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The Gospel Magazine

The blessed man • Prayer for Rulers • Meditation upon Song of Solomon 6:2–3

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1766–2022

*Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.
Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God.
Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*

These texts, which have been associated for so many years with *The Gospel Magazine*, give some indication of what this bi-monthly stands for. We seek to present the Lord Jesus as the only Saviour for a lost world: to edify the people of God; and to promote unity among believers, ‘the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace’.

The Gospel Magazine is believed to be the oldest religious periodical still being published. One distinguished former editor was the Rev. Augustus Toplady, whose famous hymn, ‘Rock of Ages cleft for me, Let me hide myself in Thee’, was first published in these pages.

The Trust Deed of *The Gospel Magazine* is defined in terms of the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion of the Church of England, but the magazine itself is non-denominational. We aim to provide variety in unity, publishing articles from a wide diversity of past and present writers committed to ‘the faith once delivered to the saints’.

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EDITORIAL

THE Bishop of Oxford, the Rt Rev Steven Croft, has been in the news. He has published an essay in which he has set out his own journey towards accepting so-called gay ‘marriage’ as right in the church. The report quotes him as saying, ‘I am sorry that, corporately, we have been so slow as a Church to reach better decisions and practice on these matters.’

The choice of words is telling. When we hear about ‘better decisions and practices’ we are hearing the language of management. One might expect such words to be followed by a recommendation relating to health and safety at work, or to the way in which some aspect of medical care is implemented. One would not normally expect such language to be used about the doctrine and practices of the Christian Church, although that is evidently what the Bishop has in mind.

How does the church move from a position where practice is informed by doctrine, to one where practice is informed by decisions? Of course, one assumes that those whose practice is informed by doctrine are

taking decisions based on doctrine: one assumes also that those whose practice is informed only by decisions, be they better or worse, are doing so without due regard for doctrine.

But what is doctrine? It is defined as a set of beliefs that is both held and taught by a body, be it religious or political. Being beliefs they are inseparable from faith. Christian faith is not merely believing a thing, no matter how firmly we believe it. True Christian faith is believing what we are taught by the one who alone is all wisdom and truth. We believe what God teaches us. We believe what is written in the revelation from God, the Scriptures. We believe what is written because we trust the Author. We trust the Author because he has given us the gift of faith, without which we are by nature unable and unwilling to believe anything he says—not because we can see any defects in it or him but because our nature is inclined to hate him and his word. When he gives the gift of faith we are re-made, born again; scales as it were fall from our eyes, stony

hearts become beating hearts of flesh, and hatred gives way to love and trust.

Such a change is more than adequate testimony to the trustworthiness of the one who has worked this in us. We see only good in his every word and deed, and so we willingly submit to his direction, instruction and teaching. Whatever we find to be taught as doctrine in Scripture, we are ready to receive. Whatever practices arise from receiving of that doctrine, we are ready to enact.

It is necessary that, as a body, the church is agreed on the doctrine. If there is division at this point it will be impossible to agree on the practice arising from the doctrine.

The church is not coming to this for the first time. There is no question raised in our day that has not been raised and answered already. We are blessed to have the decrees of Councils and the creeds of the church going back to the very earliest times. We have the doctrine of the apostles taught in their Epistles, and from it they have set out the proper practice of the church on so many points. The intervening centuries have provided every opportunity for the church to discern the right doctrine and the proper practice on every point not covered by the word of God; and in no case does the true doctrine or practice contradict anything found in Scripture. It is true that at times the doctrine has been mistaken and even corrupted. Consequently the practice arising from that doctrine has been wrong. The Protestant Reformation exposed the false doctrine and cleared out the wrong practices, replacing both with the truth. This is a matter of thanksgiving in our generation, and is yet another reason why we must retain the relevance of the Reformation against those who consider it to have been a mistake, or its significance overstated, or its effects rendered irrelevant by the passage of time.

The Bishop of Oxford is further quoted. 'Any settlement must be founded on love and respect: love and respect for LGBTQ+ people and their families within and beyond the Church, love and respect for those who take different views....This love must be the hallmark of our debates and conduct through this season'.

Many will hear these sentiments with approval, considering the church to have failed too often in showing love towards certain groups and persons in the past. There is some truth to this: it was Anglican clergymen who were at the forefront of condemnation of the Tolpuddle Martyrs, whose aims were reasonable. At various time different denominations in different countries have defended slavery on spurious Scriptural grounds.

Such responses, however, miss the central point. There can be no love or respect that does not include love and respect for our Lord and his word. The Apostle John declared the Lord Jesus Christ, the Word of life, to his readers 'that ye also may have fellowship with us' (1 Jn 1:3). But John, the Apostle of love, was not looking for some expression of mutual love among people from different backgrounds, each with their different experiences, hopes and expectations. Rather, he added, 'our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.' That is, there can be no fellowship between the readers and the writer (John and his fellow apostles) if there is not also fellowship with the Godhead. The two are inseparable. John is seeking the fellowship of his readers as an expression of mutual fellowship with the Triune God.

The nature of love is also defined in Scripture. Two verses in particular set the matter in the clearest light. 'Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends' (John 15:13). 'If ye love me, keep my commandments' (John 14:15).

The first quotation teaches us that love is sacrificial, and that it seeks the absolute best for its objects. Jesus Christ died on the cross to save his people from their sins. He endured the agony of the cross, and its shame, to offer himself as the spotless sacrifice for sin. He has atoned for us, bearing our sins in his body on the tree. He has reconciled us with the Father, having made peace by the blood of his cross. The handwriting of ordinance that was against us, that was contrary to us has been taken out of the way, blotted out, and nailed to Christ's cross. It is inconceivable that those sins will be charged upon us again. If Christ has made satisfaction for them, then are they put away as far as the east is from the west. We are truly and fully forgiven, if we are sinners saved by grace.

If we are sinners saved by grace we cannot think that we can continue in those sins for which we should have been condemned, and for which Christ died. Paul exhorts us to mortify the members which are upon the earth, and to put off the old man with his deeds. Scripture plainly and unmistakably condemns all sins, including those things advocated and done by the very people with whom the Bishop of Oxford seeks settlement. If those people confess Jesus Christ and him crucified—in other words, if they accept the first verse of our definition of love taken from Scripture—surely it follows that they accept also the second verse. They must keep God's commandments. If anyone tries to argue that John 14:15 deals only with the commandments of Jesus, and not of God, then let that one learn the true doctrine of the Trinity: the commandments of Jesus and those of God the Father are one and the same for they are both God.

The commandments of God are not grievous—although unbelievers consider them to be an intolerable burden. The one who has

obtained grace at the throne of grace delights to do God's law, and to keep his commandments. He delights in the doctrine taught in Scripture, and obeys the practice arising from that doctrine. He does not reshape the practice according to his own desires or prejudices, and then recast the doctrine to suit. The person who does that is confessing that he is not one of Christ's lambs, for he is not led or taught by the Spirit sent down from above. Whatever his standing may be in the visible church, his standing before the Lord is cast into serious doubt. A person may slide into error for a while, and if they are truly Christ's, they will be recovered from that error. Any who persist in error will find themselves facing the judgment of God in the last day. They will be accompanied by all who have disobeyed the word of God, and whose sins have not been forgiven.

What, then, is the loving response to be from the church? Is it loving to find a way to accommodate those whom the Lord will reject in the last day? Is it loving to let them think that they are no longer under God's wrath because they are no longer condemned by men? Or is it more loving to speak the truth to them, to warn them to flee from the wrath to come? When Paul painted that dreadful picture of the state of the world in his day, Rom 1:18ff, he did so as a warning of the coming judgment. 'The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all unrighteousness of men.' When he listed the sins the believer is to put off in Col 3, he did so with the warning that the wrath of God comes on the children of disobedience. We do not expose sin to show how good we are, but to exhort sinners to flee to Christ, to the fountain open in the house of David, where the only forgiveness is to be found. This is love. This is the commission given to the church. Obey it. ¶

THE BLESSED MAN

A sermon by THE EDITOR on PSALM I

Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper. The ungodly are not so: but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away. Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. For the LORD knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish.

THE blessedness or happiness of the one who is in favour with the Lord is described for us in this first psalm. When we consider the general unhappiness, to the point of sheer misery, that we observe in our neighbours, our society, and indeed in the whole world, we are sure that the cause is the lack of the blessedness declared in these verses.

This man is described, first, by what he does not do, v. 1; then by what he does do, v. 2; then by the blessing that he enjoys. In contrast, the state of the ungodly is described, vv. 4–5, showing the great difference that exists between the one and the other. The whole is then brought to the standard of the Lord, in whose sight these things matter very much.

1. The state of the blessed man

The word ‘blessed’ means happy, to know the Lord’s favour. Daniel and his friends were able to ask to be fed a different diet because the chief of the eunuchs looked on them favourably, Dan 1:9. Leah called herself blessed, or happy, when her handmaiden Zilpah bore her a son: she named him Asher, the Hebrew word for ‘blessed’. Yet true blessedness does not consist in being the mother of children, nor even in being looked upon with favour by any man, be he never so

important. Rather, it consists in our standing or state before the Lord our God. Thus we consider this man, and note, first,

i. His state denied

He does not walk in the counsel of the ungodly. That is, he does not conform his life to the wisdom of the wicked who know not the Lord. There is a standard by which many live, of which the Scriptures know nothing. It may appear to be wisdom to men, but it is folly in the sight of the Lord. Peter was determined that the Saviour should not go up to Jerusalem to be killed; in the eyes of the world, this was wise advice. In the wisdom of God, however, it was fitting and proper that the sacrifice be presented at the temple. The wisdom of the world is far from the wisdom of God, for it is not found in the word of God, nor is it the way in which the Holy Spirit leads us. It is contrary to the way Christ went, and we are to be imitators of him, 1 Cor 11:1. The world is keen to present a united front and to act as if all are of the same mind. The blessed person is the one who seeks a different unity, and who desires to know the mind of Christ.

He does not stand in the way of sinners. He does not count himself to be one of them,

nor does he associate with them. The ungodly are not neutral in their ungodliness, but are active and habitual sinners. 'And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.' How can the one who has been bought with that price return, like the dog to its vomit, and keep company with those whose hearts are set on breaking God's law?

He does not sit in the seat of the scornful. The scorner is the opposite of the simple, Prov 19:25, 25:11. He is usually proud and haughty, Prov 21:25. He has no interest in the things of the Lord, does not care for his promises or blessings, and considers himself to be the arbiter of all truth. Like the wicked, they set their mouth against heaven, Ps 73:9. To sit among such is to be like them, and to receive their judgments on any matter. It is to accept that anti-Christian, atheistic attitude that is so common today.

The blessed person will neither walk with the ungodly, nor stand with the sinners, nor sit with the scoffers. Notice the progression; if we walk with those who know not the Lord we will soon be standing with those who offend, and then sitting with those who deny that there is even any God.

If he will not seek, accept or live by the wisdom of the ungodly, by what standard will he live? To what wisdom will he turn? Whose advice will he follow? Where will he find it?

ii. His state affirmed

He delights in the law of the Lord. Two matters are set out here, the attitude of the blessed person, and the object of that attitude. For the first, we are told that the happy person delights or takes great pleasure. He is wholly inclined to this object, takes pleasure in it, and makes it the constant and

perpetual matter in his life. For the second, the object is the law of the Lord. The torah is instruction, Prov 1:8; it is light, Prov 6:23; it is a fountain of life, Prov 13:14. Being God's law it is the only source of true knowledge and wisdom, for it is the judgments of the Lord on any matter, and we are to hear it in order to obey it. This law is not a set of burdensome rules, imposed on us by a high and distant deity, but the lively oracles of God, given to us so that we might hear and live. The one who delights in the law of the Lord is, among other things, one who accounts his life precious: he will not lose it by remaining ignorant. More than that, the law of the Lord is the revelation of the heavenly grace and glory. It is the declaration of who God is, in the fulness of his majesty and power. It is the promise of the coming Messiah, the record of his coming, and the instruction that flows from his coming—and from the promise of his coming again. The Scriptures are a heavenly gift, providentially preserved down the ages, and made available through the mercies of our loving heavenly Father in translations into many languages. In them we hear the voice of the Lord, and in them we see the beauties of our Lord Jesus Christ. We delight in them for these reasons.

He meditates continually in God's law. Our delight in the law of the Lord leads us to meditate upon them. Although the word translated 'meditate' can mean to coo, growl or moan about, or even to plot, the main meaning concerns proclamation. So Ps 35:28; 37:30; 71:24. This can be done quietly, when we are alone and spending time in the word of God. This can be done aloud, when we declare the wondrous works of the Lord. There can be no outward declaration of the instruction from the Scriptures without there first being an inward reflection and feeding on that word. There is no feeding on

the word of God without first having union with Christ, who is the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person, Heb 1:3. Thus the one who meditates in God's law day and night is the one who knows the Lord Jesus Christ, who loves him, and who has entrusted himself and all he desires to the one who is able to keep it until that day.

The one who does this is indeed blessed, and the form of that blessing begins to be described now.

iii. His state confirmed

He is constantly refreshed. He is like a tree planted by the rivers of waters. His roots never lack moisture. Though the ground all around is dry, and though the plants wither and die, yet this tree is always supplied with water. One reason why the unbelieving world is always looking for some new thing is that it is dissatisfied with what it has so far. It cannot get its fill of anything good, and what it imbibes leaves it looking around for something else, like the thirsty man who drinks seawater in desperation, and then craves fresh water even more than before. The blessed individual is the one whose constant supply is the water of life. The Samaritan woman was told about water springing up to everlasting life, Jn 4:14, which Christ alone can give. 'He leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul' (Ps 23:2-3).

He cannot wither. He is always supplied with the life-giving water and so he never comes to that distress that marks the ungodly, the sinner and the scorner. This does not mean he never endures trials or temptations, but rather it means he is kept in them. The child of God casts himself on the Lord when tried; the sinner casts about for any port in a storm, and finds no safe anchorage. There is no end to this supply of water, for the rivers

of waters flow ceaselessly from the throne of God, Rev 22:1f, the living waters, Zech 14:8, which the ungodly have forsaken, Jer 2:13, 17:13. Being living waters, and flowing eternally from the throne of God, they supply more than this present life; they supply eternal life. All who know and love the Lord Jesus Christ are heirs of the world to come. Eternal life is ours, for Christ is the eternal life, that Word of life, 1 Jn 1:1, 2.

He will always be fruitful. 'By their fruits ye shall know them.' This is as true of the fruitless as it is of those who bear fruit that contradicts their profession. How many pulpits will have turned out to have been filled with whited sepulchres, full of dead men's bones? How many professing Christians will be told in that day, 'I never knew you: depart from me.' The true branches, engrafted into the true vine, must be fruitful. We may not always be as fruitful as we ought, and we know that the Lord prunes us, sometimes quite harshly but never unlovingly. The true child of God is always fruitful in all good works, which God has before ordained we should walk in them.

This fruitfulness, arising from our being planted by the rivers of waters such that we never wither, cannot be separated from our delighting in and meditating on the law of the Lord. The word of God is that river of water, because the word of God incarnate is Jesus Christ whom the Scriptures declare. None can have read the word of God properly who have not come to the knowledge of the Saviour, because none can read that word properly without the illumination of the Holy Spirit. A right reading does not depend on intellectual ability, far less on mere gullibility, but on the operation of grace. This is why the psalmist prayed, 'Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law' (Ps 119:18). When the Lord opens our eyes,

we do indeed behold great treasures, and we are assured that they are ours through him who loved us and gave himself for us.

What of the ungodly?

2. The state of the ungodly

i. He is at the mercy of strange forces

Being as chaff he is of no worth or value; there is no weight to him that he should be precious to the Lord. Rather, he is left at the disposal of any force that acts on him. 'There were they in great fear, where no fear was.' (Ps 53:5), because their lightness makes them afraid of everything. The ungodly has followed bad counsel, he has stood in the way of sinners, and has sat in the seat of the scornful. Such things cannot be expected to leave a person undamaged. Just as Adam's disobedience brought about his utter ruin, so the rebelliousness of the wicked means that nothing they do can prosper. Mankind has, once again, turned away from any vestige of obedience to the Lord. He has placed his trust in men, and they in turn have let him down. We now see whole swathes of our society, to say nothing of the wider world, turning to paganism and heathenism. Having refused the light they have turned to false light. These have brought them to despair, and now, rather than seek the true light, many seek after any glimmer in the dark. What a blessing it is to walk in the light as he is in the light. The will o' the wisps are taken to be safe guides, but those who follow them are blown hither and yon before they come to their destruction.

ii. He shall have no inheritance among the righteous

He will have no defence in the day when all secrets are brought to light. He will have nothing to plead. If he believes he can make his case and argue his position, he will be

sorely disappointed and put to shame. The judgment to come is for the benefit of the congregation of the righteous. In this life we have endured all things for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ, and have been deprived of much that ought to have come to us. Yet we count not these things as loss, but rather we gladly bear all things for the name of our dear Saviour. In the day of judgment, when the dead both great and small stand before God, it will be vindication for the righteous, and damnation for the sinners. What will be joy and gladness to the one will be despair beyond mind to the other.

Such a view of the differing futures of the wicked compared with the righteous frequently goes against experience in this life. The wicked do prosper, and the righteous do suffer. The ungodly die in a good old age, surrounded by their families and wealth, and often with no evidence of any fear of what is to come. What assurance are we given, to confirm to us that our faith in Jesus Christ is not in vain? Consider the Psalmist's final point.

3. The state of both in the sight of the Lord

i. The way of the righteous ends in life

The Lord knows the way of the righteous. The events of our life, the experiences and trials we endure, are not the products of mere chance. Far less are they the unintended consequences of any defect on the part of our Father in heaven. Rather, he orders all our ways and guides our steps. Just as he chose the way by which Israel should depart from Egypt, being the way of the wilderness and through the Red Sea, so he chooses the path of our life. For this reason we meet nothing that he has not prepared for us, nor prepared us for. The chosen way for Israel led them to the promised land, and to that type of the heavenly rest (Heb 4:9). Furthermore, we did

not embark upon this way by our own will or choosing, although we have not done so against our will either. Rather, the Lord led us into this way, and he first declared and described it in his word. He has shown us that there is a broad way that leads to destruction, and a narrow way that leads to life. Few find the narrow way, and none could without the direction of the Holy Spirit. We are therefore to be confident that 'he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ' (Phil 1:6). All who have been justified by faith will come into the presence of their Saviour, to hear those wonderful words: 'Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world' (Matt 25:34).

ii. The way of the ungodly ends in death.

These are on the broad way, and they have many travelling companions. They may laugh and joke as they go, mocking those foolish, misguided, even wicked, Christian men, women and children who dare to warn them of the coming judgment. They may rejoice that their wealth, fame and power increase, and consider that they are arriving at the point when they can challenge any accusation from God. They had no need of him in life, so why should he trouble them in death, they think. But the path along which they travel is the ultimate dead end. There is no hope beyond it. Its destination is not happiness, far less is it oblivion. Rather, it is the judgment, the condemnation, and the removal to that place of everlasting punishment.

From this exposition we move to consider the chief doctrine taught here. The way of life is declared to us in the word of God.

This is the substance of the Psalm, that wisdom and life are taught in the law of

the Lord. There is a wisdom of the world, and there are many who trust it and live by it; they shall be sorely disappointed in the coming judgment when they discover that their wisdom was folly and their ways were wicked. All who live by the word of God will be blessed now and in the day of judgment, being counted happy and standing in the favour of their Lord. As to the main theme of the word of God, that is declared in the second Psalm, where the true King, the Son, is shown to be him with whom we must be reconciled if we would be blessed.

It is no coincidence that this is the first Psalm. It teaches us about the two classes of persons in this world, the righteous and the ungodly. Those very terms show us how the division is judged: some live without God, trusting in an apparent wisdom that is not wise; some live by the word of the Lord in which they meditate day and night, and who are therefore led by the true wisdom that is from above. The Scriptures are a most precious gift since they are the very oracles of God. Yet they themselves are not the ultimate gift, although they do reveal that gift to us. The incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ is the manifestation of the gift in flesh, but the coming of Christ was promised long before. The covenant of God concerns the coming of his Son to save us from our sins and to give to us the gift of eternal life. This is what we must see in the Bible; to read it to discover anything else, without having first found the Lord Jesus Christ, is to miss the very purpose for which the Bible has been given. The Scriptures teach us many things, but it teaches us none of them apart from Christ. All blessings, hopes and happiness are inseparable from Christ, so that we can reasonably expect no good thing without him.

This is one reason why we must hear sermons. It is in the sermon that the meaning

of God's word should be set out. It is in the sermon that its doctrines should be defined and illustrated. It is in the sermon that the lesson should be applied to the hearers. Of course, this requires the preacher to be competent; but it also requires the hearer to be humble and teachable. This is why neither the preparation of sermons, nor the preaching of them, nor the hearing of them, must be undertaken without prayer. We seek that gracious aid from the Lord, and the comforting guidance of God the Holy Spirit. We confess our need to be fed with the bread of life, and we admit our inability to derive any good from it without God's help. We do this in the confidence that he who taught us to pray for our daily bread will not deny us that spiritual food that nourishes the soul.

Above all, this is why we must be readers of the Scriptures. It is all too easy when we come to a passage we find difficult to turn immediately to some book or other that can assist us. Many books can, and we are not wrong to consult them. However, we must be prepared to begin with the word, and to read it with care, and to ponder its content, and to compare Scripture with Scripture. We must meditate upon the word, speaking to ourselves, muttering (as the word meditating can mean) it to ourselves. We must argue it back and forth in our minds and hearts,

discarding those interpretations that cannot bear the scrutiny of the analogy of faith because they set Scripture against Scripture. We must do this in prayer, asking the Lord to show us what he would have us see, which is not to pray that we may find what we want in the word, but that the Lord would teach us the truth set forth therein. It is helpful to make notes, to record our conclusions and even our tentative notions. We must revisit these regularly, and be prepared to alter our understanding in the light of further study.

The Psalmist declares the state of the one who does this, delighting in the law of the Lord and meditating upon it day and night. That one is blessed, happy, knowing the favour of God. Why? Because he walks in the light of God's word, having found Jesus Christ in it. He has seen him to be the Saviour, and he has been moved to love him. He desires to obey, and to glorify his Redeemer. He does so through the study of the word, feeding upon it and upon Christ in his heart by faith. He is never disappointed, even if at times the meal is hard to chew, and hard to digest. But he perseveres in the word, knowing that there is no wisdom or hope outside of its pages, for here is the Word of life, even eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord. To him be all the glory, both and ever. Amen. ¶

No marvel if the worldling escapes earthly afflictions. God corrects him not, because he loves him not. He is base-born and begot. God will not do him the favour to whip him. The world afflicts him not, because it loves him; for each one is indulgent to his own. God uses not the rod, where he means to use the sword. The pillory or scourge is for those malefactors which shall escape execution.

Bishop Hall

What is there in all this world, that can give a soul such joy and comfort, as to find himself by every thing set on and furthered in his way to heaven! And yet this may be discerned by an heedful attendance to the effects and issues of providences.

John Flavel

THE WHOLE ARMOUR OF GOD

by CARINE MACKENZIE

If you watch the television news programmes you will see every time a report of a war in some part of the world. The people of Ukraine are suffering greatly, many fleeing their homes because of the danger of the bomb and the rocket. There is danger and death in places like Yemen, Myanmar and Ethiopia, causing fear and suffering to the people who live there, even children like you.

Wars, both today and in the past, are a result of sin—pride, greed and covetousness mean that a power-hungry leader wants more land to control. To fight against the oppressor today needs a skilled army, navy and air force, with good weapons and protection.

Every Christian is in a war—not against soldiers or cruel dictators—but a spiritual war against our great enemy, the devil. But we do not fight alone or unprotected. ‘We do not war after the flesh: (for the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds)’ (2 Corinthians 10:3–4).

God has given us armour so that we can withstand the onslaught of our enemy, the devil. We can read about the whole armour of God in Ephesians 6:10–18.

It is wonderful to realise that the battle has already been won for us by the Lord Jesus Christ, when he died on the cross to conquer sin, death and the devil. But the devil still tries to upset the Christian and attack him. God has given us armour to use in these daily attacks. The devil wants us to sin, to forget about God, to disagree with our friends and not show love and patience. But the Christian has been ‘delivered from the power of darkness’ and has been transferred ‘to the kingdom of his dear Son in whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins’ (Colossians 1:13–14).

The armour of God has many pieces to protect us. The first is the belt of truth. With this we are not only committed to telling the truth, but are relying on the one who is the Truth—the Lord Jesus himself.

The breastplate is vital for the protection of the chest and heart. The Christian is given the breastplate of righteousness. He is covered by the righteousness of Christ. We are justified in God’s sight, not by any goodness of our own, but only by the righteousness of Christ imputed (or given) to us. Righteous acts of truth and purity should flow from this, countering the deceit and wickedness of the evil one.

A soldier’s shoes or boots are very important for his comfort and wellbeing, enabling him to march long distances. The Christian should be prepared and ready to proclaim the gospel of peace—telling others about the Lord Jesus Christ and what he has done to give us peace with God.

A shield was used to ward off arrows and flaming darts. When the devil attacks us by causing discord between Christians, or making us doubt God’s promises, then we have the shield of faith to protect us. By faith we trust entirely on the Lord Jesus Christ and look to him for help in every situation.

Protecting the head is the helmet. In God’s armour the helmet is our salvation, which has been achieved for us by the Lord Jesus. His salvation is our great protection and comfort.

We also have the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God. The sword is not only a defensive weapon but can be used to attack. When the devil accuses us and tries to destroy our peace, we can use our sword, the word of God, to attack him. 'The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son cleanse the us from all sin' (1 John 1:7) is enough to make him flee. Telling others about the Gospel is a powerful weapon against the evil one.

In days gone by soldiers would charge into battle shouting a war cry to scare the enemy. The Christian's war cry against the devil is prayer. We are told to pray always in all situations for all God's people. We are totally dependent on God who hears and answers prayer according to his perfect will. Through Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the battle is already won.

Bible Search

Use your Bible, the sword of the Spirit, to find the missing words from the verses which tell us about God's power and help for us. The initials of the correct answers will spell out the subject of the story.

1. We preach Christ crucified ... Christ the power of God and the _____ of God. (1 Corinthians 1:23-24)
2. But if thou wilt go, do it, be strong for the battle: God shall make thee fall before the enemy: for God hath power to _____ and to cast down. (2 Chronicles 25:8)
3. The grass withereth, the flower fade the: but the word of _____ God shall stand for ever. (Isaiah 40:8)
4. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the _____ of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him. (1 John 2:5)
5. Behold, God _____ by his power: who teacheth like him? (Job 36:22)
6. And they were all _____ at the mighty power of God. (Luke 9:43)
7. But thou shalt _____ the Lord thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day. (Deuteronomy 8:18)
8. For the word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of sound and spirit, and of the joints and _____, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. (Hebrews 4:12)

9. _____ my steps in thy word: and let not any iniquity have dominion over me. (Psalm 119:133)
10. Consider what I say and the Lord give thee _____ in all things. (2 Timothy 2:7)
11. And ye became followers of us and of the Lord, having _____ the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost. (1 Thessalonians 1:6)

PRAYER FOR RULERS

by EDWARD PAYSON

I exhort, therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men; for kings, and all that are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life, in all godliness and honesty' (1 Timothy 2:1, 2)

It appears from the preceding chapter, that Timothy had been left, by St. Paul, at Ephesus; to watch over the church in that city, and to guard against the introduction of error, by false teachers. In this chapter, the apostle gives him particular directions respecting some of the social and relative duties which were to be enjoined upon all, who professed to be the disciples of Christ. Among these duties, he mentions first in place, as first in importance, that of intercession; or praying for others. I exhort, says he, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; for kings, and all that are in authority. It is evident that persons in authority are included in the direction to pray for all men. It appears, however, that the apostle did not think it sufficient, to inculcate the duty of praying for them, in this general way only. He felt that it was necessary to make a particular mention of this duty, in a clause by

itself. He does, in effect say, While I exhort you to pray for all men, I urge you, especially to pray for those who possess the supreme power, and for all that are in authority. He thus evidently intimates, that, in addition to the general reasons, which should induce us to pray for all men, there are particular reasons why we should pray for those who rule. I propose, in the present discourse, to state the reasons why we should pray, with peculiar frequency and importunity, for all who are invested with authority.

I. We ought to pray for those who are in authority, more frequently and earnestly than for other men, because they, more than other men, need our prayers. In other words, they need a more than ordinary share of that wisdom and grace which God alone can bestow; and which he seldom or never bestows, except in answer to prayer. This is evident in the first place, from the fact, that they have

a more than ordinary share of duties to perform. All the duties which God requires of other men, considered as sinful, immortal, and accountable creatures, he requires of rulers. It is incumbent on them, as it is on other men, to possess personal religion; to exercise repentance toward God, and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; to love and fear, and serve their Creator; and to prepare for death and judgment; for Jehovah's language to them is, Though ye be as gods, ye shall die like men; and have your portion like one of the people. In addition to the various personal duties, of a moral and religious nature, which are required of them, as men, they have many official duties, which are peculiar to themselves; duties which it is, by no means, easy to perform in a manner acceptable to God, and approved of men. They are appointed, and they are required to be ministers of God for good to those over whom they are placed. They are, in a certain sense, his representatives, and vicegerents on earth; for by him they are appointed, and to him they are accountable for the manner in which they discharge their duties. By me, says he, kings reign and princes decree justice; by me princes rule, and nobles, yea, all the judges of the earth. Promotion cometh not from the north, or from the south; but it is God that setteth up one, and putteth down another. There is no power but of God, the powers that be are ordained of God. Since then, legislators, rulers and magistrates are the ministers and vicegerents of God for good, they are sacredly bound to imitate him, whom they represent; to be such on earth, as he is in heaven; to take care of his rights, and see that they are not trampled upon with impunity; to be a terror to evil-doers, and a praise and encouragement to such as do well. They are also bound, by obligations, which ought ever to be regarded as sacred, and inviolable, to seek the

welfare of those over whom they are placed, to prefer it, on all occasions, to their own private interests; to live for others, rather than for themselves; and to consider themselves, their time, and their faculties, as the property of the State. As the influence of their example must be great, it is their indispensable duty to take care that this influence be ever exerted in favour of truth and goodness; and to remember that they are like a city set upon a hill, which cannot be hid. Now, consider a moment, my hearers, how exceedingly difficult it must be for a weak, short-sighted, imperfect creature like man, to perform these various duties in a proper manner, and how large a share of prudence, and wisdom, and firmness, and goodness, is necessary to enable him to do it. Surely, then, they who are called to perform such duties, in a peculiar manner need our prayers.

2. Those who are invested with authority, need, more than other men, our prayers; because they are exposed, more than other men, to temptation and danger. While they have a more than ordinary share of duties to perform, they are urged by temptations, more than ordinarily numerous and powerful, to neglect their duty. They have, for instance, peculiarly strong temptations to neglect those personal, private duties which God requires of them as men, as immortal and accountable creatures; and a performance of which is indispensably necessary to their salvation. They are exposed to the innumerable temptations and dangers which ever attend prosperity. The world presents itself to them in its most fascinating, alluring form; they are honoured, followed, and flattered; they enjoy peculiar means and opportunities for gratifying their passions; they seldom hear the voice of admonition or reproof; and they are usually surrounded by

persons who would consider every expression of religious feeling as an indication of weakness. How powerfully, then, must they be tempted to irreligion, to pride, to ambition, to every form of what the Scriptures call worldly-mindedness? How difficult must it be for them to acquire and maintain an habitual, operative recollection of their sinfulness, their frailty, their accountability to God, their dependence on his grace, and their need of a Saviour. How difficult, in the midst of such scenes and associates, as usually surround them; to keep death in view; to be in a constant state of preparation for its approach; to practice the duties of watchfulness, self-denial, meditation and prayer; and to preserve, in lively exercise, those feelings and dispositions which God requires, and which become a candidate for eternity. How strongly, too, must they be tempted to make the performance of their official duties, an excuse for neglecting those personal duties, which God requires of all men, in whatever station or circumstance they may be placed. I will only add, with reference to this part of our subject, that the Scriptures intimate with sufficient clearness that those temptations are, in most instances, but too fatally successful. They inform us, that not many mighty men, not many noble, are saved. Our Saviour farther declares, that it is hard for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God; and it would be easy to shew that the causes which render it difficult for a rich man, operate with equal force to make it difficult for men clothed with authority, to enter this kingdom. We may remark farther, that they have many powerful temptations to neglect, not only their personal, but their official duties. They are tempted to indolence and self-indulgence; tempted to prefer their own private interest, to the public good; tempted to pay an undue regard to the selfish wishes and

entreaties of their real, or pretended friends; tempted to adopt such measures as will be most popular, rather than those which will be most beneficial to the community; tempted to forget the honour and the rights of Jehovah, and suffer them to be trampled on with impunity. It can scarcely be necessary to add, that persons who are exposed to temptations so numerous and powerful, peculiarly need our prayers.

3. This will appear still more evident if we consider, in the third place, that, should those who are clothed with authority, yield to these temptations, and neglect either their personal or official duties, the consequences will, to them, be peculiarly dreadful. Their responsibility is greater than that of other men. They have greater opportunities of doing both good and evil, than other men. If they do good, they will do much good. If the influence of their example, and their exertions, be thrown on the side of truth and goodness; no one can compute how great, or how lasting, may be the salutary effects which they will produce. On the contrary; if they do evil, they will do much evil. They will, like Jeroboam, make their people to sin. We are informed, by an inspired writer, that one sinner destroyeth much good. This remark is true of every sinner; but it is most emphatically true, of sinners who are placed in authority. One such sinner may destroy more good, and prove the cause of more evil, than a whole generation of sinners who are placed in a lower sphere. And even if they do not actually do evil, they may occasion great evil, and incur great guilt, by neglecting to do good. Says the voice of inspiration, To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin. In another place, we are taught that men partake in the guilt of all those sins which they might have prevented.

Legislators, rulers, and magistrates, then, are answerable to God for all the possible good which they neglect to do; and they share in the guilt of all the sins which they might, but do not, prevent. So far as those who are invested with authority, neglect to prevent, to the utmost of their power, open impiety, irreligion, disregard of the Sabbath, and of divine institutions, profanation of God's name, intemperance, and other similar evils; they share in the sinfulness and guilt of every Sabbath-breaker, profane swearer, and drunkard, among those over whom they are placed.

How great, then, is the responsibility of all who are invested either with legislative, judicial or executive authority! How aggravated will be their guilt, how terrible their punishment, should they prove unfaithful to their country and their God! Surely then, they, above all other men, need our prayers; since they have peculiarly difficult duties to perform, are under peculiar temptations to neglect those duties; and, if they neglect them, will receive a punishment peculiarly severe. And remember, my hearers, that we assist to place them in this difficult and dangerous situation. Are we not then sacredly bound to afford them all the assistance in our power, to obtain for them all that wisdom and grace from heaven, which it is in the power of fervent and persevering prayer, to draw down? Shall we place them, as watchmen, upon a steep and slippery precipice, where it is exceedingly difficult to stand, and infinitely dangerous to fall; and neglect the only means which can render their standing secure? God forbid. It is unreasonable, it is ungenerous, it is cruel and unjust,—cruel and unjust, not only to them, but to ourselves, and to the community. This leads me to observe,

4. *We ought to pray with peculiar earnestness for all who are in authority, because our own interest, and the great interests of the community require it.* This motive, the apostle urges in our text. Pray, says he, for all in authority, that we may lead quiet and peaceable lives, in all godliness and honesty. These expressions plainly intimate, that, if we wish to enjoy peace and quiet; if we wish godliness and honesty, or, in other words, religion and morality, to prevail among us, we must pray for our rulers. That we depend on them, under God, for the enjoyment of these blessings, is too obvious to require proof. How much, for instance, do the morals, the peace and prosperity of a State, depend upon the enactment of wise and equitable laws. And how much integrity, wisdom, and prudence, how much knowledge of human nature, of political principles, and of the science of legislation, is necessary to enable men to frame such laws. And from whom shall legislators obtain these qualities, if not from the Father of lights, from whom cometh down every good and perfect gift; to whom it is owing that there is a spirit in man, and whose inspiration gives us understanding. Again; if the morals, peace and prosperity of a State depend much on the formation of good laws, no less do they depend on the proper execution of those laws. Indeed, the best laws, unless strictly and impartially executed, are perhaps worse than none; since they only serve to show the vicious and abandoned that legal restraints may be disregarded with impunity. But it evidently depends much on rulers and magistrates whether the laws shall be executed with strictness and impartiality; and perhaps it requires more firmness, integrity, and wisdom to execute them in this manner, than it does to enact them. Permit me to add, that it is exceedingly important that those by whom the laws are enacted and

executed, should themselves exemplify obedience to the laws; for if they disregard their own enactments, it can scarcely be expected that others should obey them.

Farther; the peace and prosperity of a nation, evidently depend much upon the measures which its rulers adopt, in their intercourse with other nations. A mistake or error in this respect, apparently trifling, may not only involve a nation in great embarrassment, but can plunge it into all the evils of war, and it is too much to expect of fallible, short-sighted creatures, that they should never fall into error, unless they are guided by him who sees the end from the beginning, and who can never err.

Once more; the peace and prosperity of a nation depends entirely on its securing the favour of God. This, I presume, no one will deny. But his favour cannot be secured by any nation, unless its rulers are just men, ruling in his fear. We have already observed, that rulers share in the guilt of those national sins which they might, but do not, prevent. We may add, that nations share in the guilt contracted by their rulers, and in the punishment of their sins. Of this remark, many striking verifications are recorded in the Scriptures. Indeed; if those who are placed in authority, become impious, irreligious, or immoral, they will soon, by the force of their influence and example, impart much of their own character to the people over whom they preside; and thus render them fit objects of the divine displeasure. Permit me to add, that we cannot rationally expect to be favoured with wise and good rulers; we cannot expect that God will bestow on them those intellectual and moral endowments which are necessary to render them ministers for good, unless we fervently ask of him these blessings; for favours which we neglect to ask, he may refuse to bestow.

Nay more, he will probably punish our negligence and impiety, by turning our national counsels into foolishness. We are informed, that when he pleases, he can take the wise in their own craftiness, and carry headlong the counsel of the froward; that he leadeth counsellors away spoiled, and maketh judges to become fools; that he removeth the speech of the trusty, and taketh away the understanding of the aged; that he taketh away the heart of the chief of the people, so that they grope, as in the dark; and that he can, on the other hand, counsel our counsellors, and teach our senators wisdom. If, then, we wish to enjoy the protection of wise and equitable laws; if we wish our rulers to be endowed with wisdom, prudence and integrity; if we wish to see our country prosperous and happy; to see learning and liberty, morality and religion flourish; let us never forget to pray with earnestness and perseverance, for all who are invested with authority.

There are some things, in our present situation, which render this exhortation peculiarly seasonable. In the first place, is there not reason to believe, that the duty here enjoined, is a duty which we, and our countrymen generally, have too much neglected? Have we not all been much more ready to complain of our rulers, than to pray for them? Some have complained of our national government, and some of our State government; but where is the man who has prayed for either, as he ought? Have we not reason to believe that, if one half the breath which has been spent in complaining of our rulers, had been employed in praying for them, we should have been much more prosperous and happy, as a nation, than we now are? If any feel convinced that we have erred in this respect, let me remind them that now is the time to correct our error. We are now commencing a new mode of political existence.

Now, then, is the time to correct past errors, and to establish right principles.

In the second place, it is now peculiarly important and necessary that we should pray for our legislators and rulers, because the duties which they are now called to perform, are peculiarly arduous; and because much, very much depends upon the manner in which these duties shall be performed. Not only our own temporal interests, but the future prosperity of the State, the welfare of our children, and of our children's children, will be seriously affected by the official conduct of our present, chief magistrate, counsellors, and legislators. To them is committed the difficult and responsible work of shaping the commencement of our course; and such as is its commencement, will probably be its progress and its termination. Surely, then, every one who has a tongue to pray, ought to employ it in earnestly supplicating the Father of lights, to impart to our present rulers, a double portion of his own Spirit; and to give them, as he did Solomon, a wise and understanding heart, that they may know how to rule and guide this people. Let every one who calls himself a disciple of Christ, remember that one of his Master's commands is, pray, supplicate, intercede for all who are in authority. View them, my friends, in the light of this subject, and methinks you cannot deny them your prayers. See them placed in an awfully responsible station, where they have numerous and difficult duties to perform, where they are exposed to peculiarly powerful temptations, where they are in imminent danger of losing everlasting life, and incurring aggravated guilt and condemnation. Remember that they are men, and of course, weak, fallible, and mortal. Look forward to the other world, and see them there reduced to a level with other men, and standing before the tribunal of God, where

nothing remains of all the honour and influence which they once possessed, except the consequences of the manner in which they employed it. View them in this light, and you cannot but feel for them, and pray for them, that they may obtain mercy of the Lord to be faithful, and receive a crown of righteousness in the great day.

To conclude; how desirable is it both to rulers and people, that such a disposition should exist; that the religion which enjoins and produces it, should universally prevail among us. What an encouragement would it be to rulers, to unite their own morning supplications with those of the people over whom they were placed, and with what confidence might they engage in the duties assigned them, believing that he whom they and their subjects had addressed, would direct all their paths. Then religion, and morality and peace and harmony would prevail. Rulers would love their subjects, and seek their good; and subjects would love the rulers, in whose behalf they were daily addressing the throne of grace; while the God whom they both worshipped, would command the blessing upon them, out of Zion; and the world would see how good and pleasant it is for rulers and subjects to dwell together in unity. It is, however, necessary to remark, that all these blessings can scarcely be expected from the prayers of the people alone. They must be attended with the prayers of their rulers. All the considerations which have been urged, as reasons why we should pray for those who are in authority, may be urged with still greater force, as reasons why they should pray for themselves. In this way alone, can they obtain that wisdom and grace which are indispensably necessary to render them faithful in this world, and happy in the world to come. Never, perhaps,

since the foundation of the world, has a state been so prosperous, so happy, as was the Jewish nation, while under the government of one who began his reign by saying, Lord, thou hast set thy servant over this great people, and thy servant is as a little child, and

knows not how to go out, or come in before them. Give thy servant, therefore, a wise and understanding heart, that I may know how to rule this thy people. God grant that this may be the sincere prayer of all our rulers, and that all the people may say, Amen!

CHRIST ALL IN ALL

REV EDUARD MEINDERS (1691–1752)

Supplied by A.W. DE LANGE (Woudenberg, The Netherlands)

‘But Christ is all, and in all’ (Colossians 3:11)

1. He is the Redeemer is the elect. I know, says Job, my Redeemer liveth (Job 19:25; Colossians 1:14). He is their Kinsman, and hath the right to be near. He hath found the ransom and paid it (Job 33:24; 1 Peter 1:18, 19). He hath revenged the blood of the elect on the hellish murderer and he will espouse the elect with himself.

a. The Surety that Christ acquired is his passive and active obedience (1 Tim 2:6b).

b. He paid this for all the elect, who are by nature denuded of all goods and slaves and slave women, strangers to Christ and espoused to others (Revelation 3:17; John 8:34; Ephesians 2:12).

c. He redeemeth them by tis strength from their miserable state (Colossians 1:14) and translateth them to the opposite happy state.

2. He is the Saviour of the elect. The God of our Salvation (Psalm 68:19, 20). He shall save his people from their sins (Matthew 1:21).

a. The elect were by nature damned, subdued to the greatest evil, namely sin (John 14:4). And without fellowship with God, the

highest Good (Ephesians 2:12).

b. Their Salvation is enclosed in the redemption from sin (Psalm 32:2) and in the possession and enjoyment of God’s fellowship, and the salvation goods with are included therein (Psalm 33:12).

c. Christ gained this salvation by his obedience (Hebrews 2:10).

d. He applieth this with power, beginning in this life and perfect after this life (Matthew 1:21).

3. He maketh the dead alive. And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1).

a. The elect are by nature spiritually dead, that is, devoid of the true life, and in contrary working to commit sin, from a wretched initiation in the heart, according to the guidance of the carnal desires, in order to satisfy evil lusts, while having an evil and accusing conscience.

b. This they have become by the transgression of Adam (Romans 5:12).

c. Christ imparteth them the spiritual life, which exists in a right working of the

whole man, flowing from the union with Christ by faith, according to the prescription of God's Word, focus to God's glorification, and is accompanied by an good and still conscience.

d. He imparteth this to them step by step by his Spirit.

4. *He is the Physician of the elect.* I am the LORD that healeth thee (Exodus 15:26). And but Jesus heard that, he said unto them, They that be whole need not a physician, meaning himself, but they that are sick (Matthew 9:12).

a. The elect are spiritually sick (Isaiah 1:5).
6). They are sick and in a bad state.

b. Jesus healeth them, he putteth their illnesses to an end, and substitutes it for health.

c. He doth this in degrees.

d. He useth for this his stripes or passive obedience (Isaiah 53:5), which he prescribeth or maketh known in his Word, giveth by for curing by the saving work of the Holy Ghost,

5. *He healeth the elect from blindness.* I shall, saith the Father to the Son, give Thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles; to open the blind eyes (Isaiah 42: 6, 7). And Jesus offereth eyesalve to those of Laodicea to buy, so that they, using it to anoint their eyes, might see (Revelation 3:18).

a. The elect are by nature spiritually blind; this blindness exists in an incapability in the mind and a naughtiness in judgement, to correctly understand Divine, spiritual an heavenly matters and to judge them suitably; yes, in a evil state of the mind and of the judgement, whereby he wrongly understands the matters, and then judges them incorrectly.

b. They are healed by Christ from their blindness; the healing exists in that their mind and judgement are made capable to

correctly understand spiritual and heavenly, and to judge those suitably; but they are also given a new skill or capacity in their mind, whereby they really start to understand the mentioned matters correctly, and to judge them suitably.

c. Christ doth this by degrees.

d. By means of his Word and Spirit.

6. *He healeth them from their deafness.* Thus was predicted that when he would come in the flesh the ears of the death would be opened.(Isaiah 35:5).

a. The elect are by nature spiritually deaf, that is, they are incapable to be working and affected by the language of God's Word as they should.

b. They are healed by Christ from their deafness, so that they receive a capability and an ability to be able to listen to the voice of the Lord, from which flows a sanctified working affection in the soul there of.

c. Christ doth this by degrees.

d. By means of his Word and Spirit.

7. *He healeth the elect of lameness and limpness.* Then shall the lame man leap as an hart.(Isaiah 35:6).

a. The elect are by nature lame an limp, that is, they are incapable to want and to do what the Lord commandeth from men in his Word.

b. Christ healeth them, when he taketh away the unwillingness and incapability from them and giveth in place thereof that they can and want to.

c. He doth this by degrees.

d. By means of his Word and Spirit.

8. *He healeth the elect from dumbness and stammering.* The tongue of the stammerers shall be ready to speak plainly (Isaiah 32:4). Namely when the Messiah would reign as a

King in righteousness (v. 1).

a. The elect are by nature dumb and stammering, that is, they are incapable to speak before God, to God and about God; from this flows that they speak, it is done evilly by them.

b. Christ healeth them when He imparteth them to able to speak before God, to God and about God, wherefrom flow an actual speaking in an suitable manner.

c. He doth this by degrees.

d. By means of his Word and Spirit.

9. He purifieth the leper, or unclean elect. In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness. (Zechariah 13:1, 1 John 1:7).

a. The natural uncleanness of the elect exists in that spiritual filthiness, whereby the elect in soul and body, and all capacities and operations thereof are contaminated; whereby they, unequal to God, separated from his fellowship, yes, to be despised by him, and in the sight thereof they are ashamed before the countenance of the Lord.

b. Christ purifieth them, this purification is the cleansing of soul and body and all capacities and operations thereof, as well in the impartation of pureness and holiness; from which flows that the elect are received in his fellowship, pleasant to him and receive boldness for him.

c. He doth this by degrees.

d. By means of his Word and Spirit.

TO BE CONTINUED

THE REFORMED PROTESTANT RELIGION

An extract from THOMAS BOSTON
Supplied by a Reader

The reformed Protestant religion is the only true religion in the world, because it is built upon the infallible truth and veracity of God. We have reason to be thankful to God that it is not built upon such sandy foundations as human unwritten traditions, or any human testimony whatsoever. It is built upon the God of truth, and not upon infallible men... The precious truths which we believe,

we receive them not upon the testimony of the churches, Popes, or councils, but upon the testimony of the God of truth that cannot lie. But the Popish religion hath no sure foundation. The faith of Papists is built upon the testimony of men; so that their religion hath no more certainty in it, than these men have of infallibility.

Works Vol 1 p.129, Tentmaker edn.

Prayer brings us to communion with God. Now, if good company increase grace, how much more will communion with the Lord himself quicken and increase it.

John Preston

MEDITATION UPON SONG OF SOLOMON 6:2-3

by JAMES E. NORTH (Totton)

My beloved is gone down into his garden, to the beds of spices, to feed in the gardens, and to gather lilies. I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine: he feedeth among the lilies.

The Song of Solomon is one of the most mysterious books of the Scriptures of Truth, and being such, it is inspired by the Holy Spirit (2 Tim. 3:16) and 'is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness'. We neglect the Song of Solomon to our peril for this book is not just a Hebrew love poem, but it is a rehearsing of the love of the Lord Jesus Christ's love for and the winning of the Church of God. It is set in the language of love; the love of King Solomon for the Shulamite Maiden. It is a 'Poem of Loves' written in the form of a dialogue between those two people. Other personages, the Daughters of Jerusalem and the Watchmen, are also included.

The context of these three verses we are considering commences at 5:2. It is night-time, the Shulamite Maiden says that she is asleep; she is awakened by the noise of her Beloved knocking on the door but she refuses to answer and open the door. She makes various excuses for not doing so. She knows it is her Beloved One because he addresses her as 'my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled' (5:2). But she still refuses to open the door and let him in (5:3). He withdraws and, as he withdraws, he leaves traces of his precious odours of myrrh on the handle of the door which was not opened to him (5:3-5). This was to awaken the Shulamite to what she had done in the rejection of the Beloved. She rises from her bed, opens the door but finds

that he is no longer there (5:6). She looks for him but could not find him and there was no answer to her calls for him. She sets out to find him! She enters the city, the walled city the watchmen found her. They removed her veil, the token of her chastity; they beat her and wounded her (5:7). She then turns to the company of the Daughters of Jerusalem and she asks them if they have seen her Beloved and instructs them to tell him that she is desirous of his love (5:8). They in turn ask her why they should seek her Beloved One (5:9). Then from v. 10 to the end of chapter 5 she describes her Beloved. She describes every facet she can think of, telling them that he is the Lovely One, but it is as if she thinks back over what she has said in her description of him and found that description given does not describe him fully so she goes on to say that 'He is altogether lovely' (5:10-16).

So we come to the passage of our meditation.

The chapter opens with a further question from the Daughters of Jerusalem: 'Whither is thy beloved gone?' (6:1). She replies that he is gone into his garden and she tells them his purpose in so doing.

'My beloved is gone down into his garden, to the beds of spices, to feed in the gardens, and to gather lilies' (6:2).

We must first seek to identify to whom the description of 'the Daughters of Jerusalem'

belongs. It is almost certainly not the church who is asking the question! The Shulamite Maiden represents the church throughout the Song of Solomon—it is the recounting of the Lord's love for his church both as the corporate body and also as individual believers. We can therefore discount that interpretation. They are called the 'daughters of Jerusalem' which would identify them as being amongst the Lord's people, but they know nothing of the Beloved. They do not know where he is (6:1), and they ask about his characteristics (5:8) as if he were a stranger to them, whom they have never met. I take it that they are a picture of those who are present in the wider visible church, but never have been called by grace and professed faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. They are part of the wider congregation, they attend the public meetings and gatherings of the church but never profess true faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. They know nothing of the footsteps of the flock (Song 1:8). They appear to want to seek out the Beloved with the Shulamite, 'that we may seek him with thee' (6:1). She then tells the Daughters of Jerusalem where her Beloved has gone. She has the instinct to know that he has gone into his garden.

Now, we have both in the Old and New Testaments pictures drawn for us in the inspired language of Scripture of where the Lord is to be found.

The children of Israel, when they camped in the desert in their pilgrimage from Egypt to the Promised Land, erected the tabernacle according to the pattern given to Moses. The glory of the Lord came and dwelt between the Cherubim over the mercy-seat. The Lord was in the midst of his people, the church.

Again, in the New Testament, when the disciples were gathered in the upper room for fear of the Jews, the Lord Jesus Christ came and stood in the midst of the disciples.

In the Book of the Revelation the Lord Jesus is pictured as being in the midst of the golden candlesticks which is identified as being the church (Rev. 1:20).

I have no doubt that when the Shulamite says that the Beloved 'is gone down into his garden' she is referring to the church, the complete church, all those whom he has loved with an everlasting love (Jer. 31:3), all those whom he has loved to the end (Jno, 13:, 1 Jno. 4:10), all those for whom Christ shed his precious blood.

The church of the Old Testament and the church of the New Testament, the church which was chosen in Christ ere the word was formed and loved by Christ (Eph. 5:25). They were loved with an everlasting love; they are loved in time and will be loved to eternity. That love can never cease towards his people.

We are a garden walled around,
Chosen and made peculiar ground;
A little spot enclosed by grace,
Out of the world's wide wilderness.

Like trees of myrrh and spice we stand,
Planted by God the Father's hand;
And all his springs in Zion flow
To make the young plantation grow.

Isaac Watts

Then she also tells the Daughters of Jerusalem that he is gone down to the beds of spices. This I take to refer to the graces of the church: the love they have for the Lord Jesus Christ, the love they have for each other, the indwelling of the Holy Ghost as he is manifested in the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:16–18), the hope of glory (Col. 1:27) etc. Isaac Watts continues his hymn as quoted above:

Awake, O heavenly wind, and come,
Blow on this garden of perfume;
Spirit divine, descend and breathe
A gracious gale on plants beneath.

Make our best spices flow abroad,
To entertain our Saviour, God;
And faith, and love, and joy appear,
And every grace be active here.

Let my Beloved come and taste
His pleasant fruits at his own feast.
'I come, my spouse, I come,' he cries,
With love and pleasure in his eyes.

Our Lord into his garden comes,
Well pleased to smell our poor perfumes;
And calls us to a feast divine,
Sweeter than honey, milk, or wine:

'Eat of the tree of life, my friends;
The blessings that my Father sends;
Your taste shall all my dainties prove,
And drink abundance of my love.'

The next thing she says about the Beloved is that he has gone with a purpose, namely to feed in the gardens. Not that the Beloved feeds on his plants. No! It is he as the divine Gardener who feeds his plants. He nourishes his garden. He waters his plants for, he says, 'I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring' (Isa. 44:3).

John tells us of one of the Plants of the Lord who came to the well to draw water who after speaking with the Lord Jesus Christ said, 'Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw' (Jno. 4:15). The Lord Jesus also speaks of his being the Bread of Life (Jno. 6:35, 48). When the Lord Jesus speaks of eating that bread he is not speaking of the bread used in the ordinance of the Lord's Supper being transubstantiated into the 'body, soul and divinity' of Christ Jesus our Lord. He is speaking of being united to him, being in close fellowship with him,

walking daily in and with him. The Jews in the wilderness depended upon the manna from heaven to keep them daily in the pilgrimage from Egypt to the Promised Land, so the child of God is completely dependant upon Christ to maintain his pilgrimage from earth and this life to the glory of heaven to be with and like Jesus.

And everyone of his people are called 'trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he might be glorified' (Isa. 61:3). He tends his garden; he feeds each plant. Even the weak plants he nourishes and brings them back to health and strength in his garden: 'A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench' (Isa. 61:3). This is done by his Spirit teaching them and bringing to memory the truths they have learned in the past: 'But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you' (Jno. 14:26); they 'grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ' (2 Pet. 3:18).

The final thing she says about her Beloved is that he gathers the lilies. This I understand as the gathering in of the church; of their being called by grace. They are gathered one by one, by the work of the Spirit of God. 'Ye shall be gathered one by one, O ye children of Israel' (Isa. 27:12). The mercy of it is that everyone of the Lord's planting will be gathered and they will bring forth fruit unto life eternal. The Lord Jesus said that his disciples will bring forth fruit by abiding in him.

They are in his garden, they are protected by the wall of Sovereign grace. He has built a wall around them. He gathered out the stones. He rooted out all the dead stumps and weeds. He made the ground fertile so that the plants would grow and bring forth

fruit. In the case of Israel, the Lord looked for grapes, but it brought forth only wild grapes, but of the church the Lord looks for fruit and will find it there (Isa. 5:1-5).

Zion's a garden walled around,
Chosen and made peculiar ground;
A little spot, enclosed by grace
Out of the world's wide wilderness

Isaac Watts

I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine: he feedeth among the lilies.

In the previous verse we looked at the first part of the answer given to the Daughters of Jerusalem. She gave them the answer of where she believed her Beloved was to be found, namely in his garden. She now speaks of her association with the Beloved; her acknowledgment of her Beloved; her acceptance of and by the Beloved. It is an affirmation which seals the believer with Christ. 'I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine.'

There are two affirmations here in this verse of Scripture: the one on the part of the Shulamite Maiden and the other on the part of the Beloved.

Firstly, how is she her Beloved's; in what way did she become her Beloved's; what were the causes of this her state. Well, it was nothing on her part that initiated the relationship. How could a poor villager woo and win the king? She confesses that she is black, that is, she has been burnt by the sun. 'I am black, but comely, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, as the tents of Kedar, as the curtains of Solomon. Look not upon me, because I am black, because the sun hath looked upon me' (Song 1:5,6). She has been burnt! The child of God is no less burnt, he is burnt by sin. Sin has corrupted his heart! Sin has deformed him! The natural man is corrupted by sin as a result of the Adam fall which brought sin and death into the world (Rom. 5:12).

The natural man is disobedient to the law of God and the Person of Almighty God. The natural man cannot and will not seek after God so much so that he cannot and will not initiate the seeking after God; the whole of the work of salvation is in the hands of God. The Shulamite, the sinner can never and will never seek after the Beloved.

It is not anything she did that made her become his dove, neither is it anything that we ourselves can do to woo and win the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour, Prince and Redeemer. No! It is all of grace! It is all the work of redemption undertaken by the Lord Jesus Christ which brings us into covenant relationship with the Triune God. Well, how can we see the covenant workings of Almighty God?

It is to be seen in the love of God for his people. Consider this verses of Scripture: 'The LORD hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee' (Jer. 31:3). The love described here is 'everlasting'—it is from everlasting to everlasting, that is, it is eternal. And, as Almighty God cannot change ('For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed'—Mal. 3:16), so his love never changes. He did not love his people in eternity past for that love to change in the present day or change in the future. No! It continues ever. And as Jesus Christ is the same yesterday today and forever, so his love never changes. What a mercy this is for the child of God!

'For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life' (Jno. 3:16). And because of that love of the Triune God, the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the holy Ghost which is given unto us (Rom. 5:5).

We see the covenant workings of God in the choice of his own dear people. Scripture is replete with the Lord having made choice of his people. Consider Deuteronomy 7:7,8 'The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people: But because the LORD loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the LORD brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.' That is not a temporary love or a restricted love. It does not just apply to the Children of Israel in the time of the Exodus. It applies to the whole of the church in all ages. The Lord set his love upon his people because he would love them, and because he loved them he enfolded them into his everlasting covenant of grace and brought them out of the Egypt of this world and brings them to the promised land of redemption in Christ.

The Apostle Paul speaks in a similar vein in Ephesians 1:4,5: 'According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.'

Because he loved his people; because he chose his people, he purchased them by the shedding of the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, the second Person of the Holy Trinity, the eternal Son of God as Peter declares: 'Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot:

Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you' (1:18-20).

Having loved his people, chosen his people and redeemed his people, he calls them by his grace. 'And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified' (Rom. 8:28-30). And the calling of God is without repentance (Rom. 11:29), that is, God can never and will never go back upon his calling of his people.

What from Christ that soul can sever,
Bound by everlasting bands?
Once in Him, in Him for ever;
Thus the eternal covenant stands.
None shall pluck thee
From the Strength of Israel's hands.

John Kent

But the Apostle Peter takes the calling of God a step further than the Apostle Paul. Yes! Paul speaks of the calling of God, the predestinating grace of God and the certainty of those having been called of God will be glorified. But Peter speaks of the purpose of the child of God's calling: 'But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light' (1 Peter 2:9). That purpose is that the child of God should live a holy life separated from the things of this world showing forth the praises of him who has loved him and called him to be his child. 'But as he which hath

called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy' (1 Peter 1:15,16).

It is these first works that cause the child of God to be able to say with the Shulamite Maiden of her Beloved, 'I am my beloved's'. And having been brought by faith to look upon the Lord Jesus Christ, he falls at His feet and cries out with Thomas, 'My Lord and my God.'

But as I wrote above, there is not only an affirmation on the part of the Beloved, there is also an affirmation on the part of the Shulamite: 'And my beloved is mine.'

As I have written above, the initiative in this coming together on the part of the Shulamite and the Beloved was with the Beloved. He it was that sought the Shulamite. He it was that stirred the heart of the Shulamite. He it was who drew her to himself. But there had to be a response to that drawing. It is the same in the calling of the church to Christ. They are drawn one by one until all the election of grace is gathered together in Christ Jesus their Lord, and we see this illustrated and explained in the Scriptures of Truth.

How, then, is the Beloved the Shulamite's? How is Christ Jesus the church's?

Firstly, by love! When asked which was the greatest of the commandments, the Lord Jesus Christ said it was, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind' (Matt. 22:37). The Psalmist is replete in his utterance of his love towards the Lord: 'O love the LORD, all ye his saints: for the LORD preserveth the faithful, and plentifully rewardeth the proud doer' (Ps. 31:23); 'Ye that love the LORD, hate evil: he preserveth the souls of his saints; he delivereth them out of the hand of the wicked' (Ps. 97:10); 'I love the LORD, because he hath heard my voice and

my supplications' (Ps. 116:1). Joshua's exhortation to the Children of Israel was 'Take good heed therefore unto yourselves, that ye love the LORD your God' (Josh. 23:11). But if we turn to the 21st chapter of John's Gospel, we read of the examination (if we can call it that) of Peter—a searching of Peter's heart after his denial of the Lord Jesus Christ before Christ was crucified. It is a searching question not only addressed to Peter, but to all the children of God: 'Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?' What a mercy it is if we are brought to answer in the same vein as Peter: 'Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee.' and again, 'Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee' (Jno. 21:15–17). What a mercy it is that in all our declensions; in all our backslidings; in all our lukewarmness; in all our sinfulness the Lord knows all about us and still loves his people. Why? Because he first loved us. 'There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love. We love him, because he first loved us' (1 Jno. 4:18,19).

Not only is Christ ours by love, but he is ours by choice. Joshua's exhortation to the Children of Israel was, 'Now therefore fear the LORD, and serve him in sincerity and in truth: and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye the LORD. And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD' (Joshua 24:14,15).

When the Lord was in Mary and Martha's house we are told that Martha was encumbered with much serving but Mary sat at the feet of Jesus. In such a gentle manner, as only

the Lord Jesus could, he rebuked Martha and told her that Mary had chosen the better part, that of sitting at his feet. 'But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her' (Luke 10:38-42).

O that I could for ever sit
With Mary at the Master's feet!
Be this my happy choice:
My only care, delight, and bliss,
My joy; my heaven on earth, be this—
To hear the Bridegroom's voice!

C. Wesley

Joel speaks of multitudes being in the valley of decision (Joel 3:14). But does this imply that there is an ability within man to make that decision? No! Says the Lord Jesus. 'Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me. And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life' (Jno. 5:39,40). The people of God are made willing in the day of his power and enabled to make that choice of Christ (Psalm 110:3)

O happy day, that fixed my choice
On Thee my Saviour and my God!
Well may this glowing heart rejoice,
And tell its raptures all abroad.

'Tis done! The great transaction's done
I am my Lord's and He is mine;
He drew me, and I followed on,
Charmed to confess the voice divine.

P Doddridge

Loved, chosen and called. The child of God being quickened by the Holy Ghost, being brought to see his sinful nature and his troubles from sin and an apprehension of future judgment, he calls upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ (Ps. 86:7), and the promise of deliverance is given to him:

'whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be delivered: for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the LORD hath said, and in the remnant whom the LORD shall call' (Joel 2:32, cf. Acts 2:21). Having been called, he is exhorted by Peter to make his calling and election sure, 'give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall, (2 Pet. 1:10). How does he do that? By seeking the evidences of the new birth. These include walking by faith in Christ, walking in the light of the gospel 'But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin' (1 Jno. 1:7), a daily walk, a worthy walk (Eph. 4:1). The child of God, then, walks by faith and not by sight (2 Cor. 5:7).

Walk in the light, and thou shalt own
Thy darkness passed away,
Because that light that on thee shone
In which is perfect day.

Walk in the light; pursue they way
Till faith be turned to sight
For in the land of endless day
God is Himself the Light.

B Barton

This verse then concludes with the clause 'He feedeth among the lilies.' We have considered earlier the application of the Beloved feeding in his garden in that he feeds his plants; he feeds them with the bread of life, the Word of God.

The Lord Jesus Christ is the Lily of the Valleys (Song 2:1). The lilies referred to here are to be counted as 'imitators' of Christ. Now, how much are we an imitator, or a reflection of the Lord Jesus Christ? Paul exhorts, 'Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ' (1 Cor. 11:1). ¶

FORMER DAYS

BEING A SUMMARY OF PAST ISSUES FROM *THE GOSPEL MAGAZINE*

250 years ago: November & December 1772

‘The Office and Work of the Holy Spirit’ is the subject of the letter that opens the November issue, continued from the previous month. Reformed theology is sometimes accused of being weak on this aspect of doctrine. The writer of the letter shows otherwise! Omicron writes on Communion with God. He says he intends to exceed no more than a sheet of paper: his thoughts run to six pages. Reflections of a Christian on his Spiritual Elevations and Dejections is continued from the previous month, and is followed by A Letter of Advice and Consolation to a Christian. The letter on Coming to Christ, printed in October, is answered here. Another correspondent expresses dissatisfaction with the October writer’s definition of faith. He points out that faith is the persuasion of the mind that a proposition is true because of the authority of the evidence; it is not, and can never, the product of an act of will. Since justifying faith is the gift of God, we must say that faith is him working that persuasion in us, and not our working ourselves up to believing a thing to be true because we decide it is. Another writer advises a newly-ordained minister against using unbecoming language in preaching. His point is as relevant today as it was when he made it: drawing illustrations from unedifying sources, using any form of levity, and using arguments in a way that does not honour our Lord Jesus Christ, are all warned against. Poetry concludes the issue.

The December number resumes the survey of typical people, and takes Moses as its subject. The piece will be continued. In 1763

William McEwen of Dundee published the first edition of a work on the same subject—typical persons, places and things. It has been republished by Reformation Heritage Books, and is worth obtaining. Next come Reflections of a soul shut up to the faith, showing the sinfulness of hardening one’s heart. The Harmony of Scripture Prophecies is continued, this time with the Egyptians. It is followed by an article on Effectual Calling. Advice on hearing sermons includes an exhortation to find a preacher who, though perhaps imperfect in some respects, seeks to care for all spiritual conditions. The writer also warns against the practice of wandering from pulpit to pulpit to satisfy curiosity, and against attending preaching merely to hear, and not to be instructed. Omicron (the author) also points out the danger of making ourselves the standard of good preaching, and not the Scriptures. Two questions are asked and answered, on grieving the Holy Spirit, and on knowing whether one profits under the word. The letter on the Office and Work of the Holy Spirit continues, and poetry ends the month.

200 years ago: November & December 1822

The opening piece concerns Thoughts on the Authenticity of the Bible. The Servitude of the Christian is considered next. The believer is truly a new creature in Christ Jesus, and is ‘as perfect in holiness as God can create’, yet at the same is subject to temptations and trials. Our strength and hope lies in Christ who saved us, so that we can seek his aid to resist temptation. In part, this piece is aimed at some who teach the possibility of

being sinless. A glance at the Great Promise Maker, as Omniscient, Omnipotent and immutable, and the Punishment for Sin, form the next two pieces. The latter is the continuation of a debate over whether God punishes sin in his people. The proposer has argued that Annanias and Sapphira, being believers, were damned for their sin. His correspondent argues that such punishments cannot constitute eternal damnation, but serve another purpose. The complete satisfaction of Christ's atonement is the chief doctrine being debated. The sermon skeletons are continued, with Psalm 91:1, James 1:17, 2 Samuel 19:28, and Psalm 65:4. Letters from the martyr John Bradford are followed by a complaint. The author of a tract reviewed in an earlier edition complains that he has been misrepresented. The Editors defend themselves, point out that in the review, and again on re-reading the tract, they find the author to be utterly confused and confusing. Tomlinson continues his attempt to rescue the Holy Scriptures from ridicule. He offers a translation of Gen 6:6-7 from the Septuagint. He argues that they understood 'it grieved him at his heart' to refer to man's sin and not to the fact that God had created man. Further verses are considered, and the description of Noah as 'a just man' is recast as 'a justified man'. Let those who have Greek and Hebrew decide! An obituary and poems conclude the month.

Come December we are reminded that the Signs of the Times teach us that the church of Jesus Christ has always existed in the midst of foes. Terrible though the days may be, none of this is different from what has usually been. Part of a sermon on Mark 16:16 shows that none are saved for believing though the saved are believers; and none shall be damned for not believing, though all unbelievers shall be damned. A writer

advocates the coming Millennium as taking place after the burning up of this present earth. The full significance of Luke 22:20 is set out, and the outline of a sermon on Psalm 107:6 follows. A Letter to a Friend leads to correspondence, and to a controversy over an article in the New Evangelical Magazine, on whether we have the strength to perform our duty. A submission to the *Magazine* is rejected by the Editors as being full of Pelagianism. A Methodist asks for evidence that those of his name advocate sinless perfection: quotations from John Wesley are kindly supplied in answer. The angry author of the tract who replied in the previous issue has more to say, as does another author whose work was criticised. Further correspondence and an obituary conclude the issue.

100 years ago: November & December 1922

Christ's sinlessness, sacrifice and exaltation are treated in the opening sermon, from Hebrews 7:26f. Wayside Notes speak to the Coming One of Rev 1:7. The girding up of the loins of our mind, from 1 Peter 1:13, is the subject of Wellsprings, and is followed by notes of a sermon on 1 Cor 9:22. 'What aileth thee? Is thy God able?' asks Nettie. W.H. Griffith Thomas is quoted on the finality of the Bible, p. 483, and the subject of Effectual Calling comes next. Isaiah 6:8, 'Here am I; send me' is compared with Jeremiah 1:7, 'Thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee.' Entries from a journal show how much a discerning believer looks to hear Christ set forth in preaching. The command of Haggai 1:5 is examined, and we are offered some thoughts on David in his afflictions. Peake's Commentary is subjected to justified criticism in an imaginative and engaging piece. A report on George Müller's Ashley Down Orphanage shows the blessing of trusting the Lord: the largest ever donation of

almost £10,000 was received at a time when the Directors were running a huge deficit. The donation cleared it completely. There is a warning about the need for what is condemned as 'heresy hunting'; where there is error, it needs to be exposed, even though so doing may earn the hatred of some professing believers. Correspondence and reviews conclude the issue.

For **December** we begin with a sermon on Our Lord's ascension, from Acts 1:9. Wayside Notes provides Comfort for God's People from Isaiah 52:9. Wellsprings considers our times being from the Lord, from 1 Chronicles 29:30. The Notes of a Sermon are from Psalm 40:17, and this is followed by a sermon on Salvation by Grace, from Ephesians 2:8–9. The preachers contends that it is faith that is the gift, not salvation. We concur. Nettie considers the Heavenly Places from a number of Bible verses. The Rev Frank Houghton, son of the Editor,

writes from China where he is serving as a missionary. The differences between the AV translation of Psalm 37:37f and that of the Prayer Book lead a writer to ponder the nuances of the differences, and to consider other verses of the Bible that speak to the same subject. The blessing of Christian communion or fellowship is shown from journal extracts. The next article shows the similarities between Modernism (liberal theology) and Evolution: both assume the ascent from the primitive to the complex, in complete disregard for the testimony of God in his world. The Protestant Beacon reports from the United Protestant Congress, with warnings against the reappearance of the mass, Mariolatry and auricular confession. The main point of the piece is to show that when Protestants have held firmly to the Bible and preached the gospel, such errors have been thrown into confusion. Reviews conclude the issue.

TO BE CONTINUED

BOOK REVIEWS

A short introduction: How the Church Fathers read the Bible

Gerald Bray

Lexham Press, Bellingham, WA, 2022. £19.99 194pp hbk ISBN 978-1-68359-583-0

Many years ago a wise and experienced pastor advised me to read commentaries on any given passage in chronological order. One soon realises how connected later writers are to their predecessors. Our Protestant Reformers and their immediate successors interacted with the Church Fathers more often than we may realise. If we would understand the theology of the Reformers, we must know something about the theology of the Church Fathers.

This begs a question. What did the Church Fathers believe? How did they read the Bible? What, indeed, was their Bible? The answer to this last question was, for most, the Greek Septuagint. They read it as the word of God, the source of all doctrine and the only foundation of knowable truth. They saw Jesus Christ as the central theme of Scripture, and knew that in interpreting it they must test their position against the text, and not against any individual, no matter how well respected. The point of study is to aid our praise and worship, and sermons

are to be set in that context. See the last chapter, Seven Theses, for more on these points.

There are six chapters: What is Patristic biblical interpretation, the Clash of Worldviews, the Four Senses of Interpretation, the Search for Consensus, Case Studies, and Seven Theses on how the Church Fathers read the Bible. The case studies consist of ten Bible passages, five from each Testament, and shows how the Fathers understood them. The author then suggests ways in which their views are helpful, and ways in which they may not be. The book ends with a Subject and Scripture Index.

Were the Fathers always correct? By no means; but neither were they always wrong. The Song of Solomon is mentioned fairly frequently, and serves as a good example of the difference of approach. Among the Fathers only Theodore of Mopsuestia rejected the allegorical interpretation in favour of the literal. Many modern commentators would agree with him. Yet, Bray asks, what is the point of the Song if it is not allegory?

Prof. Bray has helped to edit the *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*, 29 volumes (excluding the Apocrypha) of extracts from the writings of a wide range of Church Fathers on as much of the Bible as are contained in their remains. Anyone interested in learning more about the theology and method of the Church Fathers would do well to begin with this book.

EJM

The Excellency of the Authorised Version

David N Samuel

24 pp bklt £2 inc. p&p Obtainable from: The Church of England Continuing, 1 Downshire Square, Reading.

We welcome the re-publication of this lecture delivered by Dr Samuel some 30 years ago to a meeting of the United Protestant Council. Whilst not a scholarly lecture, it does not lack a scholarly approach to the subject. The lecture was delivered under four facets of the subject as to why the Authorised Version of Holy Scripture is the best of all translations viz. That 'God's word is true light,' that 'The light of God's word is perfect,' that 'God's word is perpetual light' and that 'God's word is a penetrating and perspicuous light' (p 1). He says that 'we have a fundamental difference ... between the New Testament in the modern versions from the RV of 1881, and ... on the other hand the AV' (p 4). 'They are based upon different Greek texts and are in effect, different Bibles' (p 4). He concludes his lecture: 'if a reader wants to keep as close as possible to the Word of God as originally given, he will do well to follow the Authorised Version as his guide' (p 21)

This reviewer recommends this booklet to the readers of *The Gospel Magazine*. It is a good, solid and dependable lecture which stands for the integrity of the Authorised Version. We hope it has a wide circulation.

JEN

The Gospel Magazine library is available on our website, where every back issue ever printed can be found (except the very few named there). In addition there is a physical library, in which will also be found a number of works by former Editors. The library is housed at St Mary's Castle Street in Reading, and anyone wishing to visit is invited to contact the Editor (details in the inside front cover) to arrange a suitable time.

Please note that volumes cannot be removed. Adequate facilities are provided for study and reading.

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BIDEFORD, DEVON: *North Road Chapel*. Consecutive Expository Ministry. AV, *Christian Hymns*. LORD'S DAY 10.45 am and 6.30 pm. *Minister:* Mr R.J. Steward. northroadchapel.org. nrcbideford@gmail.com.

CHELTENHAM. *Providence Baptist Chapel*. Lord's Day services, 10.30 am and 6.30 pm. Bible Study and Prayer Meeting, Wednesdays 7.30 pm. Use AV and *Christian Worship*. *Pastor:* Mr Pooyan Mehrshahi. Tel. 01242 245116.

FRISTON, SUFFOLK: *Baptist Church*, Mill Road IP17 1PH (4 miles from Aldeburgh, 3 miles from Snape Maltings). Lord's Day services: 10.45 am and 2 pm. Bible Study Tuesdays 7.30 pm. AV and *Gospel Hymns*. Reformed Evangelical worship. *Pastor:* Michael Harley. fristonbaptistsuffolk.org.uk. Tel 01728 602657.

LANDFORD WOOD, WILTSHIRE: *Landford Wood Mission Hall*, Stock Lane, Landford Wood, SP5 2ES (off A36). Weekly

Service on each Lord's Day at 3 pm, (God willing) from February to December). Conservative Evangelical Worship using the AV at all services. Elder: J.E. North, phone 07500265419

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SUFFOLK: *Wattisham Chapel*. Evangelical and Reformed services each LORD'S DAY 10.45 am and 6.30 pm. Metrical Psalms and hymns. AV only used. Telephone 01449 612264. website: wattishambaptist.org

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