel Gabriel told Mary that she would conceive, bear a son and call his name Jesus (Luke 1:31) – before her marriage to Joseph. The angel explained this remarkable news: “The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee” (Luke 1:35). The Holy Spirit in His mighty power formed the body of Jesus from Mary’s substance and gave Jesus His soul. Jesus therefore had no human father. Isaiah’s prophecy was fulfilled: “Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Emmanuel [i.e. ‘God with us’]” (Matt.1:23).

Birth

Christ was *born of a woman*. In this He was like us. Mary was really His mother. Matthew and Luke even give us the genealogy of Christ. Although Jesus was not really the son of Joseph He was certainly the son of Mary. The Bible says that when God sent forth His Son He was “made of a woman” (Gal.4:4). So Christ was “bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh.” His body was nourished and developed in His mother’s womb. For nine months Mary carried her child until she “brought forth her firstborn son” (Luke 2:7).

Sinless

Christ was born *pure and holy*. He was completely sinless. In this He was and is quite unlike every other person. The unique way in which Christ entered the world safeguarded Him from the stain of original sin which we all have from Adam. Jesus Christ is “holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners” (Heb.7:26). Because of this He could offer Himself as a sacrifice for sin and be the Redeemer of His people. □

The Reformation in Scotland: 16. *The First General Assembly*

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

When this petition was laid before parliament, it soon became apparent that it went much farther than many of the politicians were disposed to permit. Maitland of Lethington had previously said, in reference to the discourses which Knox had preached from the book of Haggai, “We may now forget ourselves, and bear the barrow to build the house of God.” This

scoffing comment showed plainly enough what were his sentiments; and there were but too many ready to concur with and support him. In answer to the first topics of the petition, the parliament required the reformed ministers to lay before them a summary of doctrine which they could prove to be consonant with the Scriptures, and which they desired to have established. The following ministers were appointed to perform the task:—John Winram, John Spotswood, John Willock, John Douglas, John Row, and John Knox; and in the course of four days, they presented a Confession of Faith as the product of their joint labours, and an expression of their unanimous judgment. It agreed with the Confessions which had been published by other reformed Churches. In the statement of doctrinal tenets it is very clear and distinct, and eminently evangelical; but though it is a very valuable and excellent summary of Christian faith, it is perhaps more coloured with the circumstances of the times than is necessary, and in some respects less specific and decided than is desirable. For an admirable outline of it the reader may consult M'Crie's *Life of Knox*; from which work we extract the following condensed account of its ratification.

“The Confession was first read before the Lords of Articles, and afterwards before the whole parliament. The Protestant ministers attended in the house to defend it, if attacked, and to give satisfaction to the members respecting any point which might appear dubious. Those who had objections to it were formally required to state them. And the farther consideration of it was adjourned to a subsequent day, that none might pretend that an undue advantage had been taken of him, or that a matter of such importance had been concluded precipitately. On the 17th of August, the parliament resumed the subject, and, previous to the vote, the Confession was again read, article by article. The Earl of Athole, and Lords Somerville and Borthwick, were the only persons of the temporal estate who voted in the negative, assigning as their reason, ‘We will believe as our forefathers believed.’ ‘The bishops spake nothing.’ After the vote establishing the Confession of Faith, the Earl Marischal rose, and declared, that the silence of the clergy had confirmed him in his belief of the Protestant doctrine; and he protested, that if any of the ecclesiastical estate should afterwards oppose the doctrine which had just been received, they should be entitled to no credit, seeing, after full knowledge of it, and ample time for deliberation, they had allowed it to pass without the smallest opposition or contradiction. On the 24th of August, the parliament abolished the papal jurisdiction, prohibited, under certain penalties, the celebration of mass, and rescinded all the laws formerly made in support of the Roman Catholic Church, and against the reformed faith.”

With these acts Sir James Sandilands of Torpichen was sent to France, in order to obtain, if possible, their ratification by the King and Queen. This, however, they refused to give, trusting to the possibility of yet restoring the Romish Church in Scotland; but as their hostility was known, their refusal gave little disturbance to the reformers, by whom indeed it seems to have been expected. As in the treaty of Edinburgh it had been expressly agreed that, in the parliament which was to be held in August, the religious matters in dispute should be considered and grievances redressed, the reformers held themselves entitled to regard all the decisions of that parliament as in reality ratified by anticipation; and accordingly their next care was to devise what steps should now be taken for the complete diffusion and establishment of the Reformation throughout the kingdom.

Previous to the meeting of parliament, and during the calm which intervened between the treaty of Edinburgh and the later period, a temporary arrangement had been made, by which the chief of the reformed ministers were appointed to reside in the most populous and important towns. John Knox was appointed to Edinburgh; Christopher Goodman (who had been Knox's colleague at Geneva, and had of late come to Scotland) was appointed to St Andrews; Adam Heriot to Aberdeen; John Row to Perth; Paul Methven to Jedburgh; William Christison to Dundee; David Ferguson to Dunfermline; and David Lindsay to Leith. But as the country parts of the kingdom were at least equally in need of ministers and instruction, and there were not yet any thing like a sufficient number of reformed ministers to supply the urgent necessities of the case, another expedient was devised. It was resolved to divide the counties into departments, and appoint one of the Protestant party to take general charge of the religious matters throughout each of these departments, and to bear the name of Superintendents, as indicative of the general charge which they were to take of the interests of religion in their respective districts. These superintendents were, John Spotswood for the Lothians; John Winram for Fife; John Willock for Glasgow; John Erskine of Dun for Angus and Mearns; and John Carswell for Argyle. It was intended by the reformers to have divided Scotland into ten districts, and to have appointed a superintendent for each; but the difficulty of obtaining suitable persons prevented the appointment of any more than the above-named five.

From the fact of the appointment of these superintendents, Episcopalian writers have striven to represent the Scottish reformers as favourable to diocesan Prelacy. The utter absurdity of this notion has been demonstrated so conclusively by many authors, that we need not expend our time in its

refutation: it is enough to refer to Calderwood, Stevenson, and M'Crie, or to the First Book of Discipline, in which it manifestly appears that the superintendents had no one thing in common with prelates, except the charge of religious matters in an extensive district,—a charge by the one class of men laboriously executed, and by the other made a source of honour and emolument; thus, even in this apparent similarity, proving their inherent and essential difference. It may be added, that not only was there no difference between the ordination of the superintendent and the minister, but Erskine of Dun filled the office of a superintendent before he was ordained at all; and, farther, that when it was proposed to make the Bishop of Galloway superintendent over Galloway, the proposal was rejected, lest the appointment of one who had been a bishop should give some colour to the idea that the office was Prelacy under a different name.

Soon after the parliament had finished its labours and been dissolved, the reformed ministers and the leading Protestants determined to meet and deliberate respecting the measures to be next adopted. On the 20th day of December 1560, they met accordingly, in Edinburgh, “To consult upon those things which are to forward God’s glory, and the well of his Kirk, in this realme.” And this was the first meeting of the FIRST GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND. □

Precious Psalms: 16. A Goodly Heritage

“The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage.” (Psalm 16:6)

Here is a truly contented man. He testifies to his inheritance. It is a delightful and pleasing one. David is not thinking of a plot of land, not even Canaan. He does not have in mind any earthly possession, not even his own kingdom. What excited his soul is clear. “The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup” (v.5). God was everything to him: God was his *all*. What is the goodly heritage which God’s children have from their heavenly Father?

Pardon

We have the full pardon of our sins. How many they are, and how grievous! Yet each one is blotted out by the Saviour’s blood. We never earned this. We did not deserve it. Instead we are “justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Rom.3:24). The

time came when we were drawn with “bands of love” (Hos.11:4) and we believed to the saving of our soul.

Peace

We have a blessed peace dwelling in our hearts. “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom.5:1). Though we have had our sad times and dark moments this peace has remained. “My peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you” (John 14:27). What a precious gift in a world full of fear!

Protection

We have a mighty hand holding us and keeping us. In fact more than one hand. “Neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand....no man is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand” (John 10:28,29). There are “everlasting arms” underneath us (Deut.33:27) and no enemy, however strong, shall overcome us.

Prosperity

We have the promise of prosperity. True riches are surely those which we possess not only in time but also in eternity. To have everlasting life and a place in heaven is to be wealthy indeed. “At thy right hand are pleasures for evermore” (v.11). □

For Young People: *Plants of the Bible*

(These articles were first published in “The Explorer”, our denomination’s youth magazine)

5. *The Hyssop – Forgiveness*

“Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow” (Psalm 51:7)

We have learned that sinners are saved by the grace of God which is in Christ Jesus. There are many blessings which believers receive through the death and resurrection of their Lord and Saviour. Some of these blessings are pictured for us by the plants of the Bible. This time we look at a plant which illustrates a very important blessing.

As sinners the great thing we all need is forgiveness from God. While

we may offend other people by our sins we always offend God by them. David understood this. After he had committed the great sin of stealing Uriah's wife and sending him to his death he was brought to repentance. He cried to the Lord and said: "Against thee, *thee only*, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight" (v.4).

Many forget this. If they have wronged their fellow men and they are found out then they admit their fault to them and ask them for their forgiveness. They think that this is the end of the matter. However we must always remember that God is looking down from above and that he sees our every deed, hears our every word and knows our every thought. "The Lord is in his holy temple, the Lord's throne is in heaven: his eyes behold, his eyelids try, the children of men" (Psa.11:4).

God gave us his holy law to keep but we have broken his law so many times. We cannot pay our debts. The scribes were were right when they said to Jesus, "Who can forgive sins but God only?" (Mark 2:7). We must go to the Lord with our burden of sin and guilt and seek his pardon. In his Word he encourages us to come to him. "But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared" (Psa.130:4).

The hyssop plant teaches us about the wonder of God's forgiveness. Hyssop is a bush found in the Middle East. There are about a dozen species, differing little one from another. The stems carry small, fragrant leaves and bear small blue flowers in the summer. How does the hyssop help us to learn a vital spiritual lesson?

Hyssop is a *lowly* plant. Solomon in his wisdom "spake of trees, from the cedar tree that is in Lebanon even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall" (1Kings 4:33). He began with the greatest of trees and finished with the least of trees. While the cedar stretches up to the skies the hyssop rises just a few feet above the ground.

When Jesus was in this world, though he was the Son of God, he appeared more like the humble hyssop than the stately cedar. He was here to suffer and make atonement for sin. Jesus never sought the praise of men: he sought only to please his heavenly Father. By his perfect obedience to the will of God, even unto death, he provided pardon of sin for all who trust in him.

Though lowly, hyssop is a *special* plant. It once had a sacred use among God's people. The stems would be cut off close to the ground and bunched together. Then the tips would be dipped in either water or blood. Drops of the liquid would be trapped within the leaves and the fine hairs on the tips. Lifted up and shaken the stems would bend and a spray would be sent into the air.

The priest took hyssop in his hand to purify those who were regarded as unclean and unfit for the house of God. Moses sprinkled the blood of calves and goats on the people at the giving of the law (Exod.24:8); when a leper was cured the priest sprinkled the blood of a bird upon him before he could come into the camp (Lev.14:4-8); when a man had touched a dead body the priest sprinkled water from a vessel containing the ashes of a burnt heifer (Num.19:17-19).

These ceremonies showed the cleansing from sin which Christ provides. He is the true “high priest over the house of God” (Heb.10:21) and he is also the sinless sacrifice once offered to God. He shed his own blood at Calvary. Animal blood could only purify the flesh but the precious blood of Jesus purges the conscience from guilt and purifies the heart from sin.

Though special, hyssop is a *common* plant. It was readily to hand for the Jews, even when they were slaves in Egypt. There the Lord told the head of every household to take a lamb and kill it. “And ye shall take a bunch of hyssop, and dip it in the blood that is in the bason, and strike the lintel and the two side posts with the blood that is in the bason; and none of you shall go out at the door of his house until the morning” (Exod.12:22).

Where the Lord saw the blood he passed over the house and the destroying angel did not bring the death which he brought upon the firstborn among the Egyptians. Many centuries later the prophet Isaiah foretold that Jesus Christ in his death would “sprinkle many nations” (Isa.52:15). By the preaching of the gospel God’s forgiveness is freely available to sinners everywhere today!

David longed for this forgiveness. He saw himself with a wicked heart, condemned by God’s law and deserving punishment for his sins. He prayed that God would cleanse his soul by the blood of Christ, the sacrifice to end all sacrifices. That blood washes away the blackest sins and makes believers purer than the driven snow! They have “redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins” (Col.1:14). Have *you*? □

Gàidhlig: Asadsa, Dhè, ni mise bun – Salm 31.1
(Seonaidh Mac’ill Eathainn)

Tha na briathran seo air an labhairt leis an t-salmaidh agus chaneil teagamh sam bith gur ann a’ dh’ionnsaigh an Tighearna a tha iad air an tabhairt. Tha adhbhair fhein aig an t-salmaidh airson a bhi tagradh ris

an Tighearna oir tha e cho mothachail air a shuidheachadh fhein agus an laigse a tha an cois an fhein-fhiosrachaidh seo. Tha e faicinn gu bheil e a cuir feum air neart agus air cumhachd nach eil ri fhaotainn ach ann an Dia; an Dia anns am bheil e cuir a'dhòchas. Chan e an salmaidh a mhain aig am bheil feum air cumhachd bhon an Tighearna.

Chi sinn air feadh nan sgrìobtairean gum bheil moran earail air a' dheanamh chum is gum biodh daoine a' sireadh an Tighearna airson fuasgladh bho chuibhrichean na beatha seo. Tha an t-abstol Pòl a'toirt seo am follais dhuinn na litir a'dh'ionnsaigh nan Colosianach far am bheil e ag innseadh dhaibh mar a tha e ri còmhrag air an son. Tha an Spiorad a' cuir ìmpidh air labhairt ris an eaglais ann an Colosse agus ann an Laodicea gum bitheadh iad air an dlùth-cheangal ra cheile ann an gràdh, agus chum uile shaoibhreis an làn dearbh-bheachd tuigse, chum eòlais rùin-diomhair Dhè, eadhon an Athar, agus Chrìosd [Colosianach 2.1,2]. Tha Dia ri bhi na bhunait do gach aon a tha cuir an dòchas ann. Chaneil e na ìognadh mòr sam bith dhuinn gu bheil an salmaidh ag innseadh dhuinn anns an t-salm [Salm 40.2] gur anns a chlàbar a'fhuair e. Nach ann an sin a' chuireas am peacadh gach aon againn. Bi sinn a' moladh an Tighearna gun do thogadh an salmaidh as a chlàbar agus gur ann air carraig a' chuireadh a' chosan agus a' shocraicheadh a' cheuman. Gum bitheadh focal na firinn a' cuir ìmpidh ormsa agus ortsa gu bhi ag iarraidh Chrìosd gu bhi na bhunait dhuinne. Gum bitheamaid mar a bha salmaidh ag radh, "asadsa, Dhè, ni mise bun." □

Congregational News

Fellowships

Our monthly fellowships this year are on the theme 'Our Bible and How we Got it'. They are held in the manse beginning at 8.00pm and all are welcome. God willing in July we will consider the Infallibility of Scripture and in August the Authority of Scripture. The dates will be announced.

Prayer

Please remember before the Lord those in the congregation who are due to face surgery in coming months. Pray also that the Lord would bless efforts that are being made to bring about a satisfactory negotiated settlement with the residual body of the Free Church in regard to property and other matters. "Our soul waiteth for the Lord: he is our help and our shield" (Psa.33:20). □

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Services:

Sabbath: 12.00noon; 6.00pm

Wednesday: 7.30pm

Communion: 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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