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GOD IN THE MIDST

Malcolm H. Watts

The greatest blessing Israel ever enjoyed was God's gracious and manifested presence, symbolised by the ark of the covenant. Moses told that ancient people 'the Lord thy God walketh in the midst of the camp (Deut. 23:14) Thereafter the expression '*God in the midst*' became a kind of watchword (Ps 46: 5), frequently appearing in songs of praise (Is 12:6), petitionary prayer (Jer. 14: 9), and preaching (Ezek. 43:7). See also: Hos. 11:9; Joel 2:27; Zeph. 3:15, 17; Zech. 2:10,11.

It is the privilege of the New Testament Church to have God present in Christ. Our Lord gave a promise to that effect, saying: 'Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them' (Matt 18:20).

He did not say, 'I will be', but 'I AM', indicating that his presence is divine (Exod. 3:14; cf. Jn 8:58), to be known at all times and in all places. 'Am I a God at hand, saith the Lord, and not a God afar off?' (Jer. 23:23; cf. Exod. 20:24) Even 'from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God' (Ps. 90:2; cf. 1 Kgs. 8:29).

Our Lord's promise was fulfilled initially, and in part, when He appeared as the Risen One to his assembled disciples: 'Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst' (Jn. 20:19; cf. Lk. 24:36).

It is specifically noted that the doors were 'shut' or 'barred', yet the Lord - in a physical body - 'came' into the room: the bolts, it would seem, being supernaturally removed, as in Acts 5:19 and 12:10.

Thus, to the disciples' astonishment, Christ unexpectedly entered the place where they were gathered together. Can you not see the preciousness of that? There was no way the Lord could be kept from His disciples when they were in such need of Him to calm the tumult of their hearts. Dr John Brown, of Haddington, draws out the comfort of the passage when he says: 'Jesus and

his consolations are frequently at hand when we know not where to find him. He takes delight to recognise his relation and hasten to our help. And neither shut doors, slavish fears, nor unbelieving hearts, can hinder his gracious visits.'

Yet, most wonderfully, this promise is being fulfilled at the present time by our Lord's spiritual presence in the church.

Turn with me for a moment to Psalm 22. This psalm is, as no doubt you know, a prophecy of the Messiah. In amazing detail, it describes both 'the sufferings of Christ' (vv1—21) and 'the glory that should follow' (vv. 22-36). In that latter part, we hear the Saviour saying: 'I will declare thy name unto my brethren; in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee (v 22).

This describes what Christ intends to do after his death. He would declare God's name: that is, he would reveal, by means of the Word and Spirit, the nature, perfections and glories of God (Matt. 28: 19; Jn 17:26; cf. Exod. 34:6,7). He would also praise God: in the fulness of His joy, he would join in the many and varied expressions of thankfulness offered to the God of salvation (Heb. 12:2 - 'the joy that was set before him' cf. Lk 10:21).

What thoughts these are! Mr. Spurgeon comments: 'Jesus himself...is both precentor and preacher in the church.'

Yet for us the vital phrase is 'in the midst of the congregation'. When this whole verse is quoted in the New Testament, and expressly applied to Christ, that particular phrase is rendered 'in the midst of the church' (Heb. 2:12).

I suggest that here we have one of the greatest of all truths. It is that the eternal Son of God, our Saviour, is present among His people whenever they are assembled as a church. Furthermore, he is not only present, but he also occupies the most important place, being the centre of attraction and the very life and soul of the worshipping community.

How this should impress us with the importance of our public services! What a rebuke to those who neglect them! The true Christian will delight to be where his Saviour is.

‘How charming is the place
Where my Redeemer-God
Unveils the beauties of His face,
And sheds His love abroad!

Not the fair palaces
To which the great resort,
Are once to be compared with this,
Where Jesus holds His court.

With praise these humble souls
Receive what He imparts;
He, in return, accepts with smiles
The tribute of our hearts.’

The last words our Lord spoke on earth before ascending into heaven, were: 'Lo (a word calling for attention), I am (notice once again, it is not 'I will be but 'I AM' - the word of the ever-present God) with you (the preposition, 'meta' , suggesting the closest proximity - 'among' or 'amid') always (literally, 'all the days' , so as never to be absent), even unto the end of the world (or, 'unto the end of the age' i.e. the age of grace, which will be followed by the age of glory) (Matt. 18:20).

In perfect accord with all this, is the vision granted to John on Patmos: 'I saw seven golden candlesticks (signifying churches); and in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of Man. (Rev 1:12,13,20 cf. 2:1)

His promise still awaits, however, ultimate and glorious fulfilment. It will be fulfilled in heaven, throughout eternity.

‘And I beheld, and lo, in the midst of the throne (the seat of infinite Majesty) and of the four beasts (the cherubim, a very high order of angels), and in the

midst of the elders (the representatives of the entire church of God), stood a Lamb (our Lord Jesus Christ)... And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders (Note that the angels and saints form a circle around the throne, so that Jesus Christ is in the central place — 'in the midst'): and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing (Rev. 5: 11 , 12).

Let all who trust in this divine Redeemer look forward to that day when they shall see Him thus honoured and adored 'in the midst' of the grandest assembly ever gathered. What a sight it will be! And what a privilege to be there.'

'Hark! how the choir around the throne
Adore their glorious King
They drink full draughts of bliss unknown
And Hallelujah sing.

Ere long I hope to join the throng
Who bow before the King:
And in one everlasting song,
My Hallelujah bring.'

FELLOWSHIP NEWS

Liz Storey

It is wonderful to at last be thinking about re-starting some of our Church activities after lockdown and we thank God for renewed opportunities to recommence some of these endeavours, as restrictions slowly ease.

The Toddler Group is hoping to resume meeting outdoors in the Grove House garden. (Weather permitting of course) Initially this will be just for those within the fellowship, but the desire is that it will be extended to others in the near future, as guidelines allow.

Keith G is doing some Sunday School lessons to post on-line until the group can resume again in a more normal format. It is hoped that the youthwork review meeting planned for Tuesday 27 April at 7.30pm, will help us to know how the Lord would have us to go forward with the youthwork in all the existing age groups. Our desire and longing is of course that all these young people would continue to hear the precious truths of God's Word.

The first Open Air of 2021 took place on 17 April, with a Gospel message given by Paul M and John H. We are thankful that the Council have again approved a monthly date for this year's Open Airs, giving us another opportunity to share the love of Christ shown in the Gospel to those in our City.

We are thankful to those who have recently been back into the Church to finish the decorating in the Sanctuary. Although just bricks and mortar, we acknowledge God's goodness to us in all that He provides, and it is lovely to have a fresh and light new look to our building, resulting from all their hard work.

The 18 April then saw some of us gathering for worship again in the Church building, both morning and evening, which was such a joy. Although we are still restricted in our fellowship before and after the services, we all continue to be a help and an encouragement to one another in our Christian walk as we speak with one another on the phone, meet via Zoom, or have happy times seeing each other outside in the week for a walk or a garden visit. We are mindful however of those dear members in our fellowship who are unable to attend the services in person and who therefore rely on the live-streaming, and who are not able to meet up physically with family and friends as they would like. May God be pleased to bless us together as a local Church as we seek to serve Him, and one another, by whatever means we can.

We are so grateful for the ministry we have received from visiting preachers since Pastor Watts retired at the end of February. We continue to pray for them and the Churches they represent, as we do for our own Church, that the Lord would be pleased to provide us with a Pastor of His choosing and in His perfect time.

Recent days have seen the precious gifts of two healthy baby boys born to our dear friends Keith & Abi, and Dan & Jenni. We give thanks to God for the wonderful blessing of these precious children and our sincere prayer is that they would know savingly, in the days to come, the God of their parents.

Later in the year some of our young people will be embarking on new courses and we assure them of our prayers as they anticipate these new ventures. We pray that the Lord will be a guide and a help to all the young people in our Church, in their decisions over studies or employment.

We had been praying very much for Paul M's sister, Barbara, who we had learnt had become very unwell and been admitted to hospital, so it was with much sadness that we learnt of her death on 9th March. Our thoughts and prayers continue to be with Paul and Helen and other members of the family in their very sad loss.

TRAVELLING WITHOUT A TICKET

A train was just leaving one of our large railway stations; the doors were shut, and the guard was on the point of giving the signal to start, when two women hurried across the platform and entered one of the railway carriages. They each carried a large basket or hamper of fruit, so large that the passengers remonstrated at their being brought into the carriage, as against the rules, and most inconvenient for the travellers; but the women entreated so earnestly to be allowed to keep them there, that the rest consented at last, and they remained undisturbed.

The engine whistled, and the train moved slowly away from the station. The women appeared relieved, but still spoke anxiously every now and then to each other, as if all was not settled yet.

A gentleman who sat near them watched them with some curiosity and interest, which increased when he noticed that, as the train drew near the station where the first inspection of tickets took place, they grew more and more uneasy. It stopped at last, and the ticket-collector was heard going from

door to door. As he reached this carriage the man saw that one of the women had slipped down, and was almost hidden behind the large basket of fruit. It was market-day, and a very full train, so, in the hurry of the moment, the guard did not see her. Her companion presented one ticket, and the man passed on.

The woman rose slowly from her hiding-place, as if doubting how she would be received by her fellow-travellers. The man bent forward and said quietly to her: "You **may** escape from the ticket-collectors notice, but you will not be able to hide from **God** like that when His great reckoning day comes."

The woman looked in his face anxiously, and answered, after a pause: "Oh, sir, we have no help for it! This is market-day, and our fruit will spoil if we do not sell it today. We had enough money to pay our way up by the early market train, but we missed it, so we agreed to take one ticket and try to get up unknown to the railway men. We have done it all right so far; please don't say anything, sir."

"But it is not right," the man replied; "you know it is not!" "But what am I to do, sir?" she asked despairingly; "I haven't the money to pay, and I have my husband ill at home, and four little children who have had nothing to eat today."

"Supposing I were to pay for your ticket?" he replied.

She looked doubtfully at him; and as he watched her face, he could read plainly the thoughts that were passing through her mind. No; she was not going to believe that sort of thing: people were not so rich or so generous that they would go about paying the fares of strangers who could not pay their own way. No, indeed, she was not so foolish as to believe that! "**I will pay it for you**" he said again.

The train was now approaching the market town, and soon it had stopped just outside the station where the tickets must be given up. The man turned to the woman, and saw that once more she was preparing to slip down behind her basket.

"Can you not trust me?" he asked. "I said that I would pay for you."

The ticket-collector was at the door next to theirs. For a moment the woman hesitated, and then decided to believe his word. The door was opened and the passengers presented their tickets, all except one, who had no ticket, nor any money to buy it.

“I wish to pay for this woman,” the man said; “she has no ticket.” “All right, sir,” the ticket-collector said, as he took the money handed to him and passed on.

“You have no need to hide now,” the man said, as the train moved into the station. She could not answer; but, bending down over her basket, she drew out an armful of her choicest fruit, dropped it into his wife’s lap, and then left the carriage.

The train moved on, and the gentleman turned to his fellow-travellers, who had been much impressed, and he said: “We are all on a journey, which must come to an end before very long. Every one **hopes** to reach the desired destination that lies at the end of our journey; but **are we** all certain that we have what will secure an entrance to that place when the journey is done? No one can slip in there, un-perceived by the piercing eye of God. We must have a ticket if we are to have access to that place.

What is to be done? Our own consciences tell us how utterly unable we are to secure an entrance for ourselves, vile and sinful as we are. But God – the holy, just God – has Himself provided this for us. His own Son *has already paid the price* which sinners could never pay, “*not with silver and gold, but with His own precious blood.*” He died that *they* might have eternal life.

Turn to Him; believe in Him; and claim the blessing provided. Will you not believe His word? Do you think it *too good to be true*? It is His own word: “*While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us*” (Romans 5: 8). “Only believe.”

ANTINOMIANISM

Antinomian (Greek: *anti* - against, *nomos* - law) is a name which applies to those who maintain that the Law of God has been entirely abrogated by the Gospel, so that Christians *are free from the Law in every sense*. This error was taught, it seems, even in New Testament days, for the apostles often found it necessary to recall the early Christians to God's commandments.

It was revived during the Reformation by John Agricola, who was, at first, a disciple of Luther, but afterwards a violent opponent of the Reformer. Agricola, an Antinomian extremist. He went so far as to say that "all who had anything to do with Moses would go to the devil, for Moses ought to be hanged." He was opposed by Luther, who publicly refuted Agricola's arguments. (The word "Antinomian" was coined by Luther during this controversy).

In the Puritan age, Antinomianism reappeared in the preaching and writing of such men as John Eaton, John Saltmarsh and Robert Lancaster, but the Puritans were swift to alert believers to the errors and dangers of this system and, by the exposition of the Scripture's teaching, they were able to stem the tide of Antinomian thought and belief.

There is a resurgence of this teaching today. Not only are some men openly preaching it, but magazines, seemingly dedicated to its promotion, are now being made available in this country. This has moved us to include in this issue, the following extracts from valuable works of the past. These extracts, we believe, set out clearly and convincingly the Biblical doctrine of the Law.

[Note: Slight editing has been necessary and archaic words have been replaced by modern equivalents. MHW]

Important Distinctions with respect to the Law

"God's Law given to Moses and Israel on Mount Sinai is, in respect of the subject-matter therein contained, most usually divided into three sorts:

MORAL, CIVIL, and JUDICIAL. Or, if we rather affect a dichotomy, into *two* sorts:

1. Perpetual, of obligatory force and power for ever, as THE MORAL LAW, contained in Ten Commandments.

2. Temporary, of obligatory power and force only for a certain time, and then determinable: and this concerning (a) the Worship and Service of God, as THE CEREMONIAL LAW; and (b) the Civil State and Polity of the Jews, as THE JUDICIAL LAW. Both which were determined to expire after the death of Christ: Christ being the substance or body of those shadows, the accomplishment of those ceremonies (Col. 2:17; Heb. 10:1); and the commonwealth of the Jews not long after Christ's death being utterly dissolved. (Gen 49:10)

That this distinction of God's Law into MORAL, CEREMONIAL and JUDICIAL is founded on Scripture is evident:

1. By testimonies of Moses, frequently enumerating these three branches. As, 'The Lord spake unto you out of the midst of the fire...and He declared unto you His covenant, which He commanded you to perform, even ten commandments (Hebrew: ten words) and He wrote them upon two tables of stone. And the Lord commanded me at that time to teach you *statutes*, and *judgments*, that ye might do them in the land whither ye go over to possess it.' (Deut. 4:12—14) Here, by 'ten words' (or ten brief sentences by way of command, properly "ten sayings", as the Hebrew signifies) understand THE MORAL LAW summarily comprised in the Ten Commandments. By 'statutes' (Hebrew: *hukkim*, from *hok*, to imprint the form or image of something), THE CEREMONIAL LAW; and by 'judgments', (Hebrew: *mishpatim*, from *mishpat*, judgement or judicial decision), THE JUDICIAL (OR POLITICAL) LAW.

Sometimes they are expressed by 'commandments, statutes and judgments' (Deut 4:1; 6:1; 7:11; 8:11 11: 1; 26:17; 30:16). Sometimes by 'laws, statutes and judgments' (Lev 26:46). Sometimes by 'testimonies, statutes and judgments' (Deut. 6:20) All to the same effect for substance, denoting THE MORAL, CEREMONIAL, and JUDICIAL LAWS.

2. By the testimony of Malachi: 'Remember ye the law of Moses, my servant, which I commanded unto him in Horeb for all Israel, the statutes and judgments.' (Mal. 4:4). Here are law, statutes, and judgments: as formerly.

3. By the testimony of Paul. 'Who are Israelites: to whom pertaineth the adoption, the glory, and the covenants (or testaments), and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises.' (Rom 9:4). To omit vain curiosities in interpreting these particulars, this sense of them seems to me most genuine. 'The glory', the ark of God elsewhere called the glory' (1 Sam. 4:21,22); 'the covenants', the two tables of the covenant which were put into that ark and there reserved. Here is THE MORAL LAW: 'The giving of the law': the constituting of JUDICIAL and political LAWS for that commonwealth. 'The service of God': the manner of God's service and worship which was prescribed in THE CEREMONIAL LAW for that people till Christ should come in the flesh."

(Francis Roberts, 1657)

The Permanence of the Moral Law (summed up in the Ten Commandments)

"Now many considerations persuade us to believe, that the law of the decalogue (or Ten Commandments) was given to the church, in order to be a perpetual rule, from the manner in which it was given.

For, as these commandments were published before the assembly of the whole church, in the hearing of all, while the other precepts were given to Moses alone in his sacred retirement: as they were engraved on tables of stone by the finger of God, to the end that, as Calvin remarks, this doctrine might remain in perpetual force: and seeing they, and they alone, were put in the ark of the covenant, under the wings and guardianship of God Himself; God plainly showed by so many prerogatives, that the reason of those precepts was far different from that of others, which were only imposed on the church for a time.

We may add that Christ has declared He was not come to 'destroy', but to 'fulfil' the law (Matt. 5:17). To "destroy" signifies there to "abrogate" and to "free men from the obligation of it", as appears from verse 19. That Christ speaks of

the law of the Decalogue (the Ten Words), we gather from what follows, where He explains the precepts of that law, and recommends them to His disciples.

When Paul (Rom.13:9) and James (James 2:8,11) inculcate the precepts of the law on Christians in the same terms in which they were delivered by Moses to Israel, they do not insist upon this consideration, that they were agreeable to the dictates of natural reason, or were ratified again by Christ, but that they were thus formerly published and written by God.

In Ephesians 6:2, the apostle not only insists on the promise that was annexed to the fifth commandment, but also on the order of the precepts, recommending honour or regard to parents from this argument, that this is the first commandment with promise. If the Decalogue, as it was formerly delivered to the church of Israel, did not concern Christians, that argument of the apostle (which be it far from us to say) would have no force with Christians.” See also: 1 Corinthians 10:7; Eph. 4:25,28; Col 3:5.

(Herman Witsius, 1693)

The Rule of Life for Believers, the Law of Christ

“Now there are in the Law but three things to be considered, either it is for JUSTIFICATION, for CONDEMNATION, or for DIRECTION.

“Now for JUSTIFICATION unto all that are in Christ, it is by Christ *abolished*; no man is justified by the works of the Law; but by the grace of Jesus Christ (Rom. 10:4; Gal. 3:11; Titus 3:7). And for CONDEMNATION also, it is by Christ *abolished*; for He hath delivered us from the curse of the Law and was made a curse for us (Jn. 3:18; Rom. 8:1; Gal. 3:13).

“There remains now no other proper use of the Law but for DIRECTION - as it is a rule; and therefore, either Christ has destroyed it wholly, or else He will have it remain in this last sense. Matthew 5:18 tells us heaven and earth shall sooner pass away, and the whole frame of this world fall to pieces, before the Law shall pass away. Therefore, it doth remain for direction unto the saints unto the end of the world. So, Romans 3:31, the gospel does not destroy but establish the law. The word in the Greek doth signify “to strengthen and make a thing firm, that was falling before it.” By the sin of man, the Law became weak

through the flesh, neither to be fulfilled in the precept of it, or the penalty or the curse of it, but men must be for ever satisfying it. Now the gospel comes and makes the Law firm:

a. In our Surety; for in Him is the precept fulfilled, and the curse borne, He did fulfil all righteousness.

b. In us, because, by the grace of the gospel, we do attain strength in some measure to obey the Law, which is increased more and more, till in our nature and actions, we shall be made perfectly conformable unto the Law in Heaven, and so the righteousness of the Law is perfectly fulfilled in us, the Lord perfecting His good work that He has begun in the day of the Lord.

“So the Law remains as a rule to believers, being not abolished but established by the gospel.”

(William Strong, 1678)

“The Law, in the hand of Christ, the blessed Mediator, is a rule of life to all believers...It is a law, which Christ has clearly explained, and which He has vindicated from the false glosses of the Scribes and Pharisees... The precept of *the law as a covenant*, is, ‘Do and live’; but the command of *the law as a rule*, is, ‘Live, and do’...By this law as a rule of life, a man is required to do, not in his own strength, but *in the strength that is in Christ Jesus...*”

(John Colquhoun, 1816)

“These terms — ‘the law of works’ and ‘the law of Christ’ — are scriptural (Rom 3:27; Gal 6:2).

“By ‘the law of works’ is meant the law of the ten commandments, as the covenant of works. By ‘the law of Christ’ is meant the same law of the Ten Commandments, as a rule of life, in the hand of a Mediator, to believers already justified.

“‘The law of works’ is the law to be done, that one may be saved; ‘the law of Christ’ is the law of the Saviour, binding His saved people to all the duties of obedience.

“The law of Christ” is an ‘easy yoke’ and a ‘light burden’ (Matt. 11:30); but ‘the law of works’ to a sinner is an insupportable burden, requiring works as the condition of justification and acceptance with God, as is clear from the apostle’s reasoning (Romans 3) and cursing ‘everyone that continues not in all things written in it to do them’ (Gal 3:10). The duties of ‘the law of works’, as such, are, as I conceive, called by our Lord Himself “heavy burdens, and grievous to be borne.” (Matt. 23:4). ‘For they (the Scribes and Pharisees) bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers.’ These heavy burdens were not human traditions, and rites devised by men; for Christ would not have commanded the observing and doing of these as, in this case, He did (verse 3); neither were they the Mosaic rites and ceremonies, which were not then abrogated, for the Scribes and Pharisees were so far from not moving these burdens with their own fingers, that the whole of their religion was confined to them, namely to the rites and ceremonies of Moses’ Law, and those of their own devising. But they were duties of the Moral Law which they laid on others, binding them on with the tie of ‘the law of works’, though they made no conscience of them in their own practice.

“What this distinction amounts to is, that thereby a difference is constituted between the Ten Commandments as coming from an absolute God out of Christ unto sinners, and the same Ten Commandments as coming from God in Christ unto them. Now, the Law of the Ten Commandments is given, the former way, only to unbelievers, or such as are out of Christ, the latter way to believers, or such as are in Christ. And to prove whether this be a vain distinction or not, one needs but to consult the conscience, when thoroughly awakened, whether it is all the same to it, to receive the Law of the Ten Commandments in the thunders from Mount Sinai, or in the still, small voice, out of the tabernacle: that is, from an absolute God, or from a God in Christ.

Unbelievers are not under the Law as it is ‘the law of Christ’; and that is their misery, even as it is the misery of slaves, that the commands of the master of the family, though the matter of them be the very same to them, and to the children, yet they are not fatherly commands to them, as they are to children, but purely masterly.”

(Thomas Boston, 1726)

Objections Answered

“For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law but under grace.” (Rom. 6:14).

“What more natural than to express our deliverance from the curse and from the law, as the conditions of life, or as the procuring cause of justification, by declaring us free from the yoke of that system? So far as sinners are concerned, the condemning sentence of the Law is its most prominent feature; and, therefore, that sentence is sometimes itself denominated the Law, in opposition to that grace which provides for the exercise of pardon.”

(David Russell, 1824)

“Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the Law by the Body of Christ.” (Rom 7:4)

“Never was any more dead than the Law is, as to the power of giving justification, or fruitfulness in holiness, to sinners. Yet it lives in the fearful sanction (or, penalty) of death and the curse to sinners: and they must all have died by its hands, in rigorous and just revenge of their undutifulness and disobedience, if a way had not been found for their relief. God Himself, of His manifold wisdom, uncontrollable sovereignty, and rich grace, hath provided a way of relief. By the body of Christ crucified is the happy event truly brought about. If the Law had a claim of justice against them for their undutiful behaviour; the crucifixion of the body of Christ, whereby sin hath been expiated, and which is the consummation of that righteousness by which He hath fulfilled the Law, hath answered the claim of the Law. So, the resentment of the Law cannot reach them. They are, as by death, delivered from it; as a bond-servant is by death delivered from a hard-master, or a wife from the yoke of a rigorous husband. It is by being ‘dead with Christ’ by their fellowship with Christ in His death, and in the fruits thereof, that they are thus delivered from the Law (Rom.6:8).”

(James Fraser, 1774)

“The ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious,...if that which is done away was glorious, much more that which remaineth is glorious,” (2 Corinthians 3:7,11),

“I know they object that the Ten Commands of the Moral Law, ‘the ministration of death, written on stones’, are also done away by Christ. They are the ministration of death and done away, not as they commanded perfect obedience, or even Christ Himself commandeth us to be perfect (Matt. 5:48); but as they were conditions for procuring life, and avoiding death, established by a promise of life to the doers, and a curse to the breakers of them (Gal 3:10,12). We must still practice moral duties, as commanded by Moses: but we must not seek to be justified by our practice. If we use them as a rule of life, not as conditions of justification, they can be no ministration of death, or killing letter unto us (nor are they done away).”

(Walter Marshall, 1692)

A Final Word

“Some unskilful persons...boldly discard the whole Law of Moses, and do away with both its Tables, imagining it unchristian to adhere to a doctrine which contains the ministration of death. Far from our thoughts be this profane notion. Moses has admirably shown that the Law which can produce nothing but death in sinners, ought to have a better and more excellent effect upon the righteous. When about to die, he thus addressed the people: ‘Set your hearts upon all the words which I testify among you this day, which ye shall command your children to observe to do, all the words of this law. For it is not a vain thing for you; because it is your life.’ (Deut. 32:46, 47). If it cannot be denied that it contains a perfect pattern of righteousness, then, unless we ought not to have any proper rule of life, it must be impious to discard it. There are not various rules of life, but one perpetual and inflexible rule; and, therefore, when David describes the righteous as spending their whole lives in meditating on the Law (Psalm 1:2), we must not confine to a single age, an employment which is most appropriate to all ages, even to the end of the world.”

(John Calvin, 1536)

MY SAVIOUR’S OBEDIENCE TO BLOOD HIDE ALL MY TRANSGRESSIONS FROM VIEW.

“What did Christ do for you? Someone says, ‘He died for me.’ Is that all? ‘Is not that everything?’ Why had His death any value for you? ‘Well, because He

was the Son of God.' Why, then, did He not come immediately from the glory to the cross? Why did He begin at Bethlehem? ... The first Adam began his career, not as a babe, but as a full grown man. Why could not our Lord miraculously have assumed our flesh and come to earth as a man, and gone immediately to the cross, paying our debt? ... Jesus Christ was made under the law – what for? That He might fulfil the requirements of the law, that He might work out a righteousness for us. ... Throughout His earthly life He was just as much our Substitute under the law as when He went to the cross on our behalf, fulfilling the law's requirements in our room and stead. His life was as necessary to our salvation as His death." (Dr. Thomas Todhunter Shields, 1873-1955)

"As their Surety and Sponsor Christ entered the place occupied by His people under the Law, so identifying Himself with them as to be their Head and Representative, and as such He assumed and discharged all their legal obligations. ... As creatures they were under obligations to obey God's Law; as criminals (transgressors) they were under the death-sentence of the law. Therefore to fully meet our liabilities and discharge our debts it was necessary that our Substitute should both obey and die." (Dr. Arthur W. Pink, 1886-1952)

"The abolition of our sins by the blood of Christ renders us indeed without fault; but something more than this is necessary to constitute our claim, and perfect our title to heaven and glory. ... As the infinite merit of His death could atone for infinite transgressions, and redeem from death eternal; so, by a parity of reason as well as by express revelation, we may conclude, that the infinite merit of His life not less purchased the infinite reward, which His people enjoy with Him for ever." (Ambrose Serle, 1742-1812)

"The God-man undertakes in our nature to pay perfect satisfaction to His Father's justice. Accordingly He paid the law an infinitely perfect obedience. And He thereby magnified it, and made it more honourable than the obedience of all created beings could have done. Then He suffered what was due to our breach of the law, and paid the death which we deserved. And justice demonstrated that it had no more demands upon Him, when it released Him from the prison of the grave. And by this obedience and these sufferings He wrought out an infinitely perfect righteousness, which being imputed (or,

reckoned to) the unrighteous, and laid hold of by the hand of faith, renders them perfectly righteous at the bar of justice.” (William Romaine, 1714-1795)

“That amazing work which the incarnate Son completed when He expired on the cross, is the grand requisite for our justification before the heavenly tribunal. To this, and to this only, the eternal Sovereign has respect, when He pronounces the sinner just, and acquits him in judgment. Hence we are said to be made righteous by the obedience of Christ, and be justified by His blood. This blood being shed, and that obedience being performed by our Divine Substitute, on the sinner’s behalf and in his nature, are placed to his account as fully and as much to his advantage, as if he had in his own person underwent the sufferings and performed the obedience.” (Abraham Booth, 1784—1806)

“If then the Courts of God admit this mode of justification founded on the substitutional obedience and suffering of Another, the next question we have to consider is – What is the link that connects with the means of justification thus provided by God? The link is faith. In all questions respecting justification, men seem to delight in perplexing much as possible themselves and others, and in nothing has their invention been more fertile than in multiplying difficulties respecting the nature and meaning of faith. But we may at once free ourselves from all these entanglements by remembering that faith in its connection with justification, means simply reliance or dependence on that which another person proposes to us, as the object of our dependence or reliance.” (Benjamin Wills Newton, 1807-1899)

THE ULTIMATE FOLLY

“I’ll run my chance” was the reply of the Captain of the *Royal Charter* when assistance was offered in the wild night of 26 October, 1859. In response to the ship’s signals of distress, a troopship drew near to offer assistance. “For what will you tow us into port? our engines are broken down”, said the Captain of the *Royal Charter*. The price was stated, and the answer given as above – “I’ll run my chance.” Within 24 hours the ship went down with 490 souls, in

sight of home. A picture of many of whom it can be said, "Thou art not far from the kingdom of God" (Mark 12:34).

THE PLANK OF FREE GRACE

Mr. M'Laren and Mr. Gustard were both ministers of the Tolbooth Church, Edinburgh. When Mr. M'Laren was dying, Mr. Gustard visited him, and put this question to him, "What are you doing, brother?" His answer was, "I'll tell you what I am doing; I am gathering together all my prayers, all my sermons, all my good deeds, and all my ill deeds; and I am going to throw them all overboard, and swim to glory on the plank of free grace."

THE SHELTERED BIRD

One fine summer morning many years ago Charles Wesley was standing before an open window. Looking out, he observed a little bird being pursued by a cruel hawk. He anxiously watched the little creature for a while, wondering if it would escape its fierce and powerful foe. Nearer and nearer it flew to the open window. At last, fluttering and panting, it flew straight through it, and rested exhausted on Mr. Wesley's bosom. The hawk pursued the small bird no further. It had found a refuge and a resting-place on the bosom of a friend, and there it was safe from its pursuer.

The incident produced a deep impression on Mr. Wesley's mind, and a few hours later he took up his pen and wrote those well-known and well-loved words:

*"Jesus! Lover of my soul,
Let me to thy bosom fly..."*

*"Other refuge have I none;
Hangs my helpless soul on Thee;
Leave, ah! Leave me not alone,
Still support and comfort me..."*

Have you fled for shelter to Christ the Refuge? His words are: “Him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out” (John 6:37). Flee to Him, dear friend; flee to Him and be saved.

THE FINAL WITNESS

Words spoken from the borders of eternity have often been unutterably solemn. Near and in the hour of death, when men and women are brought face to face with the reality of never-ending existence, they speak in such a way, and of such things, as demand our deepest attention.

The testimonies which follow, not only provide strong proof for life beyond death, but they also convince us of the fact that, at death, Christian believers enter into heaven.

Martin Luther (died 1546): “O heavenly Father, though I must leave this body and be torn from life, yet I know for sure that I shall abide eternally with thee, and that no man can take me out of thy hands.”

John Holland (1600): “Oh speak when I am gone and preach it at my funeral – that *God dealeth familiarly with man*. I feel his mercy; I see his majesty, whether in or out of the body I cannot tell; but I see things unutterable.”

John Preston (1628): “Blessed be God, though I change my place, I shall not change my company; for I have walked with God while living, and now I go to rest with God!”

Robert Bruce (1631): “Hold, daughter, hold, my Master calls me ... God be with you, my children, I have breakfasted with you, and shall sup with my Lord Jesus this night.”

Samuel Rutherford (1661): “I feel, I feel, I believe – in joy, and rejoice. I feed on manna. Oh, for arms to embrace Him! Oh, for a well-tuned harp!”

Thomas Goodwin (1679): “Ah! is this dying? How have I dreaded as an enemy this smiling friend!”

William Gouge (1653): “Now I have not long to live. The time of my departure is at hand. I am going to my desired haven. I am most willing to die. I have, blessed be God, nothing else to do but to die. Death is my best friend, next to Jesus Christ. I am sure I shall be with Christ when I die.”

James Durham (1658): “For all I have preached or written, there is but one Scripture I can remember and dare grip to – ‘him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.’”

Hugh McKail (1666): “Farewell father and mother, friends and relations; farewell the world and its delights; farewell meat and drink; farewell sun, moon and stars. Welcome God and Father; welcome sweet Lord Jesus, the Mediator of the new covenant; welcome Spirit of grace, and God of all consolation; welcome glory; welcome eternal life; welcome death.”

John Owen (1683): “I am going to him whom my soul loveth, or rather who has loved me with an everlasting love, which is the sole ground of all my consolation.”

William Beveridge (1708): “I have known him these forty years. Precious Saviour! He is my only hope!”

Philip Doddridge (1751): “I have a cheerful, well-grounded hope, through the Redeemer, of being received to His everlasting mercy and glory.”

Ralph Erskine (1752): “I shall be for ever a debtor to free grace. Victory! Victory!”

Ebenezer Erskine (1754): “I know that when my soul forsakes this tabernacle of clay, it will fly as naturally to my Saviour’s bosom, as the bird to its beloved nest.”

Jonathan Edwards (1758): “Now where is Jesus of Nazareth, my true and never-failing friend?”

Samuel Walker (1761): “I have been upon the wings of the cherubim. Heaven has been in a manner opened to me. I shall soon be there... Oh, my friend, had I strength to speak I could tell you such news as would rejoice your very soul! I have had such views of heaven; but I am not able to say more.”

William Grimshaw (1763): “Never had I such a visit from God since I first knew him. I am as happy as I can be on earth, and as sure of glory as if I were in it.”

Augustus Toplady (1778): “Oh, what delights! Who can fathom the joy of the third heaven? The sky is clear, there is no cloud; come, Lord Jesus, come quickly!...It will not be long before God takes me; for no mortal man can live after the glories which God has manifested to my soul.”

John Brown [of Haddington] (1787): “My Christ, my Christ!”

William Romaine (1795): “He is a precious Saviour to me now.”

Samuel Medley (1799): “My heavenly Father, I am looking up to my dear Lord Jesus, my God, my portion, my all in all. Glory! Glory! Home! Home!”

Daniel Rowlands (1790): “I have no more to state, by way of acceptance with God, than I have always stated: I die as a poor sinner, depending fully and entirely on the merits of a crucified Saviour for my acceptance with God.”

Edward Payson (1827): “The celestial city is full in my view. Its glories beam upon me, its breezes fan me, its odours are wafted to me, its sounds strike upon my ears and its spirit is breathed into my heart...Why should God design thus to shine upon a sinful worm?”

John Kent (1843): “I rejoice in hope. I am accepted – accepted!”

Edward Bickersteth (1850): “I have no other ground of confidence than the blood of Jesus. Christ first, Christ all in all.”

Gen. Stonewall Jackson (1863): “Let us cross over the river, and rest under the shade of the trees.”

EPILOGUE

“How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts! My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the LORD: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God. Yea, the sparrow hath found an house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even thine altars, O LORD of hosts, my King, and my God” (Psalm 84:1-3).

The Psalmist expresses his deep and heartfelt desire for the Lord and to be at the place of worship. In those days the Lord’s presence was in the Temple in a particular way - above the Mercy seat which was over the Ark of the Covenant in the Holiest place.

From New Testament times onwards (after the Temple curtain was torn in two) it was clear that God’s people have the Lord in their midst when they meet for worship in Jesus’ name (Matthew 18:20). The Lord Jesus is with His people always and especially when they have their times of devotion. If we can (COVID restrictions allowing), we should congregate together to worship the Lord and receive the ministry of the Word of God (Hebrews 10:25).

Whoever we are, may we be able to testify that “our heart and flesh cries out for the living God”.

May we know the blessing of worshiping the Lord as our Lord Jesus Christ said to the woman at the well: “But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth” (John 4:23-24).

Ron Morris