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UNBELIEF

Many years ago a ship named *The Thetis* was cruising in the Mediterranean in search of unseen but treacherous rocks. After some time, the Captain, having failed, abandoned his enterprise, declaring that the reported danger was all a dream. However, an officer on board thought otherwise and, sometime later, he went out himself on an expedition and, after searching, he found beneath the waters a reef of rocks, which he subsequently reported to the Admiralty. The Captain came to hear about this discovery and he just would not believe that such a reef existed. "The whole thing is a falsehood", he exclaimed, adding, "If ever I have the keel of *The Thetis* under me in those waters again, if I don't carry her clean over where the chart now marks a rock, call me a liar, and no seaman."

Two years after this, the Captain was in this very same ship, carrying the British Ambassador to Naples. One dark and windy night, he and the Master were examining the chart when the latter pointed to the sunken rock on the map. "What!" he exclaimed, "is this absurd notion to confront me yet again? No, I once swore that I would sail over the spot the first chance I had; and this is what I'll do." Descending to the cabin, he related to the ship's company the whole story, and then he said, "Within five minutes we shall have passed the spot." Then, taking out his watch, he said, "Oh! The time is past. We have already gone over this so-called reef." Almost immediately there was a terrible grating noise underneath them, then a sudden shock, followed by a tremendous crash: the ship had foundered. Through great exertions most of the crew were saved; but, tragically, the Captain was not to survive. The last seen of him was from the dark hull of *The Thetis*, as the waves burst round her bows and stern. He perished that night in that awful place, a victim of his own unbelief.

Even so today, many are warned of the unseen but terrible danger awaiting them on account of their sins, but they disparagingly dismiss it as the product of an over-active imagination and they deny that there is any truth about Judgment to come or everlasting punishment in Hell. They are determined to proceed in life, without thought or fear. Then, all too suddenly, in an hour when they least expect it, the terrible reality of divine retribution strikes home and, in an instant, they are forcibly brought down to death and to despair. Believe God's Word. Through faith in Jesus Christ, the only Saviour, *be saved right now* – or, in adamant unbelief, *be lost for ever*.

FELLOWSHIP NEWS

It was both a joy and a privilege to welcome Rev. Andrew Allan to our pulpit for our missionary weekend held on 12 - 13 May. Mr. Allan, who is minister of Partick Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) in Glasgow, is also the General Secretary of Hudson Taylor Ministries. This year our attention was focused on the work of this society in China. The weekend commenced with a meeting on Saturday afternoon. Mr. Allan began by directing our thoughts to Christ's Great Commission, reminding us of the responsibility of the Church to engage in evangelism at every opportunity. Together we considered the power of the One whom we serve; that all nations need to be taught that Christ is the only way to God; that we must teach others to observe Christ's commands in the Scriptures; and finally that in all our endeavours we have the encouraging presence of Christ and the help of His Holy Spirit. Mr Allan then gave a brief resume of the history of the Hudson Taylor Ministries, so named to acknowledge the endeavours of this great missionary statesman in the nineteenth century. Today, the society focuses on theological training for those called to preach the gospel; translating and publishing of reformed literature; Christian education in schools; and diaconal help for those in real need. We are urged to pray much for this vast country where Christians are once again under attack. We hold on in faith to Christ's promise that He will build his church - even in China. Mr Allan faithfully preached God's Word at both services on the Lord's Day. Then, at an After Church Fellowship, he spoke movingly of the Lord's dealings with him from before conversion until his present preaching ministry. The whole weekend was much blessed of the Lord, leaving us with a challenge to pray not only for China, but also for Mr. Allan's ministry there in Partick. May he be much encouraged, knowing that his labour is not in vain in the Lord.

We were privileged to meet Pastor Daniel Silveira, together with his wife and young daughter, on the Lord's Day 3 June. Mr Silveira and Pastor Green studied together at the Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, forming a close friendship. At an After Church Fellowship Mr Silveira spoke to us of his call to the ministry which, in the providence of God, has led him to the pastorate of a Presbyterian church in Salvador, Brazil. Mr Silveira gave us a brief history of the emergence of Protestantism in this deeply Catholic country, which began with the arrival of some French Huguenots in the 16th century. Today there are 3000 Presbyterian churches in Brazil. Despite problems due to the rise of Pentecostalism and the prosperity gospel,

God is nevertheless blessing through the publication of reformed literature in Portuguese. As a result there is a growing number of reformed evangelical churches in Brazil today. Pastor Silveira closed by requesting prayer for his own ministry with all its challenges; for increased maturity in the reformed churches so that reformation may influence all of life not only the sermon; and finally for an army of faithful preachers to continue the work of reformation in this vast country, to the glory of God.

SALISBURY REFORMED SEMINARY OPEN STUDY WEEKEND

Friday and Saturday, 8 & 9 June, were set apart as an Open Study Weekend when we were ready to welcome interested friends to join us for the lectures. Sadly, in the event, Dr Michael Haykin was unable to deliver his lectures on "The Particular Baptists and the Revival in the 18th Century."

This meant a rearrangement of the lecture programme on both the Friday and the Saturday. We were very grateful to the brethren who stood in at such short notice; and we were thankful for a truly blessed time together when we welcomed a number of visitors from our own area and from further afield. The new schedule was as follows:

Friday:

- 8.30 - Joshua (1) {John Saunders) – for the students.
- 10.00 - The Felt Presence of God (Malcolm Watts)
- 11.30 - The Reformed Faith in the Public Domain (Hywel Roberts)
- 13.45 - Overview of British Church History (1) (Roland Burrows)
- 15.15 - Overview of British Church History (2) (Roland Burrows)

Saturday:

- 8.30 - Joshua (2) (John Saunders) – for the students.
- 10.00 - The Life of John Calvin (Malcolm Watts)
- 11.30 - The History of Revivals in Wales (Dewi Higham)
- 13.45 - Prerequisites for Revival (Dewi Higham)
- 15:15 - Encouragement in God (Malcolm Watts)

Studies in the book of Joshua – John Saunders

In the first of two lectures, a brief personal history of Joshua was given followed by consideration of the historical setting, date and authorship of the book, together with an overview of its overall structure. Following this, there was an introduction to the book's rich potential for pastoral and evangelistic themes, along with its views and glimpses of a greater than Joshua who was to come. The second lecture concentrated on a closer look at some of the passages of the book, with particular emphasis on their spiritual application.

The Felt Presence of God; the Life of John Calvin; and Encouragement in God – Malcolm Watts

Introducing this subject, an important distinction was made between the *general* presence of God and the *special* presence of God. In the former sense, God, in the immensity of His Being, fills all places (1 Kings 8:27; Jeremiah 23:23,24); and His authority and power reach everywhere (Psalm 135:6; Romans 9:5), so that His works and their effects are also everywhere ((Acts 17:28); and in the latter sense, He is particularly present: *in heaven*, for example, he is *gloriously* present (Psalm 115:3): *in hell*, he is *wrathfully* present (Psalm 139:8); and *on earth*, He may be, at times, *graciously* present (Genesis 28:16,17; Exodus 20:24).

This *gracious* presence can be *known* and *felt*. In fact, it very much relates to Christian *experience*. Believers enjoy a union with God, through the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thessalonians 1:1; 1 John 4:16), a union that is *mysterious*, *intimate* and *permanent* (Psalm 65:4; John 17:21; Romans 8:38,39; cf. 1 Samuel 12:22; Hosea 2:19). How then do we understand those scriptures which speak of God *withdrawing* and *returning* (Isaiah 54:7,8. Psalm 101:2; Zechariah 1:16). There can be no change with respect to union, but, in experience, *the sense* and *awareness* of His presence can *come* and *go* – and *return again* (Psalm 77:7-9; Lamentations 3:57; Micah 7:19).

The experience of God *drawing near* is *evidenced* and *enjoyed* when God makes some manifestation of Himself (Leviticus 9:4; Jeremiah 31:30), communicates His love to our hearts (Romans 5:5), grants to us some wise counsel (Psalms 25:14), bestows to us His spiritual comfort (Isaiah 45:12), works graciously within us (Philippians 2:12), and allows us sweet and blessed communion with Himself (2 Corinthians 6:16-18).

Visitations of this kind are promised (Genesis 26:3; John 14:18) and therefore they may be expected (Hosea 6:3), especially on account of His great love, His gracious covenant, and His effective reconciliation. Truly, “He satisfieth the longing soul” (Psalm 107:9). There are signs of His nearer approach to us: He begins to speak to us through His Word, calling us to Himself and to blessing (Song of Solomon 2:8); our graces are quickened and stirred (Song of Solomon 1:12); our hearts begin to pray for His presence (Isaiah 64:1,3); we feel great reverence in worship (Habakkuk 2:20); and, finally, there arises within us a feeling of hope and expectancy (Luke 3:15).

It was pointed out that this experience of God admits of *degrees*: therefore, it is likened to *the sun*, increasing in light and heat (Hosea 6:3); and to *rivers*, the waters of which can rise, even to the overflowing of their banks (Ezekiel 47:1-5); and to *clouds* which may be very small at first but eventually they can fill the whole sky (2 Kings 18:44,45). In one way believers are never satisfied. Like Moses, they constantly say, “I beseech thee, shew me thy glory” (Exodus 33:18).

Towards the close of the lecture, there was *application made* to 1) those presently enjoying this experience; 2) those who once knew it but know it no more; and 3) those who earnestly desire God to come to them in a new way. We so much need *the felt presence of God*.

The second lecture outlined the life of John Calvin. Born at Noyon in Picardy in 1509, Calvin was destined to become the leading figure of the Protestant Reformation. His father, Gerard, had become a lawyer securing for himself important legal positions in the Church. He was ambitious for his son, at first wanting for him a place within the priesthood, but then deciding that his son’s future best lay in the study of the law. At the age of 19, John was therefore sent to the Faculty of Law, at Orleans, where he mastered law so well, that he proved capable of deputizing for his professors.

In 1531, his father died; and it was about this time that John experienced real conversion. In the Preface to his commentary on the Psalms, he wrote: “At first, I was so obstinately devoted to the superstitions of the Papacy (and more stubbornly so than was right for someone of my age) that I was not easily extricated from so profound an abyss. Then God, by a sudden conversion, changed and shaped my heart toward being more receptive. Having received some foretaste of true godliness, I at once burned with so great a zeal to

progress, that although I did not give up my other studies, I yet pursued them more slackly..." Whenever this actually took place, it is certain that by 1533 John was wholly on the side of the Reformation. As to the means used by God to bring him to faith, mention should be made of his exposure to the Holy Scriptures, the spread of Reformation teaching, and the personal witness of a relative - Pierre Robert Olivetan.

On All Saints' Day, 1533, Nicholas Cop, the new Rector of the University, preached in defence of Reformation Truth and, in particular, the doctrine of Justification by Faith Alone. Cop was one of John's close friends and since a part of this sermon was found in his handwriting, it was thought to be his work. John therefore fled from the University of Paris, in 1533, strongly suspected of being a Protestant, and for a while he lived a rather nomadic existence, but he spent considerable time at the home of Louis Du Tillet, where he was granted access to a Library of 4,000 volumes. In the peace and quiet of that home, he worked on the first edition of his famous *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1536).

Later, in 1536, in the course of his travels, he visited the City of Geneva, where Guillaume Farel was the Minister. Farel felt strongly that John should stay in Geneva, furthering the work of reformation there. Indeed, he threatened him with a dreadful curse if he should leave. John felt compelled to stay. Thus began an association with Geneva which continued for the remaining 28 years of his life. He, along with Farel and others, produced *A Confession of Faith* and a series of Articles on *The Organization of the Church and its Worship in Geneva*. He also established an *Academy* in that City. Although there were encouragements, there were also severe conflicts, especially in the late 1540s and early 1550s.

After many years of faithful service, tuberculosis set in, and John Calvin died on Saturday, 27 May, 1564, at 8pm. Theodore Beza, His friend and successor, wrote: "On that day, with the setting sun, the brightest light in the Church of God on earth was taken to heaven."

What can be said of this man? He was one who had a deep experience of God and His grace; he cultivated his spiritual life with private devotions, walking with God; he was very courageous in his stand for the Truth of God's written Word; he was a great Reformer, strengthening the Cause of God and Truth, in England, Scotland, and many other parts of the world; he faithfully taught

throughout his life the whole counsel of God; he evidenced a pastoral and loving heart, comforting many who were suffering for the Lord's sake; and, let it be said, he lived to the glory of God and for the good of His Church, never doubting or denying any doctrine or precept taught in God's Holy Word.

The third lecture was an exposition of those impressive words: "*David encouraged himself in the Lord his God*" (1 Samuel 30:6).

During his early life, when persecuted by King Saul, David returned one day to Ziklag, his home-base, only to find that the Amalekites had attacked and burned the city, taking captive all the women and children. He and those with him were overwhelmed with grief, the Scripture recording that "they lifted up their voice and wept, until they had no more power to weep" (1 Samuel 30:4).

A Great Distress: This world often proves to be a "valley of weeping" (Psalm 84:6). God's people seem to be distinguished by their troubles and sorrows (Psalm 38:6). It is "through much tribulation" that they "enter into the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). We languish at times under extremity of sorrow (Psalm 119:28). Only in heaven will the tears be wiped from our eyes (Revelation 21:4).

A Great Comfort: God is our comfort, but how exactly can we draw on that comfort? 1) In deep and pressing sorrow, we can think on Him as the One who has sovereign control of our lives (Psalm 57:2); 2) We can reflect on His great love and care for us (Isaiah 43:4); 3) As our covenant God, He is committed (Jeremiah 32:38); 4) He is a pardoning God and hence we can rest assured there is no punishment in what befalls us (Isaiah 40:2); 5) His promises constitute the charter of our consolations (Hebrews 13:5,6); 6) However wretched and miserable our condition, we always have access to Him through prayer (1 Peter 5:6,7); and 7) His people have proved Him faithful in the past and they have known what it is to be lifted up (Job 22:29). "Hope thou in God" (Psalm 42:11).

The Reformed Faith in the Public Domain – Hywel Roberts

This lecture began by noting that the Protestant Reformation has had a profound influence on the political, social and cultural life of the British people for nearly five hundred years. Sadly, as was pointed out, the influence of the Reformation is on the wane in our contemporary society, with the advance of secular humanism in the corridors of power, the media and education. The

powers that be regard religious belief as a private matter which has no place in the public domain. Some believers also regard their faith as a private matter, so they maintain a low profile in national life and community affairs and have very little influence on society in general and government in particular. This clearly ought not to be. As Christians in the Reformed tradition, it was stated that we have a clear Biblical warrant to bring our faith into the public domain, that we might exercise some influence for good and for God in our contemporary society.

Abraham Kuyper held that the genius of Calvinism was the doctrine of God's sovereignty over every sphere of life, in contrast to the pietistic view that Christianity was only about the salvation of individual souls.

The observation was made – and it is for all to see – that a remarkable change has taken place in British society in recent years. We are undergoing a profound identity crisis, brought about by the loss of our Christian heritage and wide-spread abandonment of traditional Judeo-Christian values. Successive governments have shown appalling disregard for the moral law of God, and threaten to silence believers who openly declare their faith in Christ and adhere to the fundamental doctrines and principles of Biblical Christianity. We must, nevertheless, as the lecture made clear, adhere to the historic Reformed Faith and extend our Christian witness to every sphere of life and human activity; and thereby influence the institutions of state, media and education, for good and for God.

The Reformed Faith not only addresses the matter of personal salvation, but puts it into the wider context of God's eternal purpose in the redemption of the world through our Lord Jesus Christ. This may not be very evident at the present time, but it nevertheless holds forth the prospect of its realization in the glory of the world to come.

A Survey of British Church History – Roland Burrows

The first aim of this survey was to show that Christianity, by the grace of God, arrived in these Islands at a very early date. Some authorities have suggested that the apostles Peter and Paul actually visited Britain. Certainly the ancient Celtic Church can be traced back to the 1st Century. Some like T.V. Moore even claimed it to have been Presbyterian in regard to its Church order. The Celtic, later known as the Culdee Church (one interpretation, Companions of

God), maintained its independence from Rome, which came later via the evangelisation of the Saxons by Augustine of Canterbury in A.D. 597.

The second point was to show that the British Church always maintained a certain independence from Rome. Though the two Churches officially merged after the Synod of Whitby A.D. 664, a significant number of the Culdees maintain their independence and this continued for many centuries; there is some evidence of their existence as late as the 17th Century. Some maintain a connection between the Culdees and the Lollards in the 14th Century.

Amongst the great figures of this early period, mention could be made of Alfred the Great (849-899) who sought to apply Christian principles to all aspects of national and public life.

Anselm (c. 1033–1109) Archbishop of Canterbury, is particularly remembered for his great work on the Atonement, *Cur Deus Homo*, (*Why God Became Man*), in which we see the seed of the Reformation.

The third point demonstrated that God maintains his witness at all times, and we noted some of the early forerunners of the Reformation such as Robert Grosseteste (c. 1175 – 1253), Thomas Bradwardine (1290 – 1349) and others leading up to the time of John Wycliffe, known as the *Morning Star of the Reformation* (c. 1320 – 1384). The immense significance of Wycliffe - and the implications of all that he wrote - has probably yet to be fully discovered.

The fourth point was that Christianity brought about union between the various peoples that then made up the population of Britain: Celts, Saxons, Angles, Jutes, Danes, Normans.

The fifth point noted the Christian influence behind the Magna Carta and the establishing of representative government.

The Sixth point was that the Reformation came at a time when the cause of Christ seemed lost, and its future bleak. Time and time again in Church history, we see that darkest night comes before dawn.

The Puritans were those who wanted the Reformation to go further and as it developed it produced some of the greatest Divines of all time. Politically it

enshrined in the nation principles of democracy and religious liberty and a wholesome standard of living perhaps not seen in history before.

Though Puritanism seemed for a while defeated towards the end of the 17th century, it nevertheless gave us the Bill of Rights in 1689, and re-emerged in the great Revival of the 18th Century under Whitefield and Wesley. The 18th Century Revival is said to have enabled the Industrial Revolution to develop, and later saved the country from a French-style revolution. The same revival gave birth to the modern Missionary Movement and later to the great social reforms of the 19th century. The benefits of Christian influence in the 19th century were enormous, and continued the moral transformation of the nation.

Sadly, the Higher Critical Movement, together with the influence of Darwinism in that century gave rise to theological liberalism and constituted a serious attack on the Victorian Church. (Men like C.H. Spurgeon faithfully and bravely stood against it.) The further outcome of these developments, exacerbated by the effect of the First and Second World wars, has had a serious and baneful influence on the churches of the Twentieth Century, and lies behind the secular, amoral atmosphere of the present day.

Summing up, the great truth was presented to us that God is the Potentate of Time, He will build His Church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. When dark days come, when there is least appearance, suddenly we see the day of his power. Always in the shadows is God, keeping watch upon his own, and ever working, and ever moving towards the final manifestation of the victory of Christ, his Glorious Second Coming.

The History of Revivals in Wales; and Prerequisites for Revival – Dewi Higham

Wales was at one time referred to as “the land of revivals”. In the first lecture it was pointed out that there were two golden periods in the history of Wales. The first golden era spanned from about 400 to 650, where the early “saints” spread the gospel with evangelistic zeal. The evidence all points to a time of Divine visitation. The second golden era spanned from about 1700 to 1900 or so. Many connect Wales with the 1904 revival but, although this revival was a great blessing, it was far from the most powerful and deep work experienced. The dates of 1735, 1817-22 and 1859 are the most well-known periods of revival, when there was a wonderful emphasis and balance of the Word and Spirit. In truth, there was unbroken revival throughout the two centuries, where

some part of Wales knew of a visitation. It is the Lord's grace that brought about these visitations and it is to the Lord's grace that we look again.

The second lecture began by observing that the first chapter of books on revival often reveals the *beginnings* and *stirrings* associated with a true work of God. In 2 Chronicles 7:14, we find a description of the Lord's conditions and promises to bless. We understand that God is sovereign and there cannot be any kind of formula for revival, yet the Lord calls upon us to draw near with humility, to repent of our wicked ways and to pray. Essentially, we are to come before him with integrity of heart and of life and pray to Him. In the final analysis, if He hears our prayer, it will be grace, as we come so short of his invitations. Yet if we truly seek him he will hear. As Matthew Henry said, "If we perform our part of the covenant, God will not fail to perform his". In the words of the old revival people, "He will come again."

CHARLES SPURGEON'S BRIEF MEDITATION

From the evening of 28 May

"This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope" — Lamentations 3:21

Memory is frequently the bond slave of despondency. Despairing minds call to remembrance every dark foreboding in the past, and dilate upon every gloomy feature in the present; thus memory, clothed in sackcloth, presents to the mind a cup of mingled gall and wormwood. There is, however, no necessity for this. Wisdom can readily transform memory into an angel of comfort. That same recollection which in its left hand brings so many gloomy omens, may be trained to bear in its right a wealth of hopeful signs. She need not wear a crown of iron, she may encircle her brow with a fillet of gold, all spangled with stars. Thus it was in Jeremiah's experience: in the previous verse memory had brought him to deep humiliation of soul: "My soul hath them still in remembrance, and is humbled in me;" and now this same memory restored him to life and comfort. "This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope." Like a two-edged sword, his memory first killed his pride with one edge, and then slew his despair with the other. As a general principle, if we would exercise our memories more wisely, we might, in our very darkest distress, strike a match which would instantaneously kindle the lamp of comfort. There is no need for God to create a new thing upon the earth in order to restore believers to joy; if they would prayerfully rake the ashes of the past, they would find light for the

present; and if they would turn to the book of truth and the throne of grace, their candle would soon shine as aforetime. Be it ours to remember the lovingkindness of the Lord, and to rehearse his deeds of grace. Let us open the volume of recollection which is so richly illuminated with memorials of mercy, and we shall soon be happy. Thus memory may be, as Coleridge calls it, “the bosom-spring of joy,” and when the Divine Comforter bends it to his service, it may be chief among earthly comforters.

Submitted by Keith Grewcock

THE LORD’S SUPPER

John Willison (1680-1750)

Part 3

After the Sacramental Elements and the Sacramental Actions, we come now to the Sacramental Words.

THE SACRAMENTAL WORDS

Question. Are not the sacramental elements, actions and words to be reckoned all three together, as the outward sensible signs in this ordinance, for exhibiting, sealing, and applying Christ and His benefits to worthy communicants?

Answer. Yes.

Q. Is there any difference between them? A. Though they all be very significant and instructive to us in partaking, yet they seem to differ in this, that the sacramental elements mainly hold forth the spiritual matter and substance which we partake of; the sacramental actions serve as a rule or example to regulate our practice in it: and the sacramental words point forth the doctrine, uses, and ends of the ordinance.

Q. What are the sacramental words chiefly to be used in dispensing and distributing the elements in this sacrament? A. Those words which Christ spoke at the first institution.

Q. What are the words which Christ spoke? A. He spoke something concerning the bread, something concerning the wine, and something concerning the whole Sacrament.

Q. What did Christ speak with respect to the bread? A. He said, 1. Something by way of command. viz. "Take, eat, this do in remembrance of me." 2. Something by way of explanation, viz. "This is my body which is broken for you," I Cor. 11:24.

Q. What did Christ speak concerning the wine? A. He said likewise, 1: Something by way of command, viz. "Drink ye all of it, this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me," Matt. 26:27; 1 Cor. 11:25. 2. Something by way of explanation, viz. "this cup is the New Testament in my blood, which is shed for many for the remission of sins," Matt. 26: 28; Luke 22:20.

Q. What spake Christ with respect to the whole sacrament? A. He said by way of argument to enforce it, "for as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show forth the Lord's death till he come", 1 Cor. 11:26. He likewise added on this occasion, "I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom", Matt. 26:29.

Q. What is the import of these words concerning the bread, Take, eat? A. It is, as if Christ had said, receive and make use of this broken bread, as a sign and seal of my broken body, with all its benefits. As ye take the bread out of my hand, and by eating receive it into your stomachs; so accept of a Saviour as He is offered unto you, receive the atonement, approve of it, and consent to it, come up to the gracious terms on which Christ and His benefits are proposed to you, accept of His grace, and submit to His government.

Q. What should we think upon, when we hear these words? A. We should think upon the infinite free love of God in giving His Son, and of Christ in giving Himself to such poor wretches as we are. Yea, we should in a contemplative and believing way, think we see Christ (as it were personally) at the head of the table, making offer of Himself to us in the freest manner, saying, take me and the whole purchase of my death and sufferings; take my sealed testament, and all the legacies in it; take a sealed pardon of all your sins, and a sealed right to eternal life.

Q. In what manner are we to take Christ and His benefits in this sacrament? A. We are to take Christ and all the blessings of his covenant in the following manner: 1. Sincerely and honestly, without dissimulation or hypocrisy, which is a thing most hateful to God. 2. Entirely, fully, and without exception of anything required of you. 3. With close and particular application, saying, "My Lord, and my God." 4. With thankfulness and praise, stirring up your souls, and all that is within you to bless his holy name: bless God for such a glorious surety, such a rich purchase, such a free covenant, and such suitable promises. 5. With humility and self-denial, reckoning yourselves unworthy of the least crumb from His table, renouncing all confidence in your preparations, humiliations, or qualifications of any sort, saying, "In the Lord only have I righteousness and strength." Lastly, we ought to take Christ and his purchase in the sacrament with full assurance of faith; looking on the sacramental bread as the Lord's seal and pledge of our interest in, and title to all the blessings of the covenant: and taking this bread as a sure sign and token from Christ, that his body was broken for us; believing that Christ and all the blessings of the covenant, and purchase of his death, are herewith given to us, as really as Christ gives the bread into our hands.

Q. What is the meaning of these words, this is my body broken for you? A. The meaning is, this broken bread is my body spiritually and sacramentally, or, it signifies and represents my body; and is a visible sign and token of my body's being broken, bruised and crucified; yea, crucified for you, worthy communicants, even wounded for your transgressions, and bruised for your iniquities."

Q. Do we not partake of Christ's body and blood in the sacrament, after a corporal or a carnal manner, or by the mouth of the body? A. No; we only do it spiritually by faith, which is the mouth of the soul.

Q. Is not Christ really present in the sacrament; and are not believers said to be partakers of Christ? A. Though Christ is not bodily present, yet He is really and truly present in a spiritual and invisible manner. He is present by his Godhead, and by His Spirit. He is present by His power and efficacy, communicating and applying the virtue and benefits of His death: and thus we are really made partakers of Christ in this ordinance. We partake of the sun, when we have its beams of light and heat darted down upon us, although we have not the bulk and body of the sun put into our hands: so we partake of

Christ in the sacrament, when we share of His grace, and the blessed fruits of His broken body, though we do not actually eat His flesh with our mouths.

Q. Are not the bread and wine, by the words of consecration transubstantiated, and really turned into the body and blood of Christ, as the Papists do maintain?

A. No, the opinion is most false and absurd, because, 1. It is destructive of the very nature and end of a sacrament, which is to signify and commemorate an absent Christ; for according to this opinion he would be corporeally present, and so there would be no difference between the signs and things signified. 2. It is also destructive of the nature of Christ's body: for, according to this opinion, it would not be a true human body, "in all things like unto his brethren", Heb. 2:17, if it could neither be seen nor felt, or could be contracted into the bounds of a small bit of bread. 3. It is expressly contrary to the scriptures, which call the elements after their consecration, still bread and wine, as formerly, Matt. 26:29; 1 Cor. 10: 16. Yea many times over, 1 Cor. 11:26, 27, 28. Again, the scriptures inform us, that when Christ first administered this sacrament, His body was entire, and His blood in His veins; and that the same body afterwards went forth and sweat blood in the garden, was crucified, buried and arose again, appeared to live to many witnesses, and at length really ascended up into heaven, where He still continues; and his body must remain there till His coming at the last day; and so, it neither was, nor can be corporally eaten in the sacrament. Matt. 26:26, 27; 1 Cor. 15:4, 5, 6; Acts 1:9,10,11; 3:21; 1 Thess. 4:16; Heb. 8:4. 4. It is contrary to sense and reason, for it is most obvious to us, that the bread and wine after consecration are the same in substance that they were: we see, feel, taste and smell them to be real bread and wine still: they retain both their quantities and qualities; they have the length, thickness, breadth, colour, taste and smell of bread and wine. Reason also tells us that the same body cannot be at the same time both glorified in heaven, and broken and eaten upon the earth; that Christ's body could not be entire, living, sitting at the table, and speaking with His disciples; and yet at the same time broken, dead, lying on the table, and eaten by His disciples; yea and by himself also. Besides these, many other monstrous absurdities and contradictions do follow upon the doctrine of transubstantiation.

Q. What are the other absurdities of this doctrine? A. 1. It would follow hence, that either Christ must have many thousand bodies, which would be absurd; or that the same one whole body of Christ can be in many thousand places at the same time; both whereof are equally absurd. 2. It destroys the testimony of our senses in all other cases, so that the being or power of God cannot be

proved by the works of creation, which is contrary to the apostles' doctrine, Rom. 1:20; nor can the truth of Christ's resurrection be proved from the testimony of the witnesses, or from their seeing, feeling and hearing, which is contrary to Luke 1:1, 2; 1 Cor. 15:5, 6, 7; 1 John 1:1. According to this doctrine, there was no strength in the argument which Christ used to prove the reality of His resurrection, when He appealed to the senses of His disciples, bidding them "handle Him and see, behold His hands and feet, and thrust the hand into His side", Luke 24:39, 40; John 20:27. And this would go far to shake the truth of Christianity itself, which depends on the resurrection of Christ. 3. This doctrine allows a power to a silly mass-priest, which is not granted to all the angels in heaven, viz. to make his maker and eat his god, for he worships what he makes, and eats what he worships. 4. According to this Christ's glorious body would yet be liable to sufferings, subject to corruption, and obnoxious to be eaten by wicked men, yea, by dogs, rats, mice, &c. 5. It would follow that a minister could give to a communicant, the thing signified as well as the signs, which is the prerogative of God alone... 6. That other figurative expressions in scripture should also be understood literally, and so Christ would also be turned really into a door, a vine, a rock, &c., for He doth as expressly call Himself by those names, as he calls the bread in the sacrament His body.

Q. Is there no change made at all upon the elements at consecration? A. Yes; but it is not a physical, but a moral change: it is only a change as to their use and signification. By consecration they are set apart from common use to a sacred and mystical use. They are no more for ordinary aliment (food or support) to the body, but become thereby signs of Christ, seals of grace, pledges of justification, and earnest of salvation; which is not done by destruction of their nature, but by divine designation. As of common wax a valid seal is made to a charter, by putting an authoritative stamp upon it, though it be still the same, that it was, as to its substance; so here the consecrated elements still retain their former nature, and are not Christ's real body and blood, under the accidents of bread and wine, as the Papists most absurdly assert.

Q. How then can Christ's words be true, when he saith expressly of the bread, This is my body? A. These words are most true in a sacramental sense; for Christ speaks here in a sacramental dialect, and retains the same style he had used formerly concerning the Passover, Exod. 12:11. "It is the Lord's passover." Now this cannot be meant but figuratively, for certainly the Lamb, or their eating of it, was not literally the Lord's gracious act of passing over the

Israelites' houses, when he came to destroy the Egyptians on every side of the, but a sign or token of his passing over them. Yet he says expressly, "It is the Lord's Passover", thus also did he speak of the other sacraments, viz. circumcision, when he instituted it, Gen. 17:18, "this is my covenant." Now circumcision was not literally the covenant itself, but only a sign and seal of the covenant. Also in the institution of the Lord's Supper, he useth the same sort of figurative speeches; and if the Papists will not grant this concerning the bread, when Christ said of it, "This is my body;" yet whether they will or not, they must own it, concerning the wine, when he saith, "This cup is the new testament." For here is a two-fold figure; first he did not mean this properly or literally of the cup or vessel that contained the wine; for so the cup cannot be the New Testament or Covenant of Grace, but the wine contained in the cup. Neither, secondly, can the wine be properly called the New Testament, or Covenant itself, but only a sign or pledge of it. So that we see such metaphorical and figurative speeches, are the ordinary sacramental language that God in all ages hath made use of, in instituting the seals of this covenant. And can Papists give any solid reason, why such speeches as these, should be taken in a figurative sense in one place and not in another, when the case is the same, and the necessity plainly equal?

Q. What is the meaning of Christ's words concerning the cup, Drink ye all of it, and this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me? A. He means these things: 1. To discover the freeness of his grace, and the ready welcome he gives to all His guests, even the meanest and poorest of them. 2. To teach us thirstily and affectionately to receive (together with the cup) the precious blood of Christ, and by faith apply it to our souls in a particular manner, for the curing of all our diseases, the washing away of all our sins, and the supply of all our wants. 3. That in the receiving and drinking of this cup, we should entertain and keep up a fresh and thankful remembrance of Christ's sufferings, and of His dying love in shedding and offering up His blood as a propitiatory sacrifice for our sins. We should remember and think upon, both what He has done, what He is still doing, and what He is about to do for us.

Q. Why are we so expressly charged to remember Christ in this ordinance? Are we in any hazard of forgetting Him? A. Yes; our Saviour knows that we have worldly hearts, treacherous memories, and stand in need of all these memorandums, to keep up the lively remembrance of His love.

Q. What is implied in remembering Christ? A. It hath in it: 1. The knowledge of Christ, and the method of redemption through His blood. 2. Some precious

acquaintance with him, by a work of grace on the heart, and closing with Him by faith. 3. A believing contemplation of His death and sufferings. 4. Such a remembrance as makes deep and suitable impressions on our souls.

Q. What obligations lie upon us to keep up the remembrance of Christ? A. 1. Because He is our most loving friend; a friend that remembered us in our low estate, and that hath done more for us than all the friends of the world could or would have done. 2. Because He is an absent friend; yea, absent on our account, and still negotiating our affairs at the court of heaven. He constantly remembers His people, and hath them still on His heart and in His eye. 3. Because He is a friend quickly about to return. He is still meditating on it, and fast preparing for it. He is hasting to come again in the clouds to meet His people, take them home to His palace, and put them in possession of all His purchase.

Q. What kind of remembrance of Christ ought we to have in receiving the sacrament?

A. Not a bare historical remembrance, for so Judas, Pilate and the devils in hell, may remember how they betrayed and crucified Christ on earth; but it is a remembrance with suitable impressions on our souls: 1. We must have an awful and reverential remembrance, adoring the justice and holiness of God, displayed in the sufferings of Christ his dear Son. O how vehemently did he hate sin, that he would not spare him when he cried, and was but surety for another! May not we cry with the Bethshemites, 1 Sam. 6:20, "Who is able to stand before this holy Lord God?" 2. It must be a mournful and heart-breaking remembrance to look on a slain Christ in the elements, as one pierced through and crucified by our sins; and our eye should affect our hearts with grief and sorrow for those sins that nailed and killed the Lord of life. 3. We must have a sin-loathing remembrance; abhorring with the utmost detestation, our cursed sins that made a strong and mighty Redeemer to sweat blood, and groan under their weight; yea, never parted with him till they brought him to a bitter death. 4. It must be an affectionate remembrance. The unparalleled love of Christ discovered in the sacrament, must not be thought on without love. Our hearts should even burn with affection to him, when we remember the great flood of wrath that broke in upon Christ's soul, and yet could not drown his love for us. 5. It must be a thankful remembrance, saying, O what shall I render to Christ for undertaking my deliverance, and wading through hell to save me from perishing there for ever. O, if men and angels would help me to extol his free grace and wondrous love! 6. It must be a confident remembrance, laying the

whole stress of our soul's justification and salvation upon the death of Christ: pleading with God, for answering all the accusations of Satan, the indictments of the law, and challenges of our own consciences.

Q. What is the import of these words of Christ, concerning the cup, This cup is the New Testament in my blood, shed for many for the remission of sins? A. It is a figurative speech, as I showed before, and the plain literal sense of it is, the wine in this cup as representing the shedding of my blood for your sins, is a sure sign and token to you, of God's making and confirming the New Testament, or covenant of grace with you; and of his sealing all the blessings of it unto you; or, this cup is a visible pledge to you of that rich covenant with its blessings, which is brought about and ratified to you by the shedding of my blood for sin.

Q. What are the sweet instructions and meditations which these words of Christ do afford us?

A. They are many, such as these: 1. The Covenant of Grace is Christ's Testament, wherein all manner of precious legacies are freely bequeathed unto his people. 2. That this Testament is sure, and of undoubted force, being confirmed by the death of the Testator, and sealed with His blood. 3. That Christ puts a sealed copy of his Testament into every worthy communicant's hand, at the Lord's table. 4. That the Covenant of Grace, with all its blessings, is purchased by Jesus Christ to believers, by the price of His blood. 5. That pardon of sin is one of the choicest legacies in Christ's Testament, and to be highly valued. 6. That without the shedding of blood (even the precious blood of Christ, which is the blood of atonement) there can be no remission of sin. 7. The blood of Christ cannot be effectual to any, unless it be received and applied by the hand of faith. 8. That in order to make a good title to covenant blessings it is absolutely needful, that every man for himself takes hold of the Covenant, as tendered in the gospel ordinances. 9. That the news of a Covenant ratified, and pardon, sealed by the blood of Christ, is most reviving and refreshing to the guilty soul, as wine that makes glad the heart.

Q. What are the legacies and blessings contained in the Testament given, and sealed to believers in the Lord's Supper? A. There is the Holy Spirit to teach, guide, and comfort them; there is pardon of sin, and peace with God: in a word, there is wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, redemption, grace and glory. All which, with many more, were mentioned before, among the promises of the covenant of grace.

Q. How shall we know if we have any part in Christ's Testament, or if our names be in it?

A. By these two things, 1. If we do heartily take hold of it, embrace its promises, and acquiesce in the method of salvation contained in it. 2. If we can prove ourselves to be amongst Christ's poor relations, or claim any relation to him by faith and regeneration. All these being children and heirs, have an interest in Christ's Testament. Isa. 56:4, 5; John 1: 12; 2 Cor. 6: 16, 17, 18; Ezek. 36:25, 26; Rom. 8:17.

Q. What are the marks of those who are children of Christ's family and heirs of his Testament?

A. They are such as are begotten by the Word to a lively hope, transplanted from nature's garden to grace, and become plants of his right hand's planting. 2. They know something of the spirit of adoption, and his operations in their souls, particularly in discovering sin, exciting to prayer, conquering lusts and sanctifying the heart, Rom. 8: 15; Gal. 4:6; Eph. 4:23, 24. 3. They have children's frames and dispositions of heart, viz. a filial fear, and reverence of God, a filial love and affection to Christ, and a deep hatred of everything that is offensive or dishonourable to him. Also they have a great concern for their mother, the church, and a love to their brethren, the saints. They love their Father's presence, and desire to be much about His hand, Mal. 1:6; John 8:42; Ps.119:136; Ps. 137:6. 4. They have children's appetites for their food: they earnestly desire the ordinances, and communion with Christ in them, Ps. 84:1; 1 Pet. 2: 2.

Q. How are we assured that Christ's Testament is firm and unalterable? A. From these three things: 1. The faithfulness and immutability of the Testator, Heb. 10:23; 13: 8; Rev. 1: 5. 2. It is become of unalterable force by the Testator's death, and is confirmed by his blood, Heb. 9:16, 17; Matt. 26:28. 3. He hath appended the two great seals of heaven to it, baptism and the Lord's supper, on purpose to declare the validity and fulness of his Testament.

Q. But how are we certain that this Testament will be duly executed, according to the Testator's will? A. Because, 1. He hath left it in a sure and faithful hand, even that of the Holy Spirit, who is the executor thereof, to apply it, and bestow the legacies it bequeaths, upon those who are named in it, John 14:16, 26. Yea, 2. The blessed Testator is risen from the dead, and lives for ever, to see the execution of His own Testament himself, Rev. 1: 18. Heb. 7:25;

Q. When will all these legacies be bestowed on the heirs of this Testament? Is it just now?

A. They are just now infest (put in possession), and vested therein, by the Word and sacraments; whereby their right is sufficiently secured to the great estate, which Christ hath left them by his latter-will. And in the meantime, they have out of it a sufficient maintenance, to continue till the time appointed come, when they shall enter into the full possession of the whole. Believers while here, are but minors, and not fit to be entrusted with the management of their estate so that it is secured for them in good hands, till they arrive at full age.

Q. What is the meaning of the words which Christ spoke with respect to the whole sacrament; for as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show forth the Lord's death till he come? A. It is as if He had said, see that ye make conscience of coming to this holy table, and of coming frequently; for every time you do it in a right manner, you keep up the memorial of your Lord and Saviour's death in a way that is pleasant to Him, seeing he hath appointed this as a standing ordinance in the church, to continue till His coming to judgment, when He will call his whole servants to account concerning their observing his injunctions, and this among the rest.

To be continued

HOPE-FILLED GRIEF

Malcolm H. Watts

One of life's severest trials is the death of someone we love. This can leave the strongest believer stunned, bewildered and devastated. When Dr Joseph Parker's wife died, he was quite overcome with the grief. He later recalled his sense of desolation. 'In that dark hour', he said, 'I almost became an atheist.' He wrote in his autobiography, 'God has driven me into a dark path... Not a gleam of relieving light can find its way into the secret cave of lonely distress. Life seems now – perhaps only for a moment – not worth living. I have lost my other heart. My soul's treasure has been stolen. I am poor indeed.'

The afflicted Christian may find comfort in the prospect of a reunion in heaven. But what if the relative or friend died apparently without faith? Our sorrow is then increased and we have painful fears of an everlasting separation. How

can we cope with that? There are no easy answers to that question, but I would draw your attention to the following truths:

1. God is 'the judge of all' (Hebrews 12:23). He alone has the right to judge and he alone has the necessary qualifications, chief among which are his absolute rectitude, his infinite knowledge, and his perfect wisdom. In view of this, we say with Abraham: 'Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?' (Genesis 18:25). Undoubtedly he shall. The Bible speaks of 'the righteous judgement of God' (Romans 2:5).

It is well to remember that the judgement is in his hands. When someone dies, we may fear the worst, but we dare not presume to declare that person eternally lost. If we do, we not only usurp God's prerogative as judge but we also pass a sentence which, in the years to come, will merely prove a means of self-torture. The whole matter should be left with God, who may be trusted to judge according to his nature, with integrity and fairness. Dr Thornwell once wrote to a woman who had lost a son and who was in great distress over the uncertainty of his salvation. In his letter of comfort, he said, 'The destinies of men are in the hands of God; and it is enough for us to know that he is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works... Oh! then, trust God in the dark.'

2. It sometimes happens that people with no previous spiritual concern experience God's saving grace in a sudden and remarkable manner. In the book of Isaiah, God refers to those who for a long while continue ignorant and careless but who, notwithstanding, are reached and saved through his amazing grace. 'I am sought of them', he says, 'that asked not for me: I am found of them that sought me not: I said, Behold me, behold me, unto a nation that was not called by my name' (Isaiah 65:1 cf. Romans 10:20).

Thomas Boston once touched on this point and observed that 'Grace sometimes catches them that in appearance, and to the eyes of the world, are farthest from it.' You see, although there may have been few hopeful signs in the person who died, this does not mean that we must utterly despair of his or her salvation. There is a biblical doctrine of sovereign and free grace. A most unlikely soul can be saved at the very last. It is not for me to encourage false hopes. I only want to remind those in unrelieved gloom of God's omnipotent and irresistible grace.

3. Our Lord plainly taught in the parable of 'The labourers in the vineyard' that some sinners are called at 'the eleventh hour' which is, as Matthew Henry explains, 'when the day of life is far spent' (Matthew 20:6). The example, of course, which comes immediately to mind is the penitent thief upon the cross (Luke 23:42-43). His hardened heart was touched within minutes of death. But someone may say that this was a singular instance. I grant that. It does show, however, that God is able to save a man right at the end of his life. 'Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?' (Zechariah 3:2).

The following extract is from one of John Wesley's letters, written in 1772: 'Holy faith is the gift of God; and he is never straitened for time. He can as easily give this faith in a moment as in a thousand years. He frequently does give it on a deathbed, in answer to the prayer of believers.' We can assume nothing, but we cannot deny the possibility. And that possibility preserves us from the experience of hopeless sorrow. Who can tell what dealings God has with a soul immediately before death? Remember Jonah. He was in the sea, encompassed by its waters, seconds away from death by drowning, and he prayed to the Lord – and the Lord heard him (Jonah 2:1-9).

4. Whether these considerations help or not, it is our duty humbly to submit to the will of God. In the case of a death, we should acknowledge God's sovereignty in it (Job 7:1; 14:5; Psalm 31:15), and we should accept that God has ordered it in his righteousness and wisdom since 'He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgement: a God of truth, and without iniquity, just and right is he' (Deuteronomy 32:4 cf. Job 34:10; Isaiah 30:18). Our response should be: 'Behold, he taketh away, who can hinder him? Who will say unto him, What doest thou?' (Job 9:12). 'I was dumb, I opened not my mouth; because thou didst it' (Psalm 39:9). 'What shall I say? He hath both spoken unto me, and himself hath done it: I shall go softly [i.e. with a hushed and subdued spirit]...' (Isaiah 38:15).

Our submission to God, who is too good to sin and too wise to err, brings peace and calm to our troubled hearts. 'It is the Lord,' we say. 'It is well.' 'The will of the Lord be done' (1 Samuel 3:18; 2 Kings 4:26; Acts 21:14).

'Peace, my complaining, doubting heart,
Ye busy cares, be still;
Adore the just, the sovereign Lord,
Nor murmur at his will.

Yes, Lord, I own thy sovereign hand,
Thou just, and wise and kind;
Be every anxious thought suppressed,
And all my soul resigned.'

Anne Steele

5. Faith enables us to view God as 'our Father'; and 'like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him' (Psalm 103:13). In bereavement, we need to reflect often upon that truth. And what a precious truth it is!

Can there be a better illustration of tenderness, than a loving father seeking to soothe an anxious and distressed child? Yet such is the loving-kindness of God towards us. As soon as grief strikes, God's heart is filled with sympathy and all his compassions begin to flow. He draws near as our 'Comforter'. He has his own sweet way of healing the broken heart and wiping away the tears. 'The Lord will not cast off for ever. But though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies' (Lamentations 3:31-32. See also: Psalm 147:3; Isaiah 25:8). 'Let us then be still and know, not only that he is God, but that he is our covenant God, and will be our guide even unto death. The hand that has smitten is the uplifted hand of a Father. Upon it, wounded, bleeding, humbled, let us lean. Listen to his own consolatory words, "I wound, and I heal." "He maketh sore, and bindeth up: he woundeth, and his hand makes whole" (Dr Octavius Winslow).

6. The testimony of a good conscience will prove of no small consolation. Before the person died, we may have been able to bring them to church to hear the gospel; perhaps we gave them some Christian literature or even spoke directly to them about the Saviour and the way of salvation. Reflecting upon this, we feel that at least they knew how to find peace with God and how to make preparation for eternity. In their last moments, if their hearts were moved to pray, they might have recalled some saving truth and then acted upon it; and, if their memories failed, the Holy Spirit could have brought such

truth to their remembrance (John 14:26 cf. 2:22; 12:16). 'Our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience' (2 Corinthians 1:12).

Paul's conscience specially bore witness of his faithfulness in making known the gospel. If his friends and acquaintances perished in their unbelief, Paul knew that he was free of all responsibility for their doom. He had discharged his duty, in faithfully warning and teaching them. He could say, 'I take you to record this day; that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God' (Acts 20:26 – 27). Like Paul, we can be thankful that we were able to speak of our Lord Jesus Christ. We did what we could, and what a consoling reflection that is!

Perhaps the consolation is not ours to enjoy. In that case, let me draw your attention to some words written by Thomas Scott to someone who was mourning the loss of an apparently unconverted relative: 'While our children or relatives live, we cannot be too earnest in seeking their salvation; in using every means, and in pouring out our prayers incessantly for it; and in enforcing all by our example... If conscious of having neglected our duty, we are called on deeply to repent and earnestly seek forgiveness (and there is forgiveness with God, Psalm 130:4; Daniel 9:9)... (And) these considerations should excite us to redoubled diligence and earnestness about those who are still with us...."

7. The last thing I want to say is this: when all has been said, we are to understand that there is a mystery with God and with his dealings with men. He fulfils his purposes, but he rarely explains his actions. But, be assured, for every sorrow there is a reason. The believer can only fall back on the inscrutability of God. 'Why dost thou strive against him? for he giveth not account of any of his matters' (Job 33:13 cf. Romans 11:33).

Here on earth, we are continually perplexed over things. But one day, God will make everything plain; and we shall not only see why things had to be as they were, but we shall be perfectly satisfied with all that God has done. In the full light of heaven, we shall sing with redeemed and glorified saints: 'Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints. Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for thou only art holy: for all nations shall come and worship before thee; for thy judgements [or, righteous acts] are made manifest' (Revelation 13:3-4). Our wisdom is not to vex ourselves with excessive grief, but to trust and wait. God grant us all that very special grace.

EPILOGUE

“How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! How great is the sum of them.” Psalm 139:17

Here the Psalmist, David, encourages us to meditate upon the magnitude and multitude of God’s gracious thoughts towards us. Books could be written to expound all the different aspects of God’s loving kindness towards his people. However, here we will consider just a couple, and these only very briefly.

Firstly, God’s love was demonstrated when He took the initiative to provide a way of reconciliation for us, even when we were “alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works” (Colossians 1 v 21). In 1 John 4 v 10 the Apostle tells us that “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins” - and brought us into communion with Himself. Having thus provided the means of reconciliation, God’s love for his elect extends even further. In Romans 6 v 28 we read that “the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord”. God has made us a gift of eternal life – wholly underserved by us. This is an amazing thought, that God, from eternity past, planned to save His elect people and has implemented that plan in our earthly lives.

The surpassing love of God extends even further than making for us the way of reconciliation and blessing us with the gift of eternal life, by also adopting us into the family of God “.. we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ.” (Romans 8 v 16b – 17a). We are lifted up from our lost state, where we were under the righteous judgement of God, to an eternity of bliss with Him in heaven, as His children and joint-heirs with Christ, beholding His glory.

If God has performed all this for us – and Scripture is clear that He has – then how will He not care for us and protect us in our daily struggles during our earthly life? “For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8 vv. 38 – 39.)

Bill Norton