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A QUESTION FOR EVERYBODY

John Charles Ryle, Bishop of Liverpool

Are you converted? The question is one which touches all mankind. It ought to come home to all ranks and classes, high or low, rich or poor, old or young, gentle or simple. Anyone may get to heaven without money, rank, or learning. No one, however wise, wealthy, noble, or beautiful, will ever get to heaven without conversion.

1. Conversion is a scriptural thing. I mean by this, that conversion is a thing plainly mentioned in the Bible. It matters nothing who says a thing and declares it to be a religious truth; it matters nothing whether we like or dislike a doctrine. Is it in the Bible? Hear what David says: "The law of the Lord is perfect, *converting* the soul;" "Sinners shall be *converted* unto Thee" (Psalm 19.7; 51.13). Hear what our Lord Jesus Christ says: "Except ye be *converted*, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 18.3). Hear what Peter says: "Repent ye, and be *converted*, that your sins may be blotted out" (Acts 3.19). Add to this many passages in which the *idea* of conversion is contained, though the *word* itself is not used. To be renewed – to be transformed – to be created anew – to be raised from the dead – to be illuminated – to pass from death to life – to be born again – all mean the same thing. Conversion is not a mere device of man's invention: it is in the Bible.

2. Conversion is a real thing. We live in an age of shams, cheats, deceptions, and impositions. It is an age of white-wash, varnish, lacquer, and veneer. Still, notwithstanding all that such people may say, I assert confidently that there is such a thing as conversion. There are to be seen among men, every here and there, unmistakable cases of a complete turning round of heart, character, tastes, and life – cases that deserve no other name than that of conversion. Of such changes the Bible gives many unmistakable patterns. Let anyone read attentively the history of Manasseh king of Judah, of Matthew the apostle, of the woman of Samaria, of Zacchaeus the publican, of Mary Magdalene, of Saul of Tarsus, of the Philippian jailor, of Lydia the purple seller, of the Jews to whom Peter preached on the day of Pentecost, of the Corinthians to whom Paul preached. Of such changes, every man's own neighbourhood and circle

of acquaintances will furnish specimens. They are to be met with here and there in every part of the kingdom. What can such changes be called but conversions?

3. Conversion is a necessary thing. Some worthy people are ready enough to admit that conversion is a scriptural truth and a reality, but not a thing that needs to be pressed. The heathen, they grant, need conversion: even the thieves, and fallen characters, and inmates of jails, they allow, may require conversion; but to talk of conversion being necessary for church-going people is to talk of things which they cannot see at all. "Some people may, in some cases, need a little stirring up and amendment. They may not be quite as good as they ought to be; but you have no right to say they need conversion!" Let no man deceive you. An interest in Christ and conversion are absolutely necessary; without them no one can possibly be saved. All, all alike, high or low, rich or poor, old or young, gentle or simple, churchmen or dissenters, baptised or unbaptised, all must be converted, or perish. There is no salvation without conversion. It is a necessary thing. Now, *are you converted?*

FELLOWSHIP NEWS

It was a great joy to witness the baptism of our friend, Chloe H, during the morning service on the Lord's Day, 10 November. Chloe testified clearly of God's loving dealings with her over the past few years, as he has revealed his sufficient grace towards her in her times of need. We were especially pleased to welcome a number of Chloe's friends and relatives to the baptismal service, who were then invited to a fellowship lunch. Chloe was formally received into membership of the church at the communion service that same evening. We pray that she will continue to find comfort in the presence of the One who has promised never to leave her or forsake her.

We were very glad to have another visit from our friend Rev Timothy Burden, at our midweek meeting on 13 November. Mr Burden represents the Middle East Reformed Fellowship, seeking to build up and equip the church in Arab and Muslim lands. Mr Burden and his wife, Rosalind, are planning to travel to Ethiopia in November and December to teach "the Augustine programme" -

materials which provide a consistent approach to the teaching of reformed doctrine to potential church leaders. Our prayer is that these church leaders will be enabled, through this instruction, to teach others also, so that the church will thrive and increase in these lands.

On the Lord's Day, 17 November, we were pleased to welcome to our pulpit for the first time, Rev Kevin Bidwell from Sheffield Presbyterian Church. On the previous day, Dr Bidwell had addressed the Young Adult Conference held at Maryport Street Baptist Chapel, Devizes. His ministry over the whole weekend was greatly appreciated.

The evening gospel service on the Lord's Day, 1 December, was taken by our member, Daniel Tribe. Daniel is currently in his second year of study at the Salisbury Reformed Seminary, and is seeking God's guidance for his future ministry. Daniel delivered a very powerful and challenging gospel message based on Paul's words to the Ephesian elders : "...repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:21). We pray that God's blessing will be on his word, resulting in faith being born in some hearts.

It was good to have Stephen St John to speak at our midweek meeting on 4 December. Stephen is heading up the ministry of the Daylight Christian Prison Trust (DCPT), which supports the work of prison chaplains. We were both encouraged and challenged as we heard of the needs of prisoners and of the work of the DCPT as they seek to meet many and varied needs through proclaiming God's Word and discipling those who have come to faith in Christ. With thousands of people in prison at any one time in the UK, those who visit, befriend, and share the gospel with them are in great need of our prayerful support.

On 18 December Rev Graham Chewter made his annual visit to us from the Trinitarian Bible Society. He focused on India, from the pioneering mission and translation work done by William Carey in that vast country with over 1500 languages. TBS have just published the whole Bible in Thadou spoken in N. India. Currently translators are needed for a Tamil Bible for S. India and Sri Lanka. We have been thankful to hear of the recent publication of the Persian New Testament, revised from the old 1895 standard version. This is the most

accurate translation in the Persian language, and is the fruition of years of hard work by the main reviser and others who helped him in this project. 10,000 copies have been printed, to be distributed to Iranians, some of whom have been imprisoned for simply reading John's gospel. Mr Chewter directed our thoughts to John 10:16, and we pray that the work of translating God's Word will result in "other sheep" from many lands being enabled to hear the voice of the Great Shepherd of his sheep.

"Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; and his greatness is unsearchable" Ps 145:3.

Words of Thanks

We are very grateful for the prayers of the Lord's people at Emmanuel over the past few months when Bill has been so unwell. His heart-attack in September has been followed by a long, protracted recovery period with numerous hospital admissions and visits to A and E.

We want to thank everyone who has been so supportive and prayerful for us during this time of trial. Experiencing the love and kindness shown by so many has been truly humbling.

"From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee, when my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the rock that is higher than I" Psalm 61:2.

Bill & June N

TESTIMONY OF CHLOE H

[The following testimony was given at the baptizing service on the morning of the Lord's Day, 10 November]

I've come from a totally non-Christian background, and two years ago I knew nothing at all about the Bible or Church. I would have been the kind of person who would have walked by people preaching in the streets, saying something

rude to them; and, if they gave me a leaflet, I would have made it into a paper-aeroplane and would have then thrown it away.

If anyone had asked me to come to church, I'd have said they were completely mad.

It wasn't until I met Andrew W, through driving lessons, and he mentioned church in a conversation, that I made known to him all my troubles and struggles. I was in a bad place with things in my life that caused great anxiety, severe depression and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. I asked Andrew many questions; and, as well as learning how to drive, I began to learn about the Bible and the Christian Faith. I became interested in what he was telling me. Somehow it all began to make sense. I asked him if I could come along to church, I'd never really been to a church before. It wasn't as bad as I thought it was going to be.

Very early one morning - somewhere about 3am - I woke up feeling very low, the lowest I'd ever felt. I texted Andrew and told him that I was giving up and that I wanted to end my life. Thankfully he was awake. He told me about something that happened in Bible-times. Christ's disciples were in a boat and caught in a great storm. Christ came to them walking on the water. Peter asked Him if he could come out to meet Him on the water. Christ invited him to join Him, but no sooner had Peter stepped out of the boat than he began to sink; and he called out to Christ, "LORD SAVE ME." Christ held out his hand and rescued him. Andrew said that I must do what Peter did - call to Christ in prayer - "LORD SAVE ME." I did that; and I woke up the next day and felt like a different person. I didn't feel so anxious or so unhappy. I just felt different.

I felt like I had been given a new life. I then spoke further to Andrew and also to Pastor Green. I started Discipleship Classes. These were very helpful. After these Classes, questions would often arise in my mind and I texted Pastor Green then, so that I would not forget these questions.

It was at this time that I came to see that I was a sinner. I wondered what I could do about that. I was told that the Lord Jesus Christ had done something about it. He had died on the cross, taking the punishment for us. I understood

then that I must pray for forgiveness and be well and truly sorry for all my sins. One evening that was what I did.

I know now that there is a God who can help and who will always be there for me. This has really changed my life. Yes, I do still struggle with lots of things, especially because I'm now in process of fostering my younger sister and keeping down a job. I still struggle at times with anxiety, but not as once I did. I feel like I am being kept by the Lord each day and am being helped to be the person I truly want to be.

I'm thankful to the Lord for bringing me to where I am today; and I am so very thankful that here I have met so many new people - people who have shown me so much kindness. At times, however, meeting them has not been without its difficulties on account of my anxiety, but each and every time the Lord has helped me with this.

I've come to realise there is a God who can answer prayer - my prayers. This is simply amazing!

While standing here, I would like to thank everyone for all their prayers, cards, and words of encouragement through all the problems. It has meant a lot to me, and to my family; but, above all, I want to thank God for all He has done for me and all that He is doing for me even now.

I would like to finish with a verse from Psalm 46 which has been with me from very early on. It is Psalm 46, verse 1, *"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble."*

CHURCH & PASTOR'S ANNIVERSARY, 2020

God willing, this Anniversary – the Church's 67th and Pastor Watts's 49th. will be held the weekend of 1 - 2 February, 2020. Our Guest Preacher will be Rev. Graeme Craig, minister of the Ayr congregation of the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing).

On Saturday, there will be a service in the church at 3pm, and on the Lord's Day, services will be at the usual times of 11am & 6.30pm. Mr Craig will be preaching at all three of these services, and he will also be speaking at the After Church Meeting on the Lord's Day which will commence at approximately 8.30pm.

THE GOSPEL ALPHABET

All men have sinned, the Word declares,
And all from God have gone astray:

Behold the spotless Lamb of God,
Who came to take our sins away.

Christ left His home in heaven above,
And came the lost to seek and save;

Died for the ungodly in His love,
That they eternal life might have.

Eternal life the Father gives
Freely to each believing one:

Forgiveness for the blackest sins
Through faith in His Beloved Son.

God deals in richest sovereign grace
Abounding over every sin:

He welcomes all who seek His face
Through Christ the Door to enter in.

In Christ the Son of His own love
Inheritance they now receive:

Justice declares the debt is paid
Of all who in the Son believe.

Kings they are made, and priests to God.
To offer praises night and day:

Loved with an everlasting love,
Their sins have all been washed away.

Mercy and truth can now agree,
And Peace and Justice each embrace:

No condemnation is for those
Who seek this glorious Hiding-place.

O matchless grace! O wondrous plan
Devised eternally by God!

Pardon is now proclaimed to man
Through Him who shed His precious blood.

Quickened by God's free grace alone,
The service of our lives is due:

Redemption by the Son is known,
And all things are Divinely new,

Saved from the guilt and power of sin,
No more we to ourselves belong:

Triumphant let our hearts begin
The new, the everlasting song.

Unto our God who reigns above
Be endless praise and honour given:

Vast as His free eternal love
Shall be the joy and bliss of heaven.

Worthy the Lamb who once was slain
Is now our humble song below:

'Xalted King, for ever reign,
Till Thy full glory we shall know.

Ye ransomed sinners, till His face
You see unveiled in heavenly joy,

Zealously let His love and grace
Your highest notes of praise employ.

Submitted by Ruth W

SALVATION BY GOOD WORKS?

Malcolm H. Watts

A common misconception is that a person can reach heaven by being or doing good. Although this seems to be what many people believe, it is difficult to conceive of anything more opposed to Christianity.

What exactly is wrong with it?

First of all, it is an *impossibility*. How can anyone hope to perform the necessary works? The law, summed up in the Ten Commandments, is 'perfect' (Psalm 19:7), which means that it is not only perfect in itself, but that it also requires perfection in the hearts and lives of men. People seeking salvation this way must obey 'all things which are written in the book of the law' (Galatians 3:10). If they break just one commandment, all their hopes are dashed and they are exposed to the law's awful penalty. 'For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all' (James 2:10). Surely no one in his right mind would give a moment's thought to the idea.

George Whitefield used to say that he would sooner try to climb to heaven on a rope of sand!

Secondly, it is a *complete fallacy*. Let us imagine for a moment that the impossible is possible, and that we are able to keep the law perfectly for the rest of our lives. What about previous sins? 'God requireth that which is past' (Ecclesiastes 3:15). If applied to former behaviour, this means that God will bring our past sins into judgement. So, you see, we are disqualified before we even make the attempt. The Bible says that we are 'condemned already' and that we have already 'come short of [or, failed to obtain] the glory of God' (John 3:18; Romans 3:23).

There was a famous preacher in the eighteenth century called John Berridge. In 1755 he was called to Everton and he preached there for two years, exhorting the people to lead more moral lives. Then, one day, these words came to him and impressed themselves upon his mind: 'Cease from thine own works, only believe.' He saw the error into which he had fallen, and he began preaching the gospel to his congregation. 'So', he says, 'I dealt with my hearers in a very different manner from what I used to do. I told them very plainly that they were children of wrath, and under the curse of God, though they knew it not; and that none but Jesus Christ could deliver them from that curse. I told them, if ever they had broken the law of God once in thought, word or deed, no future good behaviour could make any atonement for past miscarriages. For if I keep all God's laws today, this is no amends for breaking them yesterday.'

Thirdly, it is *counter-productive*. When a man believes he can save himself, he either dishonours God by thinking he has changed, lowered his standards and accepted some kind of compromise, or he exalts himself, proudly claiming a goodness and righteousness worthy of eternal life. In the story our Lord told about the Pharisee and the publican, the former was guilty of both these things. 'The Pharisee stood and prayed with himself: God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess' (Luke 18: 11-12). As Dr Campbell Morgan commented, 'This man thought of God as one satisfied with trivialities, abstaining from vulgar sins, and the observing of certain rites

and ceremonies. We may go further and say he thought God was obligated to him, because of these things.' Ironically, then, this is a scheme of salvation which tends only to make men more sinful.

Fourthly, it has proved an *absolute failure*. The Bible tells us that Adam, even in a state of innocence, was unable to keep the commandments (Genesis 3:6; Romans 5: 14-16). David was called 'the man after God's own heart' but he also transgressed; and, such was his guilt that he pleaded with God not to call him to justice (Psalm 25:7; 143:2). And Paul confessed to indwelling corruption and to the fact that he was 'the chief of sinners' (Romans 7: 14-18; 1 Timothy 1:15). Are we better than they? Are we hoping to succeed where they failed? Surely our own hearts testify to our sin and to the hopelessness of all our attempts.

Fifthly, it is bad news: in fact, the worst news yet. If all have to earn their way to heaven, there is no consolation for parents grieving over an infant's death. What works did the child perform? No comfort either for the person who, at the end of his life, desperately wants to be right with God. Good works done now cannot possibly outweigh the bad. And as for the rest of us, according to this doctrine, we must anxiously wait for the Day of Judgement when at last we shall know if we have done enough to secure our heaven.

Are these the 'good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people'? (Luke 2:10). No, certainly not! They are mistaken views, belonging to a pathetic creed. In one of his letters, James Hervey admits that he had sometimes been tempted away from the truth and towards this error. 'And I do assure you', he says, 'when I wander from this path (the way of the gospel), I stumble upon dark mountains, and fall into briers and thorns; I lose my peace and tranquillity, and my hope.'

Sixthly, it is a *denial of the Christian faith*. The religions of the world all teach a system of moralism, salvation by effort and achievement, but not so Christianity. In the words of Johannes Vos, 'The other religions offer man advice - some of it good, some not so good - but Christianity brings men "good news", the gospel, the message that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, has done for man what he could never do for himself.' The apostle Paul sums it up in

this way: 'Salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us' (1 Thessalonians 5:9-10). Now, it stands to reason that, if we resort to the teaching of non-Christian religions and teach the falsehood common to them all, we abandon New Testament truth. Worse still, we declare that Christ's death was uncalled for and quite superfluous. 'If righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain' (Galatians 2:21; cf. 5:4). We might just as well be honest and recall every missionary, for we have nothing, absolutely nothing, to tell the nations.

Seventhly, and lastly, this idea that you can be saved by good works is contradicted and condemned by the Word of God.

'By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight' (Romans 3:20).

'If it be by grace, then is it **no more of works**: otherwise grace is no more grace' (Romans 11:6).

'Knowing that **a man is not justified by the works of the law**, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and **not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified**' (Galatians 2:16).

'By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: **not of works** lest any man should boast' (Ephesians 2:8-9).

'Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us' (Titus 3:5).

A minister named Martin Boos, who believed this error of 'salvation by good works', was one day visiting a Christian woman. She was dangerously ill, and Boos tried to prepare her for death by saying, 'I don't doubt that you will die calm and happy.' 'How do you know that?' she asked. 'Because your life', he replied, 'has been a series of good works.' The woman sighed; 'If I die', she said, 'relying on those good works, I know for certain that I'll be condemned. What gives me peace is that I trust only in Jesus Christ my Saviour.' Those

words helped Martin Boos to see for himself God's way of salvation. Soon afterwards he too was trusting in the Saviour-and preaching him to others.

May God give you the precious gift of saving faith.

WHY PSALMS ONLY?

**Rev Professor R. J. George DD.,
Professor of Theology and Church History
in the Covenanter Seminary, Alleghany, Pennsylvania, USA.**

Part 2

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.” (Colossians 3:16)

Third. Uninspired songs cannot be placed on a level with the songs of inspiration as the rule for “teaching and admonishing.” All agree that the “psalms” of the text are the inspired Psalms, the very word of God. “Teaching” refers to doctrine, what we are to believe. “Admonishing” refers to practice, how we are to live. It is not conceivable that Paul would place the writings of uninspired men on a level with the Psalms of the Bible as a standard of doctrine and practice. “The scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the word of God, the only rule of faith and manners.”

Uninspired hymns abound in errors. Dr Cook of Belfast, says, “I never yet found a compilation of hymns that I could pronounce free from serious errors. In 1838 the Presbyterian General assembly appointed a committee to revise their hymn book. In their report they say, “On a critical examination we found many hymns deficient in literary merit, some incorrect in doctrine, and many altogether unsuitable for the sanctuary.” What an indictment to bring against the book which their own church had substituted for God’s book of praises! Does anyone suppose that Paul referred to such “hymns and spiritual songs”

as these, and places them on a level with the Psalms of the Bible for teaching and admonition?

Fourth. The inspired Psalms alone are adapted to be the vehicles of grace to the heart and of praise to the Lord. “Singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.” Here are two things: the awakening of gracious affections in the heart, and the uplifting of the soul to God. Two characteristics of the inspired Psalms mark their adaptation to this two-fold purpose, viz. their devotional spirit, and their objective nature.

1. The Psalms are devotional. The Psalter is in a pre-eminent sense the devotional book of the bible. All Christians recognize this in their personal devotional reading. It occupies a large place in the services of liturgical churches. Ambrose says: “Although all divine scripture breathes the grace of God, yet sweet beyond all others is the book of Psalms.” It is sometimes objected that the Psalms are not adapted to awaken gracious affections in revivals. Such a view is entirely mistaken.

Think for a moment of the contents of the book: its views of God; its views of man; its views of law; its views of sin; its views of Christ; its views of repentance; its view of pardon; its views of covenant relationship; its view of the new life; its views of judgement; its views of heaven; its views of hell. What is there that is needed for revival that it does not contain? And what book is more likely to be honoured by the Holy Spirit than his own Book? As Dr J.W. Bain has said, “They will be found suitable for any revival that comes down; those revivals that are ‘gotten up’ may need something less divine.”

The fact is that the greatest revivals of religion the world has ever seen have been connected with the exclusive use of the Psalms. They were used exclusively in the great revivals in the days of Hezekiah, Josiah, Ezra and Nehemiah. The same was true in the revival at Pentecost when three thousand were converted in one day. The period of the Reformation was a grand revival period, and it was a glorious revival of psalm-singing.

The Calvinistic Reformers used them exclusively. All France was thrilled with their music in the days of the Huguenots. They, alone, were used in the

Scottish church on that wonderful day at the Kirk of Shotts when under Livingstone, five hundred were converted by one sermon. In the times of Robert McCheyne, when they continued their meetings until near midnight, they made the seasons of the night glad singing the songs of Zion.

President Edwards bears this testimony as to their use in the great Northampton revival in New England in his days. "One of the most observable features of the work was the singular delight which all the awakened appeared to take in singing psalms. In houses, in the fields, in the woods, alone and together, they spake forth the praises of their King; and even little children and aged persons who had never before learned to sing, came to sing praises with solemnity and sweetness."

2. The Psalms are objective. In this regard the inspired songs are in striking contrast with human compositions. Hymns are Subjective. Men write about themselves, their states and experiences, their high resolves. They are introspective. They are self-centred. But the Psalms are objective. They are God-centred. The soul looks outward and upward. They lead the soul reverently to adore God in the beauty of holiness and devoutly to bow before His throne as the hearer of prayer. This is true devotion. "Worship God." It appears that the Psalms of the Bible are eminently adapted to be the vehicles of grace to the heart, and praise to the Lord. "Singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord."

We conclude, therefore, that this passage which has always been relied upon by the advocates of hymn-singing as containing a warrant for their practices has no such meaning. The titles "Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" belong to the inspired Psalms, and as qualified by the word "spiritual" are not true of any other. The Psalms are "the word of Christ"; uninspired songs are not His word; the Psalms are a true standard for "teaching and admonishing"; uninspired songs are not; the Psalms are adapted to be the vehicles of grace to the heart and of praise to the Lord; uninspired songs are not. The passage furnishes no warrant for the use of uninspired songs in worship but is an explicit apostolic injunction that in the praise service of the New Testament church the divinely authorized Psalmody should be continued.

We cannot close without an earnest appeal to the Christian heart on behalf of two things.

1. The restoration of God's own Psalter to a place in the hymnals of all the churches. A movement in this direction should have the hearty co-operation of every Christian. Its rejection has been in disregard of the divine appointment, and of the example of our blessed Lord, and of the apostolic authority contained in this passage. It should be restored to its place by the united voice of all Christendom and the joyous acclaim of all Christians. It would be the bringing back of the ark of God.

2. When the Psalter is restored to its place in the hymnals of the churches it should be used exclusively in the worship of God. A place may be found for the use of uninspired songs, but not in worship. God must be served with His own. "But cursed be the deceiver, which hath in his flock a male, and voweth and sacrificeth unto the Lord a corrupt thing; for I am a great king, saith the Lord of Hosts, and my name is dreadful among the heathen" (Mal. 1:14).

Rev. W.D. Ralston in his "Talks on Psalmody," related the following story: "As I trudged homeward I stopped at an uncle's and spent the night there. In the evening I brought out my hymn book and had some singing with my cousins. After I laid it down, my uncle took it up, put on his glasses, and spent some time in looking through it. He was a firm believer in the exclusive use of the Psalms, and my book was the hymn book of another denomination. It gave the hymns, and the music, with the names of the composers of each as far as known. Uncle read a hymn and naming the author, said, 'I know nothing of him.' He read another, and said, 'I have read about the author of this one. He was a Roman Catholic priest.' He read another and said, 'I have often read of this author. He was a good man and an earnest Christian minister.' He then said: 'Now, John, if I were going to use one of these hymns in the worship of God to-night, which do you think I had best choose, the one about whose author I know nothing, the one by the Roman Catholic priest, or the one by the earnest Christian minister?' I replied, 'The one by the minister.' 'True,' said he, 'we should select the one written by the best man; and I see by looking through your book that it contains many hymns written by good men; but if I should find in it one composed by God Himself, would it not be better to sing that one than

one composed by any good man?" I replied, 'It surely would.' After a little, he said, 'I have now carefully looked through your book, and I do not find one hymn in it marked 'composed by God'; but I have here a little hymn book and God by His Holy Spirit has composed every hymn in it; for Peter says, 'Holy men spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.' As he spoke, he handed me one of our psalm books and the manner in which he presented his argument made an impression upon my mind that I never forgot."

How conclusive this argument is. We ought to serve God with the best. God's own book is the best. When Ingersoll (an American agnostic) said that he "could write a better book than the Bible", Christians were shocked and denounced him as an "infidel blasphemer." How then can we say that we can write a better book of praises than God's Psalter? If it be true that hymn books are better than the Psalm book, it marks the highest achievement of the race; for then man has transcended God in His own field. If it be not true, then the displacing of the God-made Psalter, by the man-made hymn books, in God's worship, is an act of most daring presumption.

At a meeting of ministers of various denominations in an eastern city a paper was read on Church Hymnology. General discussion followed the address. An advocate of the exclusive use of the inspired Psalms employed the following illustration with great effect. "If I had an important message to send to one living in the upper districts of the city, I might summon a messenger boy and say to him: 'Can you carry this message for me to such a person living in such a part of the city?' And the boy would answer doubtfully: 'I think I can. It is true that I have never been in that part of the city, I was born near here. I have heard of the person to whom you wish to send the message, but I am not acquainted with him; but I think I can find him. I am willing to try. 'My message is a very important one, and while satisfied of the good intentions of this boy, I am not quite assured of his ability to fulfil the trust. So I call up another boy and ask him the same question. At once his face glows with intelligence as he answers, 'Oh yes, I can carry your message directly to his home. I know all about that part of the city. I was born there. I came from there. In fact, your friend sent me down here to find you and bear up any message you might desire to send to him.' It would not be difficult to decide which of these messengers I should employ. This is an allegory. If I had a message of praise to send up to God and

I employed a hymn to carry it, I would feel uncertain about it; it might reach Him, and it might not. But if I employed a Psalm to carry it, I know that it would ascend to heaven. The Psalm was born there. It came from God to me; and, indeed, God sent it to me to bear any message of praise I might wish to send up to Him.”

Concluded

CHRIST’S SPECIAL LOVE

Philip Henry (1631-1696)
(father of Matthew Henry, the Commentator)

“Now there was leaning on Jesus’ bosom one of his disciples, whom Jesus loved.” (John 13:23)

There are *some* disciples of Christ for whom He hath an extraordinary love, and whom He lays in His bosom.

The Lord Jesus will love them best that are most like Him. Likeness is the loadstone of love. All his children are like Him, have His “image,” Romans 8:29. But there are some *more* like Him than others. And those He loves with a special love. All “receive of his fulness,” but some more than others. The more of His grace is in us, the more of His grace and favour there is towards us. The more we tread in His steps, the more we shall have a place in His special and peculiar love. Often reflect on your walking – Is this to behave like Christ? Labour to conform yourself to Him, and to His example.

He loves those best who love him best. Would you lean on His breast? Bid Him welcome to lean upon *your* breast. He begins in love to us: “We love him because he *first* loved us.” But the manifestations of His love are grounded upon the growth and increase of our love to Him. See that your love to Christ be not only sincere, but fervent: not only true, but faithful. Where there is *true* love there are desires after union. Judge of your love by your *desires*. According as the love is weak or strong so will the desires be. If the love be warm, the desires will be warm. Now, where the Lord Jesus sees true desires

of His presence, *there* will he throw open His bosom. – Where there is true love there will also be delight in the enjoyment of Him. There is no delight comparable to that which a child of God has in the enjoyment of Christ. Cursed be he that esteems all the pleasures of the world comparable to one hour's communion with Christ. There will also be grief in His absence. If He be at anytime withdrawn, oh, how restless is the soul! Why are His chariot wheels so long a coming? As the earth and plants mourn in the winter, when the sun is withdrawn: as the wife mourns in the absence of her beloved husband; so the Christian in the absence of the Saviour. And, where there is true love there will be care to please: fear to offend. How is it with you as to this? Do you care in everything to please Christ?

He loves those best who are most meek, and humble, and lowly in their hearts. This is part of His "image." He was a meek, humble, lowly Saviour. "Learn of me," saith he, "for I am meek and lowly in heart, and you shall find rest." He "giveth grace unto the humble." "Thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones." "Thus saith the Lord, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool:- but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word." Let others look to themselves, I will look to this man. I will take care of him. Labour to be humble and lowly, for Christ loves such. The proud he "knows afar off." Paul was very low in his own eyes. He could deny himself for the salvation of souls; and the Lord Jesus loved him with an extraordinary love: inasmuch that He took him up to His bosom in the third heaven before he died, where he saw and heard unspeakable things.

He loves them most that have most faith; because he that hath most faith doth most honour and lift Him up. Faith lifts up Christ, and Christ lifts up faith. Abraham was eminent for faith. He is called the "Father of the faithful." He obeyed the call of God when he called him from his kindred to go he knew not whither. When God told him he should have a son by Sarah, though he was a hundred years old, and Sarah ninety, he believed God, "staggered not at the promise." And when God bade him offer up his Isaac, the fruit of the promise, he went about it in obedience to the command. So that his faith was a very

strong faith. Now for this Abraham was a special favourite of Heaven. "I know," said God, "that thou fearest me." "In blessing I will bless thee." And he called him "Abraham." In all that truly love Christ there is a faith like this. A faith to enable us to leave all near and dear relations to follow God wherever he calls us. To "hope against hope." To be willing to sacrifice our dear Isaacs. All that love Christ have true faith, and do something of these; but not all to a like degree.

Those that are most active for God and for His glory, in the place where He hath set them, Christ loves with a special love. Those who are thus active are like Him. When he was upon earth He "went about doing good." Magistrates, ministers should "shine." We may be active in our place, though we are but in a narrow sphere. The Lord Jesus will love them that love Him, and are careful to manifest that love, by doing what they can for His glory. "Give all diligence" in doing this. "Be stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord." "Add" grace to grace: faith to faith: that you may lean on the breast of Christ. "Them that honour me I will honour."

He loves them that keep their integrity in times of general apostasy: that will not suffer themselves to be carried down the stream with others. These Jesus Christ hath a special care for. Caleb and Joshua brought in a true verdict of the promised land when the rest of the spies brought an ill report. And God honoured them. They were famous in their generation and entered into Canaan. Whereas the carcasses of the rest fell "in the wilderness." In Ezekiel 14 mention is made of three famous men – Noah, Daniel, and Job - who were most likely to prevail with God. These kept their integrity in times of apostasy, and God remembered it long after. "The priests the Levites, the sons of Zadok, that kept the charge of my sanctuary when the children of Israel went astray from me, they shall come near to me to minister unto me, and they shall stand before me to offer unto me the fat and the blood, saith the Lord God." If we would have an interest in Christ's special love we must hold fast our integrity in times of apostasy.

He loves them specially who carry themselves aright under sufferings. Sufferings from God: in the estate – losses, crosses, disappointments; in the family – sickness, death of friends. Now, how do we carry it under these? Do

we murmur and repine, and “charge God foolishly?” Or do we keep close to him, and carry it submissively towards Him? Afflictions are called trials.

They try what metal we are made of. Job, though greatly afflicted, carried it bravely. "The Lord gave, the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." God puts a mark of honour upon him. He makes his boast of him: "Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man?" He was not perfect in patience, yet God accepted him, because his patience did prevail. When we are called to bear our testimony in bonds and imprisonments, perhaps unto death, God will especially love and honour them that suffer aright for Him: "I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr." Not that the sufferings themselves endear us to Christ, but our gracious carriage under them: our rejoicing under them.

He has a special love for those that are good betimes: for young converts. They shall lie in Christ's bosom. Some think that was the reason of his special love to John. He was by far the youngest of the disciples. "Those that seek me early shall find me." "Thus saith the Lord God, I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals." "All Israel shall mourn for him (the child of Jeroboam), and bury him: for he only of Jeroboam shall come to the grave, because in him there is found some good thing toward the Lord God of Israel in the house of Jeroboam." So King Josiah began betimes in religious ways. You that are young, if you will lie in the bosom of Christ set yourselves to seek and serve Him. Those that are good when young, break through extraordinary difficulties and hindrances. Usually such are very good: because then their spirits are lively, and vigorous, and active. "Remember," then, "your Creator in the days of your youth," and you shall lie in Christ's bosom.

The Lord Jesus Christ hath a special love for old disciples: such as began young, and continue until old: "He taught me from my youth." Mnason was "an old disciple." David pleads with God – "Now when I am old and greyheaded, forsake me not."

What special tokens of love shall such as these have from the Lord Jesus? Or, what is it to lean on Christ's breast, to lie in his bosom?

1. *He will admit them into His nearest communion.* They shall be dandled on His knee. Peter, James, and John were the most intimate associates of the Lord Jesus, above the rest of the twelve. Three times we find them admitted when none else were: - To see the ruler's daughter raised; when He was transfigured in the mount; at His agony in the garden. The second admission was to fit them for the last. First they saw his glory. Then his suffering. Such are admitted into His "banqueting house:" they taste the sweetmeats. And what that is none know but those who have tasted. To the "carnal" world these are riddles and mysteries. Have not your hearts sometimes "burned within" you, so that your souls have been like "the chariots of Amminadib?" Why, that is a mark of special favour.

2. *He will acquaint them with His secrets.* Some of His secrets are with all them that fear him, Psalm 25:14. The secrets of his "covenant." But then there are the secrets of his providence. What the Lord doeth, he reveals to his servants the prophets: "Shall I hide from Abraham the thing that I do?" Christ tells John, the beloved disciple, who should betray him. The bosom is the place of the secrets. The way to know things to come is not to study the stars, but to have our "conversation in heaven."

3. *They shall have audience to their prayers.* He will hear their prayers. Noah, Daniel, and Job were all famous for prayer. God heard them: "Go to my servant Job: him will I accept." When Abraham interceded for Sodom, God granted his request, as long as he asked. Abraham left off first.

4. *They shall have additions of grace:* "To him that hath shall be given." He that hath faith, to him more faith shall be given: "There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth: and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty." He that hath the grace of prayer, and uses it, shall have more. As in worldly riches the way to increase them is to lay them out, and trade with them; so grace, the more it is employed the more it is improved. John, the "beloved disciple," was full of love. He was a man made up of love, as appears by his

epistles. Love is the burden in every chapter. And how came he to be so full of it? By lying on the breast of Christ, the fountain of love.

5. *They shall have more abundant consolation.* The Spirit of God, wherever He is, is a "Comforter." But not always alike so. Christ's favourites shall have "strong consolation:" "Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord"; see Matthew 25. Present joy in this life. None know the sweetness of the "testimony of a good conscience" but those that experience it. It is our Master's "joy."

6. *They many times have signal tokens of the love of Christ at death.* Sometimes in respect of the season of it, when their lives are lengthened to a "good old age." Then they are gathered "as a shock of corn in its season." This was so with Caleb, Joshua, and Moses. Sometimes He takes them away immediately before a storm. There are many instances of that. Augustine died immediately before the city, where he was, was taken. Luther just before the wars in Germany broke out. Sometimes in the circumstances of their death. They die easily, with less sickness and pain than others. Moses died at the word (Hebrew - at the mouth) of the Lord.

7. *They shall have higher degrees in glory:* "One star differeth from another." They that lie in Christ's bosom here shall lie there for ever.

8. *They shall receive marks of honour on their posterity.* David's kindness to Mephibosheth is called the kindness of God, because it is God's unusual way to be kind to His people's posterity. He blessed the posterity of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, for their sakes. I believe many are now blessed for the sake of godly ancestors.