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LETTER FROM THE PASTOR

Mary's Ointment

'Then Jesus six days before the Passover came to Bethany, where Lazarus was which had been dead, whom he raised from the dead. There they made him a supper; and Martha served: but Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with him. Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment.' John 12:1-3

This event happened in "Bethany." But Matthew and Mark tell us that this was not where we might think - in the home of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus - but "in the house of Simon the leper."

Simon was probably a neighbour of Martha and family. He had leprosy but the Lord healed him. And now he shows his gratitude by inviting Jesus and His disciples to a supper, together with Martha, Mary, and Lazarus. We notice from the above verses that they are each doing something to serve the Lord.

1. Martha. "Martha served." Not now as the flustered and tetchy woman of Luke 10:40. She had learned from the Lord's gentle correction. She had not reasoned, "Well, if that's how it is, I won't do it again." But now she does what she does best, but in the right way. It is the service of Martha in the spirit of Mary. Let us ensure, by grace, that if we are corrected for a fault, we profit from it like Martha did.

2. Lazarus. "Lazarus was one of them that sat at table with him." No recorded words come from him, but he is there as a witness to the Lord who has given him life: "With him." Perhaps we may not have much opportunity to speak for the Lord, but never undervalue showing that we have "been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13). There is great witness-value in a quiet and godly life, a living Christian.

3. Mary. "Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment." In the custom of those times, refreshing oil was provided for the head of guests arriving from the outside heat. But here, Mary anoints the Lord's feet too – they were usually washed upon entering. She uses the rest of the ointment to do this, and then undoes her long hair and uses it as a towel.

In Mary's act of devotion to our Lord, we see illustrated certain spiritual offerings we make to Him. We can see how ardent her love was: "Mary took a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly." This perfume was expensive: in verse 5 of the passage, Judas complains that it could have been "sold for three hundred pence" - a man's wages for a year! Love does not count the cost. All of it is lavished upon Christ.

What would be our equivalent?

a) *Our prayers.* Mary drew near, and in Mark's account, she broke open her flask and poured out the ointment. We do the same when we come and open our hearts to Him. This is fragrant ointment: "While the king sitteth at his table, my spikenard sendeth forth the smell thereof" (Song 1:12). Do you see prayer as pleasing Him like this? Our poor prayers are truly precious to Him.

b) *In giving.* Mary gave an enormous amount, at great cost. Our tithes and offerings can be that. One tenth, and above as we can: "Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:7). From the widow's mite to Barnabas's sold land, whatever we give, may it be in love to the Saviour who gave His all for us. We will never lose what we give to Him.

c) *In worship.* In Luke 7:38 there is another Simon's house and another woman, but they are different from here: "Simon the Pharisee" and "a woman which was a sinner." This Simon has little gratitude to the Lord, and this woman only has tears to give, but they flow freely out of grateful love because she has been "loved much."

This is a gracious reason to love the Lord. However, Mary in our passage is even more gracious: she adores Jesus for His own sake. Our highest devotion to the Lord is when we would love Him even if He had done nothing for us: simply because He is worthy. We never rise higher in our devotion than this.

d) *In service.* Mary served the Lord with her precious means. And we can give the best and most costly to the Master – in time, effort, gifts, dedication, going the extra mile. Nothing should be too much trouble for Him. It is all for love's sake.

e) *God's Word.* Mary's actions come after a previous time when she "sat at Jesus' feet, and heard his word" (Luke 10:39). That was "the one thing needful." And the more we hear Him in the Word the more we will love Him

and be devoted to Him. The written and preached word will lead us to the Living Word. May it always do that for us!

*Beyond the sacred page
I seek Thee, Lord;
My spirit pants for Thee,
O Living Word.*

With Christian love,
John Thackway

FELLOWSHIP NEWS

Daniel Tribe

On Friday 1st March, we were pleased to be able to host the Ministers' Fraternal here in Salisbury. We give thanks to the Lord that this Fraternal is growing with more ministers from local churches joining for mutual fellowship and encouragement.

On the weekend of 9th & 10th March, our Pastor travelled to Glasgow to preach at the Induction of Justin Beach to the Pastorate at Anniesland Baptist Church. Justin studied at Salisbury Reformed Seminary and we rejoice to see the way the Lord has equipped him and led him to serve the Gospel of Christ among the Lord's people in Glasgow. We pray that Pastor and people alike will be richly blessed and that the Lord will grant much fruit from Justin's ministry in the coming months and years.

On the evening of Tuesday, 19th March, we gathered at Grove House for our Evangelistic Supper. It was a wonderful opportunity to share a fantastic meal with friends and visitors, but most importantly to share the glorious Gospel of Jesus Christ with them too. We're thankful for the Lord's help given to the speaker, enabling him to share the Gospel simply and effectively. Please join us in praying for those who heard that Word, that they may be graciously brought to faith in Christ.

Friday 22nd and Saturday 23rd March saw the annual Birmingham Conference take place. It was a blessed day of worship and ministry, with Jonathan Northern speaking on "Keeping the Faith" and "Keeping ourselves". David Allen spoke on "The need of Reformation in Preaching" and "The need of Christ Centred Preaching"; Oliver Wyncoll preached at the Gospel Rally.

As a Church, we rejoice with Daniel and Jenni after the birth of their fourth child. We pray for the baby, and all the children of the membership, that the Lord's hand would be upon them as they grow and that they would be brought to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ while they are young.

On Monday 8th April the Trustees of the Bible League met at Grove House for their AGM. As we have done for many years, we continue to support the important and valuable work of the Bible League as they seek to promote the careful study of the Holy Scriptures and defend the inspiration, infallibility and sole sufficiency of God's Word. If you'd like to find out more about the Bible League Trust why not visit their website at bibleleaguetrust.org.

We very much looked forward to Saturday 20th April, when we were visited by the Reverend Murdo MacLeod on behalf of Hudson Taylor Ministries. The meeting commenced at 3:30pm, and involved a presentation about the work and an exhortation from God's Word. The Lord's Day following Rev MacLeod preached at Crosslanes Chapel, Ibsley, in the morning, and then for us here at Emmanuel in the evening, with a special after Church meeting following the service. It was a very informative and blessed weekend.

A Word of Thanks

We would like to thank our church family for all your prayers, support and kind messages following the passing of Jo's father into Glory, and prior to this whilst he was in hospital.

We were greatly upheld during this time and continue to know so much of the Lord's comfort.

Jonny, Jo & family

THE ORDINATION OF DANIEL TRIBE TO THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY

On the afternoon of Saturday, 2 March, the church at Emmanuel had the joy of meeting for the Ordination Service of Daniel Tribe. We were glad to welcome ministers and friends from other churches who joined with us for this solemn and happy occasion. The service was led by Pastor Thackway, with a number of other ministers also taking part.

After the call to worship and prayer, the congregation praised God by singing Psalm 105, verses 1-7. Pastor Thackway then welcomed everyone to the service, after which Pastor Buss from Grace Reformed Baptist Church in Hilpertown read Ephesians 4. In this chapter, we are told of how the ascended Christ has given the gift of “pastors and teachers” to his church so that Christians might be edified and brought to spiritual maturity in Christ.

Pastor Thackway then stated the biblical warrant for the ordination of a minister. He said that only God can make a minister (Acts 26:16). He explained that God calls a man into the ministry (Acts 13:2), and that this will be evidenced by three things: a God-given desire (1 Timothy 3:1), a God-given recognition by other ministers and the local church (2 Corinthians 6:4), and a God-given seal on the labours of the one to be ordained (1 Corinthians 3:6).

Daniel gave a heart-warming account of his call by grace, in which he gave the glory to Christ. He spoke of the blessing of being brought up in a Christian home under the faithful ministry of Pastor Watts. He explained that as a boy he accepted the truths of Christianity that he was taught, but it was only head knowledge at that time. In his mid-teens, however, the Lord began to work in his heart to convince him of his sin. For some time, he was concerned mainly about the judgment threatened on sin, rather than about sin itself. He then began to see that the Lord’s people had a love for Christ that he did not have. His heart was drawn to Christ, and he started to see the loveliness of the Saviour and the evil of having offended him. For a while he struggled with assurance, but God blessed to him the witness of a man in the church and in due time he was granted peace.

Daniel also spoke of how God called him to the ministry. Daniel said that he and his wife Jenni were given a desire to live their lives for the Lord in a direct kind of way. The Lord’s people started sharing with him their conviction that God was calling him to the Christian ministry. At first, he tried to put it out of his mind as just the misplaced enthusiasm of the Lord’s people. However, the Lord repeatedly challenged him through the application to his heart of the question at the end of Romans 10:14: “how shall they hear without a preacher?” He then tried to scare himself away from the thought of ministry by reading passages of Scripture that spoke about false pastors and running without being sent. In 2017, the Lord confirmed the call through a sermon by Pastor Watts from 1 Chronicles 29:5 on consecration to the Lord. He then thought of his youth as a reason why he could not enter the ministry, but God answered this objection through a daily devotional reading from Jeremiah 1:6-7 that his mother put through his door. God continued to confirm the call, and

Daniel said that he now considered that there was no higher calling in life than being in the Christian ministry.

Pastor Thackway stated that it was a joy to have Daniel working alongside him. Pastor Higham from Tabernacle Cardiff spoke as Registrar of the Salisbury Reformed Seminary, where Daniel trained for three years. He said that Daniel had been a model student and that all the trustees only had good things to say of him.

In answer to questions from Pastor Thackway, Daniel affirmed his belief in the Scriptures, his adherence to the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith, his approval of reformed church government, his adherence to purity of worship, and his acceptance of the office of minister. With prayer, he was then solemnly set apart for the office of minister by the laying on of the hands of the presiding ministers and elders, including Pastors Malcolm Watts, Dewi Higham, Aaron Lewis, and Chris Buss.

After the singing of Psalm 40 verses 9-11, Pastor Thackway preached a very helpful sermon from Deuteronomy 5:31: *“But as for thee, stand thou here by me, and I will speak unto thee all the commandments, and the statutes, and the judgments, which thou shalt teach them, that they may do them in the land which I give them to possess it.”*

The Pastor spoke of how ministers need the **presence** of God, shown by the fact that God told Moses to “stand thou here by me”. Ministers need to live near to the Lord if their ministry is to lift their hearers heavenwards, and if they are to receive strength to stand. He then spoke of the **preaching**. As Moses received commandments from God and taught them to the people, so ministers need to receive their text and their thoughts from God. The grand subject that they need to preach is Christ Jesus the Lord. Finally, he spoke of the **purpose**, which is that the hearers may obey the divine commandments and enter into the blessing. Pastor also spoke of the important role of ministers in helping the Lord’s people to the promised land of Heaven.

After the singing of Psalm 68 verses 17-20, Pastor Lewis from Crosslanes Chapel closed the service in prayer and pronounced the Benediction.

We thank the Lord for calling Daniel by his grace and then calling him into the ministry. We pray that the Lord will sustain him in a lifetime of faithful ministry and grant much blessing on his labours.

25th Annual Salisbury Conference

Friday 4th – Lord's Day 6th October 2024

Guest Speaker: Rev Jeff Riddle (USA)

Please note the change of date

ANECDOTES AND REFLECTIONS

Ingram Cobbin

In a severe winter, about the year 1781, King George the Third, regardless of the weather, was taking a lonely walk on foot, when he was met by two boys, the eldest not eight years of age, who, although ignorant that it was the King, fell upon their knees before him, and, wringing their little hands, prayed for relief. "The smallest help," they cried, "for we are hungry, and have nothing to eat." More they would have said, but a torrent of tears, which ran down their innocent cheeks, checked their utterance.

The kind-hearted monarch raised the weeping supplicants, and encouraged them to proceed with their story. They did so; and told him that their mother had been dead three days, and still lay unburied; that their father, whom they were also afraid of losing, was stretched by her side upon a bed of straw, in a sick and hopeless condition; and that they had neither money, food, nor firing at home. This artless response was more than sufficient to excite sympathy in the royal bosom. His Majesty, therefore, ordered the boys to proceed homeward, and followed them until they reached a wretched hovel: there he found the deceased mother, who had died through the want of common necessaries; and the father ready to perish also, but still encircling in his feeble arm his beloved wife, as if unwilling to live any longer now that she was gone.

The tears started from the King's eyes, and leaving all the money he had about him, he hastened back to Windsor, and informed the Queen of what he had witnessed, who directly sent a supply of food, clothes, coals, and everything necessary for the comfort of this helpless family. Revived by the bounty of his sovereign, the old man soon recovered, and the King, to finish the good work he had so wonderfully begun, determined to educate and provide for these children.

It was so very kind and condescending in the old King to pity these children; and if he did not disdain to be so kind to the poor, we should not be backward to follow his example. But what were his kindness and condescension compared with the grace of the Lord Jesus? "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be made rich."

Let the young reader think of the greatness of His love who "gave himself for us;" who laid down His own precious life as a ransom for our souls. Divine justice demanded punishment, because of our sinning against God; but divine love found a means to save us, when the dear Lord Jesus died in our room and stead.

Then, from this benevolence in Jesus towards us, let us learn to be benevolent towards others. Let us pity the poor, and be very thankful if God has given us in his providence more than others. Then shall we be more like God; and while we are doing good to others, get good for ourselves.

THE DANGERS OF SANDEMANIANISM

Maurice Roberts (Stornaway, Isle of Lewis)

Part 2

In last month's article we traced the rise of Sandemanianism from its founders John Glas and his son-in-law Robert Sandeman and mentioned some of its principal teachings. This month we offer some assessment of the distinctive tenets of Sandemanianism.

When evaluating any form of religion we must not simply look at what men say but at what they do not say and at what they actually practise. It is usually easier to understand the tendency and the trend of the movement in this way.

If we apply this test to the Sandemanians we must note in passing certain things which were not held highly by them. They were poor at keeping the Sabbath, for instance. They did not like family worship and would say that there is no such thing in the Scriptures. They taught that unbelievers ought not to be allowed to be present in an act of public worship. Their theory was that the presence of an unbeliever might be contaminating in the sight of God.

So, you see at once, before we look in detail at Sandemanianism's main features, that there is a new type of religion emerging already.

ITS CHARACTERISTICS

We come now to mention the leading characteristics of Sandemanianism.

1. It was censorious

As we have seen they were very critical of orthodox writers and they went very far in their criticism. Robert Sandeman used to say about Flavel, Boston, Guthrie and the Erskines that their writings were a “devout path to hell”. He called them Pharisees and he did that with good intention. He did not understand the Puritan outlook and he was therefore dismissive of it.

There are, of course, many today who are critical of the experimental Calvinism of our own Church in a similar way. Even some who claim to be Calvinists can be extremely censorious in their attitude to orthodox churches like our own.

2. They were strongly separatist

Sandemanians wanted all the churches or societies connected with them to be disconnected from any other group. Theirs were the only “real” churches. All other churches they regarded as “Babylon”. That is the term which they used.

This sectarian spirit, of course, appears again and again in the history of churches and can be found today in highly independent and strongly militant churches professing orthodoxy. The attitude is that if you join them, you must be dissociated from all other churches and even, if necessary, turn against those who were your former friends and brethren in the faith.

3. The Sandemanian Movement was marked by authoritarianism

They used excommunication and they used it with a heavy hand. As we have seen, they would tell church members in their circles how they ought to use their money and they would take to do with these personal aspects of the life of a Christian.

We have similar things in the world today. It goes by the name of the “Heavy Shepherding Movement” and can be seen in some Restoration churches. The church leaders tell you whom you should marry or how many children you should have; where to go on holiday; which job to take and if you are allowed to move away from home to some other job. We refer to that as heavy

shepherding. It is a form of lording it over God's heritage but it was also found in the Sandemanian movement up to a point.

4. Then a fourth feature of the Sandemanians is that they were anti-clerical.

They did not believe in a paid ministry. They had a strong emphasis on the absolute equality of the elder and the minister. The preaching elder and the ruling elder, they said, is one and the same office. If you do not pay money to a ruling elder, they argued, you should not pay it to the preaching elder, and, in this way, they were clearly anti-clerical.

5. They bred a small-church mentality.

Many of the Reformed churches in Scotland in their day had vast congregations. The same was true in Wales during the same 18th Century. There were great revivals. It was the beginning of the wonderful evangelical movement in Wales. So, there were huge churches in Scotland and in Wales at that time.

But the Sandemanians tended to frown on large churches. The important thing, they said, is not to be evangelising nor to be thinking of missionary work but rather to make "pure churches". The church was to be made perfect in the sight of God and so they got their supply of new members by proselytising. Their members tended not to come straight out of the world but rather out of other churches.

There are, of course, obvious similarities with some churches and movements which we see in the world today.

6. Sandemanianism produced an intellectual sort of Calvinism

This is of particular concern to us – their intellectual Calvinism had no interest in Christian experience.

The great Welsh preacher Christmas Evans, undoubtedly one of the outstanding Baptist preachers of our country, was greatly influenced for a period of some years by the Sandemanian movement. When he left the movement, he came to see that it had done great spiritual harm. It affected his preaching during the time in which he embraced its type of religion but he eventually escaped from it and became his former self.

When he did so he came to regard Sandemanianism as religious poison. It had robbed him for years of his zeal for God, of his delight in God and of

spiritual sweetness in prayer and preaching. He put it like this: "I have been robbed to a great degree of the spirit of prayer, the spirit of preaching".

So Sandemanianism affected all who came under its blighting influence. It held men in an icy grip like the North Pole. The famous William Williams of Pantycelyn, another outstanding Welsh evangelical minister, said of Sandemanianism: "it chilled one's feelings".

7. Sandemanianism produced a cold form of Christian character.

This was inevitable. Their Calvinism was correct, crystalline, cold and icy. Emotion was discouraged and frowned on.

Let us then see where the Sandemanians went wrong.

ITS ERRORS

As we have seen, they were not Arminians nor Amyraldians but professing Calvinists. Some of their leaders had been students of Calvin and admired greatly the English theological giant, John Owen. But they did not understand Calvin or Owen in some of their central emphases. They had misread these outstanding men. So we must now see how it was they went wrong.

1. Misunderstanding the Bible

For one thing, the Sandemanians went wrong because they misunderstood certain texts in the Bible.

One of their favourite texts was Romans 4:5: "But to him that worketh not but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness."

They understood this text in the sense that the first act of faith is the act of a man who hates God. God, they said justifies a man even though he is as yet ungodly and then, as a consequence, the fruits of faith follow, one of which is love towards God.

It is no wonder that the critics of the Sandemanians used to say that their view of faith was the faith of devils. The criticism is justified because it is preposterous to suggest that God justifies any person through a faith that is not accompanied by love.

Another of their favourite texts was 1 John 5:1: "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God". They again misunderstood this verse. They

argued from this text that the first thing the sinner does is to exercise faith in Christ and that, as a consequence of this act of faith, God blesses him with the privilege of being born into His kingdom. But the great error here is to reverse faith and the new birth as we shall see a little later.

2. Faith and Moral Discipline

At the root of Robert Sandeman's theory of faith is the question: can a man who is not rightly disposed towards God believe in him? Can a man exercise an act of saving faith in God when his whole moral character is at enmity with God? They said: yes, he can.

But that is again a misreading of the New Testament. The change must first come in a sinner's moral disposition before he can exercise his first act of justifying faith.

3. Faith and Repentance

The Sandemanian view was that repentance must follow faith. Faith, they said, comes first and repentance must follow.

It was at this point that the great English theologian, Andrew Fuller, was so helpful in his criticism of Sandemanianism. He said: "In that case, the Sandemanians talk about *a believer who is impenitent*". The sinner who believes in Christ, according to Sandemanianism, is *impenitent when he first believes*. He is a man who has faith in God but at this stage not yet any love for God. But again, this is impossible. *Faith and repentance always go together and cannot be separated.*

4. Faith and Regeneration

As we have noticed, the Sandemanians reversed faith and the new birth. They argued that the new birth occurs *after a sinner has believed in Christ*. Some notable American evangelists have brought the same theory across to this country, but the Scriptures teach that the new birth must come first. Andrew Fuller explained this point clearly in reference to John 3:6: "That which is born of the flesh is flesh". Fuller asked the question: how can a man who is "flesh" put his trust in Christ which is an act of a spiritual person? In that way Andrew Fuller showed the absurdity of the Sandemanian theory that faith comes before the new birth. There are other texts which he used to the same purpose such as Romans 8:7 and 1 Corinthians 2:14. Sandemanians had a method of evangelism all their own. If a man came to them wanting help or to be taught how to find Christ, the Sandemanian preacher would not tell him to repent or exhort him to believe or press any spiritual duties upon him at all. He would

simply inform him that Christ had died and then he would leave it at that, without any exhortation, because the Sandemanian preacher believed that the information should be sufficient for the enquiring sinner to come to faith. This was the mode of his evangelism.

5. Faith and Emotion

The Sandemanian definition of faith is defective because it leaves out any evidence of the will or the emotions as we have seen. It talked simply of a “naked faith”. But the faith which justifies the sinner is *not* a mere passive act of the soul.

It is not a mere “naked” faith as we see from such texts as 2 Thessalonians 2:10 where Paul speaks of “receiving the love of the truth”. Jonathan Edwards represents all orthodox writers when he says, in his treatise on Religious Affections, “that all true religion really consists in holy feelings, holy affections, love to God and love to man”. It is no wonder that the Sandemanian churches ended up with censorious attitudes and a sectarian mentality because, when true Christian love goes, everything goes.

CONCLUSION

At the heart of this subject is something far more relevant than would appear at first sight. This is not just a by-path of church history but an ever-present tendency in Calvinistic and other Christian circles.

It is always man’s temptation to reduce the Gospel to the “bare” believing of Gospel facts. True apostolic Christianity goes far beyond mental assent to Gospel truth. It involves a delight in God himself for His own sake. It involves union and communion with Christ in glory. It involves a personal experience of the Holy Ghost moving over our hearts with a variety of emotions such as delight, ecstasy and comfort. All these things are lost through the chilling influences of Sandemanianism which is a caricature of the religion of the Bible.

It is important that we should realise how glorious was the recovery of Christmas Evans from the chill winds of Sandemanianism. After 15 years of bondage to the cold religion which Sandemanian teaching brought to him he was wonderfully, finally and for ever delivered from this error. He tells us in his own journal about the experience. (See separate box.)

There will be little or no change in the churches of our land until our preachers and people have some richer and fuller experience of God than is commonly

the case today. We do not argue for emotionalism but we do plead for the need of a *deeper experimental religion* than is found commonly today. Where are our religious feelings? Where are the tears? Where are the sighs? Where is there to be seen evidence of strong emotions which are the result of a profound appreciation of God, His glory, His Gospel and the whole counsel of His Word?

Let us stir ourselves up everywhere with a fresh appetite for the knowledge of God Himself and let us guard against the dangers of Sandemanianism which are never far from us.

We are most grateful to our dear friend, Rev. Maurice Roberts, not only for writing these most informative and helpful articles, but also for giving us his very kind permission to reprint them in The Messenger. — MW

THE RARE JEWEL OF CHRISTIAN CONTENTMENT

Jeremiah Burroughs (1599-1646)

(edited and abridged)

“I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content” (Philippians 4:11)

Christian contentment is that sweet, inward, quiet, gracious frame of spirit, which freely submits to and delights in God’s wise and fatherly disposal in every condition.

(1) *A contented Christian is the most contented man in the world, and yet the most unsatisfied man in the world.* Mark, here lies the mystery of it: a little in the world will content a Christian for his passage, but all the world, and ten thousand times more, will not content a Christian for his portion. Content if he has but a crust, but bread and water; but having a gracious heart, enlarged to be capable of God and enjoying somewhat of Him, such a heart can be filled by nothing in the world, but only by God Himself. “Whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none upon the earth that I desire beside thee.” (Ps. 73:25)

(2) *A Christian comes to contentment, not so much by way of addition, as by way of subtraction.* I open it thus: not so much by adding what he would have, or to what he has; but rather by subtracting from his desires, so as to make his desires and his circumstances even and equal.

Another has said, The way to be rich is not by increasing wealth, but by diminishing our desires. *“The preparations of the heart in man...is from the Lord.”* (Prov. 16:1)

(3) *A Christian finds contentment, not so much by getting rid of the burden that is on him, as by adding another burden to himself.* You will say, How is this? In this manner: are you afflicted, and is there a great load and burden on you, because of your affliction? You think there is no way for the contentment of your spirit, but to get rid of your burden? O, you are deceived. The way of contentment is to add another burden, that is, to labour to load and burden your heart with your sin; the heavier your burden of sin is to your heart, the lighter will the burden of your affliction be to your heart, and so you will come to be content. *“A broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.”* (Ps. 51:17)

(4) *Contentment arises, not by the removing of the affliction, but by the turning and changing of the affliction into something else.* There is a power of grace to turn this affliction into good; it takes away the sting and poison of it. It comes now to be turned to a spiritual benefit to you. And so you come to be content. Luther comments on Galatians 5:15, *“A Christian beomes a mighty worker and a wonderful creator, that is, to create of heaviness, joy; out of terror, comfort; out of sin, righteousness; and out of death, life.”* It is the nature of grace to turn water into wine, that is, to turn the water of your affliction into the wine of heavenly consolation. *“Blessed be God, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; who comforteth us in all our tribulation.”* (2 Cor. 1:3,4)

(5) *Christian contentment is discovered, not by making up the want of circumstances, but by performing the work of circumstances.* A carnal heart thinks, I must have my wants made up or else it is impossible that I should be content. But a gracious heart says: What is the duty of the circumstances into which God has placed me? You should labour to bring your heart to quiet and contentment by setting your soul to work in the duties of your present condition. Say to yourself, *“Well, though I am in a low position, yet I am serving the counsels of God in the circumstances where I am; it is the counsel of God that has brought me into these circumstances that I am in, and I desire to serve the counsels of God in these circumstances.”* Thus is the heart quieted for the present, and shall live and die comfortably. There is a remarkable scripture concerning David: *“David, after he had served his generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers.”* (Acts: 13:36)

(6) *A gracious heart is contented by the melting of its will and desires into God's will and desires.* This is a small degree higher than submitting to the will of God. A Christian believer can make God's will and his own the same. It is said of believers that they are "joined to the Lord", and are "one spirit" (1 Cor. 6:17): that means, that whatever God's will is, the believer does not only see good reason to submit to it, but God's will is his will. When the soul can make over, as it were, his will to God, he must needs be contented. "*He shall choose our inheritance for us*" (Ps. 47:4).

(7) *Contentment consists not in bringing anything from outside to make the condition more comfortable, but in purging out something that is within.* Now the men of the world, when they would have contentment feel that they lack something. They must have something from outside to content them; but a godly man says, Let me get something out that is in already, and then I shall come to contentment. To illustrate, suppose a man has a fever that makes what he drinks taste really bitter: he says to his wife, You must put some sugar in my drink; she puts some in, but still the drink tastes bitter. Why? Because the bitterness comes from a bitter choleric humour within. The way to contentment is to purge out your lusts and bitter humours. This is the way of godliness, that the men of this world never think of. From whence comes discontent and all its consequences? "*Come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?*" (James: 4:1).

(8) *A gracious heart gets contentment by living upon the dew of God's blessing.* Adrian Junius uses the simile of a grasshopper to described a contented man. A grasshopper, he says, leaps and skips up and down, living upon the dew: in the same way a Christian finds food the world does not know of; he is fed in a secret way by the dew of the blessing of God. He feels God's love to him; by the sanctifying of his heart, he finds, in what he has and enjoys, that his heart is drawn nearer to God; although he has only mean fare, he knows that God as a Father has provided it free of all cost to him, and it therefore is very sweet to him; true, what he has is little, but he knows he has a right to it, through the purchase of the Lord Jesus Christ, and this makes it a great deal better and sweeter to him; and one other thing here: everything he has – however small - is like a first instalment and the rest is to follow, even glory, which is reserved for him. This brings true contentment. "*Thy blessing is upon thy people*" (Ps. 3:8).

(9) *The true believer, in all his afflictions, in all the evils that befall him, discovers God's love and goodness, which makes everything bearable, and makes him strangely contented.* This is a mystery to a carnal man: such think

God loves them when He prospers them and makes them rich, and loves them not when He afflicts them with trouble and sorrow. But the spiritual man knows that *“all the paths of the Lord”* - the paths of affliction as well as the paths of prosperity – *“are mercy and truth unto such as keep his covenant and his testimonies.”* (Ps. 25:10)

(10) *As a godly man, he sees all the sting, venom, and poison of his hardships and difficulties taken out by the virtue of Jesus Christ, His Mediator.* He believes and knows that whether he suffers poverty, dishonour, or fear, it is not punitive, intended to inflict punishment, because the Saviour suffered in our place and for us, and reflecting on that he is relieved and contented. Sometimes one who is very godly and gracious, may be found bearing grievous pains and extremities very cheerfully, and you may wonder at it. But he has peace by acting his faith upon what pains and griefs Jesus Christ suffered, and he knows in his heart that *“there is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.”* (Rom. 8:1)

(11) *A gracious heart has contentment by getting strength from Jesus Christ; and with His strength, he is content to bear his burden whatever that burden may be.* The Scripture says, *“of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace”* (Jn. 1:16); and there is strength in Christ, not only to save and sanctify us, but there is strength to support us under all our burdens and afflictions. Indeed, our troubles may be heavy, and we may cry out, Oh, we cannot bear them; but although you cannot bear them in your own strength, yet how can you tell what you will do with the strength of Jesus Christ? His strength is made over to you by faith and thus the Lord becomes our strength. Unto what? Unto contentment, as the apostle prays for the Colossians, that they might be *“strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness.”* (Col. 1:11)

(12) *Godly people enjoy much of God in everything they have, and they know how to make up all wants in God Himself.* Just as God often lets out a great deal of His power in working miracles on small things, even so He lets out much of His goodness and mercy, in comforting and rejoicing the hearts of His people. If anything is cut off from the stream, they know how to go to the fountain and make up everything there. God is their all in all. Says God to them, *“Your estate is lost, but am I not to you as ten homes, and ten shops?”* What is it that satisfies God, but that He enjoys all fulness in Himself, and so He comes to have satisfaction in Himself. Now, if you enjoy God as your portion, why should you not be satisfied and contented in Him? And *“The Lord is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him.”* (Lam. 3:24)

God has made a Covenant with them and, in the promises of that Covenant, He has supplied all our needs. This is the way of contentment, to go to the promises and trust Him to fulfil them. God says to us, "I am the Lord thy God", enabling us to say, "I shall not want... Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever."

So true it is that "*godliness with contentment is great gain.*" (1 Tim. 6:6)

GOD'S PROMISES

Horatius Bonar (1808-1889)

In all promises God is speaking to us as only God can speak: He speaks in truth and love; He expects to be credited and trusted. Let us not wrong Him by suspicion or coldness. Let us do justice to His Word and to Himself.

"The word of promise," says John Owen, "is the soul's great support in waiting for God;" and another has truly said that "every promise is built upon four pillars: God's justice or holiness, which will not suffer Him to deceive; His grace or goodness, which will not suffer Him to forget; His truth, which will not suffer him to change; and His power, which makes Him able to accomplish."

A promise is something sent on beforehand to tell of something else that is coming after. It is from a Latin word meaning "foresent": a *foresent* word, or sign, or deed, making sure to us something better than itself, which must be waited for.

The faint light-streaks in the east are the promises of day, foresent to tell us that the sun is coming up in his strength. The seed is the promise of the flower; and the spring-bud is the promise of autumn with its mellow fruit.

It is the will of God that binds together past and present and future; and in the promise we have the intimation of that will. We trust the future because of the present and the past. The thing that hath been is that which shall be, and that which is done is that which shall be done.

He who sends the messenger, or gives the sign, or speaks the word, is the promiser; and it is on his character for truthfulness that we depend in regard to the certainty of that which is to come. If he be faithless, or rash in promising, or unable to carry out his own will, or vacillating in his purposes, his messages

are worthless. They are hollow sounds that do but mock us; worm-eaten planks flung across a stream, which look like a bridge, but are too frail to be trusted even by a child. If, however, he be true and powerful, and stable in purpose, then the thing to come is as sure as that which has come. His promise is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For everything that gives worth to a promise depends on the truth and grace and power of the promiser; and as in Scripture we have to do with Him who is not a man that he should lie, nor the son of man that he should repent, we are sure that not one good thing shall fail which He has forespoken.

A promise does indeed sometimes seem to fail. It sounded well, but it has passed away, and nothing has come forth from it. It shot up, but it has died down; its root seems to have become rottenness, and its blossom to have gone up as dust. So was it with the first promise regarding the woman's seed, which lay dormant for four thousand years; and not till then came to pass the saying that is written, "Behold, a virgin (*'the virgin,'* it should run) shall conceive, and bear a son." But the temporary failure is the permanent success; the promise departs for a season that it should be realized for ever. Like the corn of wheat, it falls into the ground and dies, in order that it may not remain alone, but be more fruitful.

Through death it is, we may say, that many a promise passes to resurrection, and that which was sown in weakness is raised in power. To many a troubled spirit, forecasting sorrowfully its own future, or the world's future, or the Church's future (as if the link had snapped, and the truth of God failed), we may say, "That which thou sowest is not quickened except it die." Many are the promises which, like the stars, are hidden by light, and need darkness to bring out their lustre — "Like secret characters, invisible till opened to the light, or like the potter's paintings, colourless, 'till they have passed to glory through the flames."

"He ever wins who sides with God," it has been well said; and we may add, he ever wins who trusts in God, and gives him credit for speaking truthfully, for meaning what he says, and for an unailing purpose to carry out every jot and tittle of what he has declared. To be in sympathy with God as to the present, rejoicing that his will is done, and that it is just what it is this is one side or phase of faith, producing healthy tranquillity of soul.

To trust Him with the future, because it is His future, and because we are to be partakers of that future with Him according to His word of promise, this is the other side of faith; and fitted not only to make us "careful for nothing," but

to "rejoice in hope," to look into the cloudiest future that ever hung over a Church or an age, with serene though solemn eye.

It is not a little remarkable that in the Hebrew there is no special term for promise. That which our version renders "promise" is simply "word" yes, WORD, no more. God's word is His promise. With men more may be needed, "and an oath for confirmation is to them the end of all strife;" but with God this is not required. With One so true, so loving, so powerful, so unchangeable, a word is enough. He speaks, and it is done.

It is even more remarkable that the Hebrew term for word is the same as for deed. God's words are deeds. "I have pronounced the word," says He (Jer. 34:5). "I will hasten my word to perform it" (Jer. 1:12). "None of my words shall be prolonged" (Ezek. 12:28). "The days are at hand, and the effect literally 'the word' of every vision" (Ezek. 12:23). "Then came the word of the Lord, saying, Is there anything [literally 'any word'] too hard for me?" (Jer. 32:26, 27). With God, to speak the thing is to do it; the word uttered from His almighty lips would have done the thing at the very moment, had not He for a season restrained its power and interposed an interval between the utterance and the consummation. Volition, speech, and action among men are very different things, quite separable from each other, nay, at variance sometimes with each other; but it is not so with God. When he says something, it is as good as done; and you may call it either a word, or a thing, or a fact. With Him a promise is not a messenger sent on before to tell of something to be done; it is itself the fulfiller and performer. With Him the interval between the saying and the doing is as nothing; the promise contains the thing; the word conveys the deed; the declaration carries in its own bosom its fulfilment and execution. "Let there be light," He said, "and there was light;" for he commanded the light to shine out of darkness; he spoke creation out of nothing; for "where the word of a king is, there is power" (Eccles. 8:4). By His word all things have been, are, and shall be; by the word of God the heavens were of old; and He who is called "The WORD of God" is represented as "upholding all things by the word of his power" (Heb. 1:3). Yes "his word runneth very swiftly" (Ps. 147:15); and yet it hardly seems to overtake His doings; like the two disciples, word and deed" run both of them together."

Confidence, then, in the perfection of Scripture and in the Divine accuracy of its words, must be the foundation of any treatise on its promises. For how idle to select, or classify, or comment on sentences, of the accuracy of which you are not sure, and for whose authority as an infallible utterance you feel that you have no evidence. Of what avail would it be for me to press home upon

any fellow-man such words as, "He will abundantly pardon," or, "Seek ye me, and ye shall live," if I cannot tell him that these are the very words of God Himself; not a thought of God embodied, perhaps very imperfectly, in man's words, but the very utterance of God, the words of his lips, and the outflowing of his heart? Without this confidence, the link between the promise and the promiser is broken; for I cannot know whether the former truly represents the mind of the latter; and unless I know this, a promise is a mockery. If the gracious words which I read truly represent the gracious speaker, and are exact revelations of his mind and heart, then I rejoice in them. They are honest as well as loving words; authentic expositions of a grace which I feel to be altogether suitable. But if the words are defective, ambiguous, and only very indirectly Divine, then I am, in so far as security is concerned, without a promise; for I can only feel secure if I am absolutely persuaded that the words I rest on are the words of the living God. Nothing else will bear my weight. Faith cannot fasten itself to a human anchor; it cannot build on any foundation less than Divine. It believes, because it knows that God has spoken. It stands not in feeling, or intuition, or sentiment, or speculation, but in the genuine word. Anything less than this is sand, not rock. "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17).

The whole comfort of a promise depends upon its being the very word of the Promiser, the revelation of God's mind to us. Take away this and its pleasant sound is nothing but a sentiment, or a soothing verse of poetry, or a cheering melody. It speaks with no authority, and can be no real help. It can heal no wounds, open no prison doors, administer no medicine, strengthen no weakness, nerve us against no adversary, lead us on to no victory.

The Bible's promises all land us in God himself; and each word is a round in that Divine ladder whose foot is at our door, and whose top rests against the gate of the heavenly city. If the words fail us, the ground on which we stand gives way; we are cheated, we are mocked, a deception has been practised upon us, the aspect of gladness which the promise presented to us vanishes away. Let me call the promises the title-deeds of my inheritance. Each clause in these is of importance to me; for on it my right to this or that portion of the heritage will rest.

THE PURITANS ON THE PROMISES OF GOD

“It is better to be low as hell with a promise, than in Paradise without one.”
— *John Flavel*

“A great part of a Christian’s estate lies in bonds and bills in God’s hand.”
— *John Trapp*

“Grace and truth are the two ingredients of an evangelical promise.”
— *John Owen*

“We cannot close with Christ without a promise; and we must not close with a promise without Christ.”
— *Thomas Manton*

“The promise is the marriage-ring on the hand of faith; now we are not married to the ring, but with it to Christ.”
— *William Gurnall*

“The Bible is bespangled with promises made to prayer...The promises are the cork to keep faith from sinking in prayer.”
— *Thomas Watson*

“Though providences may seem to cross one another, they shall never cross God’s promises.”
— *Stephen Charnock*

“The promises...are a mine of rich treasures, a garden full of the choicest and sweetest flowers; in them are wrapped up all celestial contentments and delights.”
— *Thomas Brooks*

“‘All the promises of God in him are yea, and in him amen’, that is, they are certain, they are made in Him; they and they are accomplished in Him...God will have His church ruled by promises in all ages, to exercise faith, and hope, and prayer, and dependence upon God; and to arm us in this world against fears and discouragements.”
— *Richard Sibbes*

“The promises are the great charter, containing all the privileges which were purchased by Christ; like an apothecary’s shop [that is, a chemist’s shop] they are full of various salves for every sore, of precious remedies for every malady, of choice cordials to enliven thee with spiritual consolation in the saddest condition. One promise is of unspeakable worth.”

— *George Swinnock*

“The being of God may as well fail as the promise of God.”

— *Timothy Cruso*

“The very possession of the world is not half so sure as God’s promises.”

— *Thomas Adams*