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A PRAYER FOR THE COMING YEAR

James W. Weir (1805-1878)

O thou God of the rolling seasons, I thank thee for thy mercies to me during the last year. There has not been an hour nor a moment of it, which has not brought me tokens of thy care and kindness. Assist me now to bring its transactions, in which I have been engaged, in solemn review before my conscience. Though the record of them is fast wasting away from the treacherous tablet of my memory, yet they are written, as with a pen of iron, in the books of thy remembrance; where they will remain until that fearful hour of trial, when the books shall be opened, and all men shall be judged out of the things that are written therein, whether they be good or evil.

Lord, I desire to acknowledge before thee, with godly sorrow, that I have neglected many duties, and abused many privileges, during the past year. My heart, and my lips, and my hands, have often been agents of transgression. Many of thy mercies have been ungratefully perverted or forgotten; and thy chastenings have often been despised or unheeded. O, my tongue would grow weary, and my heart would sicken, if I should undertake to recite all my iniquities before thee. Help me, I pray thee, for the sake of our Great Advocate, to repent over them, to loathe and forsake them, and to look to thee for strength, that the time past of my life may suffice to have wrought the deeds of the flesh, and that henceforth I may live to the will of God.

O Lord, I desire to enter the coming year, feeling the solemn responsibilities of human life. I know not what a day may bring forth, nor what the approaching months may reveal respecting me: except that they will bring me so much nearer eternity, and be full of records of my growth in grace, or of my backslidings from thy holy law. Yet I thank thee that my span of life is still lengthened out, and that I am still permitted to enjoy the precious opportunities that have been vouchsafed to me in days past. O God, assist me, I beseech thee, to discharge aright all the duties that lie before me. Make me understand the uncertainty of time, the worth of my soul, the multiplied interests of my fellow-travellers to eternity, and the righteous claims of thy service. Make me watchful against the many dangers to which I am exposed. Strengthen my love to thee; deepen my convictions of sin; animate my desires after holiness;

increase my spirit of prayer; enlarge my benevolence; and lead me in thine own way, for thy name's sake. Protect me by thy care; supply me by thy bounty; and grant me an increasing meetness for that state, where these changing seasons will give place to an endless life.

Lord, make this opening year, a year of the right hand of the Most High. Pour the healing balm of peace on all the bleeding wounds of thy church. Spread over her the spotless mantle of purity. Invigorate her by the reviving power of truth. Awaken her to renewed efforts in doing good. O may these months stand forth in the history of redemption, as precious seasons of refreshing from thy holy and life-giving presence.

ETERNITY

"If I could, I should show what eternity is. But who can measure the waters of the ocean? Or who can tell the days, years, and ages of eternity, which are infinitely more than the drops of the ocean?"

None can comprehend eternity but the eternal God...Eternity is an ocean, whereof we shall never see the shore; it is a deep, where we can find no bottom...It shall never have an end.

When you go out in the night, and behold the stars of heaven, how they cannot be numbered for multitude, think of the ages of eternity; considering withal, there is a certain definite number of the stars, but no number of the ages of eternity.

When you see a water running, think how vain a thing it would be to sit down by it, and wait till it should run out, that you may pass over: look how new water still succeeds to that which passeth by you; and therein you will have an image of eternity, which is a river that never dries up.

When you look to a mountain, imagine in your hearts how long it would be ere that mountain should be removed by a little bird coming but once every thousand years, and carrying away but one grain of the dust thereof at once:

the mountain would at length be removed that way, and brought to an end; but eternity will never end. Suppose this with respect to all the mountains of the earth; nay, with respect to the whole globe of the earth. The grains of dust, whereof the whole earth is made up, are not infinite; and, therefore, the last grain would, at long run, come to be carried away in the way supposed; but when that slowest work would be brought to an end, eternity would be, in effect, but beginning.”

*Thomas Boston (1676-1732),
Human Nature in its Fourfold State.*

“On leaving time we pass into eternity...No sinner may hope that he can ever die, no saint need fear that he shall ever cease to live. Saint and sinner alike are endowed with the glorious or the tremendous attribute of immortality: ‘These shall go away into *everlasting* punishment; but the righteous unto life *eternal*.’

It is impossible to picture to our minds the idea of an eternal duration. To say that our life can never cease to be, is only to tell what eternity is *not*. To number millions of millions of years and ages, is not to tell what eternity *is*; it is not so much as to describe a portion of it: for after all these years and ages have been lived, eternity has not been diminished, it is only beginning, it is *for ever* beginning, never ending.

The eternity of the unbelieving sinner is unspeakably woeful... He is shut out from God’s favour which is life, His loving-kindness which is better than life. He is driven into outer darkness...And in the lowest deep of hell there is ever a lower deep revealed in the fact that the lost soul is lost *for ever*.

The eternity of the believing saint is unspeakably joyful. It is all summed up in this, that he shall see the face of God in Christ (Rev. 22:1-4). In looking upon His face, he will be delivered from every doubt and misgiving...every sorrow and sin...no weakness, no want, no woe, but a cloudless light and an abounding strength of eternal love...

Would you be one of the joyful for ever and ever? Then obey the gospel call to faith and repentance, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, turn from sin to that

Saviour God, enter by the Spirit's grace on the new life – (*the life which shall never end*).”

*James Macgregor (1830-1894),
Christian Doctrine.*

“Over that land which is to be our heritage, no shadow of death shall ever hover. *Life* in its completeness – *life* in its fulness – *life* in its incorruptible excellency – only *life* is there! Yes; ‘the gift of God is *eternal life*.’ It is that ‘eternal life which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began’ (Titus 1:2).

This life is sometimes spoken of as a possession, and sometimes as a hope; for it is both. *We have it*; for it is written, ‘he that believeth *hath* everlasting life’: and we *shall have* it, for it is written that, ‘being justified by his grace, we are made heirs, according to *the hope of eternal life*’ (Titus 3:7). On the one hand, we do possess it, when we receive God’s record concerning it; and on the other, we look for it as a thing yet future and unenjoyed.”

*Horatius Bonar (1808-1889),
The Eternal Day.*

“YOU ARE THE MAN”

Walking in Cheapside, London, a gentleman was accosted by a stranger flourishing in his face a ragged book, which had been torn to pieces, and stuck together by the help of stamp edging. “You are the man; you are the man,” were the words uttered with great vehemence, that astonished the gentleman.

What did it mean? The gentleman accosted was the late Sir Stevenson Blackwood, in his day Secretary to the Postmaster General, a well-known evangelical Christian gentleman.

It appears some months previously, when travelling on the top of the bus from London to Croydon, he had begun to talk about the affairs of the soul to a fellow passenger. Why should this lead to surprise and indignation? We can speak about affairs relating to this life, and no surprise or indignation is shown.

Why should this topic be the one to be banned, and thrust completely into the background? Surely what relates to the soul is infinitely more important than what relates to the body. What relates to eternity demands surely more attention than that which relates to time. And yet, and yet!

Another passenger overhearing this conversation became highly indignant, talked loudly and rudely about “canting hypocrites,” rose from his seat, and left the bus in anger.

The pocket of his coat was open, and as he passed along Sir Stevenson Blackwood adroitly slipped a little book, entitled ‘Eternal Life’, into his pocket.

On arriving home in due time this gentleman found this book in his pocket, guessed who had placed it there, and in a rage, tore it into little fragments, flinging them into the fender.

The next day he spent the day in the city in the usual round of business. Returning home in the evening, to his disgust, he found the fragments of the torn-up book neatly placed on his table. In anger, he rung the bell violently and demanded of the maid, “Why have the pieces not been destroyed?” She replied that in gathering up the pieces she had read the word, ‘Eternity’, on one of them, and did not like to destroy them.

When the maid retired something caused this gentleman to put the pieces together in order to see what was said about ‘Eternity’.

And well he might. Blind indeed must men and women be who are concerned only about this little fitful life, so soon to be over, and not concerned about the eternal future.

The mind reels when contemplating eternity. Unending ages of ages! Shall it be Heaven or Hell for ever and ever?

When the gentleman read the book he had in his anger torn into shreds, he was arrested and, thank God, truly converted.

He carried the patched-up book for months hoping to meet the gentleman he had insulted, and who had returned good for evil by slipping this messenger of peace and hope into his pocket with such very happy results.

As Sir Stevenson Blackwood was a man of strikingly handsome appearance, he was able to recognise him and to confront him in the way we have described, greatly to Sir Stevenson's delight.

And now what about yourself? Have you got eternal life? Eternal life is a gift. "The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord " (Rom. 6:23). What can you do with a gift? You cannot buy it or earn it, or else it would not be a gift. You must in faith receive it. Remember it is " through Jesus Christ our Lord." It is through what He did at Calvary's cross, when He endured the wrath of God against sin, and made atonement by His precious blood. You may receive this wonderful gift even here and now, if you will accept the Lord Jesus as your own personal Saviour. "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved " (Rom. 10:9).

God means every word we have quoted from His precious Word. Why not study them very seriously and make sure you have the blessing of the Lord, which maketh rich, and addeth no sorrow.

THOROUGHLY SINCERE

Many people, when spoken to about their soul's relationship to God, and of the importance of being "prepared" to meet Him, say, "We don't think it matters much what religion a man professes, so long as he is thoroughly sincere!" This, however, is a fearful mistake. No one acts on that principle in regard to earthly things. If he did, the greatest fool would tell him of his folly.

Just let us test the sincerity of such a notion. Your child is taken very ill, and you want to fetch the doctor. Every moment is of consequence; you can't stop to put on your top coat, but snatch up your hat, and start off at a run. You know the name of the street he lives in, but have no idea where it is situated. Never mind that, make up for it by sincerity, run all the harder.

"Stop, friend, stop!" cries out a neighbour who knows your errand, " you're going the wrong way."

"I can't stop," you reply, " I'm in too great a hurry."

“But your hurry is all lost time, you are getting further and further off.”

“Never mind, I'm thoroughly sincere, look how hard I'm running.”

But you never reach the doctor, and your child dies.

Friend, sincerity on the wrong road means travelling the faster to eternal destruction!

“Christ Jesus came into the world to SAVE sinners” (1 Timothy 1:15).

“(He) once SUFFERED FOR SINS, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God”. (1 Peter 3:18)

“He that believeth on the Son hath EVERLASTING LIFE” (John 3:36).

FELLOWSHIP NEWS

We give thanks and praise to God for the gift of a baby daughter to Dan & Jenni T, on 29 December. Also, we rejoice at the safe arrival of a baby son on 6 February to Nathan & Esther D. We pray that the Lord will grant much help and wisdom to the parents in bringing up these little ones in the fear and nurture of the Lord.

A Thanksgiving Service was held on the Lord's Day morning of 5 February for some of the babies born during the Lockdown.

We were so pleased to have our friend Pastor Aaron Lewis from Crosslanes Chapel, Ibsley, ministering God's Word to us on 25 December; and Mr Lewis preached again for us again on 15 January, reminding us of 'God's Commands and Promises' from the book of Joshua, chapter 1; and 'Beholding Jesus' and 'Noticed by Jesus' from John's Gospel, chapter 1. Pastor Lewis' preaching was a rich blessing to our souls

We were all saddened to hear that our brother Eddie T had suffered a fall, resulting in the breaking of his hip. But we are very thankful for a prompt and successful operation, despite the ongoing problems within the NHS. The Lord wonderfully undertook, hearing and answering many prayers for Eddie. We are so pleased that he is now at home, recovering well.

We are thankful that our sister Helen P, who has waited long for an operation for knee-replacement has now had her operation and she is now recovering well at home. It has been so good to see her again at church services and meetings.

As a Church, we are thankful for the many continuing opportunities for evangelistic outreach through the Sunday School, Youth Work, Parent & Toddler Group, Tracting in the City, the services in Nursing Homes, and our own Personal Witness. May we continue in prayer that the Lord will graciously use these means to draw young people and men and women to Himself.

Towards the end of January, we received the very sad news of the death, on 20 January, of Hywel Wyn Roberts, one-time Assistant to Leith Samuel at Above Bar Church, Southampton, and then Minister for many years at Clarence Street Baptist Church, Penzance. A Funeral Service (for the family only) was held at Hyde Street Chapel, Winchester, conducted by the minister, Rev. Mark Higgins. Later, on 4 March, a Thanksgiving Service was held at Highfield Church, Southampton, at which Pastor Watts (a friend of Hywel's for over 50 years) preached God's Word. While we thank God for this true and faithful Minister of the Lord Jesus Christ, we commend his dear wife, Elizabeth, and all the family to the God who will not fail them at this sad time but who will lovingly and tenderly care for them.

The Church's Anniversary services and meetings, took place during the weekend of 18 & 19 February, when we welcomed to our pulpit once again Dr. David Allen, from Walsham-le-Willows in Suffolk. Dr. Allen preached on Saturday, 18 February, at 3.30pm, and then, on 19 February, at the Lord's Day Services, and at the After Church Fellowship.

CHURCH ANNIVERSARY WEEKEND

Over the weekend 18 and 19 February the church marked its 70th Anniversary. On the Saturday, we held a Thanksgiving Service when our visiting minister, Dr. David Allen from Suffolk, preached, and he also preached on the Lord's Day.

Our Pastor led the service on the Saturday, giving a short outline history of the church from its beginnings in 1953 to the present time.. He concluded by noting that:

- We who comprise Emmanuel Church today are privileged to continue the testimony so faithfully maintained over that period;
- Our distinctives as a church are Biblical and Reformed: the result of having been taught sound doctrine over many years, and of honestly embracing what the Lord by His Word has shown to us;
- And in providence, we mark all the way the Lord has been with us, through winding paths - mostly bright and prosperous, some dark and mysterious – but all for our blessing and His glory. Our name Emmanuel means “God with us”: and we can truly say, He has *been* with us; He *is* with us; and He *ever will* be with us.

Dr Allen preached on Paul’s prayer for the Ephesian Christians, and for us, in Ephesians 3:16-19. It was a rich and edifying exposition, and moved us to view the staggering dimensions of the love of God in Christ Jesus, and its wonderful implications for His Church.

A good number of friends from other churches joined us, and afterwards we enjoyed further informal fellowship with a splendid tea together. It made for an encouraging and memorable day for us all.

On the Sabbath morning, Dr Allen completed the Ephesians 3 passage with a sermon on verses 20 and 21 where Paul bursts into doxology: “Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.”

In the evening service another “who is able” theme was highlighted, that of our Great High Priest: “Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them” (Hebrews 7:25).

The Lord’s Day concluded with an After Church Fellowship, at which Dr Allen shared with us an account of his conversion and call to the Ministry, and afterwards his much-valued work as a representative of the Trinitarian Bible Society.

We thank God for His gracious presence and evident blessing during our Anniversary Weekend. And we trust that the good of it will remain with us for all the coming days.

John P. Thackway

GOD'S LOVE FOR ZION

Henry Cowles (1803-1881)

*"The Lord loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob."
(Psalm 87:2)*

Yes, the Lord loves the gates of Zion, even of His spiritual Zion. Most abundantly has He declared this, and with most rich and cheering similitudes has He represented it. "For thy Maker is thine husband; the Lord of hosts is his name: and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel; the God of the whole earth shall He be called. For the Lord hath called thee as a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, and a wife of youth, when thou wast refused, saith thy God. For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer." (Isa. 54:5-8).

O, what love! What kindness! What promises! How precious and touching is the antithesis of future good over against past affliction. A small moment of forsaking, and everlasting kindness of the ingathering; a *little* wrath in the hiding of his face, but great mercies and everlasting favour in the final shining forth of that face on Zion, like the sun in his strength and glory.

Verily, the Lord loves Zion. How amply has He proved this by ceaseless care of her interests! Often, indeed, both in ancient days, and in all days, has Zion passed through the fires of tribulation, and the deep waters of adversity; but when has God utterly forsaken her? If ever, it was as Himself says, for a small moment only. Zion has never lacked foes. Oft times they have been many strong, and sure of victory. They have thought to crush the infant in the cradle, but God took care. They have thought to root out the Church, name and memorial, from under heaven – but God has made her live. They have tried

upon her, shame and fire and faggot; but all in vain. God has been with her in the fiery furnace. The history of God's care of Zion, and of her victories in the strength of her God, is wonderful. It shows that of a truth God has loved the gates of Zion more than all else that is fair and lovely on this footstool of His throne.

Then God does love His Zion. Let the thought dwell in my soul as a living reality and a precious consolation. Men may revile and hate her. They may cast out her name as evil, and mock at her hopes, and laugh to scorn her doctrines, her labours, her character, and even her Lord: but what have I to fear, or what cause have I for shame? Let it ever be enough for me that Zion has one Friend on high.

The Lord loves Zion. Would that all her professed children loved her too. But alas! Here are some of her heaviest trials. When I see how many love the world so much that the love of Christ cannot be in them, and how cold is the love for Zion in many others: when I mark how little, almost to nothing, they say or do for Zion's Lord, I am deeply grieved and discouraged. With heavy sighs, I ask, Will Zion ever arise and shine? Can her God ever have mercy on her, and appear in his glory to build up her broken walls and crumbling palaces? I have one hope. I know the Lord loves Zion.

Yes, and let it animate my faith in prayer; for I know that I have no need to move the sympathy of God as if He felt not for His suffering cause on the earth, and for His crucified Son. He does feel for these interests incomparably more than I do or ever can. Alas for Zion! If there were not One on high who loves her with more constancy and ardour and strength than her sons and daughters on earth do.

It is a precious truth that God loves Zion, and well may it strengthen my hands to labour for her glorious enlargement. For labour done for Zion shall not be in vain. Human enterprises may come to nought, and disappointment crush the fondest hopes of mortals. But the great enterprise of redeeming a world from sin and of bringing it to the feet of Jesus shall not fail. How can it, if the Lord loves Zion, and has given her His promise that with everlasting kindness He will gather her, and to his Son "will give the heathen for his inheritance!"

Yet again, let me remember that the Lord loves Zion, and let the recollection be my solace as I sympathize with all her sorrows and despondings. For she

has other friends who sympathize in all she suffers. Yes, she has noble friends, and strong deliverers.

And amid a world whose scorn is sometimes poured on Zion's people, it may well be their consolation and more than consolation that in all their love for Zion, they feel with God and Christ and all the holy. They hold communion in this sympathy with the infinite God. His heart feels like theirs for Zion's interests, and Zion's children. And who would not deem it his highest glory, and a privilege well-bought with a martyr's stake, to have the sweet consciousness of feeling as God feels in the love He bears to Zion? - Reader, this privilege and glory may become yours – but is it *now*?

CHRISTIAN ASSURANCE

Malcolm H. Watts

A summary of two lectures recently given at the Salisbury Seminary.

As already observed, the benefits of effectual calling include justification, adoption and sanctification, and there are other benefits which actually flow from these, and among them is Christian assurance. Dr. Henry Belfrage of Falkirk writes of this, "It consists in the consciousness of God's favour, that He is at peace with us, and regards us as a Father." He continues, "It is the sweetest ray from on high which cheers the pilgrim on his way to Zion, and it often shines brightest in the darkest vale."

In introducing this doctrine, we make the following points:

- (i) Assurance is a persuasion that we are in a state of grace (conscious of God's favour (Ps. 84:11; Col. 1:6) and that, therefore, one day we shall be in a state of glory (knowing honour and happiness in God's immediate presence (Ps. 73:24; Rom. 5:2);
- (ii) It may be understood in an objective and in a subjective sense, since our salvation, in itself, is certain and sure (Isa. 55:3; 2 Tim. 2:19) and we ourselves may know this in our hearts (2 Tim. 1:12; Heb. 10:22);
- (iii) It is certainly attainable in this life (Ps. 23:4; 1 Jn. 4:16), but we may not always feel and enjoy assurance (Isa. 50:10; Heb. 6:11,12);

- (iv) There is a false assurance (Job 8:13,14; Lk. 8:13) as well as a true assurance (Isa. 32:17; Acts 15:11), the latter distinguished from the former by its being well-grounded (Matt. 7:24,25), evidenced by genuine humility (1 Cor. 15:10), and productive of holiness of life (2 Cor. 7:1);
- (v) If assurance is lost, the cause may be in God who tries our faith (2 Chron. 32:31; Job 23:3,8-10; Ps. 77:6-12); in Satan's malice who would ever tempt believers to doubt (Gen. 3:1; Eph. 6:11); or in ourselves on account of carnal confidence, spiritual negligence, or failure to appreciate the Lord (Ps. 30:6,7; Song 5:2-6; Jn. 14:21);
- (vi) God, in His love, and on account of His covenant promises, will not leave us in a sad, deserted state, but He will return to us and restore our comforts (Isa. 30:18-21; 54:7-10; 57:15-18);
- (vii) Many are the blessings of true assurance: it will make us thankful, and therefore cheerful (Ps. 103:1; 105:3); it will quicken our graces, stirring us up to duty and service (Song 4:16; 1 Cor. 15:58); and it will sweeten all afflictions and sorrows, enabling us to enjoy peace and abound in blessed hope (Ps. 4:7,8; 46:1-3; Rom. 8:37).

Theologians helpfully distinguish between the *assurance of faith* and the *assurance of sense*: the former is grounded upon God's faithfulness in keeping His unbreakable promise in the Gospel (Jn. 3:16,36; Titus 1:2,3; Heb. 6:17,20); the latter arises from our experience, in being inwardly persuaded of God's love for us in Christ, the forgiveness of our sins, and the hope of heaven (Jer. 31:3; Heb. 8:12; 1 Pet. 1:3,4).

Hence, we see that *in faith there is a certain assurance*. As the Heidelberg Catechism (1563) states in answer to the 21st. Question, "What is true faith?" – "True faith is not only *a certain knowledge*, whereby I hold for truth all that God has revealed to us in His Word, but also *an assured confidence*, which the Holy Ghost works by the gospel in my heart; that not only to others, but to me also, remission of sin, everlasting righteousness, and salvation, are freely given by God, merely of grace, only for the sake of Christ's merits."

Yet there is *a full assurance in the precious 'sense'* we have of the divine favour, the all-sufficiency of Christ, and the blessed awareness that it is well –

everlastingly well – with our souls. It has pleased God, in the sovereignty of His grace, to grant at times to His believing people *this most blessed and happy certainty of salvation, known and felt in the heart* (Gen. 15:1; Exod. 15:2; Job 19:25; Lk. 1:46,47; 2:25; Jn. 20:28).

In this assurance of sense, there are two witnesses which testify to us; and they are mentioned together in Romans 8:16: “*The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God*” – our spirit and His Spirit.

1. Our spirit: This refers to the soul, as renewed and sanctified, which is able to discover the truth about our spiritual state or condition: “The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord, searching all the inward parts...” (Prov. 20:27).

It can discover and take account of any marks of saving grace: “What man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him?” (1 Cor. 2:11).

Then, it can confirm or testify to us, making us conscious of the fact that we are the Lord’s: “If our heart (that is, our soul) condemn us not, then have we confidence before God” (1 Jn. 3:21).

As Dr Isaac Watts wrote, “God has given to teach of us, our spirit, a power of reflecting upon our own hearts and lives, whereby we become witnesses and judges for or against ourselves...Hereby we judge our own state whether it be a state of sin or a state of grace.”

2. His Spirit: The Holy Spirit dwelling in us also witnesses to us, convincing us that we are the objects of God’s favour, united to Christ, and destined for heaven; and this He does in two ways, there being,

A. *The Ordinary Witness of the Spirit:* as He blesses to us the Word we have heard and received (1 Cor. 2:4), causes us to feel God’s love (Rom. 5:5), revealing to us the beauties and glories of Christ (Jn. 16:13,14), affecting us in our hearts (Lk.24:32), giving us power to overcome in life (Eph. 3:20,21), making us more holy and pure (Phil. 2:12), and granting us the enjoyment of God as our portion (2 Cor. 6:16; 13:14).

B. *The Extraordinary Witness of the Spirit*: in an unusual way and manner, making His presence to be felt (Gen. 15:1; Jn. 16:13 – “when he, the Spirit of truth, is come...”; 2 Tim. 4:16,17); the Holy Spirit indwelling, in an abundance Of His powers and gifts (Acts 2:4; 4:8,31; 13:9 – “filled with the Holy Ghost” who graciously and powerfully communicates with us (Ps. 35:3; Lk. 24:15, 32), granting us some singular blessing, a pledge of His favour (Ps. 85:16,17); wonderfully sealing and confirming His promises to our souls (Ps. 119:49,171); administering to us amazing, unprecedented peace and joy (Rom. 15:13; Job 34:29; Phil. 4:7; Ps. 51:12 – “He knew it before by an ordinary light, but the thing he seeks for here is the witness of the Holy Ghost” [Thomas Goodwin]; Jn. 15:11; 1 Pet. 1:8); in a new and special way, giving us to know the closeness of our relationship to the Lord (Song 2:16; Isa. 41:10), powerfully dispelling, as never before, all darkness of doubt and fear (Ps. 36:9; Isa. 41:13), and convincing us of the awesome reality of the heavenly world (Rom. 8:23-25).

Assurance is one of the greatest blessings to be enjoyed on earth; and it can only be excelled by the perfect, unchanged and everlasting assurance in heaven. There, at the last, and for all eternity, we shall be in the Lord's immediate presence, face to face with Him, and this will be “glory” for us all.

THE MARROW CONTROVERSY

Malcolm H. Watts

Part 1

In 1560, the Scottish Parliament assembled - "the most important Parliament which Scotland has ever seen" - and, on the basis of the Reformation Faith, it established Scriptural worship and government in the Church. Soon Scotland became famous for its orthodoxy, largely through the ministries of such men as Andrew Melville, Robert Rollock, Robert Bruce, John Welsh, Robert Boyd, John Cameron, and David Calderwood; and then, later, during the so-called second Reformation, through the preaching and theological works of men like Alexander Henderson, Samuel Rutherford, George Gillespie, Robert Baillie, David Dickson, James Durham and William Guthrie.

Attacks upon orthodoxy

It was not long, however, before false doctrines began to appear, in a variety of forms:

1. *Scepticism*. John Simpson, Professor of Divinity at Glasgow, was the first teacher of any note openly to avow opinions opposed both to Scripture and to the Confession of Faith. From 1714, he was accused, among other things, of questioning the deity of Christ (Arianism), the orthodox teaching on Original Sin, and the lostness of the unevangelized heathen.

2. *Deism*. When, in 1660, Charles II was restored to the throne, the entire covenanted reformation, from 1637 to 1650, was declared null and void, which meant, of course, the rejection of Presbyterianism, along with the Westminster Confession of Faith. The door was thereby opened to a religion, founded not upon revelation but upon reason, along with the notion that men and women, can, by natural ability, attain to the knowledge of God. On account of such errors, the Assembly of 1696 passed an Act against the opinions of the Deists.

3. *Arminianism*. In 1610, James I introduced Bishops into the Scottish Church, namely John Spottiswoode, Andrew Lamb, and Gawin Hamilton, consecrated respectively Bishops of Glasgow, Brechin, and Galloway. Theologically, these men were Arminians and, through their influence, a number of the clergy came to adopt Arminian sentiments. The Assembly of 1638 deposed these Bishops for "preaching Arminian and Popish doctrines", but the leaven of Arminianism continued to spread, seriously weakening the cause of God and Truth. And when, in 1661, a fresh supply of Bishops was required, Charles II ordered the consecration of James Sharpe, Andrew Fairfoul, James Hamilton, and Robert Leighton; and these men – Leighton only excepted – supported and strengthened the deviant Arminian theology.

4. *Legalism*. Controversy had broken out in England as a result of the publishing of Tobias Crisp's Works (1690). Crisp was charged (wrongly, we believe) with Antinomianism, the doctrine that the believer is free from all obligation to observe the Moral Law. Many, in their revulsion for that teaching, fell into the opposite extreme: Neonomianism. This became known as Baxterianism, after Richard Baxter, who taught that, on the basis of Christ's "universal" redemption, God had issued "a new Law" requiring repentance, faith, and sincere obedience as the sinner's personal and saving

righteousness. Although Baxter could not see it, this teaching was a form of legalism, an exaltation of Law at the expense of the Gospel. By the end of the seventeenth century, this error had begun to invade Scotland.

5. *Moderatism*. This word was first used in an ecclesiastical sense when, at the Assembly of 1690, Lord Carmichael, the King's Commissioner, delivered a letter from his Majesty. King William wrote in that letter: "A calm and peaceable procedure will be no less pleasing to us than it becometh you. We never could be of the mind that violence was suited to the advancing of true religion, nor do we intend that our authority shall ever be a tool to the irregular passions of any party. MODERATION is what religion enjoins, neighbouring churches expect from you, and we recommend to you." However innocuous that word may have seemed to be at the time, it marked the introduction of a period of Moderatism, when a spirit of "tolerance" pervaded the Church, leaving no room for deep conviction and burning enthusiasm. It proved to be a specious form of Liberalism, challenging the place of biblical Evangelicalism.

Evangelical counter-attack

Many evangelicals did what they could to stem the tide of these errors and to preserve the Gospel of Free Grace. Sermons were preached and tracts were written; but it was the republication of a Puritan book which did most for the maintenance of the Truth. That book was *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*, by Edward Fisher, published in two parts, the first in 1645, the second in 1648.

When originally published in 1645, the only clue to its authorship was the initials E.F. on the title page. Anthony Wood, the historian, thought the initials stood for Edward Fisher, the son of an English Knight, who graduated from Brasen-nose College, Oxford, in 1630, and thereafter became an Oriental scholar. Unfortunately for Wood (and all the historians who followed him), his only correct assertion was that the author was called Edward Fisher! The book's real author was Edward Fisher, a member of the Guild of Barber-Surgeons, and one who belonged to a Presbyterian Church in London. In his *Address to the Reader*, he informs us that he was converted under the Puritan, Thomas Hooker, who became one of the most influential Ministers of New England. "Let me confess ingenuously," he says, "(that) I was a professor of religion at least a dozen years before I knew any other way to eternal life, than to be sorry for my sins, and ask forgiveness, and strive and endeavour to fulfil the laws, and keep the commandments...At last, by means of conferring with Mr Thomas Hooker in private, the Lord was pleased to convince me that I was

yet but a proud Pharisee, and to show me the way of faith and salvation by Christ alone, and to give me, I hope, a heart in some measure to embrace it..."

The Marrow of Modern Divinity is cast in the form of a dialogue, conducted by Neophytus, a young Christian; Nomista, a Legalist; Antinomista, an Antinomian; Nomologista, a prattler of the Law; and Evangelista, a Minister of the Gospel, through whom, of course, the author expresses his own biblical views. Designed to give the marrow, or essential truth, of Reformation Doctrine, it is largely a compilation from the writings of Reformed and Puritan divines.

In the first part of the book, Fisher teaches Federal or Covenant Theology, showing the difference between the Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace; and in the second part he expounds the Ten Commandments, emphasising that the Law remains for Christian believers as a rule of life - but *not* as a covenant of works, a means of justifying or condemning them. Throughout the book various other matters are dealt with, such as, faith and assurance, holiness of heart and life, and the true preaching of the gospel.

James Hervey, in his *Theron and Aspasio*, describes it as "a book designed to guard equally against Antinomian Licentiousness and Legal Bondage. The thoughts are just and striking, the arguments are solid and convincing, the diction is familiar yet perspicuous, and the doctrine exceedingly comforting because truly evangelical. Perhaps I may venture to say that this little treatise pours as much light upon the gospel and grace of Christ and affords as many important distinctions in divinity as any book of its size whatever."

The "Marrow" introduced to Scotland

In 1699, Thomas Boston began his ministry at Simprin, in Berwickshire. At that time he had no clear understanding of the doctrine of grace; but, in the providence of God, he came across a copy of the "Marrow" in the house of one of his parishioners. The story is probably best told in his own words:

"As I was sitting one day in a house of Simprin, I espied above the window-head two little old books; which, when I had taken down, I found entitled, the one 'The Marrow of Modern Divinity', the other, 'Christ's blood flowing freely to Sinners.' These I reckon had been brought home from England by the master of the house, a soldier in the time of the civil wars. Finding them to point to the subject I was in particular concern about, I brought them both away. The

latter, a book of Saltmarsh's, I relished not; and I think I returned it without reading it quite through. The other, being the first part only of the `Marrow', I relished greatly; and having purchased it at length from the owner, kept it from that time to this day; and it is still to be found among my books. I found it to come close to the points I was in quest of...I rejoiced in it, as a light which the Lord had seasonably struck up to me in my darkness."

Thomas Boston was present at the General Assembly of 1717 when extraordinary lenity was shown towards Professor Simpson, concluding that he had been giving vent to "some opinions not necessary to be taught in divinity."

He was therefore present when at that same Assembly a dreadful blow was delivered to the doctrine of grace by its condemnation of what has become known as the "Auchterarder creed." Auchterarder was a place northwest of Edinburgh. The Presbytery there, in order to check the spread of legal doctrine, had drawn up some propositions, to which candidates for ordination and licence had to give assent. One of these was: "I believe that it is *not* sound and orthodox to teach that we must forsake sin, in order to our coming to Christ, and instating us in covenant with God." By this, the Presbytery meant that in coming to Christ, the sinner comes *just as he is*, in order *to be pardoned and purified*. He does not renounce his sins before coming, for this is to imply that the sinner must cure himself of his disease before applying to the Saviour, which is certainly not the biblical Gospel. Christ Himself said, "They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick." (Matt. 9:12)

[As Ebenezer Erskine wrote, "Never will you forsake sin evangelically till Christ once comes to you and you to Him. When Christ comes into the temple, He drives out all the buyers and sellers. *Therefore, let Him in and He will make the home clean.*"]

Now a student called William Craig, who desired to enter the ministry, had appeared before the Auchterarder Presbytery, but confessed to having difficulty in subscribing to this proposition presented to him. As a result, the Presbytery, believing him to be doctrinally suspect, refused to confirm his licence to preach. Craig decided to appeal to the General Assembly, which declared itself *against* the proposition, prohibiting all such subscriptions in future, and ordering the Auchterarder Presbytery to grant William Craig a licence to preach.

Boston believed the proposition to be “truth, howbeit *not well worded*” (*Memoirs*, p. 317) and he was therefore profoundly disturbed by this judgment, but, due to his extreme reserve, he was unable publicly to protest. However, during the Assembly’s deliberations on this matter, Boston spoke with John Drummond, Minister of Crieff and a member of the Auchterarder Presbytery. In the course of this conversation Boston spoke warmly of the “Marrow” as a book which helpfully set out the differences between the Law and the Gospel. Drummond eventually managed to secure a copy of the book and, through him, it came, first of all, into the hands of James Webster, who then passed it on to James Hog, Minister of Carnock, in Fife. These Ministers, along with others, decided that the time had come to republish the “Marrow”; and so, in 1718, a new edition appeared with a recommendatory Preface by James Hog.

Controversy breaks out

While some welcomed the book's republication, others believed that the doctrine taught in the book was positively dangerous. In the same year in which the Scottish edition appeared, John Drummond was called before his Presbytery accused of Antinomianism (the doctrine that believers are released from all obligations to keep God’s Moral Law) and James Hog found it necessary to publish a pamphlet defending himself and other gospel preachers from the same charge: *A Vindication of the Doctrine of Grace from the Charge of Antinomianism* (1718).

Early the following year, 1719, saw the first public defence of the “Marrow” in *An Explanation of Passages excepted against in the Marrow of Modern Divinity*, by James Hog. Among the passages Hog defended was one which taught that *in the very nature of faith a certain assurance is included*. Hog points out that this is to be understood in the sense of sinners being *persuaded that God has given his Son to be the Saviour of men* and that *He will save all who turn to Him*. Another passage in the “Marrow” (taken actually from Dr Preston, the Puritan) described the Gospel in terms of telling every man that “Christ is dead for him”, but as Hog says, this was not intended as support for the doctrine of universal redemption, but, as the context shows, the reference is rather to the preaching of the Gospel, by means of which *Christ crucified is presented to everyone and made available to all who feel their need of Him* (See: Matt. 22:4; Jn. 3:16). Thus, Dr Preston quotes Mark 16:15, where our Lord is recorded as saying, “Go and preach the gospel to every creature under heaven”; and he asks, “What is that? (the preaching of the gospel to every

creature)”, and he then proceeds to answer his own question: “It is nothing less than a warrant to “Go and tell every man without exception, that there is good news for him, Christ is dead for him, and if he will take Him, and accept of His righteousness, he shall have it”; and he concludes, “Restrain it not, but go and tell every man under heaven.” There is no mention here of the extent of the atonement. The focus is on the gospel holding out Christ to all poor, lost sinners.

Soon after this, in the April of 1719, came the first major attack upon the "Marrow" from Principal Haddow of St Andrew's, the leader of the so-called "Moderates". He preached a sermon before the Synod of Fife, later published under the title, *The Record of God, and Duty of Faith therein required*. In this sermon, Haddow attacked the Marrow's doctrine of faith and its teaching on the preaching of the gospel. Haddow's conclusion was that the theology of the "Marrow" was at variance with Scripture and the Standards of the Church. Hog was quick to reply to it in a pamphlet entitled *A Conference between Epaphroditus and Epaphras*. This was the beginning of a pamphlet war; and, in the words of Dr. John Cunningham, "The Church of Scotland was now for the first time...divided upon a point of doctrine."

To be continued

ETERNITY'S LENS

Chloe Sadler

People often say, “Get as much as you can out of life” or “Live your best life”. If our lives are difficult though, for whatever reason, and they aren't the life we dreamed of, where is our comfort?

Viewing our lives through the lens of eternity changes that view.

If we know we are at peace with God, and our wrong-doings are forgiven through Jesus' blood shed upon the cross, we are headed to a never-ending eternity of joy and peace. Whatever happens to us on earth is only passing, it is as the Bible calls it “a vapour that appeareth for a little while, then afterward vanisheth away.”

That house we don't like living in, there are mansions prepared for the Christian in Heaven; those people who are unkind to us, we will be forever with other souls made perfect and, even better, with Christ; that illness that drags us down, we will one day be free for ever from pain and suffering.

EPILOGUE

"A vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work." (2 Timothy 2:21)

Many years ago, as a young apprentice engineer at Southampton Technical College, I and some other teenagers were given a piece of steel-bar and we were told to make a chisel. The steel-bar had to be heated and then fashioned on an anvil with a large hammer, after which we were invited to present our efforts to the lecturer, and marks were given, out of ten. We then had to "harden and temper" our chisels, which involved heat-treatment and quenching in oil, the first to harden the steel and the second to temper it. The lecturer then tested what we had done by hitting the point of our chisels upon the anvil: if the chisel-point was too hard it would shatter, and if too soft it would flatten. Either way the chisel would prove unfit for purpose. Our text-book said that it was essential "to provide the component with the perfect properties for their intended service or purpose."

As a Christian, I have sometimes reflected on this, observing that in Scripture God calls and then uses various characters in His service, and each and every one of them has been provided with the perfect properties: none too brittle, and none too soft. Take Moses, for example, nurtured by his mother and raised in Pharaoh's courts; then, faced with the hardship of desert-life. Gradually, he became able to address others, authoritatively and eloquently, as well as to possess the necessary physical stamina, ultimately to lead His people to the border of the promised land. God made him the man he had to be, granting him "all perfect properties for intended service." Others also come to mind, such as David, with his skill in using the sling, his ability in playing the harp, and his literary ability in writing poetry. In time, all these things would be of great use to him as he discerned and performed the will of God in his life.

This should make us think. If God calls us to work for Him, whether it be to preach in the church, or to evangelize in the city, or to teach in the Sunday School, He always prepares us for the service: so that we are not too hard and not too soft, just perfectly tempered.

Steve Storey