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GOD WILL ABUNDANTLY PARDON

In 1971 the New York Post wrote a true story about a man who lived in a small town in White Oak, Georgia, United States. This man married a good and beautiful woman. Unfortunately he never appreciated her and he did not become a good husband or a good father. He often came home at night drunk and he treated his wife and children very badly indeed.

One night he decided to venture into the big city, New York. After stealing money from his wife's savings, he took a bus to the north, and he started a new life. Joining with some of his friends he began a business and seemed to prosper. For a while he enjoyed his life, a life made up of immorality, gambling, and drugs. Months and years passed. But then his business failed, and, for the first time, he began to feel poverty and need. In his desperation, he turned to criminal acts. One day, he wrote a fake cheque and used it to deceive people and obtain their money. He was caught. The police arrested him, and then a court sentenced him to three years in prison. Toward the end of his imprisonment, he began to miss home. He especially missed his wife and children. Finding himself in such a bad place, he decided to write a letter to his wife, to tell her how very sorry he was and that he still loved her and his children. He longed to go home, but he realised that it may well be too late. However, at the end of his letter he wrote: "You do not need to wait for me. But if you still have some feeling of love for me, will you reveal it in some way? If you still want me to come back to you, please tie a yellow ribbon on the banyan tree in the centre of our town. When I return, if I find no yellow ribbon there, I will know and I will understand. I will not even get off the bus but I will continue to Miami. And I promise I will never again disturb you and the children any more for the rest of my life."

Finally, his release day arrived. He was very nervous, because he had not received a reply from his wife. That left him thinking that she may not have received it or that she had refused to read it. The question which tormented him was, would she be willing to forgive him? He took the bus to Miami, Florida, and, as he neared his home-town, White Oak, felt extremely nervous. On route, he had shared his story with the people on the bus and they said to the bus-driver, "Please, drive slowly through White Oak. It is important that you drive slowly."

As the bus approached the centre of the town, the man's heart pounded. He hardly dared raise his head; but finally he saw the tree. He then broke down and wept. There was not *one* yellow ribbon tied to a branch. There were literally *hundreds* of yellow ribbons, tied to every branch of the tree. The tree was *full* of yellow ribbons, each seeming to say to him, "I forgive you everything. I love you. Welcome – Welcome home!"

Like the man in this story, we have all failed to appreciate our blessings. We have behaved selfishly and badly, pursuing the vain pleasures of this world. However, although the world promises a great deal, it always fails to deliver. This leaves us in a miserable state, disappointed and disillusioned. How relevant the Scripture – "Hast thou not procured this unto thyself, in that thou has forsaken the Lord thy God...?" Again, we read – "Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee." (Jeremiah 2:17, 19)

Reflecting on our distressing experience, we resolve to remain no longer in this unhappy condition, and we are moved to return to God and to come home. We do not wish to conceal our sin; rather, we confess it and earnestly seek forgiveness. But will God pardon and receive us? Will He take pity on us, restoring us to favour? Will He, in His love, welcome us home? Perhaps our thoughts oscillate between hope and fear.

Yet, on coming back to God, we are overwhelmed at His amazing kindness. He shows us every token of reconciliation and thereby removes all our suspicions and concerns. "Thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive; and *plenteous in mercy* unto all them that call upon thee." "Thou, O Lord, art a God *full of compassion*, and gracious; longsuffering, and *plenteous in mercy and truth*." (Psalm 86:5, 15) "*Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity...?... He retaineth not His anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy.*" (Micah 7:18)

ROMANISM AND ISLAM

Prior to the Second Vatican Council, the Church of Rome held a very different view of Islam to the one it holds today. The *Catholic Encyclopaedia* published in 1910 states: "In matters political Islam is a system of despotism at home and aggression abroad. The Prophet commanded absolute submission to the

Imam. In no case was the sword to be raised against him. The rights of non-Muslim subjects are of the vaguest and most limited kind, and a religious war is a sacred duty whenever there is a chance of success against the "Infidel". Medieval and modern Mohammedan, especially Turkish, persecutions of both Jews and Christians are perhaps the best illustration of this fanatical religious and political spirit."

The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) issued two documents dealing with non-Christian religions. The first, *Lumen Gentium*, states: "The plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator, in the first place among whom are the Muslims: these profess to hold the faith of Abraham, and together with us they adore the one, merciful God, mankind's judge on the last day." The second, *Nostra Aetate*, contains: "The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions. She has a high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and doctrines which, although differing in many ways from her own teaching, nevertheless often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men."

The idea that the Papacy is a sworn enemy of Islam has been disproved by the public displays of John Paul II, Benedict XVI and Francis toward Muslims. There are pictures of these pontiffs respectfully handling and kissing the Quran, and Francis even prayed with Muslims. Pope John Paul II stated: "I wonder if it is not urgent, precisely today when Christians and Muslims have entered a new period of history, to recognise and develop the spiritual bonds that unite us, in order to preserve and promote together for the benefit of all men, peace, liberty, social justice and moral values as the Council calls upon us to do."

Benedict XVI stated: "I was glad to be able to express my esteem for Muslims and to reiterate the commitment of the Catholic Church to carry forward inter-religious dialogue in a spirit of mutual respect and friendship, bearing joint witness to the firm faith in God that characterises Christians and Muslims, and striving to know one another better so as to strengthen the bonds of affection between us."

Pope Francis stated: "Jesus Christ, Jehovah, Allah. These are all names employed to describe an entity that is distinctly the same across the world. For centuries, blood has been needlessly shed because of the desire to

segregate our faiths. This, however, should be the very concept which unites us as people, as nations, and as a world bound by faith. Together, we can bring about an unprecedented age of peace. All we need to achieve such a state is to respect each other's beliefs, for we are all children of God regardless of the name we choose to address Him by. We can accomplish miraculous things in the world by merging our faiths, and the time for such a movement is now. No longer shall we slaughter our neighbours over differences in reference to their God."

Both Islam and Roman Catholicism have been guilty of bloodshed in their efforts to establish a temporal kingdom in which their religion and its laws should be imposed and obeyed, and which treats those who differed with bitter persecution and discrimination. Truly the Bible teaches what the kingdom of God is: "For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." (Romans 14:17).

The Reformer

THE BIBLE REPLACED BY THE KORAN

A passage from the Koran denying that Jesus is the Son of God has been read during a Scottish Episcopal Church (SEC) service. The passage also claims that Mary was "ashamed" after giving birth and that Jesus spoke to her from his crib. The Muslim student who read it had been invited to do so at St Mary's Episcopal Cathedral, Glasgow.

Michael Nazir-Ali, the former Bishop of Rochester, slammed the incident and called on Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby to publicly distance the Church of England and the wider Anglican Communion from it.

"The authorities of the Scottish Episcopal Church should immediately repudiate this ill-advised invitation," he said. The former Bishop added that it was "particularly insensitive" for the passage to be read at Epiphany "when we celebrate not only Christ's manifestation to the gentiles but also his baptism and the divine declaration, 'You are my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased'".

The Very Revd Kelvin Holdsworth, Provost of St Mary's Cathedral, claimed the church service was part of efforts to strengthen ties between Christians and Muslims in the area. He said: "Such readings have happened a number of times in the past in this and in other churches and have led to deepening friendships locally, to greater awareness of the things we hold in common and to dialogue about the ways in which we differ."

One of the Queen's chaplains, the Revd Dr Gavin Ashenden, referred to the reading as "blasphemy" and "serious failure". He also said: "I am fairly clear in my own mind that my duty to my conscience, to my order, to my understanding of Christianity and my vocation is that I am supposed to be speaking out in the public space on behalf of the Christ I serve." Dr Ashenden has resigned from the honorary position of Chaplain to The Queen.

THE CALL TO REPENT FOR THE REFORMATION

Last Autumn Pope Francis made a plea for "forgiveness for divisions perpetuated by Christians from the two traditions". He said the anniversary of the Reformation gave "opportunity to mend a critical moment of our history by moving beyond the controversies and disagreements that have often prevented us from understanding one another".

More recently, on the eve of "Church Unity Week", the two Archbishops of the Church of England – professedly a Protestant and Reformed denomination – took the opportunity in a joint statement to highlight the fact that 2017 marks the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, and, to call on Christians to repent for the divisions caused by that great Movement. They spoke of "the lasting damage done five centuries ago to the unity of the Church, in defiance of the clear command of Jesus Christ to unity in love". This marks an unprecedented and fearful departure from our most holy Faith. It is a betrayal of Biblical Religion and Protestantism.

RECOVERING OUR REFORMATION HERITAGE

John J. Murray

The final chapter of John Murray's excellent book, "The Reformation 1560 – The Greatest Year in Scotland's History"

One of the most common attitudes to the Protestant Reformation found in the Church today is that it was a tragic mistake and a monumental failure. The Reformers, some say, were guilty of bringing sinful and unnecessary division into the Church. Others would contend that the differences at the time of the Reformation were little more than ones of terminology. In recent years we have seen the rise of a movement by the name of 'Evangelicals and Catholics Together', with a Reformed theologian holding the opinion that 'Catholics and Protestants fighting together for the basics of the creed is nowadays more important than discussion on individual doctrines.'

The Reformers would have no place for such an attitude. As far as they were concerned the battle was not between forms or traditions; it was between those who had the Gospel and those who were committed to hiding it or opposing it or destroying it. Our Reformers risked their lives and put up with great hardship to give us the pure Gospel. We owe them a tremendous debt of gratitude. The best tribute we can pay to their devotion and sacrifice is for us to highly value the truths for which they stood and seek the recovery of them in our day.

1. Another Reformation needed

If what has been described in these pages is our true Reformed heritage, it is evident how far we are removed from it today. Scotland has lapsed into a state of ignorance and darkness similar to what prevailed before the Reformation. We need a change as radical as what took place in the sixteenth century. The Reformation addressed the theological foundation of the Church of that day and strove to reform the whole, root and branch. The Reformation sought to return to the original sources (*ad fontes*), to the Bible and to the earliest Christian writings, in order to rediscover and revive Christianity in its original and purest form. Luther and Calvin went back to Augustine, the Church Fathers and the New Testament. Dr Lloyd-Jones said, 'The secret of success in the realm of the Church and of the things of the Spirit is to go

back.’ In our day we need to go back to the Protestant Reformers. The Reformed Church, with its historic creeds, confessions and catechisms and theological tradition, will provide us with the historical continuity that is so desperately needed today.

2. Recovering God

We are living in a man-centred age. Theological liberalism undermined the supernatural and presented the Church with a God that was no longer transcendent. Arminianism rejected the sovereignty of God in salvation. Man-centredness is at the root of the weakness in modern evangelicalism. David Wells, with a trenchant pen, has exposed this and shown how ‘the centrality of God is disappearing. God comes to rest lightly and inconsequently upon the Church. All spiritual weakness is ultimately due to poverty of thought about God and such weakness will persist as long as we suppose that man is the starting point for its resolution.’ If Knox could come back he would tell us that our God is too small and he would ask us if we have ever seen the vision of God on his throne. What dominates the Reformed vision is the centrality of God.

The Church today needs to be convinced that the usefulness of Reformed theology lies in its emphasis upon God. We must begin with the doctrine of the triune God. Calvin rebuked Sadoletto for not holding the name of God in the highest sanctity before man as the prime motive for his existence – zeal to illustrate the glory of God. The greatest guardian of biblical orthodoxy throughout the centuries is a passion for the glory and excellency of God in Christ. When the centre shifts from God, everything begins to shift everywhere. The doctrine of God is the central organising principle of Christian theology and establishes the foundation of all other theological concerns.

3. Recovering Scripture

A convert to Roman Catholicism is required to believe ‘what the Church believes.’ This is as true today as it was in the sixteenth century. The Catechism of the Catholic Church published in 1994 says: ‘The task of interpreting the Word of God authentically has been entrusted solely to the Magisterium of the Church, that is, to the Pope and the bishops in communion with him.’ We need to take our stand as Martin Luther did on the sole authority of Scripture: ‘I place against the sayings of all Fathers, and every

artifice and word of angels, men and devils, the Scripture and the Gospel. Here I stand, here I bid defiance, here I strut about and say, God's Word for me is above everything.'

While Romanism puts tradition alongside Scripture, Protestantism for more than a century now has been undermining the Word of God. In the name of progress and biblical scholarship there has been a wholesale rejection of the inerrancy and infallibility of Scripture. When we consider all the ink that has been spilt in the debates about Scripture it is good to turn back to the attitude of the Reformers, expressed so well by Martin Luther: 'I will not waste a word in arguing with one who does not consider that the Scriptures are the Word of God; we ought not to dispute with a man who thus rejects first principles.' They would have agreed with Dr Geerhardus Vos: 'To take one's stand upon the infallibility of Scripture is an eminently religious act; it honours the supremacy of God in the sphere of truth.'

The doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture has been steadily declining for several decades. It is claimed by many in evangelical circles that the Bible is not an adequate guide in answering today's questions. Ways have been found to adjust or adapt God's Word to worldly tastes. The role of women, ordination and sexual ethics are areas affected in this respect. Pragmatism is seen as the way forward. As one writer has said: 'Therapeutic technique, marketing strategies and the beat of the entertainment world often have more to say about what the church wants, how it functions and what it offers, than does the Word of God.'

4. Recovering the Only Way of Salvation

Remove the knowledge of justification by faith, Calvin argued, and the glory of Christ is extinguished, religion is abolished, the Church is destroyed and the hope of salvation utterly overthrown. Instead of upholding the New Testament Gospel, the Roman system is calculated to lead away from faith in Christ, to faith in the Church and faith in the priest.

But it is not only Rome that is threatening the Reformation doctrine of justification by faith. This teaching is largely vanishing from our Protestant Churches. Professor John Murray raised the question as to why this doctrine is to such an extent a meaningless sound in the world and in the Church today. He answered: 'It is because we are not imbued with the profound sense

of the reality of God and of his majesty and holiness.’ As we have already seen, when the centre shifts from God, everything shifts. Besides this there has been an alarming shift on this doctrine within evangelicalism in recent years. The ‘New Perspective’ theologians declare that justification, as the Apostle Paul defined it, has to do, not with individuals personally being declared righteous in Christ, but with membership in the covenant community.

5. Recovering the Preached Word

Scotland was delivered from the ignorance and darkness prior to the Reformation by the true preaching of the Word. In recent years evangelicals have been losing interest in biblical preaching and doctrinal institution. The raised pulpit is no longer at the centre of the building but moved to the side and replaced in many places by an open platform where ‘a performance’ takes place. To quote Trueman again: ‘To marginalize preaching in our Church life and outreach is to marginalize words; to marginalize words will inevitably involve marginalizing the Word himself.’ In light of the fact that preaching has been marginalised, how timely the words of P T Forsyth: ‘It is, perhaps, an overbold beginning, but I will venture to say that with its preaching Christianity stands or falls... Wherever the Bible has the primacy which is given to it in Protestantism, there preaching is the most distinctive feature of worship.’

Related to the recovery of preaching is the recovery of instruction of faith. It is not without significance that as instruction in the faith has been set aside so we have seen at least a generation of children lost from many of our Churches. The Reformers saw the vital importance of the instruction of children in the family and in the Church. John Calvin, in the dedication of his Catechism, appealed to the King of France: ‘Believe my Lord that the Church of God shall never be conserved without catechism, for it is as the seed to be kept that the good grain perish not but that it may increase from age to age. Wherefore if you desire to build a work of continuance to endure long, and which should not shortly fall into decay, cause that the children in their young age be instructed in a good catechism.’

6. Recovering the Church

The Reformation was not simply the reformation of the doctrine of salvation along scriptural lines, important though that was, but also the reformation of

the Church and its relationship to society. Calvin had a high view of the Church, saying in the Institutes that those to whom God is the Father, 'the Church must also be mother.' The Church is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Jesus Christ as the chief cornerstone. Against this Church 'the gates of hell will not prevail.' We are called upon to be faithful, 'to earnestly contend for the faith once delivered to the saints.' The true Church is engaged in spiritual warfare against false teaching.

The attempt to bring about one World Church through the Ecumenical Movement has been going on for a century. In fact in the 19th century the Southern Presbyterian theologian, R L Dabney correctly anticipated this coming of the ecumenical movement: 'The Protestant World will soon be educated to set inordinate store by that of which God makes least account – formal union; at the expense of what he regards as supreme value – doctrinal fidelity.' In an effort to include all varieties of Churches the doctrinal foundation has continued to evaporate. Some would welcome the Roman Catholic Church into the mix but whatever gestures the Vatican makes to deluded Protestants the settlement will ultimately be on Rome's terms. In her view the communities that began with Martin Luther are not to be called 'churches'. 'According to Catholic doctrine, these Communities do not enjoy apostolic succession in the Sacrament of Orders and are, therefore, deprived of a constitutive element of the Church' (the current Pope in his decree of July 10th 2007).

The Reformers considered peaceful co-existence with a false religion inconceivable. They endured much hardship and the martyr's death in many instances rather than submit to the Roman system. John Hooper was 'willing to give up his life rather than consent to the wicked papistical religion of the Bishop of Rome.' When urged to recant with the words 'Consider that life is sweet and death is bitter,' he replied: 'The life to come is more sweet, and the death to come is more bitter.' The same applies to the attempt to accommodate theological liberalism with Protestant Churches. It was fatal to the Free Church of Scotland in the 19th century. Horatius Bonar was aware of the danger when he said in 1883: 'Fellowship between faith and unbelief must, sooner or later, be fatal to the former.' J Gresham Machen, in his contentions against trends in the Presbyterian Church in the USA in the early 20th century, rightly classified liberalism as 'another religion' and suffered the consequences, for which we must be eternally grateful.

7. Recovering Godly Living

The moral void in society today is clear for all to see. Politicians and educationalists have their theories but can furnish no satisfactory solutions. They fail to discern that ethics have their source in religion and as our religion is so will be our ethic. What or whom we worship determines our behaviour. A generation worshipping material gods is bound to lose its morality. But even within the professing Church there is to be found the prevalence of worldliness. The concept of the fear of God has almost vanished from contemporary Christianity, whereas, in the words of Professor John Murray, 'the Biblical ethic is grounded in and is the fruit of the fear of the Lord.' There is no doubt today a quest for spiritual or religious experience but it is something that is very subjective. Speaking of the godliness of the Puritans, Dr Packer makes this observation: 'The experimental piety of the Puritans was natural and unselfconscious, because it was so utterly God-centred; our own (such as it is) is too often artificial and boastful, because it is so largely concerned with ourselves. Our interest focuses on religious experience as such and on man's quest for God, whereas the Puritans were concerned with the God of whom men have experience, and in his manner of dealings with those whom he draws to himself.'

8. Recovering Leadership

In 1932 J Gresham Machen climbed the Matterhorn. While musing from the summit on the grandeur and the beauty of the Alpine snow peaks that surrounded him, he began to wonder about the future of the Europe that lay beneath them.

'What will be the end of that European civilization and its daughter in America? What does the future hold in store? Will Luther prove to have lived in vain? Will all the dreams of liberty issue into some vast industrial machine?... Will all things in Church and State be reduced to one dead level, coming at last to an equilibrium in which all liberty and all high aspirations will be gone?

Will that be the end of all humanity's hopes? I can see no escape from that conclusion from the signs of the times: too inexorable to me seems to be the march of events. No. I can see only one alternative. The alternative is that there is a God – a God who in his own time will bring forward great men again to do his will, great men to resist tyranny of experts and lead humanity out again into the realms of light and freedom; great men above all who will be messengers of his grace.'

9. The Final Issue: Spiritual Renewal

The restoration of the Church is ultimately the work of God as was so clearly demonstrated in the Reformation but he is a God who works through means. We need the recovery of the Word of God. J Gresham Machen offered this hope in his day: 'One thing is clear – if the Word of God were again heard, there would be an upheaval like the Reformation of the sixteenth century. Now as at the end of the Middle Ages the Bible is obscured by an interpretation which reverses its meaning; and now as well as then the re-discovery of the Bible would set the world free.'

We need men like Luther and Calvin and Knox who will speak that Word with boldness. These men took their stand against error and were prepared to put their lives at risk to do so. They did not shun controversy. Over a century ago C H Spurgeon said: 'We want John Knox back again. Do not talk to me of mild and gentle men, of soft manners and squeamish words; we want the fiery Knox, and even though his vehemence should "ding our pulpits into blads" ("break our pulpits into pieces") it were well if he did but rouse our hearts to action.'

We need the Holy Spirit. The Reformation came about because, as John Knox said, 'God gave His Holy Spirit to simple men in great abundance.' God worked mightily in him and through him. John Knox caught the fire and it burned brightly for God and His cause. The cry that needs to go out from our heart today is 'Where is the God of John Knox?' All this is well summed up by J Gresham Machen:

'We know not in detail what will take place when the great revival comes, the great revival for which we long, when the Spirit of God will sweep over the church like a mighty flood. But one thing we do know – when that great revival comes, the present feeble aversion to "controversy", the present cowardly unwillingness to take sides in the age-long issue between faith and unbelief in the Church – will at once be swept aside. There is not a trace of such an attitude in God's holy Word. That attitude is just Satan's way of trying to deceive the people of God; peace and church-unionism and aversion to controversy, as they are found in the modern church are just the fine garments that cover the enemy, unbelief.'

May God send us men who are not deceived, men who will respond to the forces of unbelief and compromise now so largely dominant in the visible church with

a brave and unqualified “No”! Paul was such a man in his day. He said “No” in the very first word of this Epistle [to the Galatians] after the bare name and title of the author; and that word gives the key to the whole Epistle that follows. The Epistle to the Galatians is a polemic, a fighting epistle from beginning to end. What a fire it kindled at the Reformation! May it kindle another fire in our day – not a fire that will destroy any fine or noble Christian thing, but a fire of Christian zeal in hearts grown cold.’

MARVELLOUS MERCY!

The Testimony of James Smith of Cheltenham (1802 – 1862)

Author of “The Believer’s Daily Remembrancer”

Of my father, I know comparatively little, and of his family, literally nothing. When I was born my parents were living in a street called the Halfacre, at Old Brentford in Middlesex. They were moral and industrious, regularly attending the parish church, and paying about as much attention to religion as their neighbours around them. Nov 19th 1802, was my birthday, and while I was quite young my father died, leaving a widow and eight children behind him. My mother, whose business was dressmaking, had now to provide for herself, and her numerous family, which through the blessing of God, and the kindness of friends, she was enabled to do. Very early I was sent to a dame’s school, and was required to regularly attend the services of the church.

While quite a child, I experienced the delivering mercy of God in a remarkable way. Near our residence was a very deep well, which supplied all the inhabitants of the neighbourhood with water. Going one day with my brother for water, while looking down into the well, my foot slipped, and I fell in head foremost. An alarm was raised, and a man, who was working at a smith’s shop close by, ran, and in his fright, let himself down by the chain, and caught me by the clothes, just as I was about to sink the last time.

The well being narrow at the bottom, he sustained himself by placing one foot on each side, while two ladders were tied together, and he then brought me up out of my perilous condition. My escape appeared to be almost miraculous, as the bucket was down the well when I fell, and the wonder was

that I did not strike my head against it in falling. But I was comparatively uninjured, to the surprise of all who were aware of the accident. Surely the eye of the Lord was upon me for good, and my life was spared to taste the sweetness of his grace, be useful to others, and glorify his great and holy name.

I have been informed that there was always a singularity about my manners. Seldom did I take delight in the common amusements of childhood, or play with boys of my own age. I was religiously inclined from a very early period, and loved to be much alone, reading and talking with myself. My education was very limited, though a clergyman was willing to pay for my instruction; but as my mother found it a difficult task to support her family with her own hands, I was taken from school when about ten years of age, and sent to work at a soap manufactory. Being very quick at learning, I had made very considerable progress for my age, but then I gave up all attendance to my studies, and so lost most that I had gained. In this situation I continued about three years, and was deeply corrupted by the example and instruction of my fellow-workmen, some of whom took pleasure in leading me into sin.

During part of this time, I was very religious, in my way. I read a good deal when I got a book which pleased me, set myself tasks to atone for my sins, and read a long prayer every night before going to bed. I kept a list of all the texts I heard preached from at church, with the preacher's name, if I knew it. At times my convictions of sin were very powerful, and then I would bind myself by vows and promises, to live more correctly for the future, and by a double task of duties make up for my defects. Of the way of salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, I knew little more than a heathen; for the gospel was not preached in the churches where I attended. A blind minister was leading poor sinners, and but for God's mercy, we had all fallen into the ditch.

When quite young, I had a very awful dream which for a time affected me very much, and filled me with terror and distress of mind. I dreamed that the end of the world was come, and there was a fearful storm and tempest. Filled with alarm, arising from a consciousness of my unfitness to appear before God, I ran into my mother's bedroom, crying out, "What shall we do? What shall we do?" I thought we kneeled down by the bed side to pray, while the house seemed to rock, and the elements were fearfully convulsed, and in great alarm and fear, I awoke. O how glad I felt, when I found that it was but

a dream! This led me to double my diligence in the performance of religious duties, and I bound myself to read through the New Testament as quickly as possible, looking upon this as a very meritorious deed. I now began to tire of attending always at the same church, where there was nothing either to interest or profit a lad in my situation; and thought if I could but have my liberty to attend the different churches in the neighbourhood, how much more religious I should be, vainly fancying that a change of place would do what only a change of heart can effect. At another time a dreadful hailstorm, accompanied with terrific thunder and lightning aroused my conscience, and now I determined that I would not be confined, but would have my liberty to attend where I chose. I wandered about from church to church, Sunday after Sunday, but it was all in vain; for I at length found that there could be no real religion without the grace of God.

I was remarkably fond of imitating clergymen, and have often collected around me, my sisters and others; and dressing myself in some garment as a substitute for a surplice and gown, have read prayers and a sermon to them. At this early period I had a great longing to be a minister, and so far did I carry my imitations, that the neighbours often said, that they thought I should be a parson before I died. I had a profound reverence for the building we called a church, and its priests, services and its vestments. I would kneel down as soon as I entered it to pray, believing that prayers offered there had a peculiar sanctity in them; and when under conviction in the week, would long for Sunday to come, that I might go to church to pray, persuaded that God would hear me there, rather than anywhere else.

During this period, I one day met with Dr Watts' hymns, and opening the book at the 136th Hymn, 1st Book, founded on John 4:24, I was much struck with it, and began to search and compare myself with it. The idea of a heart-searching God, requiring spiritual worship, had not struck me before, and I began to fear that with all my reading and saying of prayers, I had never in reality prayed, and therefore all my religion was vain. I now began to try to pray in spirit and in truth, but the more I tried, the more my thoughts would wander, and I found that I might as well try to restrain the winds, or rule the waves of the sea, as keep my mind stayed and fixed while in prayer. This gave me considerable uneasiness. However, fancying that I could do at church what I could do nowhere else, I longed for Sunday to come, persuaded that I could pray in spirit and in truth there. Accordingly, as soon as I entered the

sacred place, I devoutly kneeled down to make the attempt, but if possible my mind wandered more than ever; I then thought I would wait until the minister came in and began the service, hoping for better success; but the more I tried, the farther I appeared to be off; the more I watched my heart the more it appeared to wander. I now began to despair of ever praying as God required me to pray, and also to conclude that other people no more prayed with the heart than I did. Now Satan suggested that it was best to give up, and trouble no more about it.

Sometime before this, I had read a book in which it was suggested, that religion was only a scheme devised to keep the poor in order, for without it there could be no governing the masses, and that our government acted very wisely in sanctioning it. This was now brought very forcibly to my mind, and I began to reason, "Well I dare say it really is so, and therefore is folly for me to try to be religious." I now threw on one side all my forms, and began to indulge in sins, which no one ever knew, but God and myself. Temptations were presented to me, and I fell into them, and but for the forbearance and long-suffering of God, I had been ruined. All this time, I bore an excellent character with my employers and others, for I felt ashamed to sin openly as some did, though I felt a pleasure in doing so privately, and have sometimes gone alone for the purpose, even to indulge in profane swearing. My conscience would often storm at me, and at times make me tremble, but I hardened myself in my iniquity. At times I would promise to reform, and start afresh; but as I considered I was acting like a man when I sinned, because all my fellow-workmen did so, I was no sooner in their company, than all my vows and promises vanished from my thoughts. As my employers were Unitarians, I sometimes heard them argue against the inspiration of certain parts of God's Word, speak against the divinity of Christ, and sneer at evangelical religion, which served to harden me more and more in my iniquity.

After this, I was again brought under some concern about my soul, and the thought of eternity became very dreadful. O if I should be lost forever! If hell should be my eternal portion, this was terrible to think of! I now began to talk with an old man employed on the premises, who was a very quiet man, and a stiff churchman, but our conversation generally turned on the different sects, and I soon found he was very much like myself. Poor blind creatures, we both hated the Methodists, were true churchmen, but knew nothing of

faith in Christ, repentance toward God, or holiness of heart and life. For a considerable time I continued in this state, now sinning and then being sorry for it, now promising to repent, and then becoming more hardened than ever. At length, having a disagreement with my young master, I left my situation and my home, and went off into Kent to visit my brother. I did not stay long with him, but returned to my home and to such employment as I could obtain.

About this time, some friends of the Baptist denomination having introduced the preaching of the gospel and erected a small chapel, an old woman who attended with them, came to invite my mother to accompany her to hear a favourite preacher. My mother refused; when she invited me, I took this as a compliment, obtained leave and went. This was the first time I ever entered a dissenting place of worship, and I think the first time I ever heard a gospel sermon. I was somewhat pleased with the simplicity and earnestness of the service, I was all attention while there, made up my mind to go again, and henceforth attended regularly on the Lord's Day evening. I now felt an inclination to attend other places of worship besides the church, and went to the Quakers meeting, and the Unitarian chapel, but carefully avoided the Methodists.

My mother was now married again to a profane man, and I had no regular employment. He took me to work with him, but from his violent temper, and love of drink, I had to suffer much. The work was very hard, and as I was not strong, I met with bad usage, which led me to leave my work and my home, to which at length I was compelled to return. Just about this time, a Mr. Walker, a Wesleyan Methodist, an acquaintance of my father's, and who had been requested by him on his death-bed to keep an eye over me, heard how I was situated, and came and offered me employment, until he could find something better for me. He was a coal merchant, and I was to look after his horse, and accompany him in some of his journeys. He said he did not like to see boys unemployed, as they were sure to run into sin. Of all people I disliked the Methodists most, and my present employer was a Methodist. On the first Lord's Day morning after I entered his service, as I was cleaning the horse, before going to the early prayer-meeting, he came into the stable singing a hymn, and asked me if I could sing. I said "No." He said, "It is a great pity that lads are not taught to sing the praises of their Maker." After his return from the prayer-meeting we sat down to breakfast, and he was longer than usual in asking the Lord's blessing. After breakfast he handed me the

Bible to read a chapter, but between a natural shyness, of which I was the subject, and the deep-seated prejudice that I felt, I did not read. He then took the Bible, read a chapter, and offered up for me a most fervent prayer, which, though it displeased me at the time, the Lord afterwards most graciously answered. When I left the house, I determined to go no more on Sunday morning, and I never did.

After being employed by him for some time, he told me one day he had obtained a situation for me, with a fell-monger, and he thought it would suit me. To this place I went, and found the men more degraded and depraved than they were at the soap-house. Drinking, singing songs, swearing, and gambling, occupied much of their time. Being placed in such company, I threw of all show of religion, and gave way to swearing, lying, drinking, and other sins. So low did I sink, that the Lord's Day was profaned, the Bible was neglected, prayer was given up, and I became hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. O, how wondrous the patience, the forbearance, and long-suffering of my good and gracious God! Surely, if I felt properly in reference to the past, and the grace which God sovereignly exercised towards me, I should daily say with the Psalmist, "I will bless the Lord at all times, His praise shall continually be in my mouth. While I live will I praise the Lord, I will sing praises unto my God, while I have any being."

One Lord's Day morning, while I was in the midst of my sin and folly, the woman who first invited me to go to chapel, called and asked me if I should like to see the sacrament of the Lord's Supper administered. I said, I should very much. She said she would take me in the afternoon, as any person might go as a spectator. When the Church was assembled, the minister who presided, a venerable servant of God, commenced the service by giving out the hymn which commences, -

"And have I, Christ, no love for thee,
No passion for thy charms?
No wish my Saviour's face to see,
And dwell within his arms?"

The words arrested my attention and occupied my thoughts. I mused on them, and said, "I have no love for him, not a spark, - I have no wish to see his face," - and a kind of cold conviction seized me. He proceeded, -

“Such base ingratitude as this,
What heart but must detest;
Sure Christ deserves the noblest place
In every human breast.”

Again I thought, “Have I any gratitude in my heart to Jesus? Not any. Can I make mention of his name without any sweet emotion? Yes, I can. Do I detest this ingratitude? I do not feel that I do. Then I must be a very wretch!” A deep impression was made on my mind, which continued for a considerable time. But I could not understand how some people felt as that hymn stated; nor could I account for it that I could not. Mixing up with my old companions ultimately erased these impressions, and I plunged into sin again as deep as ever. O wondrous mercy, that God did not plunge me into hell!

“But sovereign grace was underneath,
And love eternal, strong as death.”

Shortly after this it was published at the chapel that Mr. U of H -, would preach on Wednesday evening and as I had never heard a sermon of a working day, I concluded to go. The text was Ps. xxxv. 3. “Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation.” I listened attentively to the discourse, and as the preacher went on, I could see very clearly, that at present the Lord was not my salvation. This made some impression upon me, which in a few days wore off, as my former impressions had done. On the following Wednesday evening I went again, as the same minister was to preach. On this occasion he took as his text, Lam. lii. 24, “God is my portion, saith my soul, therefore will I hope in him.” This was to me a very convincing discourse, for while the minister was pointing out the happiness of the believer who had God for his portion, I felt a secret envy arise within me, because of the happiness which I conceived they must enjoy, but of which I knew nothing. I went from this service persuaded that God was not my portion, and that to all the joys of religion I was a stranger. I now became more hardened than ever, and went on in sin from bad to worse; and in this state I continued until the beginning of the year, 1819. At this time a large room was opened for Sunday School in Old Brentford, near to where I then resided; and shortly after it was proposed to have the Gospel preached there as well. And now I draw near to the turning-point in my history, when God called me by his grace into the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ.

Curiosity led me to this place to hear the preaching, but the first time I went, I was offended, and determined that I would go there no more. But as God had a purpose of mercy toward me in connection with that place, my mind was changed, for here it was that,

“Jesus sought me when a stranger,
Wandering from the fold of God.”

On the last Lord’s Day in February, an elderly man from town was the supply, and, in consequence of an eccentricity of manner, I and another lad were laughing and amusing ourselves with the venerable servant of God. Full of levity, trifling with sacred things, and profaning the Lord’s Day, I left the place of meeting that morning. In the afternoon, having a desire to see how the school was conducted, I went to the door about the time of its commencement, and was invited to go in and take a class, as two of the teachers were going to endeavour to find another preacher for the evening. I had never been to a dissenting Sunday School before. I went to the Church School for a considerable time when young, but all we ever did there, was to read a Scripture lesson, repeat part of the Church Catechism, and then we marched there for that purpose. Something about the teaching of this School took with me, and I continued to be a teacher for more than three years. At Hammersmith, that day, a plain country man, of the Independent denomination was staying with a friend unemployed, and was requested to come and preach at Brentford in the evening, to which he consented. It is rather remarkable that he had never preached there before, nor did he ever preach there again. His name was Tennant. I think he came out of Wiltshire.

Well, in the evening I took my place in the chapel as I had done for some weeks. As hard, as carnal, and as indifferent about divine things as I ever had been. The minister was a plain, unlettered man. His manner was solemn, but there was nothing attractive in his voice, eloquent in his words, or winning in his composition. He gave out as his text, Mark 8:36,37. “What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” His manner was remarkably solemn and earnest, my attention became riveted, the word was accompanied with power and demonstration of the Spirit, divine life was imparted, which evinced itself in a deep drawn sigh. I felt convinced that the world, if I could gain it, would be no compensation for the loss of my immortal soul. Now the arrows of the

Almighty were within me, and I left that place in deep distress of mind. When I retired to bed, I could get no rest, but tossed and tumbled about until the dawning of the day. Ah, it is difficult for a person to sleep when he has a guilty conscience for his companion, and is awakened to a sense of his dreadful danger! At last, weary nature, worn out with terror, anxiety, and alarm, fell asleep, but it was not refreshing sleep. When I awoke in the morning the burden of guilt was lying heavy on my conscience, and the iniquity of my heels was compassing me about. My secret sins were set before me, and appeared to be placed in the light of God's countenance. The text was engraven on my memory, and like the writing on the wall of Belshazzar's palace, filled me with the most distressing fears. All my false confidence was gone, my forms of prayer would not meet my case, the way of salvation I knew not, and therefore could only sigh and cry, "God be merciful unto me a sinner!" For though I had now sat under the gospel for some time, I was altogether ignorant of God's way of salvation. The doctrines of the gospel I understood not, especially that most precious doctrine, of free salvation, through the slaughtered Lamb.

When I went to my employment on the next morning, I was saluted with, "Here comes our hypocrite." This startled and astounded me. I put on as cheerful a manner as I could, and said, "What now?" The man replied, "You go sighing and groaning to chapel to make people think you are a saint, and then come down here cursing and swearing." As I was altogether unconscious that I did sigh I denied it. "O," he said, "it is no use denying it, for Mrs. R – sat by you and heard you, and came home and told us, and said she thought there was something good in you. We told her she should come down here and hear you, and she would soon see what good was in you." Her communication they turned into ridicule, and I was taunted and tormented with it from day to day. I was now in a sad case, a load of guilt on my conscience, the sentence of condemnation in my mind, and the wrath of God revealed from heaven against me. With a fallen countenance and a dread of hell, Satan tempting me, and my fellow-workmen laughing at me, ridiculing me, and casting my past sins in my teeth, I went mourning all the day long.

But now I was led to act differently from what I had formerly done, for instead of replying or rendering railing for railing, every time I could get alone I was crying to the Lord for mercy; and even when among them, and bearing their opposition in silence, my secret ejaculations were ascending to Him who

alone was able to save me. In these depths, I was left to sink for some time. My enemies, perceiving that I was troubled in mind and that I refused either to join them in sin or reply to their taunts and jeers, grew worse and worse. At length in answer to my many heartfelt and fervent prayers, the Lord spoke peace to my heart, and set my soul at liberty.

How long I lay in bondage under the law, suffering the terrors of the Almighty, or by what means I was led into the liberty of the gospel, I cannot now remember. But I think hope first sprang up in the mind, as I was enabled to rely on the Lord's word; faith then embraced Jesus and his finished work; this produced love to God and his people; then peace sweetly flowed in, and joy unspeakable was experienced. I looked upon the Lord's people as always privileged to enjoy what I then did, and concluded that they must be the happiest people in the world. Every time I could now get by myself I could pour out my heart unto the Lord, with freedom and holy pleasure, and prayer and praise produced a little heaven upon earth. I had sweet fellowship with the Father, and with the Son Jesus Christ.

Often have I looked back with longing eyes upon those blissful days, this antepast of heaven, this foretaste of divine enjoyment, those Christ-endearing pleasures.

THE GLORIES OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST IN THE BOOK OF PROVERBS

William Luff

"Search the Scriptures," was the command of our Lord to His disciples; and He added, "*they testify of Me.*" (John 5:39) In this spirit we should study *His Word*, seeking to have unfolded to us by His Spirit "HIMSELF," and He will most surely reward us. We fear the *Book of Proverbs* is much overlooked in this respect, and yet it abounds with lovely beams of His glory. Let us look at some.

Who hath ascended up into heaven, or descended? Who hath gathered the wind in His fists? Who hath bound the waters in a garment? Who hath established all the ends of the earth? What is *His name*, and what is *His Son's name*, if thou canst tell? (Proverbs 30:4). Here we have God's seven questions

concerning God's Beloved Son.

In our recent studies, we have considered Christ as: (1) our *Friend*, loving at all times, and a *Brother* born for adversity, 17:17. He is the *Friend* that sticketh closer than a brother, 18:24. (2) the Divine *Surety* for us, but who was "sore broken:" He that is surety for a stranger shall "smart for it", "be sore broken", 11:15. (3) the *King* whose throne is for ever, 20:18, and whose favour is towards His servants, 14:35.

However there are other significant references to Christ in Proverbs:

A *Gift* is as "a precious stone", in the eyes of him that hath it: whithersoever it turneth, it prospereth, 17:8.

A *Redeemer* who is mighty, and who will plead our cause with God, 23:11.

Fools make a mock at the *Sin Offering*, but among the righteous it is an object of delight (Dr. Young's rendering), 14:9.

A *True Witness* delivereth souls 14:25.

As *Wisdom*, His delights were with the sons of men; and all the things that may be desired are not to be compared to Him", 8:11.

Riches and honour are with Him; yea, durable riches and righteousness, 8:18. My fruit is better than gold, yea, than fine gold; and My revenue than choice silver. I lead in the way of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of judgement: that I may cause those that love *Me* to inherit substance; and I will fill their treasures, 8:19-21.

Happy is the man that hath found *Wisdom*... She is more precious than rubies; and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared to her. Length of days is in her right hand; and in her left hand riches and honour. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to them that lay hold on her; and happy is every one that retaineth *her*, 3:13-18.

Get *Wisdom*; forget it not... Forsake her not, and she shall preserve thee; love her, and she shall keep thee. Wisdom is the principal thing; get Wisdom...

Exalt her, and she shall lift thee up; she shall bring thee to honour, when thou dost embrace her. She shall give to thine head an ornament of grace; a crown of glory shall she deliver to thee, 4:5-9.

Wisdom hath builded her house, she hath hewn out her seven pillars. Come, eat of My bread, and drink of the wine I have mingled, 9:1, 5.

How much better is it to get *Wisdom* than gold; and to get understanding rather to be chosen than silver, 16:16.

Whoso despiseth the *Word* (Christ) shall be destroyed; but he that feareth the commandment shall be in peace, 13:13.

The name of the Lord is a *Strong Tower*: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe, or set aloft, 18:10.

A *Faithful Man* shall abound with blessings, 28:20.

The blessing of the *Lord*, it maketh rich; and He addeth no sorrow with it, 10:22.

EPILOGUE

“Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth” Isaiah 45:22

This is our first duty – to look to Christ in faith. Without such a look we cannot be saved. The only way to be saved, revealed in Scripture is to look to Christ. We must recognise that in Christ all the fullness of the Godhead dwells and that He is able and willing to save all who seek Him in faith and with true repentance - as implied in the text. Our faith may be weak, and our repentance poor, but all that is required is a look.

“They looked unto him, and were lightened” Psalm 34:5

Who was it that David and his companions looked to for relief in dire circumstances? It was to God the Son and to his glory. They looked in faith and Christ rewarded them by a fresh outpouring of His spirit into their souls. We can also look in faith to Christ in all our circumstances and we too will receive an uplifting of our spirits. Christ will reveal himself to us with fresh spiritual, refreshing light in our souls. While this will not necessarily take

away our difficulties, it will give us the strength to face them. David found this to be true and we can also.

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

A Christian is called to look to the Lord Jesus in all circumstances of life and at all times. We depend upon him for salvation, sanctification, guidance and strength – in fact for everything. Amazingly the Lord has promised to hear our prayers and requests and answer them according to His wisdom and for His glory. We know that as He has loved us and saved us from our sins God will answer our prayers in His time and in a way that is for our good.

We have briefly considered three texts that encourage us to look unto the Lord. This does not require any great depth of theological knowledge – we just need to “look”. We merely need to know to whom we are to “look”-as the Israelites looked to the serpent on the pole we must look to Christ, the Son of God in all His risen glory at the right hand of God the Father in heaven, the only Saviour of sinners.

Let us then keep our eyes firmly fixed upon Him.

Bill Norton