

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)

Vol. 5 No. 1

January-February 2012

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Contents

Minister's Message: <i>Hopes and Fears</i>	1
Helps to Devotion: <i>Panting for God</i>	2
Parables of Jesus: <i>25. The Two Sons</i>	3
Sermon: <i>Job's Complaint</i>	4
Christian Doctrines Explained: <i>25. Adoption</i>	13
The Reformation in Scotland: <i>25. Knox on Trial</i>	14
Precious Psalms: <i>25. Grace Abounding</i>	16
For Young People: <i>Animals of the Bible: 3. The Ant</i>	17
Gàidhlig: <i>Theid mi air m'aghaidh ann an neart an Tighearna Dia</i>	19
Congregational News	20

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Minister's Message: *Hopes and Fears*

Every New Year our thoughts are mixed. We look back over the past year with both sorrow and joy, reflecting upon sad events but also the Lord's kindness to us. We look forward to the year ahead, thankful for God's precious promises but mindful too of how frail and fickle we are. We need to pray with Christ's disciples, "Increase our faith" (Luke 17:5).

For each one of us our earthly lives are a blend of hopes and fears. That is only to be expected in a fallen world. But the situation differs greatly depending upon our relationship to God. We may summarise it by saying that for those who reject the gospel of Christ their fears should be greater than their hopes, whereas for those who have believed to the saving of their souls their hopes ought to be greater than their fears.

The unconverted have every reason to fear *now*. As sinners their guilt before God is great and they are liable to His avenging wrath. If you are outside of Christ then whatever your hopes for the future this is the solemn reality. That is why the Bible warns us to "flee from the wrath to come" (Matt.3:7). Before the gospel came to them the Gentile nations dwelt in darkness, "having no hope, and without God in the world" (Eph.2:12). If even under the preaching of the Word the Saviour's dying love and redeeming blood mean nothing to you then how great is *your* darkness!

The children of God have no reason to fear in the end. They have their enemies in this life but by His cross the Lord Jesus Christ has conquered them all. So Paul was able to write to the Corinthians: "For all things are yours; Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; And ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's." (1Cor.3:21-23). Victory indeed!

Believer, do you fear the world? You should not. Certainly the world opposes your witness but Jesus says, "be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). Hoping to share in His triumph you should have the attitude of the Psalmist: "In God have I put my trust: I will not be afraid what man can do unto me" (Psa.56:11).

Believer, do you fear your flesh? You are right to do so, for "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked" (Jer.17:9). Your old nature will never improve but you are "a new creature" in Christ (2Cor.5:17) and hope one day to be like your Lord. In all your striving against sin remember this: "he will subdue our iniquities" (Mic.7:19).

Believer, do you fear the devil? You are wise to be wary of him for he "walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (1Pet.5:8). Do not face him in your own strength but "strong in the Lord, and in the power of his

might” (Eph.6:10). With all God’s people you have this encouraging hope: “the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly” (Rom.16:20).

Believer, do you fear death? Do not fear it unduly. Though “the last enemy that shall be destroyed is death” (1Cor.15:26) it *will* be destroyed: indeed it has been already, for Christ by His own death has drawn “the sting of death” which is sin (1Cor.15:56). You have the sure and comforting hope of a glorious resurrection to everlasting life.

In the year now begun may we all know a good hope through grace. □

Helps to Devotion (Rev. James Smith)

PANTING FOR GOD. *“As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?”* (Psalm 42:1,2)

Grace always leads back the soul to God, from whom it has wandered, and makes God, as he is revealed in the gospel, the great object of desire and love. Wherever grace reigns, the soul cannot be satisfied without God. As well may we live without water for the body as without God for the soul. The hunted hart, heated and exhausted, does not more long for the brooks of water than the truly gracious soul longs for fellowship and communion with God. Ordinances are precious, but they will not do as a substitute for God. The Bible is precious, but even God’s own Word will not do as a substitute for himself. “My soul thirsteth *for God*, for the living God.” Here is the proof of grace in the heart, the evidence of divine life in the soul. No one ever thirsts thus but a Christian; and every one that so thirsts shall be satisfied. Ever-living and life-giving God, our souls are thirsting for thee. We want the sense of thy presence. We want to feast on thy glories. We want to feel thy love flowing into our souls, and to feel our love flowing out to thee in return. Come, gracious God, come and satisfy us early with thy mercy. Come, and quench this painful thirst that we feel. Come, and hold close and sensible communion with us. We want to be near to God. We want to receive spiritual supplies from God. We want heaven to come down to us, preparatory to our ascending to heaven. Thou knowest, Lord, that we cannot be satisfied without thee; let us not then be put off with anything less than thee. This day let us walk with thee, talk with thee, and enjoy rich communications from thee. □

Parables of Jesus: 25. The Two Sons

(Please read Matthew 21:28-32)

This parable was spoken by Jesus at the temple in Jerusalem. He was confronted by the “chief priests and elders of the people” who challenged His authority to perform miracles and to teach the things of God (v.23). Jesus gave them some very plain lessons about faith in God.

Work

As in a previous parable the setting for this story is a vineyard belonging to a certain man. There is labour to be done if the enterprise is to be successful and the owner decides to send his own sons to work for him.

The vineyard is a picture of the kingdom of God in this world. When our first parents fell the Lord set to work in His mercy and grace to save lost sinners He had chosen out of mankind. He made known His salvation and raised up His church by His Spirit. He sent prophets and priests, apostles and disciples to do the work of publicly teaching His Word. He gives every believer some work to do for Christ. “The Lord gave the word: great was the company of those that published it” (Psa.68:11).

Change

The owner issues a command to his first son to go and work in his vineyard immediately. This call meets at first with a stubborn refusal, but later there is a change of heart and the son departs and gets to work.

Gospel preaching today may meet with a response like this. The same truths are proclaimed earnestly and repeatedly to the same people. Christ is saying to them, “Come unto me!” but they say in their hearts, “I will not!” Yet in time one man is softened. He experiences that godly sorrow which works “repentance to salvation not to be repented of” (2Cor. 7:10). He begins to truly follow Christ. Saving faith may be found where and when we least expect it.

Disobedience

The owner issues the same command to his second son. In this case there appears to be a willingness to go to work initially, but eventually this son declines to obey his father.

A tragedy of modern church life is false professions of faith. People come forward while their hearts are still divided between Christ and the world. Usually the world wins out and they quickly go back on what they promised. But listen to Christ: “No man, having put his hand to the

plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:62). Not all faith is genuine, *saving* faith.

Rebuke

Jesus challenged these Jewish leaders to say which of the two sons had done his father’s will. They knew of course. He showed them that the Gentiles were like the first son and they were like the second. They who claimed to know God had rejected the message of John the Baptist to repent of sin and to show the appropriate fruit in their lives (Matt.3:8). The tax-collectors and prostitutes *had* repented. Let us too beware of the fatal sin of self-righteousness. □

Sermon: Job’s Complaint (Rev. Donald Macfarlane)

(Taken from ‘Sermons on the Love of God and Cognate Themes’ published in 1918 when Mr Macfarlane was minister of Dingwall FP Church.)

“Oh that I knew where I might find him! that I might come even to his seat! ...” – Job 23:8-10

We have here an account of Job’s sufferings and the happy issue of them. The Higher Critics say that there was not such a man as Job; but we are told in this book, and in other parts of Scripture, that Job is an historical personage, and we believe that what is recorded of him in the book of Job is the literal truth. We are told where he lived, and some indications are given of the time in which he lived. The Apostle James (v. 11) says, “Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy.” Again, in Ezekiel xiv. 14, God says, “Though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they should deliver but their own souls by their righteousness.” In face of these testimonies of the existence of Job, we cannot believe the Higher Critics.

In speaking from this subject we shall notice—

I. Job’s complaint—“Oh that I knew where I might find Him!”

II. He endeavours to find the Lord—“Behold, I go forward, but He is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive Him.”

III. That which he proposes to do if he find him—“I might come even to His seat! I would order my cause before Him, and fill my mouth with arguments.”

IV. His hope of success in his earnest pursuit—“I would know the words which He would answer me.”

I. *Job's complaint.* Job had many reasons why he should complain. He met with uncommonly severe sufferings and trials, which would be intolerable were it not for God's sustaining grace, which enabled him to bear with them patiently. He lost, in one day, his great wealth, and his children, and soon thereafter he was deprived of his bodily health by a painful and loathsome disease. Satan was the instrumental cause of all this calamity. Satan hated Job with a perfect hatred. He hated him because "there was none like him on the earth, a perfect and upright man, one that feared God and eschewed evil"—that is, sin (chap. i. 8). Job's character as an eminently holy man was the object of the devil's malice. Satan knows God's people, and, the more like God they are, the more he hates them. He went to and fro in the earth, and saw none like Job. He saw many with whom he was well pleased, because they were his own dutiful children and his faithful servants, but he could not bear the sight of this man of God, and he contrived many fiendish schemes to make him miserable, if he could not destroy him from the face of the earth.

Looking with a malicious eye, to see how he might bring to pass his evil design, he saw that God put a wall of protection about Job and all he possessed. He went to and fro about the wall many a time, but found there was no gap for him to enter in. He is in perplexity. What is he to do? He sees that he cannot get at Job without asking permission of God. To approach the Most Holy One he has no desire; but such is his hatred of Job, and his determination to injure him, that he decides on the hard task. Off he goes, and appears before the Lord with a guilty eye. He is confronted by Job's God with the question, "Whence comest thou?" Satan answered the Lord, and said, "From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it." As the prince of this world, the evil one intimated, by his answer, that he has a right to travel through the earth, and that he had not trespassed on any forbidden ground. What or who was he in search of? The Lord knew his errand, and asks him another question, "Hast thou seen (or considered) My servant Job? I know that thou hast. That man is a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil (or sin). What hast thou, Satan, to say against such a holy man?" Now that liberty is given to the great enemy of God and His people to speak, he begins his work of accusation. He cannot deny but Job is the Lord's servant, but he maintains that he serves Him from worldly motives and mercenary ends. "Doth Job fear God for nought? Hast thou not made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? Thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land." He insinuates that it is for

these outward blessings that Job serves God, and, if they were taken from him, his religion would soon vanish away like smoke. "But put forth Thy hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse Thee to Thy face" (i. 11). Strip him of his great wealth and deprive him of his children, and his religion is gone. There will be no more secret prayer, no family worship, no going to the sanctuary for public worship; on the contrary, Job will cast off all appearance of piety. He will turn to be an atheist—he will defy Thee and curse Thee to Thy face.

If Satan were asked, How dost thou know? he would probably answer, I have seen many who made a high profession of religion in times of prosperity, but when the tide of Providence turned against them, they turned their back upon God and His cause. But he was very much hitherto experimenting on worldly professors of religion; but he will find in the end that Job is of a different character. If he can show that Job, the most pious man then in the world, is a hypocrite, he thinks that he can prove that religion is a sham. But true religion is not a sham, but a reality, and the Lord for His own glory, the good of His people and cause in the world, as well as for the overthrow of Satan's kingdom, allows the matter to be put to the test, though this must bring unspeakable sufferings on His servant. "And the Lord said unto Satan, Behold, all that he hath is in thy power, only upon himself put not forth thine hand" (i. 12). The great adversary, having received this permission, went to work. "So Satan went forth from the presence of the Lord" (i. 13). As he goes along, let us suppose that a number of evil spirits under his dominion met him, and asked, "What news?" "Good news," he would reply, with a fiendish smile on his face. "I got permission to rob Job of all he has." "But how canst thou do that?" "True, I cannot do it in my own person. I am only a spirit, and you cannot do it either." "How canst thou do it, then?" "My dear children, be not troubled about that matter. Don't you remember that, apart from the fact that I have the most of the men of this generation in my service, I have a band of robbers in yonder desert who are professionally fitted for such a work? They have been trained by myself. They know the art of robbery well." "Who are they?" "The Sabeans and the Chaldeans. Besides these instruments, I am the god of fire, and I have the wind at my command—of course, by God's permission. So having these instruments of robbery and destruction, I am sure of success." "That will do," replied the evil spirits. "Let us go to work. We also hate the man of thy malice. Were it not for such men we would keep possession of the whole world from generation to generation—there would be no man to rebuke the works of darkness, and to speak the praise of God whom we hate." "You are just at it, my

dutiful children,” rejoined the prince of darkness. “In these parts of the world where there are none to fear God and eschew sin, we manage to keep the people, young and old, under our control and in our service. In my peregrinations [travels] to and fro in the earth, I find that to be the case. But enough of talk, let us proceed to work. Let a deputation of you go to the Sabeans, another to the Chaldeans, and I will command the elements, fire and wind, to do their work.”

Orders were obeyed. The Sabeans, incited by the evil spirits, after killing the servants that were ploughing—all except one to carry the tidings to Job—carried away the oxen, and the asses; the Chaldeans carried with them the camels, and slew the servants with the edge of the sword—all except one who carried the tidings to Job. The sheep were burnt with fire from heaven, and the arch enemy himself caused a great wind from the wilderness to blow upon the four corners of the house of Job’s oldest son, where all his children were feasting. Job was now by this day’s work of Satan a poor man—deprived of all his great wealth, which consisted in sheep, oxen, asses, and camels, and bereaved of all his children. Satan says now, “Surely Job’s religion is gone, his great riches are gone—the servants that were spared brought him the news.” He sent one of the evil spirits to Job’s house in the evening to listen at the door, to see whether he had family worship that night. The messenger returned. “What is the news from the hypocrite’s house? Had he family worship tonight?” “Yes, and the wonder is, he in his devotions blessed God with such thankfulness as if nothing had happened.” “Do you remember anything of what he said?” “Yes.” “Tell me.” “When worshipping God, he addressed Him thus in the course of his prayer: ‘Naked came I out of my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return thither; the Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away; blessed by the name of the Lord.’” “Are you sure that you heard him utter these words?” “Yes, quite sure.” “Alas! alas!” exclaims the accuser of the brethren, “that is not what I expected. What shall I do?” “Father,” replied the evil spirit, “be not discouraged; surely all your devices are not exhausted. You can try another plan to make Job cast off his religion.” “But I have exhausted all the permission given me by God. I am chained. I cannot go further to injure the object of my hatred unless I get leave. To my great grief I must confess that I have failed to make out my point—to prove that Job is a hypocrite. But I am not done with him yet. If I get permission to strip him of his bodily health, I think I would succeed in stripping him of his religion. Much as I dislike approaching God the second time, I am so intent on getting the true religion banished out of the world that I shall venture. There is to be a

convocation of the sons of God tomorrow, and I shall appear among them, and if God speaks to me that will give me an opportunity of asking permission for a further attack on Job.”

The appointed time came, the sons of God were met, and Satan comes in among them. And the Lord said unto Satan, “From whence comest thou?” He gave the same answer as on the former occasion. He told the course of his travel, but did not tell the havoc he made on Job. But the Lord knew it. “Hast thou considered My servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God and escheweth evil? and still he holdeth fast his integrity, although thou movedst Me against him, to destroy him without cause” (ii. 3). “Thou hast not proved that he is a hypocrite. Thou hast stripped him of his great wealth and of his children, but not of his religion. He still holds fast his integrity. It is as well for thee to give up and to confess that thou art defeated.” “Not yet,” thinks the evil one. “I want a little lengthening of the chain of restraint by which my power is limited, and if I got that I think I would make out my point.” Many false professors of religion cleave to their profession, while they enjoy health of body, though they lose other outward comforts. “But put forth Thy hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse Thee to Thy face.” “And the Lord said unto Satan, Behold he is in thine hand, but save his life. So went Satan forth from the presence of the Lord and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown. And he took a potsherd to scrape himself withal, and he sat down among the ashes” (ii. 6-8). His wife pitied his miserable condition, and Satan moved her to advise her husband to put an end to his life by suicide. “Then said his wife, Dost thou still retain thine integrity? Curse God and die. But he said unto her, Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh. What? Shall we receive good at the hand of the Lord, and shall we not receive evil? In all this did not Job sin with his lips” (ii. 9, 10).

In all his attempts to prove that Job was an hypocrite, and that there was not such a thing as true religion in the world, Satan failed to prove his point, and had to confess that he was defeated. Let us suppose that the Lord said to Satan: “Have you any more devices to bring affliction upon my servant Job?” He had to confess that he had none, that he went to the utmost degree of his schemes. Then let us suppose that the Lord said—“Stand you aside, Satan, and I will begin to afflict him with a sorer affliction than any you have tried. I will hide My face from him.” It was this that brought the bitter cry from his soul, “Even to day is my complaint bitter, my stroke is heavier than my groaning.” “Oh, that I

knew where I might find Him.” The hiding of God’s face swallowed up all the sufferings brought upon him by Satan. He would make no mention at all of these sufferings if the Lord lifted the light of His countenance upon him as in the past in the time of his prosperity. When the Lord hid His face from the Psalmist he was afflicted. The hiding of God’s face is the greatest affliction to His people. If they enjoy the light of His countenance they can bear other afflictions, however great, without a murmur.

II. *His endeavours to find the Lord.* He went forward and backward to seek the Lord—he sought Him on the right hand and on the left—that is, he sought Him everywhere where he might expect to find Him. But we shall speak of those places in the following manner:-

What is it to go forward to seek the Lord? It is to go forward in hope to find Him. As Jonah said, “I will yet again look toward Thy holy temple.” It is to look to the promises the Lord made to His people that He would manifest Himself to them.

What is it to go backward in seeking the Lord? It is to remember the days of old, as the Psalmist did when he was in darkness: he remembered the days of old. This is a way of seeking the Lord when one is in darkness, and many found Him by remembering His goodness to them in the past. If you miss the Lord, seek Him by remembering His loving-kindness to you in the past. Begin at the time when He awakened you out of the sleep of death. When He convinced you of your sin and misery, when He enlightened your mind in the knowledge of Christ, renewed your will and enabled you to embrace Christ by faith in the free offer of the Gospel; when He pardoned your sins and made you rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory. If you will do this you will find the Lord again.

Job sought the Lord on the right hand. What is it to seek Him on the right hand? It is to seek Him among His people, who are the people of His right hand. Many found the Lord in this way. When they were alone they were in darkness, but when they came among God’s people they found Him whom they sought. This has been the experience of believers on communion occasions when so many of the Lord’s people gather together on the mount of ordinances. There are not only people of His right hand, but there are blessings of His right hand—the blessings of salvation. Read these blessings as they are set forth in the Bible. Meditate over them, pray over them, and you may find Him whom you seek.

If you do not find Him there, seek Him on the left hand. What is it to seek Him on the left hand? We mean God’s left hand. There are people

who are yet those of His left hand. The unconverted are so. If you don't find the marks of the Lord's people upon you see if there is any difference between you and the unconverted. On communion occasions there are marks given on the Friday by the Men speaking to the question—marks both of the Lord's people and of those who are still in a state of nature. There was a godly woman going home from church along with an unconverted woman. The godly woman was troubled with doubts and fears about her interest in Christ. She asked her companion if she was troubled with an evil heart, and her companion said that she was not, and this was the means of relieving her from her doubts and fears. She saw that there was a difference between her and her companion. Another instance of this may be mentioned. The godly Mr Calder, who was minister at Ferintosh, was often under the temptation that not only was he not a minister of Christ but that he was still in a state of nature. On one occasion he was suffering under this temptation, and he took to his bed, and on Sabbath, when the congregation came to church, the minister did not appear, and some of the elders went to the manse and were told that the minister was in bed. They went to the bedroom door and found it locked. They knocked, but there was no response. Knowing that Mr Calder was suffering from a temptation, one of them took a way to break the temptation by trying to break the door of his bedroom. The minister cried out when he saw that they were doing such work on the Lord's Day, "Are you doing such work on the Holy Sabbath?" a work which he would not do himself. This was the means of relieving him from his temptation. He saw that he had regard for the Lord's Day, which an unconverted man could not have. He rose from his bed, opened the door of his bedroom, went to church, and preached the Gospel with uncommon liberty.

This is a way, as already stated, to seek the Lord on the left hand and to find Him. To seek Him on the left hand is to seek Him in His works of Providence. As there are works of grace, there are also works of Providence, which believers observe in the manner in which they had not observed when they were in a state of nature. If they lived near the sea, they observed with new light the flowing and ebbing of the sea. They were accustomed from their youth to see this change in the tide, but never observed that it was the work of God till they were converted. They saw Him also in the revolution of day and night to which they were accustomed from their youth. They saw God in all His works of Providence, they saw Him in removing from this world generation after generation by death. This was before their conversion a matter of course in which they did not acknowledge God's hand.

III. *That which he purposed to do if he found Him.*

(1) He purposed to come to His seat. God has a seat. He sits on a throne, a throne of mercy, and a throne of judgment. Job had a case to settle, and he would come to God's seat of judgment to settle that case. Satan was accusing him of serving God because He was so good to him in Providence, and his friends who came to comfort him in his affliction charged him with some great sin he must have committed to provoke God to bring affliction upon him, and he would come to His seat to settle the dispute between them.

(2) He would order his cause before Him, not for the information of the Judge but for the conviction of his accusers.

(3) He would fill his mouth with arguments. It is a wonder that fills us with amazement that we should be permitted to speak to the Most High. But we have His own warrant not only to speak to Him but to argue with Him, for He says, "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson they shall be white as wool." Job was to fill his mouth with arguments in vindication of his character against the serious charges Satan and men brought against him. There, at God's seat, the righteous might dispute with him. Who is the righteous mentioned here? Some think that it is Christ, but No, it is Job himself. His accusers charged him with being a hypocrite, but he claims, and that justly, to be righteous. He was not only righteous, as a justified person in the sight of God, but he was righteous in his character before men. God Himself, the Judge, tells this to Satan: "Hast thou considered My servant Job, there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God and escheweth evil." Notwithstanding all the affliction that came upon him by Satan, men, and God Himself, he retained his integrity. He was thus righteous.

IV. *His hope of success.*

(1) He hoped God would speak in his favour, and that He would know the words which He would answer him and understand what He would say unto him. God speaks to all in His Word in the Bible, but many do not know His voice in the Word, but the Lord's people do. If we benefit by the Word of God, we must understand it. Job hoped not only to hear the words the Judge would speak to him but to understand these words.

(2) He hoped that God would not plead against him with His great power, but that He would put strength in him.

(3) Lastly, he hoped that he should be delivered for ever from his judge. Satan was judging him wrongfully, and men, even godly men, were judging him also, and he hoped that God would deliver him from their

judgment, and so He did, and Job went back from the judgment seat of God acquitted from all the guilt with which he was charged by his accusers, and as a token of his sinlessness the Lord made up his loss of property, giving him what he had before his trial twofold.

In conclusion. In Job's sufferings religion was put to the test, and it was proved to the hilt that there is such a thing in the world as true religion, which is denied by atheists and infidels. When Job was tried severely by Satan, God gave him grace to stand the trial, and when He Himself was laying him low by one hand, in hiding His face from Him, He was by the other hand upholding him mightily, or he could not have stood the trial. As his day was, so was his strength, according to the promise: "As thy day so shall thy strength be." And as it was in the case of this man of God, so it shall be in the case of all His people, whatever trial may meet them in this world. We cannot bear the least trial in our own strength. We are weak ourselves, but we can bear all trials that the Lord sees fit to lay upon us by His own grace strengthening us, for He says, "My grace is sufficient for thee, My strength is made perfect in weakness." Job, who is in Scripture spoken of as an example of suffering, is now at perfect rest in heaven, and finds there that all his sufferings on earth worked for his good. Believer, faint not, sink not, under the burden of your tribulations. Look to the Lord for support and for the good issue of these tribulations. You shall soon be with Job in the Father's house above, and you will have to confess that the Lord did all things well in His dealings with you by His grace and Providence while you were in the wilderness. Your sufferings on earth were not indeed meritorious, but they enlarged your capacity for receiving the blessings of glory. Sufferings are not in themselves desirable or pleasant to bear, but they are useful in their own place to prepare the Lord's people for the rest that remains to them. All would like with Baalam to die the death of the righteous who neglect to live the life of the righteous, but without holiness no man can see the Lord. Job desired to come to God's seat, but we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ. We should therefore seek preparation for eternity that we may be found among the happy people on the right hand of our Judge and not on His left hand among those whose doom is, "Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels."

May God in His infinite mercy awaken careless sinners to seek the Lord while He may be found, and to call upon His name while He is near, and may He uphold His own people by His grace during their time in a world of sin and misery. Amen. □

Christian Doctrines Explained: 25. Adoption

Q.34. *What is adoption?*

A. Adoption is an act of God's free grace, whereby we are received into the number, and have a right to all the privileges of the sons of God.

We are studying the main benefits of the believer's union with Christ. We saw that the first of these was justification. To be justified is to be made right with God. Now we look at the second, adoption. To be adopted is to become a child of God.

Act

Like justification, adoption is an *act* of God's free grace. It differs from adoption as we know it. Natural adoption may involve parents in years of waiting before a child is theirs. Spiritual adoption is complete in a moment. When parents adopt a child it is often because they see something attractive in that child. But there is nothing beautiful in us to persuade God to take us to Himself. Jesus says to us sinners what he said to the unbelieving Jews, "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do" (John 8:44). God sees us as defiled and ready to die, yet He says, "Live"! (Ezek.16:4-6). It is His free choice. "I swear unto thee, and entered into a covenant with thee, saith the Lord God, and thou becamest mine" (v.8).

Reception

God does not adopt us until we trust in Christ. He has known His own from eternity but they are not actually admitted into His family until they are born again. "As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:12,13). A child needs to feel wanted and assured of his status. God gives His children His Holy Spirit, who brings the knowledge of God's love to their hearts. "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God" (Rom.8:16).

Sons

Because a believer is not only adopted but also has a new heart he truly belongs in God's family. As a child in trouble will go to his parent the Christian has free access to God in prayer at all times through Christ, his elder Brother. "Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit

of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father” (Gal.4:6). As a believer he learns the rules of his Father’s house and in time takes on the likeness of his new spiritual family. He looks on all those who have also been born again as his true brothers.

Privileges

As an adopted child has privileges within his new family so do God’s children. They bear a new name, the name of Christ, for “his name shall be in their foreheads” (Rev.22:4). They dwell in a new home, for they are now of “the household of faith” (Gal.6:10). They are under a new discipline, for “whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth” (Heb.12:6). They are entitled to a new inheritance, for “if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ” (Rom.8:17). If we enjoy these privileges let us walk appropriately, as “children of light” (Eph.5:8). □

The Reformation in Scotland: 25. Knox on Trial

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

The storm in the heart had soon another opportunity of bursting forth. During the residence of the Queen at Stirling, in the month of August, the domestics whom she had left behind her in Holyrood-house celebrated the popish worship with greater publicity than had been usual even when she was present. This gave great offence to the inhabitants of Edinburgh; and a slight popular tumult, not attended with injury, or even danger, to any one, ensued. Reports, extremely exaggerated, were carried to the Queen, who declared her determination not to return to Edinburgh until this riot was punished, and commanded two of the Protestants to be indicted to stand trial for the offence said to be committed. Dreading an intention to proceed to extremities against these men, and that their condemnation would be a preparative to some hostile attempt against their religion, the Protestants in Edinburgh resolved that Knox, agreeably to a commission which he had received from the Church, should write a circular letter to the principal gentlemen of the reformed faith, informing them of the circumstances, and requesting their presence on the day of trial. It will be recollected, that a similar course of procedure

had been repeatedly adopted by the reformers in their previous contests with the Queen-regent, so that it was completely accordant with the usage of the Church and nation. He wrote the letter according to their request; but a copy of it falling into the hands of Sinclair, bishop of Ross, and president of the Court of Session, was by him transmitted to the Queen at Stirling. She communicated it to her privy council, who, to her great satisfaction, pronounced it treasonable. This was what the Queen had long wished; and she accordingly gave orders that an extraordinary meeting of councillors, assisted by other noblemen, should be held at Edinburgh, to try the cause; and the reformer was summoned to appear before this convention.

Previous to the day of trial, great influence was used in private to persuade him to acknowledge that he had committed a fault, and to throw himself on the Queen's mercy. This neither the entreaties of friends nor the threats of enemies could prevail upon him to do. On the day of trial the public mind was excited to an intense degree of anxiety. The cause of the Reformation appeared to depend on the issue; and both parties regarded it with the most tremulous and eager interest. Secretary Lethington took the disreputable office of accuser; but was repeatedly and unbecomingly interrupted by the Queen herself, when she thought he was not prosecuting the matter with sufficient point and force. Knox defended himself with such skill and ability as to refute every accusation brought against him. The main charge was that of illegally convoking the Queen's lieges [subjects], and charging herself with cruelty. This charge he met and answered, so as completely to baffle the sophistry of Lethington and the angry vehemence of the Queen. At length he was ordered to retire for that night; and the judgment of the council was taken respecting his conduct.

All of them, with the exception of the immediate dependents of the court, gave it as their opinion that he had not been guilty of any breach of the laws. The Secretary, who had assured the Queen of his condemnation, was enraged at this decision. He brought her Majesty, who had previously retired, again into the room, and proceeded to call the votes a second time. This attempt to overawe them incensed the nobility. "What!" said they, "shall the laird of Lethington have power to control us? or shall the presence of a woman cause us to offend God, and to condemn an innocent man, against our consciences?" They then repeated the vote which they had already given, absolving Knox from all offence, and, at the same time, praising his modest appearance, and the judicious manner in which he had conducted his defence.

The effects of this trial were various and extensive. The Protestant part of the community were justly indignant at the attempt made upon Knox, and alarmed with the proof thereby given of the Queen's determined hostility. On the other hand, the Queen could not control her indignation at the reformer's escape; and the effects of her resentment fell upon those who had voted for his exculpation [clearance from the charge], or failed to produce his conviction. The Earl of Murray lost her confidence; and even Lethington sunk in her favour. They attempted to induce Knox to soothe her by a voluntary submission; but to this he would not consent. They next attempted to weaken his influence among his brethren of the ministry, representing to them, that Knox exercised a despotic and popish authority in the Church, inconsistent with their freedom and equality. □

Precious Psalms: 25. Grace Abounding

“For thy name's sake, O Lord, pardon mine iniquity; for it is great.”
(Psalm 25:11)

Here is a man we may all admire. David was known as “the sweet psalmist of Israel” (2Sam.23:1). During his long reign he “executed judgment and justice among all his people” (1Chron.18:14). The Lord described him as a man after His own heart (1Sam.13:14; Acts 13:22). Yet David had a burden upon his soul, as does every true believer. He was conscious of his own *sin*. And at times, even though he was a child of God, he felt his sin to be very great indeed. This may be true of us. Why?

God

Our sin is great firstly because we sin against a great God. In our unconverted state we dismiss our sins as light and trivial because we do not truly know God. “Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself” (Psa.50:21). When grace opens our spiritual eyes we behold God's glory. We see that we are sinning against the infinite, holy God.

Light

Our sin is also great because we sin against great *light*. The heathen are guilty before God because their conscience accuses them when they

do wrong, which demonstrates “the work of the law written in their hearts” (Rom.2:15). But we have the very law itself, written plainly in the pages of Scripture for us to read and written again in our hearts by God’s Spirit in regeneration (Jer.31:33).

Love

Our sin is great again because we sin against great *love*. Has God ever done us anything but good? Has Christ ever shown us anything but love? And what love! “While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom.5:8). How then can we ever think of offending the Saviour who bought us with His precious blood?

Our needed encouragement is this: although our sin is truly great, our salvation is even greater. “But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound” (Rom.5:20). Christ’s death for our sins is sufficient. Pray to God daily for His full pardon. □

For Young People: *Animals of the Bible*

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

3. *The Ant – Working Busily*

“Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise” (Proverbs 6:6)

What time did you get up today? And what have you been doing since you rose from your sleep? When we are young we may find the time long but when we grow older the hours go by very quickly. Job said that his days passed away “as the swift ships” and “as the eagle that hasteth to the prey” (Job 9:26). When we are older it can be difficult to find the time to do everything we ought to do!

As we grow up our personal habits develop. One habit which we can easily fall into is *laziness*. Matters like schoolwork, helping our parents or even tidying our room become chores to us. We get bored with our routine and begin to look for something more exciting. Then we start to neglect the important things.

Time is very precious and we should make the best use of whatever time God in his goodness grants us. There is a creature mentioned in the Bible which shows us how to spend our time wisely. The ant is so

small that we may think nothing of it but that would be a big mistake. Ants may be “little upon the earth” but they can teach us great things about living life to the glory of God.

Ants are a type of insect. This means that their bodies are divided into a number of distinct segments. Firstly there is the head, with its jaws and antennae; then there is a thin section called the thorax to which the legs and sometimes wings are attached; and finally there is a broad section called the abdomen which contains the stomach.

There are thousands of ant species and they live almost everywhere, usually in large communities or ‘colonies’ which may contain millions of ants. On a walk in the country you may come across a small mound of earth, perhaps in long grass, and inside is a colony of ants. On a warm summer’s day the ant-hill will be alive with black, brown, red or yellow ants running over its surface.

Ants have many remarkable skills. A famous Roman named Cicero was so amazed at their apparent wisdom that he said that ants must have mind, reason and memory – just like us! Of course ants do not really possess these abilities yet it is nonetheless true that an ant colony is a kind of parable of the activities of men. Let us take a close look at this creature and “consider her ways.”

Firstly the ant is *diligent*. There are many different types of ant but they are all great workers. Some ants build wonderful houses, many stories high, with beautiful chambers, ceilings, columns and corridors. However the great task of the ants in any colony is to feed themselves. Here the ant is also very industrious. She “provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest” (v.8).

Ants have special ways of obtaining their food. Some ants form armies which launch attacks on larger insects and overcome them. Other ants raid neighbouring colonies and capture immature ants which then gather food for them. There are ants like the ‘leaf-cutter’ which cultivate underground ‘gardens’ where they grow fungus for food. There are even ants which keep ‘cows’! They collect a nutritious substance known as ‘honeydew’ from insects called aphids which suck the juices from plants.

The lesson is that we are to take our work very seriously, whatever it may be. Work is not a curse and should not be seen as a burden in itself. After all Adam had work to do in the garden of Eden before he sinned and fell (Gen.2:15).

Secondly the ant is *dutiful*. Though she has “no guide, overseer, or ruler” (v.7) she never slacks but is always attentive to her tasks. How

unlike us! When we are aware of others watching over us then we may get busy to impress the viewers – but not otherwise!

What we need to remember is that there is One whose eye is constantly upon us, even when we are alone in this world. God is the ultimate Master whom we should seek to please in all our work. “And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men” (Col.3:23).

Finally the ant does not *delay*. “The ants are a people not strong, yet they prepare their meat in the summer” (Prov.30:25). Many ants feed on seeds, removing the husks before placing the seeds in purpose-built storage chambers. Solomon had seen the ants gathering up grain when it was plentiful for a future time when it would be scarce.

There is no more needful use of our time than to spend it in seeking the Lord while he may be found. When people asked Jesus, “What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?” his reply was a surprising and a humbling one. He said: “This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent” (John 7:28,29). This is our great work.

Have you been wasting your time in the service of sin? Then you need to recover it. There is only one way. You must repent of your sin and trust in the Saviour who died for sinners. Then you will know the reality of the Lord’s promise, “I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten” (Joel 2:25). You will have received God’s wonderful gift – everlasting life! □

Gàidhlig: Theid mi air m’aghaidh ann an neart an Tighearna Dia – Salm 71.16 (Seonaidh Mac’ill Eathainn)

Nach iomadh còmhstri agus deasbad a chuala sinn a ghabh aite anns a bhliadhna a chaidh seachad, aig ìre ionadail agus nàiseanta. Faodaidh sinn a radh nach ro seo na ìoghnadh mòr sam bith dhuinn oir tha an aon ni a tachairt gach bliadhna a tha dol seachad. Tha gach duine ag iarraidh gum biodh a bheachdsan air a thogail agus air a chleachdadh ann an codhunaidhean cudthromach agus gun dragh sam bith gu dè th’aig duine eile ri radh. Tha seo air fhaicinn mar shaorsa a tha aig an duine anns an tsaoghal dheamocrataigeach anns a bheil sinn beo. A dh’aindeoin seo tha e cho follaiseach dhuinn uile nach eil smachd neo cothromachd ri fhaicinn aig ìre riaghaltais ar dùthcha neo aig ìre ionadail neo eadhon anns an teaghlach. Tha sinn beo ann an saoghal far a bheil moraltachd air ruith air falbh bhuainn

agus na aite seasaidh ni sam bith. Tha sinn air cùl a chuir ri prionnsabail. Bha an latha ann far an robh am bioball air a chleachdadh na leabhar stiùiridh ar beatha ach tha sinn an diugh a buain an ni a chuir sinn agus air a shailleabh sin chaneil toileacheas neo sìth ri fhaicinn ach a mhainn mi-rùn is mi-rian aig gach ìre.

Annas na sgrìobtairean bì sinn a cuimhneachadh air a mhi-rian a bha gabhail aite aig an àm anns nach ro rìgh an Israeil agus an t-aite air a riaghladh agus air a ruith le breitheamhan. Dè bha daoine a deanadh aig an àm sin? Bha iad a deanadh a ni a bha iad fhein ag iarraidh. Na nithean a bha iad a faicinn ceart nan suilean fhein.

Gus an till sinn a dh'ionnsaigh stiùireadh bunaiteach na Fìrinn bì sinn a sior dhol fodha ann an suidheachadh anns nach fhaigh sinn toileacheas inntinn sam bith . Cha ghabh sinn sàsachadh. Nach eil an t-àm air tighinn anns a faca sinn gu leor a tha sealltainn dhuinn nach eil sinn idir air an tslighe cheart. Bhòid an salmaidh anns a cheannteachais gun biodh esan a dol air adhart ann an neart an Tighearna anns a faigh e stiùireadh trè fhocalsan. □

Congregational News

Lord's Day Observance Society

The Annual Meeting of the North Uist Branch of the Lord's Day Observance Society is due to be held in Paible School on Tuesday 28th February at 7.30pm. The speaker expected is Rev. Angus Smith (retired). The Sabbath is under increasing threat even in the islands and the Lord's people need to rally together to defend the Lord's Day. We trust that as many as possible will attend this meeting, at which a collection will be taken in aid of branch funds.

Prayer

As well as praying for those in the congregation who are housebound or suffering ill-health we must continue to pray that the Lord will guide us as a church, keeping us faithful to His truth and providing for our congregations. We should also pray that the Lord will bless and pity us as a nation, frustrating the efforts of the homosexual lobby to have the God-given institution of marriage redefined to suit their ungodly ends and protecting believers who are standing up and speaking out according to the Word of God. "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (Jam.5:16). □

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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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