# Free Church Witness

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## Prayer With Feeling

*Rev John Keddie*

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# 'Esau Have I Hated'

God is love, but is He also hate? Paul explains the sovereignty of God in election. What was the essential difference between Esau and Jacob? They had the same mother and father, Rebecca and Isaac. Conceived at the same time they were twins. If anything, Esau had a priority over Jacob because he came first out of the womb. Before they were born and before they had done good or evil it was said to Rebecca, 'The elder shall serve the younger' (Rom.9:12). Paul then quotes the words of God through Malachi: 'As it is written, Jacob have I loved but Esau have I hated' (v13). To the modern human mind that seems a bit hard. It appears to judge and condemn someone and hate them before they have done any wrong.

But Paul in his day was also conscious that people would be critical of God. He writes: 'What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid' (v14). Away with the thought that there could be any unrighteousness in God. He is the Judge of all the earth and infinitely just and couldn't possibly be unrighteous. Paul adds: 'For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy' (vv15-16).

Because all mankind sinned and fell with Adam in his first transgression, all are guilty even before they are born and none deserve mercy or salvation. None of us have a right to demand that God loves us. We all deserve to be hated because we have rebelled against God and broken

His gracious covenant which He made with Adam and with us. God is free to have mercy on whom He will have mercy and to harden whom He will (v18).

## Hate is a harsh word

Yet hate is a very harsh word. How are we to understand it? To help explain it, the words of Jesus are sometimes quoted: 'If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple' (Lk.14:26). Jesus here is not encouraging us to hate our parents. The fifth commandment demands that we honour them. Rather, Jesus is warning against loving our parents more than we love Christ. We must not make an idol of our father or mother. Further we must not let our parents keep us from Christ. We have to obey God rather than man. In that sense 'hate' means 'love very much less'.

This helps somewhat in the understanding of 'Esau have I hated'. God's mercy and favour to Esau is very much less than to Jacob who was one of God's elect and therefore was loved with an infinite, eternal and unchangeable love. To Esau as to the non-elect in general God showed much kindness; He sent many blessings to him, required the sign of the covenant of grace to be set upon him (circumcision) and stretched out His hands all day in mercy (Rom.10:21).

It is vitally important to remember the teaching of Christ in the sermon on the mount: 'But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust' (Mt.5:44-45). Love your enemies since the Father shows love to His enemies.

## Jacob have I loved

Recently reflecting on the words 'Jacob have I loved but Esau have I hated' I felt I was given a new and helpful insight. They are a quotation from Malachi and so in interpreting them it is helpful to go back to the original context. The words were addressed to Jacob. They are not meant as a stick to beat the non-elect who are anyway hidden from us, much less the unregenerate who may yet be saved. Election is often seen as a barrier keeping men and women from Christ. It was that in my own personal experience as I sought the Lord. I often heard the words preached, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved' (Acts 16:31). But how could I believe in Christ if I wasn't in the elect and He hadn't died for me? The answer is certainly not that you have to first find out that you are in the elect, and then believe. Election is not a message for the unconverted. Rather to the sinner we must proclaim the 'good news' that Christ died on the cross to save sinners and that every sinner must repent and believe the gospel and that whosoever believes will be saved.

'Esau have I hated' is not a message to Esau but to Jacob. The prophecy of Malachi is addressed to Israel. It begins with the words: 'I have loved you, saith the LORD. Yet ye say, Wherein hast thou loved us? Was not Esau Jacob's brother? saith the LORD: yet I loved Jacob, and I hated Esau, and laid his mountains and his heritage waste for the dragons of the wilderness. Whereas Edom saith, We are impoverished, but we will return and build the desolate places; thus saith the LORD of hosts, They shall build, but I will throw down; and they shall call them, The border of wickedness, and, The people against whom the LORD hath indignation for ever. And your eyes shall see, and ye shall say, the LORD will be magnified from the border of Israel' (Mal.1:2-5). Israel were forgetting the amazing love with which God had loved them. They failed to see the contrast between God's love to them and His dealings with Esau. God appeared to have indignation forever against Esau. God does not deal with Jacob like that. Jacob, you should love God because of His love to you. Why are you dishonouring God your loving heavenly Father (v6)?

## Electing love

Electing love is a wonderful message to the Christian. God has loved you from all eternity. You are special to Him, not because of anything in you, or anything which He saw you going to do, or any potential you have. Rather He simply loved you because He loved you and having loved you He predestined you to be His child. Rejoice in God, love Him in return with all your heart and serve Him with all your might. Keep before your mind's eye the different way He has treated you from the way He has treated the Esaus whom he has not elected. Let your election and the rejection of others be a great motive in rendering obedience to Him. Paul speaks of the great power that compelled him to labour more abundantly than all the other apostles: 'the love of Christ constraineth us' (2Cor.5:14). That love is particularly revealed in election and the cross.

## Our Westminster Confession

Many ministers handle the doctrine of election in a reckless, unwise and harmful way and that is why the Westminster Confession of Faith Chapter 3 section VIII gives the following warning: 'The doctrine of this high mystery of predestination is to be handled with special prudence and care, that men, attending the will of God revealed in His Word, and yielding obedience thereunto, may, from the certainty of their effectual vocation, be assured of their eternal election. So shall this doctrine afford matter of praise, reverence, and admiration of God; and of humility, diligence, and abundant consolation to all that sincerely obey the Gospel'.

# Redefining Marriage Hurts Women Like Me – and Our Children

***Janna Darnelle***

*A mother, writer, and an advocate for upholding marriage between one man and one woman. She lives in the USA and mentors others whose families have been impacted by homosexuality.*

*Picture for illustrative purposes only*

The push to present a positive image of same-sex families has hidden the devastation on which many are built. We must stand for marriage—and for the precious lives that marriage creates. Every time a new state redefines marriage, the news is full of happy stories of gay and lesbian couples and their new families. But behind those big smiles and sunny photographs are other, more painful stories. These are left to secret, dark places. They are suppressed, and those who would tell them are silenced in the name of 'marriage equality'.

But I refuse to be silent. I represent one of those real life stories that are kept in the shadows. I have personally felt the pain and devastation wrought by the propaganda that destroys natural families.

## The Divorce

In the autumn of 2007, my husband of almost ten years told me that he was gay and that he wanted a divorce. In an instant, the world that I had known and loved—the life we had built together—was shattered.

I tried to convince him to stay, to stick it out and fight to save our marriage. But my voice, my desires, my needs—and those of our two young children—no longer mattered to him. We had become disposable, because he had embraced one tiny word that had become his entire identity. Being gay trumped commitment, vows, responsibility, faith, fatherhood, marriage, friendships, and community. All of this was thrown away for the sake of his new identity.

Try as I might to save our marriage, there was no stopping my husband. Our divorce was not settled in mediation or with lawyers. No, it went all the way to trial. My husband wanted primary custody of our children. His entire case can be summed up in one sentence: 'I am gay, and I deserve my rights'. It worked: the judge gave him practically everything he wanted. At one point, he even told my husband, 'If you had asked for more, I would have given it to you'.

I truly believe that judge was legislating from the bench, disregarding the facts of our particular case and simply using us—using our children— to help influence future cases. In our society, LGBT citizens are seen as marginalized victims who must be protected at all costs, even if it means stripping rights from others. By ignoring the injustice committed against me and my children, the judge seemed to think that he was correcting a larger injustice.

My husband had left us for his gay lover. They make more money than I do. There are two of them and only one of me. Even so, the judge believed that they were the victims. No matter what I said or did, I didn't have a chance of saving our children from being bounced around like so many pieces of luggage.

## A New Same-Sex Family - Built On the Ruins of Mine

My ex-husband and his partner went on to marry. Their first ceremony took place before our state redefined marriage. After it created same-sex marriage, they chose to have a repeat performance. In both cases, my children were forced—against my will and theirs—to participate. At the second ceremony, which included more than twenty couples, local news stations and papers were there to document the first gay weddings officiated in our state. USA Today did a photo journal shoot on my ex and his partner, my children, and even the grandparents. I was not notified that this was taking place, nor was I given a voice to object to our children being used as props to promote same-sex marriage in the media.

At the time of the first ceremony, the marriage was

not recognized by our state, our nation, or our church. And my ex-husband's new marriage, like the majority of male-male relationships, is an 'open', non-exclusive relationship. This sends a clear message to our children: what you feel trumps all laws, promises, and higher authorities. You can do whatever you want, whenever you want—and it doesn't matter who you hurt along the way.

After our children's pictures were publicized, a flood of comments and posts appeared. Commenters exclaimed at how beautiful this gay family was and congratulated my ex-husband and his new partner on the family that they 'created'. But there is a significant person missing from those pictures: the mother and abandoned wife. That 'gay family' could not exist without me.

There is not one gay family that exists in this world that was created naturally.

Every same-sex family can only exist by manipulating nature. Behind the happy façade of many families headed by same-sex couples, we see relationships that are built from brokenness. They represent covenants broken, love abandoned, and responsibilities crushed. They are built on betrayal, lies, and deep wounds.

This is also true of same-sex couples who use assisted reproductive technologies such as surrogacy or sperm donation to have children. Such processes exploit men and women for their reproductive potential, treat children as products to be bought and sold, and purposely deny children a relationship with one or both of their biological parents. Wholeness and balance cannot be found in such families, because something is always missing. I am missing. But I am real, and I represent hundreds upon thousands of spouses who have been betrayed and rejected.

If my husband had chosen to stay, I know that things wouldn't have been easy. But that is what marriage is about: making a vow and choosing to live it out, day after day. In sickness and in health, in good times and in bad, spouses must choose to put the other person first, loving them even when it's hard.

A good marriage doesn't only depend on sexual desire, which can come and go and is often out of our control. It depends on choosing to love, honour, and be faithful to one person, forsaking all others. It is common for spouses to be attracted to other people—usually of the opposite sex, but sometimes of the same sex. Spouses who value their marriage do not act on those impulses. For those who find themselves attracted to people of the same sex, staying faithful to their opposite-sex spouse isn't a betrayal of their true identity. Rather, it's a decision not to let themselves be ruled by their passions. It shows depth and strength of character when such people remain true to their vows, consciously striving to remember, honour, and revive the love they had for their spouses when they first married.

## My Children Deserve Better

Our two young children were wilfully and intentionally thrust into a world of strife and combative beliefs, lifestyles, and values, all in the name of 'gay rights'. Their father moved into his new partner's condo, which is in a complex inhabited by sixteen gay men. Another man, who functions as the father figure of this community, is in his late sixties and has a boyfriend in his twenties. My children are brought to gay parties where they are the only children and where only alcoholic beverages are served. They are taken to transgender baseball games, gay rights fundraisers, and LGBT film festivals.

Both of my children face identity issues, just like other children. Yet there are certain deep and unique problems that they will face as a direct result of my former husband's actions. My son is now a maturing teen, and he is very interested in girls. But how will he learn how to deal with that interest when he is surrounded by men who seek sexual gratification from other men? How will he learn to treat girls with care and respect when his father has rejected them and devalues them? How will he embrace his developing masculinity without seeing his father live out authentic manhood by treating his wife and family with love, honouring his marriage vows even when it's hard?

My daughter suffers too. She needs a dad who will encourage her to embrace her femininity and beauty, but these qualities are parodied and distorted in her father's world. Her dad wears make-up. She is often exposed to men dressing as women. The walls in his condo are adorned with large framed pictures of women in provocative positions. What is my little girl to believe about her own femininity and beauty? Her father should be protecting her sexuality. Instead, he is warping it.

Without the guidance of both their mother and their father, how can my children navigate their developing identities and sexuality? I ache to see my children struggle, desperately trying to make sense of their world.

My children and I have suffered great losses because of my former husband's decision to identify as a gay man and throw away his life with us. Time is revealing the depth of those wounds, but I will not allow them to destroy me and my children. I refuse to lose my faith and hope. I believe so much more passionately in the power of the marriage covenant between one man and one woman today than when I was married. There is another way for those with same-sex attractions. Destruction is not the only option—it cannot be. Our children deserve far better from us.

This type of devastation should never happen to another spouse or child. Please, I plead with you: defend marriage as being between one man and one woman. We must stand for marriage—and for the precious lives that marriage creates.

# Life and Sermons of Robert Murray McCheyne (Part II)

***Rev Alasdair J Macleod***

*Last month Mr Macleod gave a brief biography of McCheyne.*

## II. The Sermons of McCheyne: The Flowering of a Preacher

You may be surprised to learn that opinions on the value of McCheyne's sermons differ. I am told that my late grandmother from Lewis used to turn by preference to the sermons of Spurgeon and McCheyne for spiritual feeding, and many of the Lord's people have found the same nourishment in these messages. But a recent biographer, David Robertson, writes in disparaging terms: 'When one reads McCheyne's sermons, there is not a great deal that is outstanding. His leadership gifts were strong, but had largely to mature'. Later he adds, 'McCheyne's sermons were not literary classics and they generally do not translate well to the printed page', and further comments: 'His "success" cannot be gleaned from published written material, much of which will only appeal to those who are already convinced of his "sainthood"'. He goes on to propose as a question for discussion: 'Is it worthwhile publishing sermons?'. This rather suggests that he considers the value of any published sermons to be open to question, an attitude genuinely astonishing from a professedly Reformed pastor. I fear the explanation is Robertson's view of preaching as a display of 'leadership gifts', rather than faithful exposition of the Word and application of it to the conscience, something sadly rare in our day. I would rather concur with the view of Maurice Roberts expressed in his preface to the reprinted volume of sermons, From the Preacher's Heart: 'They are the workmanship of a McCheyne, exquisite sermons in miniature, the fruits of a spiritual genius'.

Most republished McCheyne sermons, including the three volumes from the Banner of Truth, are the notes of the preacher himself, and are remarkable for their fullness. There is also a published volume of notes by a hearer, entitled A Basket of Fragments, while a Banner paperback, simply called Sermons, contains a selection of both kinds, although it is remarkable how little difference there is between material from either source. This might lead one to think that McCheyne read his sermons, as some celebrated preachers of his day including Chalmers and Bruce, or that he recited them following exact memorisation, as his contemporary James Begg always did. Rather, McCheyne's pattern was very full written preparation, but with thorough revision only, rather than memorisation of the manuscript, and final delivery from the pulpit without any paper at all, so that his thoughts were prepared, but his language flowed freely. The result was popular preaching appreciated in his own day, but also a legacy of full-length and often very readable manuscripts.

The actual sermons, very typically of the age, fall into two categories sermons proper and expository lectures. Many Scottish preachers delivered such lectures on the Sabbath morning, and preached in the evening. The 'lectures' were not the detached academic presentations we associate with the term, but rather a lighter, less formal kind of sermon, usually derived from a straightforward New Testament passage, following the course of the passage for the divisions, with simple explanation and application of the text, and, crucially, usually involving consecutive exposition from week to week. McCheyne delivered extant courses of lectures from sections of Matthew, John, 1 Peter (found in NT Sermons) and Hebrews (most of the volume Sermons on Hebrews). The notes are noticeably briefer, plainer and simpler. The sermons proper were rather textual, rarely having any connection with that of the preceding week. They are much more fully prepared, including thorough explanation of the context, discussion of the meaning of key terms, illustrations and extensive application.

In terms of textual selection, McCheyne ranged over the whole Bible, more often in the New Testament than the Old, more in the epistles, especially Romans and Hebrews, than in the Gospels, although there were plenty messages from all four Evangelists. In the Old Testament, which made up about one third of his texts, his favourite books were Isaiah, Psalms and the Song of Solomon. He preached only rarely from the Pentateuch and Historical books, but often incorporated illustrations from these accounts into sermons from other passages.

In structure, McCheyne closely followed the text of the passage, seeking to divide in a natural and logical manner,

which usually allows him to work progressively through the preaching portion. Introductions are succinct, and intended to focus the attention of the congregation on the content of the passage that is to be studied, and prepare for the division into heads. On one occasion, he literally just commences: 'There are three things contained in these words' (Sermons on Hebrews, 115). Under each head, the material is divided under further sub-heads, making the development of the preacher's thought exceedingly clear and easy to follow. Usually the head will identify a topic in the text, which is then developed more broadly in the sub-heads, with the discussion not focussed exclusively on the passage but ranging over other texts of Scripture as appropriate. For example, on the institution of the Lord's Supper from Matthew 26:26, the first head is 'Jesus took bread', developed under sub-heads as 'The choosing of Christ', 'the incarnation of Christ'; the second head 'He blessed it', developed as 'He prepared a body', 'He anointed him', 'He gave him the tongue of the learned', and 'He held him by the hand'; third head 'He brake', developed similarly; fourth 'He gave' – the symbolism of the sacrament being opened up and shown to relate to many different texts of Scripture in a most edifying way.

From this, it will be clear that McCheyne, for all his linguistic gifts, was not an intensive expositor, a Jonathan Edwards, peeling off layer after layer of meaning from his text, burrowing into it like the surgeon with the scalpel. Rather he is a Scottish Spurgeon, a discursive preacher, treating the text like a lens through which to study the whole field of relevant Scriptural teaching. If Edwards places his texts on the dissecting table and patiently eviscerates them, McCheyne rather uses his text as a light source directed at the prism of Holy Scripture, opening up a whole spectrum of rich teaching from it. To come to practicalities, you would not use a McCheyne sermon as a substitute commentary on a text of Scripture, but could definitely use it to help ignite your passion for the subject, after the groundwork of exegesis has been laid.

Application is crucial to a McCheyne sermon, and is present throughout. Although he invariably concludes with forceful application, he also applies under each head, often bringing each head to a close with a direct and personal appeal. His application is pointed, powerful, passionate, very specific to the individual subject and yet with cumulative effect, as the evangelistic urgency in particular burns through sermon after sermon. Although McCheyne evidently loved to preach Christ to the unsaved, there is a good balance between evangelistic and pastoral messages evident in the collections, and he is just as at home urging gratitude and constancy on believers as he is pressing the urgency of seeking Christ on the unbelieving. There is a clear division between messages directed at the saved and at the unsaved, and from this it may reasonably be presumed that where the sermon at one end of the Sabbath addressed the needs of the Christian, the other would be a specific, targeted evangelistic message. In general, I have found the expository lectures, probably delivered on Sabbath mornings, to be more often addressed to the believer – simple, homely, encouraging messages of Christian teaching – and the sermons to be evangelistic, although there are many exceptions to this rule. McCheyne did not flinch from directness, for all his youth, and his application is always addressed to 'you'.

His style is simple, yet full of rhetorical energy: questions, challenges, objections anticipated and answered robustly, relevant texts quoted with conviction and authority. In terms of illustration, he never uses 'stories'; rather, he deploys succinct but potent word-pictures, often Biblical images clothed in fresh language. Anything like joking or flippancy is utterly excluded – the tone is sober, earnest, urgent throughout, illustration serving the purpose of the preaching, not distracting from it. Consider his description of the new convert's first experience of falling into sin: 'You may have seen some bird of noble plumage rising from the earth on swift, careering wing; he leaves behind him the dull clods of the earth and soars to heaven as if it were his native element, when suddenly the whizzing bullet pierces his feathered side. On the instant all his noble energy is gone, he droops the head and covers the wing and whirling, falls from his dizzy height, down to the earth again. Just so the believer is exalted to heaven by the sweet peace wherewith the sprinkled blood has filled his soul, breathing a purer atmosphere, beginning now to think that heaven is gained; but suddenly the arrow of the Wicked One pierces his side and he falls. Ah! How low, who can tell? Who can tell the misery of the believer's first sin?'

Or for a specifically Biblical image, hear this description of the believer's hope: 'The hope that makes not ashamed, the anchor of the soul, sure and steadfast, that enters within the veil, that is riveted on the golden shore of a blessed eternity'. It is thrilling, potent language: 'riveted on the golden shore of a blessed eternity', all the poetic gifts of the young student of literature harnessed to the work of the Kingdom of Christ!

What, fundamentally, was special about McCheyne the preacher? I think what lent him his power was the reality of experience that underlay his sermons. He was experimental, in the best sense, like the Puritans, the Covenanters, like the Apostles themselves, he spoke of what he knew. This functioned with regard to the reality of sin, for example on the danger of the sin of adultery: 'Many may be ready to say, "Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this thing?" But those of you who know the hell that is within will tremblingly keep near to God and say, Lead me not into temptation. Given opportunity on the one hand, and Satan tempting on the other, and the grace of God at neither, where should you and I be?'

Or on the believer who is betrayed into worldly company: 'From the beginning to the end of the feast, he hears nothing but worldly conversation. All around him people are taking thought what they shall eat or what they shall drink. The name of the Saviour is not once mentioned. To introduce it would be like bringing in a poisonous serpent, from which every one would shrink back with horror. The believer sits silent, and is half ashamed of Christ. He is ashamed to show that he is a Christian. And when he comes home at night, what wonder if prayer and the Word be all distasteful to

him, and he has lost all sense of safety'. This is experimental teaching that reflects real life, real sin. It is searingly honest. But there is another side to this too: hear the experimental comfort of these words to the believer anxious over the reality of sin: 'Even Christians are filled with shame, when they look only on themselves and what they have been. But when they look to Christ, their shame is forgotten. There are two reasons: (1) Their sins, they see, are fully accounted for in the sufferings of Christ; more fully than if they themselves had suffered eternally. (2) They see that they are righteous in God's sight, that God loves them, how can they be ashamed anymore? They have "no more conscience of sins" (Heb.10:2), like those in Heaven who have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb (Rev.7:14). They remember their sins but they are not ashamed. Even here, insofar as you live by faith, you may live without shame'. This teaching is experimental in the best sense, rooted and grounded in the experience of grace.

The historian of preaching, William Garden Blaikie, summed up the uniqueness of McCheyne's pulpit work as follows: 'The new element he brought into the pulpit, or rather which he revived and used so much that it appeared new, was winsomeness. It was an almost feminine quality. A pity, that turned many of his sermons into elegiac poems, thrilled his heart, and by the power of the Spirit imparted the thrill to many souls'.

He had the warmth of sympathy of one who knew what it was to walk in life trusting in morality, called a Christian but without a real change. He knew the value of grace, the change it brings, and therefore he spoke with experimental warmth, love and passion, which gave to his message a winning, winsome quality that so touched those who heard him, that under the sovereign influence of the Spirit, it was the means of salvation to many.

To illustrate my discussion of McCheyne's preaching, I have chosen an exemplary sermon, an Old Testament evangelistic message, on the 'Cities of Refuge' from Joshua 20. The message commences with a lively introduction expressing in dramatic terms the Israelite's anticipation of Christ through the various types: 'When he stood beside the smitten rock and saw the waters gush out and follow them day by day, a mighty river running through a desert, he thought with joy of the Saviour who is 'as rivers of water in a dry place'.

So the manna, the pillar-cloud, the serpent raised, all lead to the crucial assertion, which determines the whole course of the message: 'The cities of refuge were intended to set forth Jesus'. He then gives his first head as follows: 'They were like Christ in situation', sub-divided 'in nearness' and 'in being conspicuous', showing how these characteristics are reflected in Christ. The latter is especially graphic in describing the geography of the six cities, emphasising their visibility, leading to the thrilling passage: 'It seems probable that there was scarcely a place in the land from which you could not spy one of these refuge cities. So that, when the believing Israelite went out to meditate like Isaac at eventide, when he saw the sun gleaming on the fruitful top of Gerizim, or the white walls of Hebron, or the far off tower of Bezer in the wilderness, or the embowered dwellings of Ramoth-gilead, or the snow on the high hill of Bashan, every one seemed a witness for Christ. Every one had a tongue and said "Come unto me, and I will give you rest"'.

This leads him to wonderfully direct application: 'This shows the heart of God toward you. He wants you to come to a lifted-up Christ on the cross and on the throne. Christ is a lifted-up Saviour in the preached word, that any sinner may flee to Him and be safe. Oh come to a lifted-up Christ!'

The second head is, 'They were like Christ in ease of access', developed in the 'roads', the 'waymarks' and the 'open gates', each sub-point being individually applied and pressed with tremendous cumulative force. The third head is, 'They were like Christ in the safety found there', developed in the 'Safety obtained on entering', 'Safety for Jew and Stranger', and 'Instruction to be found there' – that is, the role of these cities as residences for the Levites. His closing application is a direct challenge to two specific groups: first to awakened persons seeking Christ only with slackness, whom he compares to fleers from the avenger of blood loitering on the way, still outside the city gates. The final challenge is to believers themselves, not forgotten amidst a focussed, specifically evangelistic message, warning them briefly in closing to abide within the city, to cleave to Christ.

Throughout, the sermon is characterised by vivid language and passion in commending Christ, and in this sense compares closely in character and quality with the finest sermons of C H Spurgeon. The clarity with which the Old Testament is read as Christian Scripture, the vigour with which the faith of the Old Testament saints is shown to rest on Christ, the directness of the type in its prophetic illustration of the salvation of Christ, all serve to make this a powerful, memorable discourse, evangelistic, challenging, and yet rich, edifying reading for the believer. David Robertson may disparage them, but McCheyne's written sermons still speak to us today.

*(To be continued)*

"Hear the experimental comfort of these words to the believer anxious over the reality of sin: 'Even Christians are filled with shame, when they look only on themselves and what they have been. But when they look to Christ, their shame is forgotten'."

# News

## USA Family Conference 2014

*Caroline Broyles*

The beautiful Highland Retreat in the county of Rockingham, Virginia, welcomed many visitors who gathered together for the annual Free Church (Cont.) Family Conference. The conference was held on Monday, August 4th through Friday, the 8th, 2014. This year's guest speakers were Rev William Macleod from the Knightswood congregation in Glasgow and Rev Raymond Kemp from Kilmuir & Stenscholl on the Isle of Skye. Rev Warren Gardner and Rev Jonathan Mattull also gave addresses. The company of more than 177 attendees, a sizeable increase from last year, included representatives from not only the FCC but also from other denominations, such as the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and the Presbyterian Reformed Church. Families and individuals travelled from California, Missouri, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Indiana and other states, some travelling whole days and through the night to be present at the Conference. The Highland Retreat grounds include the 'Mountain View Hotel' and 'Red Oak Lodge' which were ready to accommodate the weary travellers. Also located on the premises is a fully-functioning campground where many were able to set up tents and park camping vehicles. Delicious meals were provided by the folk from Mebane Preaching Station, which were prepared by scheduled meal teams every day in the kitchen. Throughout the week, three messages were preached each day, with the exception of one message on Monday and one on Friday before everyone departed. After hearing the Word proclaimed first thing in the morning, there was a short break before the next message was to begin. This time was often devoted to taking a quick look at the books on the two book tables that were set up, just outside the meeting room doors. On one table, the people had access to myriads of old and new books which were provided by Sarah Broberg (David Lachman's sister), while the other table displayed exclusively Banner of Truth titles.

Rev William Macleod spoke on the doctrine of Sanctification while dwelling on texts from Romans 6 and

# Desk

*Rev Raymond Kemp addresses the Conference*

7, Ephesians 6, and 1 Peter 1. His first message focused on 'The Necessity of Holiness', which was expounded from the text of 1 Peter 1. The minister gave fourteen reasons why the Christian ought to be holy; some of these reasons are because God is holy, because the Christian has been redeemed and because God is Judge. After Mr Macleod's message, a memory game was held that night for the young people, which included the test to see if they could name all 14 reasons, from memory. One team was able to get 13 out of 14 correct! The next three days, Mr Macleod spoke on 'Definitive Sanctification', 'Progressive Sanctification' and finished with 'The Christian's Warfare', when he brought forth the message of Christ's unstoppable victory over sin even in the face of the enemy's arrogant battle cries, and the position that the Christian ought to constantly persevere for the cause of Christ.

Rev Raymond Kemp occupied the attention of eager listeners each morning with texts from the Epistle of 1 John. His topic, 'The People of God', allowed the hearers to consider how those who are adopted into the family of the Heavenly Father are, in fact, part of 'The Royal Family'. The children of God enjoy 'The Centred Fellowship', which can only be found in and through the gospel of Jesus Christ. Though there is joy and security in Christ, there is also the presence of usurpers that would distract from the truth of God's Word. Mr Kemp made clear the very present danger of false doctrines that are being preached and propagated from the pulpit in this day and age. He exhorted the congregation to be aware of this spirit of anti-Christ in his message entitled 'The Unmasked Foes', and encouraged all who were present to be diligent hearers of the Word of God, so that they may not be deceived by lying lips from high places.

The second morning address on Tuesday was given by Rev Jonathan Mattull, who spoke on 'A Struggle Worth Remembering: John Knox and the Reformation'. This address transported the hearers to places like England, Scotland, Germany and Geneva, where they followed the great Reformer, John Knox, through his contending for the purity of worship against the monstrous beast of Roman Catholicism! Mr Mattull asked the question if we were ready for reformation. We want reformation and pray for it, but are we willing to undergo the sufferings that must occur to obtain that blessing? Such questions occupied many a conversation after the message during the lunch hour, while people gathered around tables in the eating hall. The next time that Mr Mattull addressed the congregation was on Thursday evening, with an evangelistic message on 2 Corinthians 5:19-21. He spoke of the urgency of being reconciled to God, whom we have sinned against, but who has come with kind words of friendship, through Christ.

The second message on Wednesday morning was delivered by Mr Gardner, which was especially directed towards the youth. The minister encouraged the young people to be 'Laying Hold on God's Covenant Promises'. One way a person may lay hold on God's covenant promises is by looking for

*Panel (L-R): Revs Gardner, Macleod, Kemp, & Mr Randy Taylor (Chair)*

the fruit of the Spirit to be exhibited in your life. Those who are regenerated are taught by the Holy Spirit to love, and do not desire to return evil for evil because love thinks no evil (1Cor.13:5). An illustration that Mr Gardner gave of this principle was that of shooting those who are in opposition to you with a bazooka of love.

In addition to benefiting from rich preaching, and sitting down to delicious meals, many activities were enjoyed by the people. The grounds include a swimming pool, a volleyball court, and several hiking trails, which were all well frequented during the afternoons between messages. The young people particularly enjoyed playing many rounds of volleyball. On Thursday, they had a volleyball tournament and a ping pong tournament where one team after another played. All ages participated in these events, and all seemed to have a grand time. A tea party was scheduled for ladies of all ages to attend, during the Presbytery meeting on Thursday. Later that evening, the last night of the Conference, a discussion panel was held where the ministers answered questions from the young people. An example was, How can I practically keep the Sabbath day holy? This was a time of great instruction, and a highlight of the week for many. Another delight of the evening was a time of impromptu Psalm singing, which was held on the front porch of the Red Oak Lodge. Those who participated enjoyed singing Psalms 63, 98, 86 and others, in the refreshing cool of the evening. The last message of the Conference was given on Friday morning by Mr Kemp, on 'The Conquering Faith' in Christ, which extinguishes the power of worldliness and bondage under Satan. The minister encouraged the hearers to go forth in confidence with Christ, for if God be for us, who can be against us (Romans 8:31)?

*Rev Jonathan Mattull (St Louis FCC, Missouri)*

We are so thankful to all of the ministers who laboured for us over the course of this Conference, especially Mr Macleod and Mr Kemp, and greatly desire that the fruits of their labours might be exhibited in the souls of many who attended this year. The reading and preaching of God's Word, the singing of Psalms and fellowship of the saints at such conferences is always to be prized and was a little foretaste of the company which will be enjoyed in Heaven. To God be all the glory!

# Persecution

*E Kendal*

## Iran Pastors treated harshly

Earlier this year the regime transferred two Christian pastors, Saeed Abedini (34, a US citizen) and Fashid Farthi (35), to Rajaei-Shahri prison, a maximum security prison housing Iran's most violent criminals. Abedini's wife and children are in the US, while Farthi's wife and children have since been forced to flee Iran for Canada. On 19 October pastors Behnam Irani and Matthias Haghnejad, along with Deacon Silas Rabbani were each given six-year sentences for 'crimes against national security' and 'creating a network to overthrow the system'. The three – all leaders in the church of Iran – will serve their terms in extremely remote locations, making it exceedingly difficult for their families, friends and lawyers to visit and monitor their health and treatment. All three will appeal.

Pastor Behnam Irani had already received a six-year sentence in January 2011, so he is now not due for release until 2023. Irani will be transferred to a prison in the remote eastern city of Zabol (1500kms from Tehran) on Iran's border with Afghanistan, a lawless and exceedingly dangerous region, with all types of criminals and traffickers. Pastor Haghnejad (arrested in July) and Deacon Rabbani (arrested in May) will be transferred to a prison in Minab, a remote southern city on the Strait of Hormuz (1370kms from Tehran). The regime is doubtless hoping these five pastors will all die horrible deaths (to instil fear into other pastors), but not at the hands of the regime – thereby shielding the regime from blame and

censure. Pray that the Lord of Hosts will be with these pastors in all his grace and glory. It is estimated that at least 49 Christians are currently in prison in Iran for their faith. God is moving amongst Persians and a fierce spiritual battle is under way.

*'Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body'* (Heb.13:3).

### Nigeria: Christian Girls Targeted

On 17 October Nigeria's military declared it had brokered a ceasefire with Boko Haram. However, at least 70 girls have been kidnapped by Boko Haram since then (up to 27 October). According to a Human Rights Watch (HWR) report Boko Haram is targeting Christian villages and Christian girls. Of the 30 victims interviewed by HRW, 29 were Christian. In one video testimony a girl says the jihadists separated the Muslim girls from the Christian girls and then released the Muslims. The girls report being threatened with whipping, beating or death unless they convert to Islam, stop attending school and wear the hijab. One girl said they put a noose around her neck and threatened to hang her unless she renounced her faith. The girls were subjected to forced marriage and sexual abuse, including rape; they were used as slaves and forced to witness brutal killings.

*May the Lord of Hosts intervene in Nigeria.*

### Sudan: Aerial Bombardment

On Friday 10 October the Islamic government of Sudan dropped four bombs on the Episcopal Church of Sudan complex in Al Atmor, near the Tabolo area in South Kordofan state. Rev Youhana Yaqoub told Morning Star News, 'The bombs have completely destroyed our church compound in Tabolo. A family living at the church compound miraculously escaped the attack, although their whole house and property were destroyed'. On 16 October the regime bombed a busy market in Heiban in the Nuba Mountains, killing seven (including five children) and wounding dozens. The constant aerial bombardment is part of a campaign of ethnic-religious cleansing which has forced hundreds of thousands of predominantly Christian Africans to flee to remote caves and to camps in South Sudan; famine is an ever-looming threat. Pray for the Church in the Nuba Mountains, and for Christian aid groups who risk their lives to deliver food and medical aid.

### The West: Christians facing sanctions

UNITED KINGDOM: Trinity Christian School at Reading in Berkshire has been told it could face closure if it fails to uphold 'British values'. The school was told that to comply with new regulations it should 'actively' promote other faiths, for example, by inviting Muslim imams to lead assembly. The school must also observe the principles of the Equality Act 2010 by not promoting a 'particular lifestyle' or stating that 'certain lifestyles are wrong'. The school, which aims to 'provide each pupil with a Biblical understanding', has received an 'advice note' from Ofsted (school inspectors) confirming that it 'does not meet the new requirements' and accordingly could face closure.

AUSTRALIA: The Victorian state Labour Party has confirmed that, should it win the state election, it will rewrite equal opportunity laws removing religious exemptions so that religious institutions – including Christian schools – will not be permitted to hire only those who uphold their beliefs and values. They may even be obliged to promote and display 'diversity' regarding religion and sexual orientation. The Labour Party had attempted to introduce these measures in 2010. When it was voted out of office the Liberal Party scrapped the measures as it had promised.

## Scrapping adultery law 'sad and reckless'

*Christian Institute*

Members of the Scottish Parliament have been handed a petition proposing that the existing law on adultery should be amended, in order to cater to same-sex couples. The legal definition on adultery has come into question following the introduction of same-sex marriage. One campaign group, Equality Network, which backed the campaign for same-sex marriage, is now pushing to scrap adultery altogether.

But a pro-marriage group have hit back at the proposition, insisting that getting rid of adultery in the law would send a message that 'faithfulness doesn't matter'. A spokesman for traditional marriage group Scotland for Marriage said: 'Scrapping adultery would send out the message that faithfulness within marriage doesn't matter. What a desperately sad and reckless thing that would be'.

Currently, adultery can only take place between a man and a woman in the eyes of the law in Scotland, as in the rest of the UK. As a result proponents of same-sex marriage argue that having no definition of adultery in same-sex marriage amounts to a breach of 'human rights'.

Equality Network said: 'The best way to do away with the anomaly, if that is felt necessary, would in our view be to abandon the specific term adultery, and deal with all sexual infidelity under unreasonable behaviour'.

Last year, MPs and lawyers warned that the concept of adultery could be removed from the law if the Government pushed ahead with its plans to redefine marriage. David Burrowes MP said that the Government had 'opened up a Pandora's box'. He said: 'It has been a fundamental principle of marriage that it is based around exclusive sexual fidelity and that is what the redefinition of marriage would remove'.

*It would seem that the effect of the introduction of 'same-sex marriage' has been the undermining and weakening of every marriage and the whole concept of marriage. Faithfulness in marriage no longer matters in the eyes of the law.*

# Books

## Christ's Glorious Achievements

*C H Spurgeon*
Banner of Truth Trust,
pbk, 184pp, £6.00

Spurgeon's small book is an enjoyable read although his poetic manner sometimes needs a little concentration. Nevertheless the book is full of Christ and therefore full of encouragement and truth for the believer.

It consists of seven short chapters based on seven texts of Scripture, which didn't take long to consume in daily quiet times.

The title suggests much and the content doesn't disappoint so if you are looking for a book that will encourage you and fix your focus on Christ then this will fit the bill.

To give you a taste of the content my favourite quote from the book is in chapter 5, 'Christ the Spoiler of Principalities and Powers': 'Death also rose against Christ, but the Saviour snatched his quiver from him, emptied out all his darts, cut them in two, gave him back the feather end, but kept the poisoned barbs from him, that he might never destroy the ransomed'.

There is however, in my view, at least one 'fly in the ointment' in chapter 6 'Christ the Destroyer of Death' when Spurgeon seems to look to geology for answers and suggests death came into the world before Adam sinned. He also, in the same chapter, suggests rather fancifully that Christ, when He had risen, 'folded up the napkin and placed it by itself, that those who lose their friends might wipe their eyes therewith'.

These small complaints aside I enjoyed the book greatly. Those who love to read Spurgeon's works will also no doubt enjoy this and for those who have never read Spurgeon and would like something to start with, this would suit them well.

*Stuart Mackay (Ayr)*

## Puritan Reformed Journal, Vol. 6, No. 2

*Edited by Joel R. Beeke*
Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary,
July 2014, 385 pp, $10

The Puritan Reformed Journal is a substantial read, but remains important in showcasing the latest research in theological subjects being undertaken by students and scholars of thoroughly Reformed convictions.

This number commences with two very fine exegetical articles, taking a fresh look at familiar passages from Isaiah 1 and Jeremiah 31, showing how these challenge, respectively, modern views on worship as a fulfilment of man's desires rather than God's commands, and the Dispensationalism so common in US Baptist circles that draws a sharp (and wholly unbiblical) distinction between the Old and New Testament churches and ways of salvation.

Inevitably some articles are weaker, including a discussion of the Shorter Catechism, and some practical points for preaching, both pitched at so elementary a level that they seem out of place in an academic journal for a Reformed readership. At the other extreme, few general readers will appreciate the discussion of Jonathan Edwards' adaptation of Lockean philosophical terminology, and the books reviewed are fairly obscure.

But Geoffrey Thomas gives a

marvellously lively and stimulating overview of the life of John Bunyan, and Joseph Harrod introduces us to the great eighteenth-century preacher Samuel Davies and his savoury and practical counsel regarding the uses of the means of grace. David Murray is wonderfully fresh in addressing the unusual topic of sleep in a theological context, showing its importance for body, mind, and even for personal moral strength, and also some lessons that God teaches us through our body's need for it.

Of the theological papers, an interesting but flawed contribution by Arthur Miskin addresses Calvin's doctrine of predestination. He is quite correct in his identification of Calvin's view, namely double predestination preceding the permissive decree for man's sin, resulting in reprobation rooted in God's decree rather than man's sin. However, he fails in his analysis to acknowledge Calvin's as a specifically supralapsarian position, and to recognise that the great majority of Reformed theologians since Calvin have held rather to an infralapsarian scheme, that views the decree permitting sin as preceding double predestination. This latter scheme, while not without its difficulties, has been found by most orthodox theologians to avoid the challenges to the goodness and justice of God that arise from Calvin's position (which Miskin acknowledges but admits he cannot answer), while safeguarding a thoroughly orthodox position on predestination. It also seems to reflect better the Biblical evidence on election, especially Ephesians 2:4-5 and Romans 5:8.

More practical papers include our fellow-Scot Ian Macleod's discussion of how to reach Jehovah's Witnesses, proposing a thoroughly Gospel-centred approach. Equally, Joel Beeke has an excellent chapter on how to begin reading Puritan literature. As always, there is much to commend in this journal, especially for readers interested in going beyond the superficial in theological debate.

*Rev Alasdair J Macleod*

## Men of Sutherland

*George Macdonald*

Published by William Murray, pbk, 160 pp.
£5 inc. p&p, from Rev J J Murray, 7 Greenacres Way, Glasgow, G53 7BG, Tel 0141 620 3983.

Our Brora elder, William Murray, is to be commended for his work in bringing old works of Scottish Christian literature back into print, and this new edition of a valuable collection of biographical sketches first published in 1937 is very welcome, not least as copies of the first edition are now exceedingly rare.

The original author, an old worthy of Lairg Free Church who died in 1930, prepared these sketches as the fruits of a lifelong interest in the history of the faith in his native county. The chapters discuss five eminent ministers, twenty-one noted 'men', and two women, mostly from the first half of the nineteenth century. The subjects include the author's own father, and conclude with Duncan MacRae of Elphin (d. 1920), whom we now know particularly as the boyhood mentor of Professor G N M Collins.

Macdonald's work formed part of a substantial genre of popular Highland church history, inaugurated by John Kennedy's Days of the Fathers in Ross-shire, but including the productions of more recent authors like Murdoch Campbell, Kenneth MacRae and Murdo MacAulay. The reader is taken back to a context where godliness was sought after, where prayer was central to everyday life and the means of grace intensely valued – the communion sacramental weekends above all.

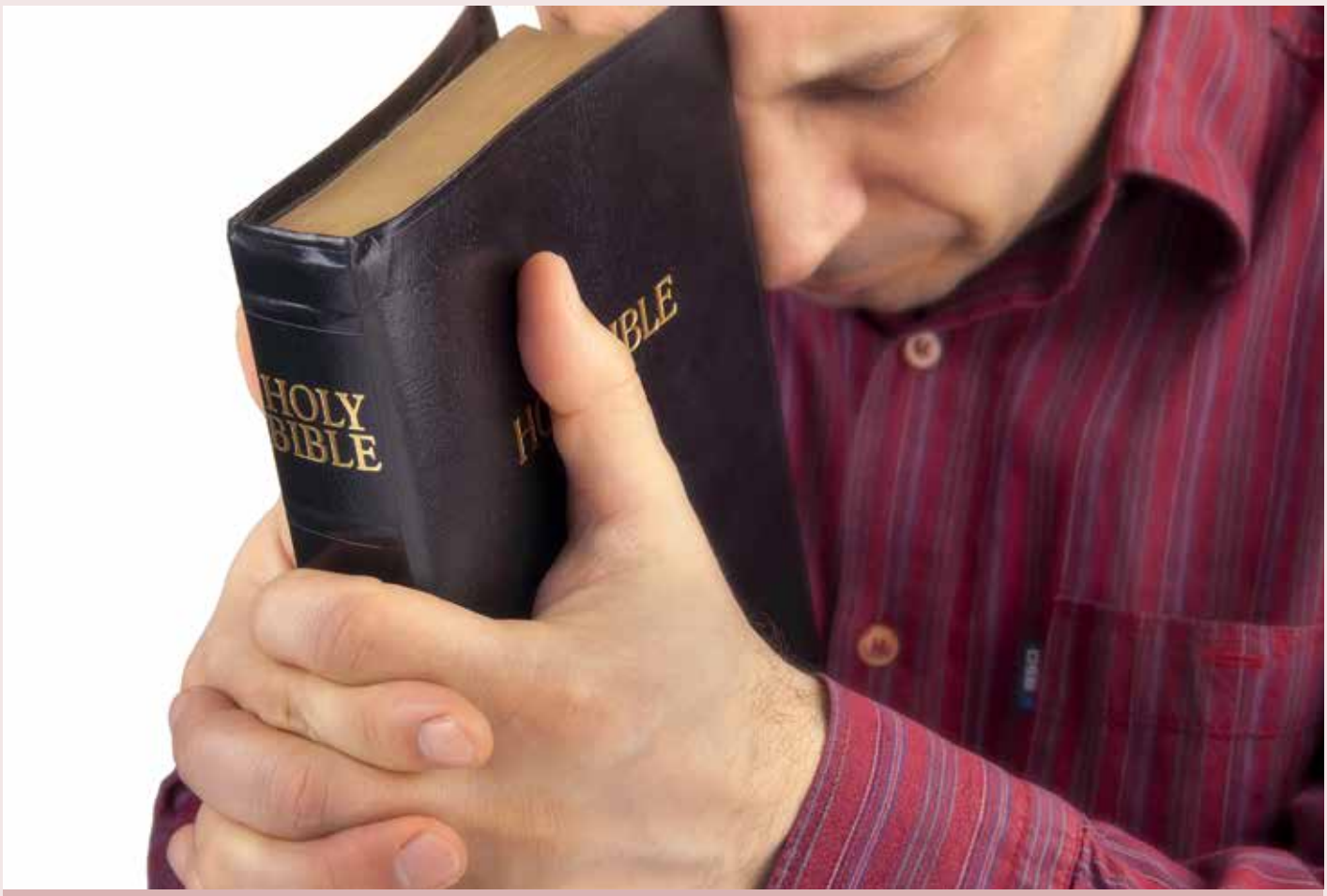
There is much to savour here: Rev Thomas Mackay warning of the 'letters from Death', the slowing step and the failing eye; and Margaret Mackay remarking that, like the box that fell from the top of the coach and smashed on the road, we cannot know the true contents of our own hearts until the Lord has broken them. The subjects of these chapters were those who lived their lives in the light of eternity.

The number of supernatural experiences described may challenge today's reader, including many prophetic utterances and insights into the private spiritual experiences of others. A couple of cases of visible manifestations, such as the man on a dark night seeing the Devil with a chain ready to bind him, and the woman who thought her horse was conscious of the presence of the angels, probably owe more to imagination than reality.

There are also a couple of genuine errors asserted. Rev Alexander Macleod was quite wrong to say that one could only be saved through the ministry of a converted preacher, as this is to limit the power of the Spirit in regeneration, who can work through any means or none at all, as He pleases (John 3:8). Even more seriously, Dr Gustavus Aird was quite wrong if he did identify minute sins (such as taking an overly generous pinch of snuff from a neighbour's pouch!) as sound reasons to stay back from the Communion table. Such teaching directly contradicts the reality of ongoing sin in the regenerate life (as Romans 7:23-25), and could only contribute to the neglect of the strengthening ordinance, which has historically been one of the failings of our Highland tradition.

But with these exceptions, there is much to recommend in this little volume. It is remarkable to read of the illiterate Havie Munro, who had committed the Scriptures so firmly to memory that he could correct those making mistakes in reading from many passages, or of James Mackenzie of Assynt, so renowned for godliness that he was ordained an elder at 18 in disregard of the strict letter of church law. We pray that the Lord will raise up their like again.

*Rev Alasdair J Macleod*




# Prayer with Feeling *(Daniel 9:1-19)*

***Rev John W Keddie***

Daniel had many fine characteristics: courage, consistency, refusal to compromise truth. Above all, he was a man of prayer. In chapter 6 we read of him praying regularly three times a day as was his custom since early days (6:10). No doubt this was the secret of the other qualities. This is what the Christian is to be above all: a man or woman of prayer, a spiritually-exercised person. In the situation we find in Daniel 9, Daniel is evidently an exercised man – desperate for the Lord to revive and restore His people. It is now the first year of the kingship of Darius the Mede in Babylon. Belshazzar is defeated (see 5:30-31). The prayer that is recorded in the 9th chapter arises from Daniel's concern about the terrible position of the people of God in his day. When will the 'captivity' from over 40 years earlier end? The Lord had spoken of this through Jeremiah (v2). Jeremiah was a contemporary with Daniel, though never exiled. Will the Lord not hasten deliverance? Do we not feel that way in our day? We are in a sort of spiritual 'captivity'. We will therefore be greatly helped by Daniel here.

## 1. Approach – Seriousness before God (v3)

We live in a shallow sort of age. It touches us all. Why do we lack power? Is it not a want of seriousness before the Lord, especially in prayer? Look at Daniel: 'prayer and supplication with fasting, sackcloth and ashes'. Does this seem remote? Christ speaks of fasting in His sermon on the mount (Matthew 6:16-18). One thing that the practice of fasting brings home to us, however little it comes into our lives, if at all, is seriousness before the Lord. And when there is such seriousness – as we see with Daniel here – you would expect to see a humbled, penitent, prayerful people. As for Daniel, he fasted in sackcloth and ashes. He sets aside the material things for a season, to focus on the more important and central. He is aware of the greatness of God (v4). How great God is! How awesome! He is One who keeps His word. And that cuts both ways: blessing for obedience, humbling yourself before Him, and curses upon those who deny Him and live in disobedience to His word. How do we properly come to the Lord?

Always with reverence, with humility; with a recognition of His greatness, and a confession of our sinfulness and unworthiness. When we come to God as we ought we recognise Him for who He is (as Daniel does here). You recognise that He is righteous (see vv7, 14, 16) ); and you recognise (thankfully) that He is merciful and forgiving to the penitent (vv4, 9, 18, 19) . Here's the truth: the more we recognise and know the character of God, the more we must be serious before Him.

## 2. Confession - Seriousness about Sin

Daniel is under no illusion about sin. In so much of modern Church-life there is lightness in this matter too. But sin is an offence to God. Sin is any breach of His commandments, or any failure to observe them aright. We are born in sin and shapen in iniquity. We are as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags in the Lord's sight. See how Daniel confesses sin. What, this good man? What had he done that was so bad? Ah, but he was not light about sin. He knew his heart. The people had transgressed the Word (vv5, 8, 11). They had rejected the prophetic message (v6). They had been unfaithful (v7), had rebelled (v9), had been disobedient (v10), had been prayerless (v13), had been impenitent (v15). What a catalogue of deficiencies. But is Daniel laying it on too thick? Oh, no. It is shameful (vv7, 8), it is disastrous (v12), it is an affront to God and His holy Word. Sin will bring a people down when it is open and unrepented of. We can get so insensitive to sin in its real seriousness, especially when we are part of a society in which low moral and spiritual standards prevail. Or maybe we blame the wicked one because after all he tempts us so strongly. But notice here how Daniel speaks of the 'captivity' being from the Lord (vv7, 14). This is what He thinks of our sin! So what must we do? Confess – repent – mortify – forsake. But you notice that it is not as if Daniel happily prays about 'their' sin – the sin of these other people – and is happy to distance himself from them. Not at all: 'we have sinned and done wickedly' (vv5, 15). That is the cry of an exercised soul. He does not exclude himself. It's true, isn't it, that we quickly recognise the deficiencies of others, but as for ourselves, well, we are not so aware of our own shortcomings, because our sins don't seem so bad when set against the tenor of the times? But we must be serious before God; and we must be serious about sin. Otherwise how will we expect the blessing of the Lord and a deliverance from our 'captivity'?

## 3. Petitions - Seriousness in Pleading

Jesus urged His followers: 'Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you' (Matthew 7:7). We have, too, Paul's exhortation: 'Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God' (Philippians 4:6). With what result: the peace of God will flood your souls (v7).

Notice here, how appealing Daniel is: His praying is full of appeals to the Lord. He appeals for the Lord to act according to His will, as He has done in the past; he appeals for mercy; he appeals for the Lord's anger to be turned away. We find all this in vv15 and 16. How suggestive for our own praying! That we might be a people who would appeal to the Lord in like manner, for our situation, and for our land, and in our day. You notice that in his appeals this is first; 'Turn away thine anger from us' (v16).

He pleads for revival in the church. That, essentially, is what we have in verse 17: make thy face to shine on thy sanctuary, which is desolate. Send revival, or reformation. What a great need we have of this in our day! What a great need in congregations and denominations!

But why should He give us what we ask? Because we are so good and deserve it so much? Because we pray so well and after all, we have all the right doctrines and practices? No, no, no! Why? For His name's sake (v18). For the Lord's sake (vv17, 19). In other words, on account of what Christ the Saviour and Mediator has done.

What a cause we have to take a leaf out of Daniel's book here. Here is the right approach: reverence, repentance, humbling ourselves before the Lord. These are to be daily exercises. Are we languishing in spiritual activities and fruit? We look at Daniel and we learn what it is to be humbled as we ought before the God of Heaven, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, before Christ Himself. Here we are in need of a turning of our captivity. Here we stand in need of reviving and refreshing from the presence of the Lord. The way forward? See Daniel and learn.

It is said that the man who took over in the mission work in China after Hudson Taylor was trying to analyse a particular problem. Whilst working in two villages in China he found that the one in which he worked and lived was not doing very well; whereas there was great blessing in the other village across a range of hills and in which he was less often present. His reflection on the problem before the Lord showed him the answer: Though spending much time in preaching and counselling and teaching in his own place he prayed much more for the other place. He concluded that there were four basic elements in a successful work: (1) pray; (2) pray; (3) pray; and (4) share the word. We could do nothing better than set our faces, like Daniel, to seek the Lord, with humbled, penitent hearts. Plead with Christ – ask, seek, knock – until He is pleased to hear from heaven and send great blessing as floods upon the dry ground. 'It is time to seek the Lord, till he come and rain righteousness upon you' (Hosea 10:12). 'And give him no rest, till he establish, and till he make Jerusalem (His church) a praise in the earth' (Isaiah 62:7).

# Congregational Remittances - November 2014

| | CENTRAL BUILDING FUND YTD 2014 | ORDINARY REMITTANCES 2014 Nov | 2014 To Nov | 2013 To Nov |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Presbytery of Inverness** | | | | |
| Aberdeen | 269 | 1,300 | 20,191 | 17,701 |
| Duthil-Dores | 109,069 | 2,122 | 24,972 | 23,246 |
| Inverness | 0 | 1,650 | 25,990 | 26,000 |
| Kilmorack & Strathglass | 0 | 1,400 | 21,021 | 16,649 |
| **Total Inverness** | **109,338** | **6,472** | **92,174** | **83,596** |
| **Northern Presbytery** | | | | |
| Assynt & Scourie | 686 | 0 | 5,975 | 4,785 |
| Brora | 700 | 0 | 17,058 | 19,081 |
| Kiltearn | 188 | 0 | 7,212 | 6,379 |
| Tarbat | 0 | 1,000 | 12,414 | 11,464 |
| **Total Northern** | **1,574** | **1,000** | **42,659** | **41,709** |
| **Southern Presbytery** | | | | |
| Arran | 599 | 225 | 8,352 | 8,604 |
| Ayr | 0 | 800 | 9,195 | 9,614 |
| Edinburgh | 252,797 | 2,500 | 30,242 | 27,718 |
| Glasgow - Partick | 105,697 | 1,356 | 26,600 | 28,000 |
| Glasgow - Shettleston | 115 | 800 | 25,200 | 24,099 |
| Glasgow - Knightswood | 550 | 1,000 | 28,177 | 26,794 |
| Rothesay | 0 | 0 | 1,000 | 1,460 |
| **Total Southern** | **359,758** | **6,681** | **128,766** | **126,290** |
| **Outer Hebrides Presbytery** | | | | |
| Cross | 0 | 1,717 | 24,533 | 22,346 |
| Harris - Leverburgh | 335 | 1,300 | 17,994 | 16,827 |
| Harris - Scalpay | 500 | 2,900 | 28,133 | 25,968 |
| Knock & Point | 0 | 1,400 | 14,811 | 13,713 |
| North Uist | 38,130 | 1,000 | 12,449 | 9,997 |
| Stornoway | 4,361 | 7,309 | 100,647 | 80,530 |
| **Total Outer Hebrides** | **43,326** | **15,626** | **198,568** | **169,380** |
| **Presbytery of Skye & Lochcarron** | | | | |
| Bracadale | 33 | 0 | 15,788 | 5,770 |
| Duirinish (Waternish) | 0 | 0 | 3,000 | 2,800 |
| Kilmuir & Stenscholl | 35 | 1,450 | 18,916 | 16,284 |
| Lochalsh | 375 | 1,450 | 17,818 | 14,129 |
| Poolewe & Aultbea | 463 | 560 | 11,273 | 12,258 |
| Portree | 0 | 1,200 | 20,495 | 18,165 |
| Snizort | 1,000 | 1,300 | 24,743 | 26,298 |
| Strath | 45 | 350 | 7,649 | 6,468 |
| **Total Skye/Lochcarron** | **1,951** | **6,310** | **119,682** | **102,216** |
| Smiths Falls | | | 2,000 | |
| **Total Congregations** | **515,945** | **36,089** | **583,848** | **523,191** |
| Other Donations | 1,230 | 3,042 | 26,291 | 28,580 |
| Legacy | | 0 | 111 | 133,353 |
| **TOTAL** | **517,175** | **39,130** | **610,249** | **685,124** |
| Including Gift Aid | 1,527 | | 130,773 | 101,652 |

# Are We Taking Error Seriously?

***Rev John J Murray***

Scripture and history tell us that the destruction of men's best interests is brought about by the reception of error. When churches embrace a lie rather than God's truth there is an inevitable spiritual and moral decline. R L Dabney wrote towards the end of the 19th century: 'While German scholarship has been busy with its labours it has suffered almost a whole nation to lapse into a semi-heathenish condition'. In the same era C H Spurgeon concluded: 'Modern criticism, like modern theology, is like the sirocco that blasts and burns, it is without dew or suction, it proves itself to be unblest of God and unblessing to men'. What can be said of the situation today?

## Where We Are Today

*1) No place for truth*

There was a day when men believed that there was such a thing as objective truth and believed that the truth could be stated in propositions, using human language and comprehensible to human minds. A sea-change has taken place in Western intellectual life. It is now argued that we can no longer speak of objective truth. Truth and falsehood have been replaced by what is 'true for me' or 'true for you'. This has infiltrated the church, as has been shown in David Wells' book No Place For Truth, a work which charts the demise of evangelical theology in the United States. He said: 'The emptiness of evangelical faith without theology echoes the emptiness of modern life'.

*2) No fear of error*

How can we profess to love God without loving His truth? Truth is the revelation of His nature, character and works. Horatius Bonar warned in his day against 'The spirit of the age which makes light of error, as if it were not sin. Even some who call themselves Christians have lost their dread of error, and are hurrying on from opinion to opinion, exulting in their freedom from old fetters and trammels, reckoning themselves peculiarly honest and unprejudiced. Alas for truth in such a case! How can it be reached? Alas for the love of truth! How can it exist where there is no fear of error?'

*3) No exercise of discipline*

Ministers and elders can hold the most outrageous views today and no action is taken against them. Trials for heresy seem to have become a thing of the past. We are living in a day when such matters have ceased to concern the evangelical church. Professor Thomas C Oden has said: 'The very thought about asking about heresy has itself become the new heresy. The archheresiarch is the one who hints that some distinction might be needed between truth and falsehood, between right and wrong'.

## What We Must Do

*1) We must be intolerant of a false gospel*

Paul was intolerant of a false gospel. He said of those who were perverting the gospel in the churches of Galatia: 'But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed' (Gal.1:8). Commenting on this, J Gresham Machen said: 'Surely Paul ought to have made common cause with teachers who were so nearly in agreement with him; surely he ought to have applied to them the great principle of Christian unity. As a matter of fact, however, Paul did nothing of the kind; and only because he (and others) did nothing of the kind does the Christian church exist today'. It is interesting to see how Paul made a distinction in the case of the church at Philippi, where some were preaching Christ from wrong motives: 'Notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice' (Phil.1:18).

Professor John Murray said: 'We too readily become the victims of a charity (love) that denies the exclusiveness of the Gospel, the charity that assumes that decent respectable friendly people are not heirs of damnation. If we are governed by that charity it is because we have not been captivated by the love of Christ. And if we are inclined to lend some sympathy to that charity it is because our love to Christ has been waxing cold and has not been fanned by Christ's love to us'.

*2) We must separate from false teachers*

An indication of the way the heretics were viewed in the past is illustrated in a story about the apostle John. The early church father, Polycarp, a disciple of the apostle, tells of an incident where John abruptly left the public baths at Ephesus when he heard that a false teacher named Cerinthus had entered. John reportedly said, 'Let us flee, lest the baths fall in with Cerinthus; the enemy of the truth is within'. Why did the gentle Apostle of Love react so vehemently against Cerinthus? Because Cerinthus denied the humanity of the Lord Jesus Christ. A distinction has to be drawn between acceptance of, and fellowship with, genuine Christians who may be mistaken and misled in their beliefs and extending the same to the appointed leaders of the churches. This applies to the Arminianism which prevails in so many churches today. In The Forgotten Spurgeon Iain Murray writes: 'Arminianism obscures the glory which belongs solely to the free grace of God and is therefore an error sufficiently serious for there to be no room for compromising. We may have fellowship with those who are under the influence of those errors but in the standards and teaching of the church there can be no wavering on the issue."

There is a solemn word from Francis Schaeffer: 'Let us never forget that we who stand in the historic stream of Christianity really believe that false doctrine, at those critical points where false doctrine is heresy, is not a small thing. If we do not make clear by word and practice our position for truth as truth and against false doctrine, we are building a wall between the next generation and the gospel. And twenty years from now, men will point their finger back at us and say of us, this is the result of the flow of history'.

*3) We must recover the church as the pillar and foundation of the truth*

We need to recover the doctrine of the church. Reformed theology has always emphasized the centrality of the visible church with its ministry, sacraments and government. This concept has been seriously undermined in recent years. We have a freelance type of Christianity which pays scant attention to church order and government. Church membership is not taken seriously. With all the concentrated effort to recover Reformed theology in the last fifty years it has not worked through to the reformation of the church. The church confesses the truth that God has given to her through the inspired Word of God. It is in this core of confession that the church's identity is preserved across the ages. Without this knowledge, it is bereft of what defines the church as the people of God. Without the church on the New Testament pattern you cannot have the guarding of the truth from generation to generation. In the great battle for orthodoxy in the early 20th century in America, J Gresham Machen appeared as the champion defender of the faith. He had to counter liberalism. He made it abundantly clear that what lay behind the problem was doctrinal indifferentism in the church. It is, as Carl Trueman says, 'that attitude which regards the individual's or the church's experience of Christ as essentially separable from, more important than, or even opposed to, a clear understanding of His Person and work'. Dr Trueman in speaking of the stance taken by Machen emphasizes the importance of the doctrine penetrating from the pulpit to the pew: 'The history of the church is peppered with examples of churches which enjoyed powerful faithful preaching for many years and yet which all but collapsed into doctrinal apathy and even heresy on the retirement or the death of their minister'.

*When will we learn from history?*

"A distinction has to be drawn between acceptance of, and fellowship with, genuine Christians who may be mistaken and misled in their beliefs and extending the same to the appointed leaders of the churches."

"O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God:
for our iniquities are increased over our head,
and our trespass is grown up unto the heaven."

**Ezra 9:6**

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