

CONTENTS

The Doctrine of the Cross	2
Fellowship News	5
Brief Observations on Scriptural Subjects (Pt. 2)	7
Gratitude	16
Saving Faith	17
A Sure and Certain Hope	17
Testimony	17
Jacob's Vision Fulfilled in Christ	18
Christ Reformed His Church	19
The Conversion of the Jews	22
Epilogue	28

THE DOCTRINE OF THE CROSS

Malcolm H. Watts

Scripture teaches that there is significance about the way our Lord Jesus Christ died. His death by crucifixion fulfilled a number of Old Testament prophecies and types (e.g. Ps. 22:16; Zech. 12:10; Gen. 22:6; Num. 21:8). In this article we ask the question: Why did our Saviour die on a cross?

The origin of sin must be traced to Adam's offence in taking fruit from a forbidden tree. Somehow it seems strangely fitting that Christ, the last Adam, should deal with sin by means of a tree. The Bible says, 'his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree' (1 Pet. 2:24). Augustine, in one of his sermons, comments: 'As we have been made dead by a Tree, so have we been made alive by a Tree; a Tree discovered to us our nakedness, and a Tree covered us with the leaves of mercy'.

According to the Bible's doctrine, sin has completely destroyed the harmony which once existed between man and God. When man sinned he became alienated from God and subject to his wrath. There was therefore a need for someone to intervene between the two parties at variance and to reconcile them. Now the biblical word for such a person is 'mediator', which literally means 'middleman'. 'There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus' (1 Tim. 2:5). In his death, the Lord Jesus stood between the offended God and the offending sinner, making full satisfaction to divine justice by his suffering and death.

The cross - with its foot on earth and its top directed towards heaven - seems to symbolize the connecting link between them both. 'So seems my Saviour's cross to me, a ladder up to heaven'.

Christ's work on that cross is described as a 'sacrifice' for the sins of men. By this we mean that Christ offered his life to divine justice in order that guilty sinners might be saved. This sacrifice was wonderfully illustrated and exhibited in the vicarious sacrifices of Old Testament times. God intended that they should foreshadow our Lord's atoning work. One of them, the lamb of the

Passover, is specially important in this respect. 'Christ our passover is sacrificed for us' (1 Cor. 5:7).

We quote here an interesting footnote in Dr Farrar's 'Life of Christ': 'It is a striking circumstance that the body of the Paschal lamb was literally crucified on two transverse spits. I witnessed the Samaritan Passover on the summit of Mount Gerezim in 1870, and the bodies of the seven lambs as they were prepared for roasting looked exactly as though they were laid on seven crosses'.

So, Christ became the sin-bearer. Significantly, he suffered that particular death which the law had associated with the infliction of the curse: 'He that is hanged is accursed of God' (Deut. 21:23 cf. 27:26).

And by undergoing the curse on our behalf, he has liberated us from it. 'Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is everyone that hangeth on a tree' (Gal. 3:13).

Why was death by hanging regarded as so terrible? The criminal, in public disgrace, was lifted up between heaven and earth as if rejected and abandoned by both. 'Jesus cried - My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?' (Matt. 27:46).

The early Christians loved to meditate upon the cross and delve into its spiritual mysteries. Among other things, they noticed that it extended four ways as if it had reference to north, south, east, and west.

It was a most interesting observation, for we know that the precious blood of Christ avails, not just for a few in one place, but for elect men and women the world over. We have been redeemed 'out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation' (Rev. 5:9); and it is this vast company of redeemed souls which will one day gather together in the heavenly kingdom. 'They shall come', said our Lord, 'from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God' (Lk. 13:29).

Observe too that, lifted up on his cross, Christ was exhibited to multitudes of men and women. According to Luke's Gospel, 'all the people...came together to that sight' (Lk. 23:48). Of course, this was all part of the divine arrangement, intimating that Christ was to be set forth and freely offered in gospel preaching, so that sinners everywhere may 'look' to him for salvation (Isa. 45:22; Zech. 12:10; Jn. 1:29).

In one of the ancient prophecies we actually hear Christ speaking of his long-continued offers of grace, and saying: 'I have spread out my hands all the day unto a rebellious people' (Isa. 65:2 cf. Rom. 10:21). Matthew Henry, with his characteristic spiritual perception, says: 'When Christ was crucified, his hands were spread out and stretched forth, as if he were preparing to receive returning sinners unto his bosom; and this "all the day", all the gospel day'. The cross is preaching to all; and the text of its sermon is: 'This man receiveth sinners' (Lk. 15:2).

So what is the good news of the gospel? It is that God grants a free pardon to every believer. The cross is a striking revelation of that. God's Law had become for all of us like one enormous bill informing us of the extent of our terrible debt; but the Lord Jesus met those legal demands on behalf of his people and all who believe can rejoice that their bill has been fully paid. Now here is something worth noting; the ancient way of cancelling a bond was by driving a nail through it and fixing it to a post.

What Christ did was to take to himself our liabilities which were then nailed with him to the cross. This was God's way of saying that the account had been settled. 'Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us... (he) took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross' (Col. 2:14).

Take another look at the cross. People present at Calvary saw it raised up and it must have appeared to them as some kind of standard. The Gospels tell us of some, like the centurion, who enlisted under that blood-stained banner (Matt 27:54). And still today, the once crucified but now glorified Redeemer presents himself to the whole world, that sinners may give themselves up to him and serve him to the end of their lives. 'In that day', Isaiah promises, 'there shall be

a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glorious' (Isa. 11:10 cf. Lk. 1:70-75).

Finally, observe how the cross has a judicial significance. On the upright was a projecting peg (sedile) upon which Christ would have been able to sit, perhaps for a few brief moments. Its purpose was to prevent the weight of the body from tearing the hands. But when elevated above the people, the cross bore a resemblance to a seat, and Christ, sitting upon it, appeared like a Judge at a solemn Tribunal, settling the destinies of men.

Was there ever such an awe-inspiring scene? On the one side of Him was a thief who had come to faith. He was acquitted. But on the other side was a thief who, in unbelief, rejected Christ. He was condemned.

A little while before His death, Christ had said that this was how it was going to be. These were His words: "The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified...Now is the judgment of this world..." (Jn. 12:23,31).

It is still true.

If, when Christ and His cross are preached, you resolutely refuse to believe in Him, sentence will be passed against you. If, on the other hand, you receive Him as your Saviour, you will be absolved and declared right with God. "He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God" (Jn. 3:18).

FELLOWSHIP NEWS

We joined with Nathan and Esther D in giving thanks to God for the safe arrival of a precious new baby son on 16 September. This has been an eventful time for the family. We prayerfully commend them to God's loving care as they adapt to their new routine and pray that they will know God's presence and enabling grace throughout the coming days.

Our dear friend, and oldest serving member of our church, Janet B, has recently moved to a care-home in Taunton in order to be near to her daughter, Debbie. For the past 18 months, Janet has been in care at Holmwood House in Salisbury, and managed, until lockdown, to attend the morning services fairly regularly, kindly assisted by Colin and Vicky M. She loved to hear God's Word and spent much time in prayer for many people. She will be greatly missed but we know she is in God's providential care, and we pray that she will know much blessing and happiness in her new location.

During the months of lockdown, our youth leaders have worked hard to keep in touch via the internet, with all our young people. Early in October, a cautious move was made to commence meeting in the church for Friday activities and Lord's Day gatherings, with the Junior and Senior Endeavourers meeting on alternate weeks. The Sunday School also met in Grove House on 18 October for the first time since lockdown. Attendance numbers have naturally been greatly affected by the safety measures we were advised to follow, but we are thankful for those who returned in October. We trust God for the future of the youth ministry, knowing that the work is his and all things are under his sovereign control. We look to him for wisdom as we face an uncertain few months this winter.

Sadly, due to present circumstances, we are still prevented from holding the Friday morning Parent and Toddler sessions, and we greatly miss this contact with the mums and carers and all the little ones. At the other end of the age spectrum, we have been unable to hold monthly services at two care homes: Milford House and Gracewell. We are praying that these opportunities for making known the gospel will soon be returned to us, in the Lord's timing.

We are thankful that, in Lockdown 2, we can continue with live-streaming for the Lord's Day morning and evening services, as well as for our mid-week meetings.

We were pleased to welcome our good friend Rev John Thackway from Holywell Evangelical Church on the Lord's Day 11 October, who ministered in the sanctuary in the morning and then online for the evening service.

*“We have thought of thy lovingkindness, O God, in the midst of thy temple.”
Psalm 47:9*

HINTS TO YOUNG PREACHERS, BEING BRIEF OBSERVATIONS ON SCRIPTURAL SUBJECTS

PART 2

“Christ [it is said] tasted death for every man”

“That He by the grace of God should taste death for every man” (Heb. 2:9). “*Man*” is not in the original. The word “every” may have reference to the “sons” of God spoken in the next verse. This passage cannot, therefore, with critical accuracy, be adduced to support the broad aspect of the Atonement. (Some expositors understand the passage in a general sense as applying to “every” *thing* that will be brought under the power of redemption in “the world to come,” which is spoken of in verse 5.)

The Blood of Christ

It is sometimes said, with the view of enhancing its value, that one drop of Christ’s blood would be sufficient to atone for all our sins. This is an erroneous idea, wholly inconsistent with the truth. If a drop were sufficient, Christ need not have died; but *death* is essential for atonement. *Death* was the penalty pronounced on sin, and therefore life must be surrendered, or the blood shed, which is an equivalent expression (Lev. 17: 11).

It is important, in preaching the Gospel, to show that salvation by the blood, to which rationalism is opposed, is not an arbitrary arrangement on the part of God. (See Observations on Atonement) “The life... is in the blood” (Lev. 17:11).

Atonement and Forgiveness

An atonement sufficient to cancel all the sins of all the sinners in the world – or, might we not say, in a thousand worlds – was made on Calvary, because the sacrifice offered there was of *infinite* value. No sins can ever be forgiven but on the ground of that sacrifice; and all sins that ever were or will be forgiven,

were there atoned for. (However, this was not the *design* of the atonement and atonement is not forgiveness.)

“Christ died to reconcile God”

The correctness of this form of expression may well be questioned. It implies that the heart of God had been alienated and estranged from man, while, on the contrary, such was the tenderness and fulness of His compassions, that He gave His Son to die for sinners. The Gospel is the outflow of the love of God towards our ruined world. “*God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself*” (2 Cor.5:19). God, therefore, is the great Reconciler, and He beseeches sinners to be reconciled to Himself. To speak of God as our reconciled *Father*, seems still more objectionable, as if God, though revealing Himself as a *Father* in the fulness of His grace, needed to be reconciled.

If His people fall into sin, there must be penitence and confession of sin, before there is forgiveness and restored communion with God.

Christ’s Active and Passive Obedience

It is often said that Christ, as our Substitute, fulfilled the requirements of the law for us in *His life* in like manner as He endured the curse of the law for us in *His death*. (But due care must be taken when teaching this). He endured the curse for us in His death that we might be exonerated from bearing it. But He did not obey for us in His life that we might be exonerated from obedience. Such a doctrine would lead to Antinomianism.

The death of Christ is expiatory; it satisfies justice; it cancels guilt; it blots out sin. But the benefit of Christ’s work for us is not merely negative; it is gloriously positive. In our standing before God as accepted *in Him*, all the benefit of His obedience are ours. And what was that obedience? Divinely beautiful in God’s sight – exquisitely lovely – so that, as *one with Him*, we are arrayed with all the excellency of His person, and all the loveliness and beauty of His perfect life.

Scripture presents the obedience of Christ as *one* – one obedience “*unto death*,” death being “viewed as the acme of His obedience”. It also presents His righteousness as *one* – (see Rom. 5:18, margin) - one accomplished righteousness, finished on the Cross.

Faith

Faith is sometimes spoken of and insisted on as if it were a virtue or grace, which is to be obtained by striving or seeking; whereas faith, to be exercised, must have an object, and without an object it can have no existence. Faith is spoken of in Scripture in three aspects – in relation to testimony, to persons, and to things. Faith in *testimony* is receiving as true that which is spoken or written. Faith in a *person* is confidence in that person because of what he is, and of what he has done, and is willing and able to do. Faith in a *thing* or *object* is trust in it – assurance of its value or efficacy for a certain purpose.

Salvation

The word *salvation* in Scripture has different significations:-

- (1) When the sinner believes on the Lord Jesus Christ as his Saviour, he is justified before God as the holy and righteous Judge, he is saved from the punishment of sin, and receives the salvation of his soul. (“Salvation is to the Christian, not a future, but a past thing, realised in present by faith.” Eph. 2:8; 1 Pet. 1:9.)
- (2) Thus pardoned and accepted in Christ, he is “kept by the power of God through faith,” amidst the varied dangers, trials, and enemies which beset him while passing through the world. (See Rom. 5:10; Eph. 5:23; Phil. 1:19; Heb. 7:25.)
- (3) But his “salvation” is not absolutely perfected until soul and body are reunited in resurrection glory (Heb. 9:28), when the body shall be delivered from the power of the grave, and the believer will be introduced into the kingdom prepared for him. Thus, glorification is the consummation of “salvation,” commenced when we believe.

These three aspects of salvation may be briefly described as deliverance from the *penalty*, from the *power*, and from the *presence* of sin.

“Salvation a finished work”

The words, “It is *finished*” (John 19:30) are sometimes misapplied. In relation to them it is said “Salvation is a finished work.” This is incorrect. The work of atonement on which *salvation* is based was finished upon the Cross; but salvation is the result of the work of Christ and of the Holy Spirit. The heart

must be brought under the power of the Spirit to enable it to receive the Christ as the Saviour.

Justification

Justification means accounting as just or righteous before God. It includes remission of sins and imputation of righteousness. It is spoken of in the New Testament in four different aspects:-

(1) We are justified *judicially* by God; (Rom. 8:33.) (2) *meritoriously*, by Christ; (Rom. 5:9; Gal. 2:16.) (3) *instrumentally*, by faith; (Rom. 5:1; Gal. 3:8.) and (4) *evidentially*, by works. (James 2:24)

Sanctification

Sanctification, in its primary meaning, does not refer to intrinsic qualities, but to *relationship to God*. It means a separating, or setting apart, unto Him. Thus, a day, a mountain, an altar, or a beast, in which there is no moral quality, is said to be sanctified, set apart, or holy unto the Lord; and thus the believer is "sanctified in Christ Jesus" (1 Cor. 1: 2). He is "sanctified through the offering of the body of Christ once for all" (Heb. 10:10). He is said also to be "sanctified by God the Father" (Jude 1). He belongs to God, and is set apart unto Him, and to His service. Thus, also, the Lord Jesus who was essentially holy, and could not be more so, says, "For their sakes I *sanctify* Myself."

(2.) But there is also a sanctification *by the Spirit*. It is the office of the Spirit of God, through the Word, or the truth, to effect an internal change in the believer corresponding to his relationship. Being in his position holy unto God, he is to be *made holy* in his affections, his character, and in all his ways.

In the *former* sense, every true Christian is a *saint*, and as really a saint the day he believes and is born of God, as at the close of his life. His sanctification is perfect, because it is consequent upon the application of the blood of Christ. But, in the *latter* sense, sanctification is *progressive*, and is incomplete while we are in the body; for "if we say we have no sin" (and therefore do not need the cleansing of the blood), "we deceive ourselves, and truth is not in us." If we are satisfied with our attainments in holiness, it proves that we have a low

estimate of sin, and of the infinite holiness of God, any inconsistency with which is of “the nature of sin.”

The Lord Jesus is God’s standard of holiness, and our great Exemplar. The holiest man on earth should humble himself before God, seeing that he falls short of perfect likeness to Him.

These two aspects of sanctification by *Christ* and by the *Spirit* were typified under the Levitical economy by the application of the blood and the oil (see Ex. 29:21; and Lev. 14:14, 15).

Pardon and Justification

Pardon and justification are to be distinguished. *Pardon*, blessed as it is, signifies merely forgiveness, or remission of a penalty. The essence of pardon is forgiveness without righteousness. It falls far short as a full expression of God’s grace. *Justification* is much more. A culprit might be pardoned, and yet dismissed as one still guilty of the crime laid to his charge; but a justified person is one who is not only pardoned, but one who is regarded and treated as *positively righteous*. Christ is to us “The LORD our Righteousness” (Jer.23:6), and we are said to be “made the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor. 5:21).

Regeneration and Conversion

They are distinct and different though allied. *Regeneration* is the impartation of *Divine* life to a soul spiritually dead. It is a quickening into life by the power of the Holy Ghost. *Conversion* is the result of this quickening. It is the *outward* and *moral* manifestation of this great spiritual inward change. But those who are regenerated, it should be observed, are not merely quickened by the Spirit or born of the Spirit, which some rationalists admit, but they are “quickened *together with Christ*” (“God vivified us together with Christ; in the one act and fact of His resurrection He raised all His people to spiritual life.”) (Eph. 2:5); and thus, by the Spirit, are brought *into union with Him* as risen from the dead, Christ being the life, the new “eternal life,” which is received when the sinner believes. This essential characteristic of regeneration is too commonly overlooked.

Repentance

Repentance is a word about which there is great confusion of ideas. The etymological significance of the Greek word translated *repentance* is simply a *change of mind*; but repentance, in its Scriptural acceptance, is not to be confined to a mere intellectual operation; nor, on the other hand, to sorrow for sin, which may be produced without any gracious influence, by the experience of the present bitter consequences of sin, or by the dread of future punishment.

Repentance is a relative term, and may be, according to its character for the better or for the worse. Judas repented, (the Greek word used here is from a different root.) and “went and hanged himself.” Every internal movement bearing that name must be a mere emotion of nature, unless accompanied by the power of the Spirit, and by faith in Divine testimony.

Evangelical repentance involves such a change of mind in relation to God, to Christ, and to sin, as affects the whole moral being – the whole character and life. Sorrow for sin, or penitence, is the natural and necessary accompaniment of repentance; but it is a very inadequate definition of it, and, it may be added, an incorrect one, as we may learn from the 2nd chapter of Acts, where the multitude were in the deepest distress on account of their sin, and yet Peter called on them to “*repent*.” (Repentance is not a moral agony that a man works in himself, in order that he may qualify himself for the Divine mercy, or entitle himself to it; repentance is a change in a man’s mind concerning the character of his God.” – *Dr McNeile, Dean of Ripon.*)

Repentance is obviously not identical with conviction of sin, although conviction of sin is implied in it, for a man may be convicted of sin and yet continue in his sinful course, and still further harden his heart.

It is to be feared that incorrect views on the subject of repentance may sometimes lead to its disparagement, and to superficial preaching of the Gospel, so that the desired results are not seen to follow, for where there is no awakening of the conscience – no conviction of sin and sense of danger – the gracious invitations of the Gospel are listened to with unconcern.

Faith and Feelings

Feelings are not faith. We are saved by *faith*, not by *feelings*; but there is no true faith without feelings. We cannot have faith in the Saviour, without feeling our need of Him. A person may *feel* safe and happy, but it may be a false security. He might be, at the time, on the brink of Hell. There are many whose faith is genuine, but whose knowledge of God's grace and Word is very defective, and who, therefore, have not abiding peace with God; but if we have true and intelligent faith, we cannot but feel safe and happy.

Faith and Works – Justification and Sanctification

They are to be carefully distinguished, but not to be separated. They are inseparable. Let our motto be: "No holiness, no faith." We are justified by *faith alone* -- but not only by the *faith which is alone*. Works have no more to do with our *justification before God, as the procuring cause*, than they have to do with the creation of the world; but any faith that does not work by love, and produce good works, is a delusion. Salvation is of grace, through faith, but works are the fruit and evidence of faith.

“What must I do to be saved?”

In answer to this question, it should never be said *absolutely*, "You have nothing to do." Sinners have to believe, to repent, to trust, to accept. But it is not by *doing* we are to be saved, but by believing what *has been done for us*. In being saved, we are created anew unto good works.

“Make your peace with God.”

No sinner can make peace with God, except in the sense of acknowledging his guilt and accepting pardon. Peace has been made for us through the blood of the Cross. (Col. 1:20.)

“Believe that you are forgiven, and you are forgiven”

This is a great and mischievous error, leading to self-deception and final ruin. Saving faith is not believing that you are saved, but believing on the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by His death, has made atonement for sin.

Final Perseverance

Final Perseverance and *Final Preservation* are the two sides of one truth, which rests upon the faithfulness of God.

Many true Christians are discouraged and inclined to doubt, by looking too much into themselves, and dwelling on their own weakness. God would have his people to rest in peace on His unfailing promises. He would have them to learn that they cannot have too much confidence in *Himself*, or too little in *themselves*. He warns the self-confident against presumption, and exhorts them to be watchful unto prayer, whilst He would “comfort the feeble-minded.” With the assurance that they are “preserved in Jesus Christ” (Jude 1), and “kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation” (1 Pet. 1:5).

Crucify and Mortify

The difference between them is to be observed. The believer, by reason of his identification with Christ, is regarded as having *been crucified* with Him, (See Gal. 2:20. Literally, “*I have been crucified with Christ.*”) and, on that ground, he is exhorted to *mortify*, or *put to death*, every evil affection.

Obedience

Christian obedience is not mere subjection to the moral precepts of the law or refraining from what is positively forbidden. The Lord Jesus Christ, in His mediatorial character, has brought us into the same relationship to God as Himself. We are made one with Him (John 17:21). We are quickened together with Him (Eph. 2:5) as sons of God, and have received the Spirit of sonship (Gal. 4:6). The filial relationship being thus established and enjoyed, *love*, and not *law*, becomes the spring of obedience. The language of the heart then is no longer, as before conversion, “What harm is this or that? It is not forbidden;” but “What can I do to please God my Father?” Thus, “What would the Lord have me to do?” becomes the actuating principle every hour of the day, and in every engagement of life (1 Cor. 10:31). This, and nothing less than this, is practical Christianity, according to the New Testament. Such was the obedience of Christ. “*He pleased not Himself*” (Rom. 15:3). And He is our example. Any lower standard – is it not *disobedience* and *unfaithfulness* to God?

Perfection

This word has various significations in Scripture and in ordinary discourse. It is used absolutely and relatively:

- (1) It is used absolutely to express a condition of sinlessness or perfect fulfilment of God's law and will, as was the case with the Lord Jesus.
- (2) It is used to express blamelessness before men, as to moral conduct and outward life, as in the case of Job (Job.1:8). Again, "Mark the perfect man," &c. (Ps. 37:37).
- (3) Perfection in the case of Abraham (see Gen. 17:1) appears to refer to full reliance upon God in faith.
- (4) Perfection is also used to express maturity, full age, or full stature (1 Cor. 2:6; Phil. 3:15).
- (5) In Matt. 5:48, it is written, "*Be ye therefore perfect,*" &c. Here it is perfection in the manifestation of *grace*, according to the pattern of God's grace, which is enjoined.
- (6) In 2 Cor. 13:11, "*Be perfect,*" means, Be completely united, by being knit together as members of the same body, or by being of the same mind. Thus in 1 Cor.1:10 the same Greek word is rendered "*perfectly joined together*" (in the same mind). This is its signification also in Heb.13:21, and 1 Pet. 5:10. In Luke 6:40, Dean Alford translates it "fully instructed".
- (7) In Heb. 10:14, we read, "*By one offering He hath perfected for ever,*" &c. Here perfection is the work of the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by His sacrificial and substitutional death, puts His people into a condition of righteousness and spotlessness before God. All sin having been put away by His precious blood, we are made perfect in *Christ*. His acceptability with God (blessed truth!) is the measure of our acceptance. But while making our "joyful boast" (This is the force of the word "rejoice" in Rom. v, 2 and Phil. 3:3) *in Him*, we are never to be satisfied with our own attainments in personal and practical holiness. An abiding sense of *imperfection* in attainment, must be an essential element of *perfection* in experience, if such an expression may be *relatively* used.

Salvation and Rewards

Salvation is God's free gift to the sinner who believes in Christ as his Saviour. *Reward* is God's acknowledgement of the services of his saints. Salvation is of *grace by faith*, but reward is according to *work*.

The sinner is justified freely by God's grace, through faith in Christ Jesus. The believer will be rewarded in the kingdom of Christ according to his works.

Confession of Sin

"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive our sins" (1 Jn 1:9). Confession of sins by the believer should be made in the remembrance of the satisfaction for sin which Christ has rendered to God, and of God's willingness to forgive.

According to Heb. 10:14, by the application of the blood of Christ the believer is "perfected for ever" from the damnatory guilt and pollution of sin, that question having been for ever settled at the Cross between Christ and God as a *Judge*; but our own sensitiveness, as children of God, requires the confession of our sins and the seeking of pardon, by which communion with God our Father, interrupted by failure, is restored.

C. Russell Hurditch in Footsteps of Truth
[Edited - MHW]

GRATITUDE

"No doubt", said John Brown of Haddington, "I have met with trials as well as others: yet so kind has God been to me, that I think, if He were to give me as many years as I have already lived in the world, I would not desire one single circumstance in my lot changed, except that I wish I had less sin. It might be written on my coffin: "Here lies one of the cares of providence, who early wanted both father and mother, and yet never missed them."

SAVING FAITH

The Countess of Huntingdon was walking in her garden one day near to where a workman was repairing part of the garden wall. She spoke to the man about his soul, but the word seemed to have little effect. Years after, while speaking to another workman, she said, “Thomas, I fear you have not yet looked to Christ for salvation.” “Your ladyship is mistaken,” replied the workman, “I have looked, and I am saved.” “How did it happen?” inquired the countess. “It was while you were speaking to James, my fellow-workman, when we were repairing the garden wall.” “How did you hear?” “I was on the other side and heard your words through a hole in the wall.” “Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.” (Romans 10:17).

A SURE AND CERTAIN HOPE

Queen Victoria was approached by an octogenarian, one of her friends near Balmoral: “May I ask your Majesty a question?” “Certainly.” “Will your Majesty meet me in the Paradise above?” The Queen answered, “Yes, by the grace of God and the all-atoning Blood of Christ, I’ll meet you there.” We feel assured that both are now members of the Heavenly Choir singing the “New Song” (Rev. 5: 9).

TESTIMONY

Dr John Conder. On his tomb in Bunhill Fields, in the City of London, is this inscription in separate lines: “I HAVE SINNED – I HAVE TRUSTED – I HAVE REPENTED – I HAVE LOVED – I REST – I SHALL RISE – AND THROUGH THE GRACE OF CHRIST, HOWEVER UNWORTHY – I SHALL REIGN.” “He which raised up Jesus shall raise up us also” (2 Cor. 4.14).

JACOB'S VISION OF A LADDER, FULFILLED IN THE LORD JESUS CHRIST

(Genesis 28:10-19; John 1:51)

To the north of Scotland lies an island called Bressay. It is one of the Shetland Islands, and its shores are very rocky. On the south coast of Bressay is a slate-quarry. The workmen had to descend the cliff to it by means of a ladder. One evening a violent and sudden storm drove the quarrymen from their work. The ladder was left fastened to the cliff.

The night was very dark and stormy. A ship which was struggling with the waves was driven close to the island. Her crew beheld with terror the white foam of the breakers as they dashed against the rocks. They knew that, if the ship were stranded, they must be wrecked. Still the howling winds drove her forward. The waves dashed over her, filled the cabin with water, and drowned the wife of the captain. The sailors now climbed into the rigging. They were at the mercy of the furious wind and of the raging sea. They gave themselves up for lost. Many prayers and cries for deliverance were uttered. On came the ship and struck against the shore. The poor seamen felt that death was almost certain. On the summit of the cliff was safety; but how could they reach it, who were helplessly dashed at its foot?

Just as the ship struck near the rock, their terror was changed to joy. Close beside them on the steep face of the cliff, was the ladder. It seemed as if it had been placed there on purpose for them. In haste, they sprang from the rigging, mounted the ladder, and reached the top of the cliff in safety. The vessel broke into pieces, so quickly that, by next morning, hardly a trace of her was left.

The ladder is a beautiful picture of Christ. In His deity, He touched heaven; In His humanity, He touched earth; and he joined earth to heaven, by reconciling man to God. Sinners can approach God through Him. Heaven is now open, and all may draw near. Acknowledge Christ as the sole Mediator, and lay hold of Him and His merits, by the hand of faith; and rise from the depths of sin and despair and reach the heights of pardon, peace with God, and everlasting life

in the kingdom of heaven. “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved” (Acts 16:31).

CHRIST REFORMS HIS CHURCH

It’s good to appreciate the history of the Reformation and what it recovered. But we would be mistaken in thinking this is merely a past event. The best way to appreciate what it achieved is by being committed to reformation in the present. Reformation means making the Word of God the only rule and principle in matters of religion. Wherever this is not faithfully applied in principle and practice, the Church needs reforming. At the Reformation, John Calvin explained that there were two great areas in which the Church needed reforming. Firstly, “the mode in which God is duly worshipped; and, secondly, the source from which salvation is to be obtained”. He emphasised the importance of worship because it is the goal of salvation. This is also one of Christ’s key priorities in reforming His Church. It includes the spirit in which we offer that worship as well as what we offer.

The Reformations under Hezekiah, Jehoshaphat and Josiah were marked by a return to biblical worship and a zeal against idolatry. These biblical histories also show us the challenges of such a work. Calvin was well aware of the difficulty involved in this work of reformation. “I know how difficult it is to persuade the world that God disapproves of all modes of worship not expressly sanctioned by His Word”. Yet it is ultimately a work that Christ undertakes for His own glory in using those who serve Him in this. Christ must be as a refiner’s fire to purge the Church’s dross (Malachi 3:2). He purges His people, His public worship and ministers so that their worship may be pure and acceptable, all things being restored to their integrity (Malachi 3:3-4). In this updated extract, George Hutcheson helps us to understand how this prophecy of Christ applies today, even to the purest of churches. Reading it should bring us to pray that Christ will do this work, however hard it may be.

1. CHRIST’S REFORMING IS VERY TRYING

Christ’s coming to His Church in the ministry of His gospel and to carry on a reformation, makes such a time prove very winnowing. “Who may abide? who

shall stand?” (Malachi 3:2). It is a trying time and therefore it is hard to endure, so that it is a wonder to see any get through it. It is no wonder when we consider the many hypocrites in his Church, and the great hypocrisy and dross of His saints which He cannot endure.

Great vicissitudes and shakings often accompany a time of reformation; many errors and delusions usually prevail then. The ministry of the gospel is effective in exposing sin but if people do not amend their ways, they become worse. The respectable become godless, the formalists become careless, and the ungodly become rebellious. How speedily may a people under the gospel fill up the measure of their sin and become ripe for many judgments. It is for these reasons that Christ’s coming is declared to be such a terrifying day; “Who may abide? who shall stand?”

2. CHRIST’S REFORMING REMOVES THE CHURCH’S DROSS

There is not only much unsoundness in Christ’s Church but it is also difficult to discern until Christ exposes it. It is then seen to cleave so closely that it is difficult to remove. No less than “a refiner’s fire, and fuller’s soap”, can either reveal or remove this dross in the metal and filth in the cloth. Only Christ’s fan can reveal the chaff and take it away. Christ has sufficient power to purge His Church and reach the dross. He is so zealous that He will not spare at all. He will either consume everything together or separate the dross. For “He is as a refiner’s fire, and like fuller’s soap”.

3. CHRIST’S REFORMING IS NEEDED BY THE PUREST CHURCH

The purest Church of Christ is so ready to contract pollution within time, that purging is necessary. God’s chosen people who are not to be destroyed need purging because they have much dross. However hot the furnace may be it is their comfort and purging that He intends. He is a refiner to His Church and He will purify it.

4. CHRIST’S REFORMING IS FOR THE CHURCH’S GOOD

Christ’s purging His Church, by His Word, Spirit and rod, speaks of His love and a purpose of much good. He sits at it as a task on which His heart is set. He “purifies as gold and silver”; precious metals refined for honourable use. Thus, the godly must submit to His way of purging in its duration, even though

He sits at it as a work that is not soon finished. They must submit to the degree of purging as silver and gold in the fire, knowing that He sits at the furnace. He will make it apparent that His refining is not with silver in relation to the heat and extremity of the trial (Isaiah 48:10).

5. CHRIST'S REFORMING PURIFIES THE CHURCH'S WORSHIP

Pure ordinances and "an offering in righteousness" (according to the rule of Jesus Christ and through His righteousness) are a special mercy for Christ's Church. The mercy is completed when it is joined with personal reformation; when there are purified Levites and "an offering in righteousness". It is personal renewal and reconciliation that enables people to engage in pure service; right service must begin there. "He shall purify the sons of Levi, that they may offer an offering in righteousness".

We are not to please ourselves as to what we do in service to God unless He has declared He will accept it. Thus, the only way of acceptable worship is through Christ. When He takes any in His hand and brings them out of their polluted condition, He makes them and their service (in itself abominable) well-pleasing through Him. When He comes and purifies His people, "then shall the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto the Lord".

6. CHRIST'S REFORMING PURIFIES THE CHURCH'S MINISTERS

Christ's coming under the gospel does not tend towards the destruction of a ministry, though indeed they often need to be purged. "He shall purify the sons of Levi". A holy ministry is a special blessing to the Church for keeping ordinances pure and promoting purity among people, especially a pure and acceptable way of worship. When the sons of Levi are purified, they offer in righteousness, and the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem are pleasant to the Lord'.

7. CHRIST'S REFORMING RESTORES THE CHURCH

Christ is the restorer of all things by His coming in the flesh and by His death and gospel. He is the substance of all that is excellent to those that close in with Him by faith. To be "pleasant as in the days of old, and as in former years", means not only that their service will be acceptable as of old when most godly men offered. It also implies that all the remarkable evidences of favour

manifested toward them and wondered at in their fathers' days as the free reward of their service, will really be given to the godly in and by Christ.

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Submitted by Keith G*

THE CONVERSION OF THE JEWS

William MacLean (1907-1985)

“With the destiny of Israel has always been linked that of the universal race of man. The casting away of them hath been the reconciling of the world, and the receiving of them will be life from the dead.” So said the saintly Rev. John Duncan, LL.D., in one of his addresses on the subject of the evangelisation of the Jews at the Free Church General Assembly in Edinburgh in May 1860. His profound knowledge of Hebrew and of oriental languages of which he was professor, and his love for the Jews, earned him the title of “Rabbi” Duncan.

The conversion of the Jews to Christ their Messiah is recorded and set forth in both the Old and New Testaments. **“For I would not, brethren,” writes the Apostle Paul in Romans 11, “that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits: that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved” etc. (v. 25, 26).**

“By all Israel here we are not to understand the whole Church of God, all the elect consisting of Jews and Gentiles. It is true that in Gal. 6:16 and elsewhere, the word Israel is applied in that general sense to the Church of God. But in this chapter Israel means the nation and people of the Jews. ‘All’ is used as in many other instances in a general way and here indicates a very great number, and in a manner the whole Jewish nation in a full body.” So writes the eminent

Netherlands divine Hermann Witsius D.D. (1636 – 1708), Professor of Divinity in the Universities of Utrecht and Leyden.

‘They depart from the apostle’s meaning” he continues, “who by ‘all Israel’ understand the mystical Israel, or the people of God, consisting both of the Jews and Gentiles, without admitting the conversion of the whole Jewish nation to Christ, in the sense we here mentioned.

Notwithstanding, this may be confirmed by the following arguments:

First, the apostle speaks of the Israel, to whom he ascribes his own pedigree, v.1, whom he calls his flesh, that is, his kindred, v.14, and the natural branches v.21, whom he constantly distinguishes from the Gentiles; to whom he testifies, blindness has happened. All this is applicable to Israel properly so called.

Secondly, he lays before us a mystery, but it was no mystery, that a very few Jews were converted to Christ together with the Gentiles; for we have daily instances of that.

Thirdly, he reminds the Gentiles not to exalt over, or despise the Jews, from this argument, that, as they themselves were now taken in among the people of God, so, in like manner, the Jews were in due time to be taken in again. But if the apostle meant that the body of the Jewish nation was to continue in their hardness; and but a few of them to be saved, who, joined to the Gentiles would form a mystical Israel, the whole of the discourse would be more adapted to the commendation of the Gentiles, than of the Israelites: and encourage rather than depress the pride of the Gentiles.

Fourthly, as the fall and diminishing of Israel, v.12, and their casting away, v.15, are to be understand; so likewise the receiving and saving them, for here the rules of a just opposition must be observed. But the fall, diminishing and

casting away of Israel are to be understood of the generality of the Jewish nation; therefore the receiving and saving of Israel in like manner.

“To this restoration of Israel shall be joined the riches of the whole church, and as it were, life from the dead (Rom. 11:12) “Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles: how much more their fulness?” and v.15 “For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?” The apostle intimates that much greater and more extensive benefits shall redound to the Christian Church from the fulness and restoration of the Jews, than did to the Gentiles from their fall and diminution: greater, I say intensely, or with respect to degrees, and larger with respect to extent.

As to intenseness or degrees, it is supposed that about the time of the conversion of the Jews, the Gentile world will be like a dead person, in a manner almost as Christ describes the church of Sardis, Rev. 3:1.2, namely, both that light of saving knowledge, and that fervent piety, and that lively and vigorous simplicity of ancient Christianity will in a course of years be very much impaired. Many nations, which had formerly embraced the gospel with much zeal, afterwards almost to be extinguished by the venom of Mahomedanism, Popery, Libertinism and Atheism would verify this prophecy; but upon the restoration of the Jews these will suddenly arise, as out of the grave: new light will shine upon them, a new zeal be kindled up: the life of Christ be again manifested in His mystical body, more lively, perhaps, and vigorous than ever.

Agreeably to which James has said, Act 15:15-17 **“And to this agree the words of the prophets: as it is written, after this I will return and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down: and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: that the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things.”** The reparation of the fallen tabernacle

of David signifies the restoration of true and spiritual worship among the Israelites. And when that shall come to pass, the rest of mankind, who never gave up their names to Christ, and the nations, upon which His name was formerly called but which by their falling away lost the benefit of the Gospel will then with emulation seek the Lord.

“And what is more evident than that prophecy in Isaiah? The prophet in Ch. 59:20, 21, having foretold the restoration of Israel, according to the apostle’s commentary, immediately, in Ch. 60:1 exclaims, “**Arise, shine: for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee,**” and in v.3 “**And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising**” etc. (The Economy of the Covenants, Book 4, ch. 15).

Rich Gleanings from “Rabbi” Duncan.

At several General Assemblies Dr. Duncan delivered highly animated and elevated addresses, marked by genius and spiritual power, on the subject of the evangelisation of the Jews. Six of these addresses from 1857 – 1867 are given in “*Rich Gleanings After the Vintage from Rabbi Duncan*”, edited by the late Rev. James S. Sinclair, Glasgow. The following are extracts linked together.

“How miserable, yet how deeply interesting the situation of Israel after the flesh! And how deeply mysterious the procedure of God’s adorable providence toward them! The spirit of the Lord preserveth among them the holy books of the law and the prophets, and thus maintaineth even in the synagogue a constant, though ever resisted testimony for Christ! They are perpetually conversant with what is spiritual (for the law is spiritual) though only after a carnal manner, they themselves being carnal. Wonders (glorious things) are still before their eyes, but their eyes are not opened to behold them. The Spirit is present by the Word - a loud reprover – but unheard, for His saving influences are for a period judicially removed. Christ is present by the Word,

for the whole of the Old Testament is full of Him – all day long stretching forth His hands to a disobedient and gainsaying people. (Rom. 10:21). For behold God hath laid “in Zion a stumbling-block and a rock of offence: and whosoever believeth in Him shall not be ashamed.” (Rom. 9:33). What a lesson does this afford to us, how insufficient the best means and noblest privileges are to benefit a people, unless the gracious presence and inward operation of the Holy Spirit accompany them! What a warning that we do nothing to grieve and provoke that good Spirit, especially by refusing to behold the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ! And as regards the Jews themselves, how astonishingly has a system of means, fitted and destined to prepare them for the ultimate reception of the kingdom of God, been, during all the fierce anger of the Lord, kept up among them! How wide in one respect and yet in another, how small is the separation between the church and the synagogue! Let but the veil which is between the face of Moses, and the heart of Israel, and which has been removed from Moses’ face in Christ, be removed also from their heart, and the synagogue immediately becomes the church; for if they believe Moses, they will believe Christ. But remove this veil no creature can; it is the work of God’s Spirit solely and entirely. God will not give His glory to another. The residue of the Spirit is with Him and it will be bestowed in answer to believing, earnest, importunate, preserving prayer. Oh then pray – pray without ceasing, that the salvation of Israel may come out of Zion.

“I would call on you to remember the days of old, when Israel was holiness to the Lord, the first fruits of His increase, at the time when God left all nations, our own fathers among them, to walk in the way of their own hearts. How bright was then the beauty over whose departure for a time, we mourn: He showed not such favour to any nation, for they had not known His judgements. Think on all the exalted privileges conferred on them by Him who had mercy on them – the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God. Think that theirs are the fathers, and greatest of all, that of them, as concerning the flesh, Christ came, who is over all blessed for

ever. Think of our obligations to them. When we were poor aliens they thought on us, they prayed for us: “We have a little sister and she hath no breasts; what shall we do for our sister, in the day when she shall be spoken for?” (Song of Solomon 8:8). “God be merciful unto us, and bless us; and cause his face to shine upon us; Selah. That thy way may be known upon earth, thy saving health among all (heathen) nations. Let the people praise thee. O God: let all the people praise thee. O let the nations be glad and sing for joy: for thou shalt judge the people righteously, and govern the nations upon the earth. Selah.” (Ps. 67:1-4). Into their olive tree we have been ingrafted and partake of the root and fatness: on the skirts of a Jew we hang for life everlasting. “Salvation is of the Jews.” Think of the benefit still in prospect for ourselves, to whom the receiving of them shall be life from the dead.

Meanwhile, let us pray, hope, work and wait. Israel waited long for us: longer for us than we have yet had to wait for him. He waited, for he had a promise that we should be brought: and so we have been. We also have a promise concerning him. It cannot fail; and we shall yet receive him. How glorious shall the consummation be when it comes! The light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun sevenfold, and the light of seven days, when the Lord shall bind up the breach of His people, and heal “the stroke of their wound.”

O that the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion! When the Lord bringeth back the captivity of His people. Jacob shall rejoice and Israel shall sing. Rejoice ye Gentiles with His people, for:

“He mindful of his grace and truth
To Israel’s house hath been;
And the salvation of our God
All ends of the earth have seen.”

EPILOGUE

“He shall cover thee with His feathers” Psalm 91:4

We are taught in Scripture and in *The Confession of Faith* and may well have learned as children to recite that ‘God does not have a body like man’. We glory in this and therefore in His omnipresence. However, to help our understanding and for our instruction and comfort, the Lord is variously likened in scripture to living things with which we are very familiar.

One such likeness or analogy is to a bird. Here, David particularly focuses on the wings of this bird, wings which may be spread or fluttered to protect the vulnerable. In Matthew 23 v37 Christ laments over Jerusalem and the hardness of heart of the Jews saying He would be to them as a hen ‘which gathereth her chickens under her wings and ye would not!’ What a picture of safety offered but sadly rejected. In Deuteronomy 32v11 we read of the Lord that to His people He is ‘as an eagle spreading her wings and bearing her young’. Here the picture is of the eagle teaching its fledgling to fly. The eagle does not desert its young in their hour of need, but rather flies alongside ready to scoop them up should any begin to drop from the sky.

Psalm 91 has several analogies to provide comfort to a troubled and worried soul. The verse quoted from Psalm 91 is especially precious and comforting for us in the times through which we - and countless others around the world - are passing. David uses several pictures in this psalm e.g. fortress and refuge, which suggest protection in a powerful military tone. But here, in verse 4, the picture is softer and gentler altogether. We are reminded of the Lord’s care and concern for each and every one of His people when they feel fearful or afraid.

These may be ‘unprecedented times’ but our God is sovereign and has promised that he will ‘cover us with His feathers.’ Under the “feathers” of our God, we can place all our trust. We need not fear either real dangers (the arrow that flieth by day), or imagined dangers (the terror by night), nor the pestilence that walketh in darkness. Under the “feathers” of our God, we have comfort, safety and security.

Bill Norton