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AN OPEN DOOR

E. R. Hope

A farmer, who rented an old farmhouse and a few acres of land, worked hard from morning till night, to try and make a living, his wife helping him by putting her hand to everything that she could do, both in the house and out of it. They were a good hard-working couple, and much respected by their neighbours. Their life was a very isolated one, but they had one boy, who was the delight of their hearts.

As this boy grew up, he became very restless and unsettled. They found that he indulged in gambling and drink, mixing very often with bad companions, and led a life which grieved and distressed them both very much. Instead of working on the farm, as they would have wished, before he was eighteen years of age he insisted on leaving home and going to live in a town at a distance. Here they heard a very sad account of the way in which he was spending his time; and he soon ran so heavily into debt, that his parents were obliged to part with one thing after another in order to get the lad out of trouble.

At last their misfortunes were too great for them, and they were compelled to leave their old home. They were much attached to the place, and felt it a great sorrow to move to an entirely new neighbourhood, where they found a small cottage, and the father was able to get some humble work, which just enabled them to live, without any of the comforts they had been accustomed to.

After three or four years had passed, they received a letter from their son, saying that he would like to return home. He was weary of town life, and he would devote his time now to helping them and working for them. They could hardly believe that this was true – the news seemed to be too good. Was it possible that their son, who had always given them so much trouble, was really coming home to be with them now, and to work on their behalf?

Yes, it was all quite true. Charlie, as they used to call him, arrived looking worn and thin, very different from the healthy boy who had, by his own choice, left the open door of his early home four years ago.

They saw immediately that a great change had taken place in him. He worked on the place, doing everything he possibly could for his father, and giving the whole of his evenings and often his nights, always rising early in the morning, and often sitting up late, to execute orders from the town. He had become apprenticed to a carpenter, and he was clever and handy in his trade. He made himself known at one or two of the country towns near, and got more work than he could accomplish, but he was never idle for a single moment, and seemed always bright and cheerful, taking the tenderest care of his aged mother, and often cheering his father when he seemed low and down-hearted.

Not a word was said about the old home which they had been obliged to leave on his account. "He is doing so well now," his mother would say, "we must never remind him of the past."

However, there came a day when the landlord called on the old man, and told him that although he had been a very good tenant, he now required the cottage for his own use, and he must therefore give him notice to move within a few weeks.

Once more the aged couple were in great trouble. Where were they to go? Could they begin life again in a new place? Charlie seemed to take it to heart very much, and yet he cheered and brightened them by telling them that all would be well, for they would always have him by their side to care for them and work for them.

One day in the following week, Charlie proposed that as it was his mother's birthday they should go for a picnic to a distant spot. When he mentioned the name of the fields where he wanted to take them, his mother gave a start,

covering her face with her hands, and said: “No, Charlie, I cannot go there. I would do anything to please you, but that is too near to our old home. I spent all my life there, happy days and sad ones too, and I cannot possibly go there again, it would break my heart.”

“Oh!” said Charlie, “business calls me in that direction, so I want you to come, and indulge me just for once. I do not often ask you to do what you do not like.”

So they went. And when they arrived within sight of their former home, to their great surprise, Charlie drove the old horse and the wagon right up to the door – yes, it was an open door!

“Come in, father,” he said. “Come in, mother. Come and see the old place, how nice it looks!”

“Oh dear, it is quite changed!” said the mother. “It has all been done up and made so smart. Dear me! I should hardly have known it again, and yet there is the old corner just the same.” It does look comfortable, to be sure! Some new tenant must have taken it.”

Charlie led his mother to an armchair by the fireside, seated his father also; and then coming near to them himself, he said: “Yes, mother, it has all been done up, and made nice and comfortable, for you and father have got the old home again. And you shall never leave it as long as you live.”

Their troubles were indeed over! Charlie had fully made up for all the grief he had caused them in those early days. This was actually their own house, and every bit of furniture in it he had purchased. The neighbours used to say that they never saw such joy and gratitude as those old people felt in their dear son who had provided for them “An Open Door!” and brought them such a loving welcome into the home that he had now restored to them.

Do remember, when you think of this young man's provision for the parents whom once he had grieved, that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and the Son of Man, has laid down His life on earth, to provide for you "An Open Door" into His glorious home in heaven! He has opened this door for sinners, for those who crucified Him, for many who have grieved Him. He says now, "Come unto me." Let us answer His call, and come in that we may share His gifts, and enter His blessed and eternal home!

SALISBURY CONFERENCE 2016

God willing, the conference will be held the weekend of 30th September – 2nd October. Our Guest–Speaker will be Rev. Andrew Swanson (Cyprus).

The general theme for the conference is: "Commitment."

Friday, 30th September, 7.30pm: "**Commitment to the Lord.**"

Saturday, 1st October, 10.30am: "**Commitment to the Local Church.**"

Saturday, 1st October, 1pm: "**Commitment to the Gospel of Grace.**"

Saturday, 1st October, 2:30pm: "**Commitment to Holiness of Heart and Life.**"

[Malcolm H. Watts]

Services on the Sabbath, 2nd October, 11am, and 6.30pm. After Church Meeting at 8.30pm.

NEXT YEAR'S CONFERENCE: ADVANCE NOTICE

God willing, 22nd-24th September, 2017. Guest Speaker: Rev. Timothy Nelson, Ballynahinch, Northern Ireland. Theme: The Protestant Reformation. As this next year will mark the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther nailing his "95 Theses" to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg (31st October, 1517) – an event which sparked the Protestant Reformation – the conference next

year will have a definite "Reformation" emphasis. The titles of the addresses will be as follows:

- 1. The Reformation: An Extraordinary Work of God;**
- 2. Great Biblical Truths Rediscovered in the Reformation;**
- 3. Spiritual Effects of the Reformation, Then and Now;**
- 4. Maintaining a Reformation Stance in the Twenty-First Century.**

Please book the date now and plan to be with us.

WHOSOEVER

In the nineteenth century, the Chaplain of a State Prison related the following incident: I want to describe a scene that occurred here some time ago. Our Commissioners went to the Governor of the State and got him to give his consent to grant pardons to five men on account of their good behaviour. The Governor said the record was to be kept secret; the men were to know nothing about it; and at the end of six months the criminals were brought out, the roll was called, and the president of the Commission came up and spoke to them; then putting his hand in his pocket he drew out the papers and said to those 1,100 convicts, "I hold in my hands pardons for five men."

I have never witnessed anything like it. Every man held his breath, and was as silent as death. Then the Commissioner went on to tell how they obtained these pardons; that it was the Governor who granted them. The suspense was so great that I spoke to the Commissioner and asked him to read out the names of those who were pardoned before he spoke further, and the first name was given out thus: "Reuben Johnson will come out and get his pardon."

He held out the papers but no one came. He looked all around expecting to see a man spring forward at once, still no one arose; and he turned to the officer of the prison and said. "Are all the convicts here?" "Yes," was the reply. "Then Reuben Johnson will come and get his pardon." Reuben Johnson was

present and all this time looking around to see where some other Reuben Johnson was.

The Chaplain beckoned to him, and he turned around and behind him, still thinking some other must be meant. A second time he beckoned to Reuben, and called to him, and the second time the man looked to see where the other Reuben was. At last the Chaplain said to him. “You are the man, Reuben;” and he arose up out of his seat and sank back again, thinking it could not be true.

He had been there for nineteen years, having been sentenced there for life; and when he came up and took his pardon he could hardly believe his eyes, and he went back to his seat and wept like a child; and then when the convicts were marched back to their cells, Reuben had been so long in the habit of falling into line and taking step with the rest of the prisoners, that he fell into his place, and the chaplain had to stay “Reuben, come out; you are a free man!”

The Lord Jesus extended the very last Gospel invitation in God’s written Word. He said, “Whoever will, let him take the water of life freely.” (Revelation 22:17). That “whoever” includes each and every one of us. It is not an invitation to someone else. It is an invitation to me, an invitation to you. It may seem quite unbelievable but it is nevertheless true. Don’t refuse it. Instead, accept the gracious pardon of the Lord our God.

WHICH COMES FIRST – FAITH OR REPENTANCE?

Thomas Boston (1676 – 1732)

Faith is the spring and source of repentance so that though the grace of faith and repentance are given together and at once in respect of time, yet, in the order of nature, faith goes before repentance, and the acting of faith goes before the exercise of repentance. And he that would repent must first

believe in Christ that he may repent. I know that some teach otherwise. But this is the doctrine of the Scriptures and our Catechism. To confirm it, consider,

1. That faith is absolutely the leading grace, and the first breathing of a quickened soul: Hebrews 11:6, "Without faith it is impossible to please God;" therefore it is impossible to repent, for that is very pleasing to him, Jeremiah 31:20. So "Without me," (John 15:5, i.e. separate from me - there is no union with him but by the Spirit of faith) "ye can do nothing" acceptable to God, therefore ye cannot repent.

2. It is particularly the leading grace to repentance: Zechariah 12:10, "They shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son." Thus it is represented in fact, Acts 11:21, "and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord." If repentance be the emptying of the soul by the dropping of the tears of godly sorrow, it is faith that generates them in the heart. It is faith that melts the hard heart, which droppeth in repentance. The eye of faith fixes on God in Christ, and then the soul turns to him by repentance, Jeremiah 3:22.

3. The Scripture usually proposeth the objects of faith, and promises of grace, for motives to repentance; thereby discovering it is by a believing application of these, that a soul is brought to repentance: Jeremiah 3:14, "Turn, O backsliding children, saith the Lord, for I am married unto you." Ver. 22, "Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings. Behold, we come unto thee, for thou art the Lord our God." Joel 2:12-13, "with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: And rend your heart and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil." Hosea 6:1, "Come and let us return to the Lord: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up." Chap. 14:1, "O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God, for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity." Nay the very law proclaimed on mount Sinai with so much terror, is graciously prefaced with gospel grace for faith to work on in the first place; "I am the

Lord thy God,” &c. And thus the doctrine of the New Testament concerning repentance is proposed to sinners, Matthew 3:2, and 4:17, “Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

4. Lastly, the nature of repentance plainly teacheth this. It is a cordial turning from sin to God: but is it possible to turn to God but through Christ? John 14:6, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.” And is there any way of coming to Christ, but by faith? The soul then that would turn and go to God again by repentance, must needs take Christ by faith, by the way. The people indeed wept; but did they put away the strange wives, or set to it, till Shechaniah cried, Ezra 10:2, “We have trespassed against our God, and have taken strange wives, of the people of the land: yet now there is hope in Israel concerning this thing?” They must not be only prisoners of fear, but of hope that will turn, Zechariah 9:12, “Turn ye to the strong hold, ye prisoners of hope.” Repentance is a kindly humiliation and mourning for sin; the faithless heart may roar under law-horror, but will never kindly mourn except under gospel-influences.

OBJECTION:

Repentance is placed before faith, Mark 1:15; and sometimes repentance only is mentioned to natural men as the way to salvation, as in our text, and Acts 2:38, and 3:19.

ANSWER:

1. Repentance no doubt is absolutely necessary to salvation; and no man needs pretend to faith, that does not repent, for they are inseparable. But that will no more infer the precedency of repentance to faith, than that, Hebrews 12:14, will infer the precedency of holiness to it. Now, this is all our text aims at.

2. Repentance being the end, and faith the means to that end, no wonder they be so placed: for the end is first in one’s intention, yet the means are first in practice. So Mark 1:15. Christ commands sinners to repent; but then

in order to repenting, he commands them to believe. So Acts 2:38, believing is implied in the command to be baptized. And therefore, speaking of the result of this work, ver. 44, it is said, "And all that believed," &c. So in Acts 3:19, it is implied in being converted; compared with Hebrews 3:12, "Take heed, brethren lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God." And that this is the true reason of this way of speaking, namely, that repentance is the end, and faith the means, is clear from Acts 20:21, "Testifying – repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." For that Scripture can bear no other meaning, without destroying that fundamental truth, that Christ is the way to the Father. John preached repentance, Mark 1:4, but how did he direct them to it? Acts 19:4, "John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus."

THE BELIEVER'S SAFETY

James H. Brookes

A young minister was in the habit of visiting an aged Scotch woman in his congregation who was familiarly called "Old Nanny." She was bedridden and rapidly approaching the end of her "long and weary pilgrimage," but she rested with undisturbed composure and full assurance of faith upon the finished work of Christ.

One day this minister said to her, "Now, Nanny, what if, after all your confidence in the Saviour, and all your watching and waiting, God should suffer your soul to be lost!" Raising herself on her elbow, and turning to him with a look of grief and pain, she laid her hand on the open Bible before her, and quietly replied, "Ah, dearie me, is that a' the length you hae got yet, man?" "God", she continued earnestly, "Who would hae the greatest loss? Poor Nannie would but lose her soul, and that would be a great loss indeed, but God would lose His honour and His character. Haven't I hung my soul upon His 'exceeding great and precious promises'? and if he brak' His word, He would make Himself a liar, and a' the universe would rush into confusion."

This anecdote reveals the true ground of the believers' safety. It is high as the honour of God; it is as trustworthy as His character; it is as immutable as His promises; it is as broad as the infinite merits of His Son's atoning blood.

"The Scripture saith," or, in other words, God saith in the Scripture, "whosoever believeth on Him [that is, on Christ] shall not be ashamed." Mark the vast extent of this blessed declaration, "whosoever believeth." The word "whosoever" goes like the light over the entire surface of our globe, and it includes within the ample and urgent invitations of the gospel every member of the human race.

There are many who fear that they do not belong to the elect, or that they are not embraced in the plan of redemption, and hence they long to have some direct and personal evidence of the willingness of God to forgive and save them; but surely there is here full warrant for the faith of every sinner. The most illiterate, the most degraded, and the friendless, as well as the intelligent, the virtuous, and the honoured, among the sons of men, are invited and exhorted and commanded to believe on Jesus Christ, for "whosoever believeth shall not be ashamed." This Divine proclamation is not only a good way, but unquestionably the best way that could be devised, to encourage the doubting and hesitating sinner to trust in the promises of God; for if there had been a better way, certainly it would have been adopted.

PRAYER BEFORE BATTLE

Lord Astley (1579–1652) was a Royalist commander in the English Civil War. According to Sir Philip Warwick (Memoirs 1701), Astley prayed this prayer before the Battle of Edgehill (1642): "O Lord! Thou knowest how busy I must be this day: if I forget Thee, do not Thou forget me."

A SHORT TREATISE CONCERNING A TRUE AND ORDERLY GOSPEL CHURCH

Benjamin Griffith

Part 2

OF THE ADMISSION OF CHURCH MEMBERS

The Lord Jesus Christ hath committed the use and power of the keys, in matters of government, to every visible congregational church, to be used, according to the rules and directions that he hath given in his word, in his name, and to his glory. The keys are the power of Christ, which he hath given to every particular congregation, to open and shut itself by; and to do all things in order to the great things proposed, viz. his glory and his people's spiritual benefit, in peace and purity, Is. 9:7 and 22:22. Rev. 3:7. Heb. 3:6. Eph. 2:19-22. Matt. 16:19. John 20:23.

By virtue of the charter and the power aforesaid, which Christ hath given to his church, his spiritual corporation, they are enabled to receive members in, and to exclude unworthy members as occasion may require, as may appear by divers examples, Rom. 14:1. Acts 2:41. 1 Cor. 5:4, 5. Matt. 18:18. 2 Thess. 2:6.14.

In this case, a church hath to do, either with non-members, or those that are members of other churches; as to non-members proposing for admission into the church, the pastor, teacher, and elders of the church also, in order that they may know the intent of such person or persons, a convenient meeting is necessary.*

** In the 17th & 18th centuries, it was the practice of Baptist churches either to call a church meeting that members might hear first-hand, from the person proposing for admission, a testimony of their Christian experience, or to send*

elders (sometimes godly members) to meet privately with the person and then, on a subsequent occasion, to report on their visit and conversation to the gathered church. In either case, the church had to indicate its willingness to receive the applicant into membership. M. H. Watts

When the church is come together, and the person proposing being present, after prayer to God for direction, the minister or pastor of the church is to put several questions to the person proposing:

Firstly, concerning the ground and reason of his hope. 1 Peter 3:15. wherein is to be inquired, what experience he hath of the manifold graces of the Holy Spirit, working in him repentance from dead works, as Acts 2:38. Heb 6:2 and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ, in whom alone is salvation hoped for, Acts 20:21. Philemon 5; for without there be some good grounds, in the judgement of charity, that such a one is a new creature, the door of admission is not to be opened, for that would be abusing the privileges of the house of God. Therefore all due and regular care is to be taken, Psalm 65:16. Acts 9:27.

Secondly. What competency of knowledge, in the principal doctrines of faith and order, such hath acquired, 1 Tim. 2:4-6. or whether such person be well instructed in the knowledge of God, in his glorious attributes, in the doctrine of the Trinity, or one God in three persons: the person, natures and offices of Christ; the nature of the law; of original sin; of the pollution of man, by reason of sin, and lost and undone estate thereby, and of his being a child of wrath by nature; of the nature of the redemption wrought by Christ, his sufficiency to satisfy divine justice; of the reconciliation of sinners to God, by the death of his Son; of our sins being imputed to Christ, and his righteousness imputed to us for justification, being received by faith alone; of the resurrection of Christ's body, and his ascension into heaven, and of his coming thence the second time, to judge the quick and the dead; and of the resurrection of the dead bodies of men; and of the eternal judgement; and of such proposing person's resolution to persevere in the profession of these truths unto the end. Such things are needful to be inquired into, by reason that too many in

our day do build their conversion upon their convictions, and some general notions of the Christian religion, when indeed they are utter strangers unto, and very ignorant of the great mysteries of the Gospel. Yet great care is to be taken that the weak be not discouraged, for the smoking flax is not to be quenched, nor the bruised reed to be broken, but such ignorant persons are to be taught by gentle instructions, and means ought to be used for their furtherance in the knowledge of divine truths, Matt. 28:19, and where there are the beginnings of true and saving grace in the heart, such will, with a spiritual appetite, receive the sincere milk of the word, that they may grow thereby, 1 Peter 2:2. and a church ought to be careful not to reject those, whom they judge to have the least degree of the work of saving grace wrought in them, Romans 14:1.

Thirdly. Inquiry must be made whether such a person's life and conversation is answerable to such a profession, that he be likely to adorn the Gospel with a holy conversation, Titus 2:11-15. 3:8. This regular carefulness is an indispensable duty of all regular churches, to use in the admission of members; and though all due care be used, yet some unsound and rotten professors will creep in unawares, and have crept into the purest churches, Jude 4. 1 John 2:19. Acts 6. Acts 20:29, 30. Gal. 2:4. and the fallibility of churches in this matter is not to be urged, as an argument or ground to neglect the duty incumbent on the churches, according to the rule of the word.

And after such examination, the question is to be put to the church, whether they are all satisfied with the party's confession and conversation; and if the answer be in the affirmative, then the pastor or minister is to proceed, to ask the party proposing, if he be willingly resolved, as God shall give ability, to walk in a professed subjection to the commands and institutions of Christ revealed in the Gospel, and to give himself a member of that church in particular, Rom. 12:1. 15:7, 8, 9. 2 Cor. 8:5. and to continue in the communion, faith, and order thereof, according to the gospel rules and directions; and after the person is baptized according to the institution and command of

Christ, and come under the imposition of hands* of the elders of the church, according to the practice of the apostles, Acts 8:14-17. Heb. 6:2. the pastor, minister, or elders, as presiding in the acts of the church's power, do receive such a one into the communion and fellowship of that church in particular.

** The Philadelphia Confession of Faith differs from the London Confession of 1689 in the addition of two articles. One is on singing Psalms, another on this matter of laying on of hands. This strange custom seemed to stem from the influence of Elias Keach. In the New Testament, it was a practice of only the apostles and was evidently connected with communicating the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Spirit. We feel that it was improper to make a rule for the church from this practice of the apostles.*

But if the church is not satisfied with the person's confession or conversation, it is proper, if the objections be of any weight, to defer the party's admission until a more ample satisfaction can be given, that all, if possible, may receive such with freedom in love, and so to discharge all gospel duties towards him, as may promote his edification in the faith, and his increase in grace, 2 Cor. 1:24. 10:8.

And concerning those that are members of sister churches, their admission is either transient or occasional admission; when any person is dismissed wholly from the church, and transmitted or recommended to another church of the same faith, order and practice. (1.) Such as are and continue members of other regular churches, may, where they are well known, be admitted into transient communion, without a letter of recommendation from the church they belong unto: but from those a church hath no knowledge of, a testimonial letter is necessary, that a church may not be imposed on by any loose or disorderly persons. (2.) Those whose residence is removed, or place of abode is more convenient to be with another congregation than that of which they are members, are, upon their request made to the church whereof such are members, to be dismissed, and to have a letter from that church they are members of, subscribed by the officers and members, and directed to the

church that the persons are to be received upon their proposal, according to the credentials they bring; except the church they apply unto have a special reason to defer or refuse.

As it appears to have been the practice of believers, in the primitive times, to give themselves members of particular churches, Acts 2:41. 5:13, 14. it appears also that, in the apostles' days, there were many distinct and distant particular churches, as 1 Cor. 1:2. Gal. 1:2. 1 Cor. 16:1. Phil. 1:1. which churches are several corporations of men professing repentance from dead works, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, and incorporated by mutual consent, as before mentioned, whose end is to glorify God by obedience to his revealed will, and to their own edification in the faith, and the good of others; so it is the duty of believers to give themselves in particular membership, in *such a particular church as shall appear by the word of God to be orthodox in the fundamental articles of the Christian religion, and to practice according to the mind of Christ declared in the New Testament, in all gospel institutions and worship.*

From which considerations, it appears the reasonable duty of every believer to give himself a member to such an orderly church as is most conveniently situated, that is, meeting nearest to the place of his or her residence, for which there are these apparent reasons:

(1) For men to give themselves members of a distant church, when another of the same faith and gospel order is nearer, is for such a person to put himself under a necessity of neglecting the ordinary appointed meetings of that church, whereof he is a member, and whereof the particular charge is given, Heb. 10:25, that he might attend and wait in the use of God's appointed means, for his edification by the ministry of that church.

(2) Such puts himself under a willful necessity to neglect his duty of care over, and constant communion with his fellow members, and willfully deprives himself of their care over him, advice, Christian conversing, and

brotherly loving instructions and counsels, that by the blessing of God might increase his knowledge, grace and comfort.

(3) Such cannot be assistant to the church in discipline, contribution, and the like duties, nor can be taken care of, and be assisted without much unnecessary trouble, by the church in case of need.

(4) Such a practice tends directly to the confusion of churches, and all church order, and suits well with the humor of noisy, lifeless, loose, or covetous niggardly persons.

(5) It is a way that the church cannot find what useful talents such persons have, to the benefit of the body of the church.

(6) It is casting great contempt upon the nearer church, in her ministry and order, and the like.

And here it is further to be considered, that as it is expedient for persons to give themselves members of such regular churches, with which they may keep the most intimate fellowship and communion in all the parts of religious worship; so it is highly reasonable that they, that are members of such regular churches, where the word is purely preached, the ordinances of the Gospel duly administered, and gospel discipline is impartially practiced, should continue their membership with such church; although there be weakness, imperfection and frailty, in the particular practical acts thereof; which, while the affairs of the church are managed by men, even their holy things will have iniquity as of old, Exodus 28:38. It is therefore unreasonable to dismiss any member, from a church that is near to any one's residence, to a church more remote, upon disgust taken at the management of some particular case, wherewith such is not well pleased, and for such cause, demands dismissal; and it is unreasonable also to grant a dismissal to such a member, who should demand a dismissal in a peremptory manner, without giving a reason for such a demand; in either of which cases, such a dismissal is not to be granted:

(1) Because by so doing the greatest confusion would be introduced; for one member would thus be dismissed to one distant church, and another distant church, and the other churches doing the like, it can end in nothing less than the confusion of every church.

(2) The same liberty that members have, pastors, ministers, ruling elders, and deacons have also, whereby any church may dismiss her members until she is unable to maintain worship and communion; for those that reside near, are become members of a remote body, and so unconcerned; and those that are members live remote and so under an impossibility to occupy their place.

(3) This, in the tendency of it, is to remove the balance of churches, which is to consist of such members as can, with the utmost convenience, meet together in one place, for both worship and government, 1 Cor. 11:20. 14:33.

(4) This hath a tendency to alter the constitution of particular churches, from being congregational corporations, into the national or universal notion of the church; which universal church we believe to be the mystical body of Jesus Christ, which as such is not the seat of instituted worship and ordinances. Also, it is not reasonable to dismiss to the world at large, or to dismiss a member to a church, with which the church dismissing cannot hold communion.

To be continued

ANOTHER LILY GATHERED
THE CONVERSION OF JAMES LAING
Robert Murray M'Cheyne (1813 – 1843)

Edited and Abridged

Part 2

“My beloved is gone down into His garden to gather lillies.” Song of Solomon 6:2

James Laing’s knowledge of the peculiar doctrines of the gospel was very wonderful. It was not mere head knowledge – it came fresh and clear from the heart, like spring water welling up from a great depth. He *felt* the sovereignty of God very deeply. Once I quoted to him the hymn– “Chosen not for good in me.” He said, “I am sure it was for nothing in me. I am a hell-deserving sinner.”

Often, when speaking of the great things God had done for their family, he would say, “Ah! Margaret, I wonder that Christ would look in here and take us.” Once he said, “I wonder how Jesus died for such a sinner as me. Why me, Lord, why me?” The greatest lack in the religion of children is generally sense of sin. Little James often wondered “how God sent His servant often to him, such a hell-deserving sinner.” This was a common expression of his. On one occasion he said, “I have a wicked, wicked heart, and a tempting devil. He’ll not let me alone, but this is all the hell that I’ll get. Jesus bore my hell already. Oh, Margaret, this wicked heart of mine would be hell enough for me though there was no other! But there are no wicked hearts in heaven.” Often he prayed, “Come, Holy Spirit, and make me holy—make me like Jesus.”

The way of salvation through the righteousness of Christ was always sweet to him. He had an uncommon grasp of it; Christ crucified was all his salvation and all his desire. One day his sister said to him, “You must meet death in Jesus, and go to the Judgment Seat in Jesus, and spend eternity in Jesus. You will be as hell-deserving in yourself when you stand before the throne as now.” He smiled sweetly, and said, “Oh, Margaret, I see it must be all Jesus from beginning to end!”

Another time a little boy who was in concern for his soul came to see James, and told him how many chapters he had read, and how often he had prayed. James did not answer at the time, but a little after he said to his sister, "David was here, and told me how many chapters he had read, etc. I see he's upon the *working* plan; but I must tell him that it's no' his reading, nor yet his praying, but Jesus alone that must save him."

Another day he said, "The devil is letting me see that this word and another word in my prayer is sin, but I just tell him it is all sin. I bid him go to Jesus, there is no sin in Him; and I have taken Him to be my Saviour."

He had a very clear discovery of the dead and helpless condition of the carnal mind, and of the need of the Holy Spirit to convert the soul. Telling me once of the boy under concern, and of what he had been saying to him, he added, "But it is nonsense to speak of these things without the Holy Spirit."

Often, when he saw the family preparing to go to church, he would pray that I might be filled with the Holy Spirit in speaking, so that some sinners might be caught. "I mind often sitting on the pulpit stairs careless; I would like if I had that place again. If I had but one sermon, I would not be so careless now."

He often wished to be carried to the church, but was never able to bear the exertion. He was no stranger to temptations from the wicked one. I scarcely ever visited him but he spoke to me of these. Once he said, "The devil often tempts me to think upon good people, but I tell him it is Christ I want." Another time, "What do you think? The devil now tempts me to believe that I'll never be saved, because I have repented on my death-bed." Often, when tempted, he would cry, "If I perish, I'll perish at Christ's feet." A few days before he died, he said, "I am afraid I will not be saved yet, for the devil will catch my soul as it leaves my body. But Jesus says, 'Ye shall never perish.' If I am in the hand of Jesus, the devil cannot pluck me out there."

Once I found him kneeling on a pillow by the fire; he complained of great darkness, and doubted his interest in Christ. I told him that we must not close with Christ because we feel Him, but because God has said it, and that we must take God's word even in the dark. After that he always seemed to trust God in the dark, even at times when he had no inward evidence of being Christ's.

At one of these times, a believer, who is often in great darkness, came in, and asked him, “When you are in darkness, Jamie, how do you do? Can you go to Jesus?” He answered, in his own pointed manner, “Annie, woman, I have no other gate to go through.” The last text I explained to him was 2 Timothy 4:7: “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith.” I was wonderfully helped in showing him that, from conversion to coronation, the life of a believer was one continued fight. He said, “Would you not think that the devil would let a poor young creature like me alone? but he’s an awful tempter.”

He had a mind that loved to think on the deep things of God. One day a believer called and prayed beside his bed, asking for him that he might be “filled with all the fullness of God.” The same person came another day, and before praying inquired, “What shall I ask for you?” He said, “You mind what you sought for me the last time. You prayed that I might be filled with all the fullness of God: I canna get any more than that, but dinna seek any less to-day.”

A dear Christian lady used to bring him flowers. She spoke to him of Christ being the “lily of the valley,” and on one occasion brought him one. He asked her to pick it out from the rest, and give it into his hand. Holding the gentle flower in his pale wasted fingers, he looked at it, and said, “This might convince the world that there is a God, though there was nothing else. Ay, there is a God—there is a heaven—there is a hell— and there is a judgment-seat— whether they will believe it or no.” He said this in a very solemn way, pausing between every member of the sentence.

He loved singing praise to God, though not able to join in it himself. He frequently made us sing beside his bed, and often bade us sing the 23rd Psalm. “I have no strength to sing here,” he would say; “I have a heart, but not strength: when I get to heaven, I’ll be able to sing there.” He delighted in secret prayer. In weakness and pain, yet he spent hours upon his knees, communing with an unseen God. When unable for the outward part of the exercise, he said, “Oh, Margaret, I prayed to Jesus as long as I was able; but now I’m not able, and He does not want it from me; but I’m just always giving Him my heart.” Many a night he got no sleep. I asked him if he wearied during

the silent watches. He said, "No; His left hand is under my head, and His right hand doth embrace me."

God gave this dear boy a very calm and cheerful spirit in the midst of all his trials. Neither bodily pain nor the assaults of the devil could sour his temper, or ruffle his placid brow. At any time when his pain increased, he would say, "It is the Lord, let Him do what seemeth Him good." One time, in deep darkness, he cried out, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him." Again, when his soul was more in the light, he would say, "I long to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better; but then I'm willing to wait the Lord's time; good is the will of the Lord." Again he would say, "I long to be with Jesus. I long to see Jesus that died for me. If I am spared to go out again, I must just go leaning upon these words, 'My grace is sufficient for thee.' They will be sure to mock me, but they mocked Jesus before." Once he said to me, "I wondered when I have heard you say that Christ was sweet; but now I feel Him to be sweet, sweet."

On the last day of 1841 he said to his sister, "I will tell you what I would like for my New Year (gift). I would like a praying heart, and a heart to love Christ more." Next day a woman came in, and said, "Poor Jamie! You'll get no fun this New Year's Day." James said, "Poor body, she thinks like as I care for the New Year. I have far better than you have, though you had the whole world. This is the happiest New Year's Day that ever I had, for I have Christ." She was very deaf, and did not hear what he said; but he often pitied that woman, and prayed for her.

At another time his father said, "Poor Jamie!" He replied, "Ah, father, don't call me poor, I am rich; they that have Christ have all things." A little after the New Year, he said, "Margaret, I am not to die yet, for I have more to suffer; but I am willing, though it should be for years." On one occasion, when he was suffering much pain, he said, "Five minutes in glory will make up for all this suffering." When Margaret had to go out with her father's dinner, she used to lock the door, leaving James alone within. On returning, she asked, "Were you wearying, Jamie?" His reply was, "Oh no, Jesus takes care of me when you are out." One of his country friends came in one day to see him, and said, "I am sure you have a weary time of it, Jamie." He said, "Oh no, I never weary; Christ keeps me from wearying."

After a very happy communion season in April, “I went to visit him, and he spoke in a most touching manner. “I was not sorry on Sabbath that all the people were sitting at the Lord’s Table, and me lying here; for I thought I would soon be at the Table above with Christ, and then I would be far happier.”

In a season of great darkness he said, “Margaret, give me my Bible” (meaning a little book of texts, called ‘Dewdrops’). When he had got it, he sought out the verse, “The Lord is a stronghold in the day of trouble, and He knoweth them that trust in Him.” He said, “Margaret, I’ll trust in Him, though I cannot see Him. I will lie down upon that verse.” A young woman who lived in the same lane was awakened to deep concern the same winter that James was brought to Christ. Before her concern she never came in to see James, though her mother often advised her to do so. But when she was brought to feel her sin and misery, she came in every Sabbath night, and was always tenderly kind to James. “How are you to-night, Jamie?” she would say; “You are well off when you can say, I have found Christ.”

Early in spring this young woman evidently found the true rest for her weary soul in Jesus. She became a candidate for the Lord’s Table, and was to have been admitted, but God called her away to sit at the Table that can never be drawn. She died full of joy, with the praises of God upon her lips. Margaret had been present at this interesting death-bed, and when she returned home she told James. He answered with great composure, “I wish I had been away with her; but I must wait the Lord’s time. Betsy is singing now, and I will soon be there too.” James used to take the bitterest medicines without any reluctance. He folded his hands, shut his eyes, and asked God to bless it to him. “Ah! Margaret, if God does not bless it to me, it will do me no good.” Often she asked, “Is it not bitter?” He would say, “Yes, but Jesus had a bitterer cup to drink for me.”

In the summer of 1841, another remarkable boy, named James Wallace, had died in the Lord. He was one whom God taught in a wonderful manner. He had a singular gift of prayer, and was made useful to many, both old and young. James Laing had known him well in former days. In 1839, a younger brother of James Laing, named Patrick, had died also, not without pleasing marks of having undergone a divine change. It is needful to know these things, to understand the following dream of our little pilgrim. A short time

after he believed, he said, "Margaret, I will tell you my dream." Margaret was afraid of some fancy leading him astray, and asked what it was. James—"I thought there was a ladder, the foot of it on earth and the top of it reached to heaven. I thought it was heaven I saw. There was a great multitude of people, but I knew none of them but Patrick and Jamsie Wallace. When I was standing on the first or second step of the ladder, Jamsie Wallace looked down and said, 'Ay, here's another one coming stepping up.'" He explained it by referring to Jacob's ladder, and that Jesus is the ladder. Margaret said, "Ay, and you are just on the first step."

In the latter part of his illness he was used as an instrument in awakening another boy, whose impressions I earnestly hope may never wear away. B. G. had been a very wild boy — so much so, that he was expelled from the Sabbath School. He found his way into James's cottage, and there saw exemplified the truths he would not listen to in school. From that day till James died, David regularly visited him, and learned from him with deepest interest the things that belonged to his peace. James often prayed with him alone. Sometimes both prayed at the same time for a new heart. Margaret was always made to withdraw at these times. He pleaded with this boy to seek Jesus when young, "for it's easier to find Jesus when we are young. Look at Annie (a grown-up person, who had been long under concern), she has been long in seeking Christ, and she is long in finding. Mind what I told you, for I will soon be in heaven." Boy — "Will you get to heaven?" James — "Oh yes all that believe in Christ get to heaven, and I believe that Jesus died for me. Now, David, if I see you on the left hand, you will mind that I often bade you come to Christ." Boy — "I'll have nobody to pray with me, and tell me about my soul, when you are dead." James — "I have bidden Margaret pray for you, and I have told the minister; and go you to our Kirk (Church), and he will tell you the way to come to Christ." Three times a-day did this anxious inquirer seek the prayers and counsels of his youthful instructor, till James's strength gave way, and he could talk no more. The day before he died the boy came in; James could hardly speak, but he looked steadily at him, and said, "Seek on, David."

The last visit I paid to this young Christian was on the Tuesday before he died, in company with Mr. Miller of Wallace-town, and Mr. Smith, one of our Jewish missionaries at Perth, who was that same day to sail from his native land. After speaking a little we prayed, and I asked what I would pray for him.

James said, "Dying grace." He shook hands with us all. When the missionary held his hand, he said, "God's people have much need to pray for you, and for them there." When we had gone out he said, "Maybe I'll never see the minister again." On the Thursday he said, "Ah! Margaret, mind it's no' easy to die. You know nothing about it. Even though you have Christ, it is dark."

The same day he bade her give D. G. his Sunday trousers and new boots, that he might go to the church. He gave his father 'The Dying Thief'; and said, "I am going to give Alick my Bible" (meaning 'Dewdrops'). There was a piece of money under his pillow. He said it was to buy Bibles for them that never heard of Jesus.

His aunt came in on the Friday morning. He said, "Oh, aunt, don't put off seeking Christ to a death-bed, for if I had Christ to seek to-day, what would have become of me? but I have given my heart to Christ." Margaret asked him, "What will I do? I will miss your company in the house." James answered, "Just go the more to Jesus. Do not be sad about me when I am dead, Margaret. If I thought that, I would be sorry; and, more than that, God would be angry at you, for I shall be far happier. It is better to depart and be with Christ. Ask grace to keep you from it."

All that day he spoke very little. In the evening he grew much worse. His sister wished to sit up with him that night, but he would not allow her. She said, "These eyes will soon see Him whom your soul loves." James said, "Ay." After midnight, Margaret, seeing him worse, arose and woke her father. She tried to conceal her tears; but James saw them, and said, with a look of solemn earnestness, "Oh, woman, I wonder to see you do the like of that!" He spoke little after this, and about one o'clock on the Saturday morning, 11th June 1842, fell asleep in Jesus.

* * * * *

From this affecting history, all children, and especially the dear children committed to my care, should learn an impressive lesson. You see here that you are not too young to have the Holy Spirit striving with you. You are not too young to resist the Holy Ghost. You are not too young to be converted and brought to Christ.

Parents also may learn from this to seek the salvation of their children. Would you not love to meet them at the right hand of the Judge? Seek their conversion now, if you would meet them in glory hereafter. How will you bear to hear their young voices in the Judgment, saying, "This father never prayed for me; this mother never warned me to flee from the wrath to come"?

Dear brethren in the ministry, and labourers in the Sabbath school, suffer the word of exhortation from one who is "Your brother and companion in tribulation." May we not learn from this to be more earnest, both in prayers and labours, in seeking the salvation of little children? How evident is it that God is willing and able to convert the young! How plain that if God give grace, they can understand and relish divine things as fully as those of mature age! Let us awake from an unbelieving dream. Let us no more be content to labour without fruit. Let us seek the present conversion to Christ of our little children. Jesus has reason to complain of us that He can do no mighty works in our Sabbath Schools because of our unbelief.

"Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen."

Concluded.

EPILOGUE

"The Lord has done great things for us, whereof we are glad!"

Psalms 126 v 3

How many of us know what it is like to wade through the "Slough of Despond" or crawl along the "Valley of Humiliation"? Such experiences are very common among the Lord's people. The Christian life often seems to be one of continual trouble and difficulties as we face the assaults of the devil and the temptations of the world. Conflicts arise within us from indwelling sin and a sense of failure to live up to our calling. There can be a tendency among some to dwell too much upon such troubles and difficulties. However,

the blessings that are ours in Christ, even in this life, far outweigh these adversities.

It would be wrong to deny that we have been through difficult times (or are even now going through them), but we must also acknowledge that we have been upheld and supported by our Lord and Saviour in them and have even profited from them spiritually. When Daniel's three friends were thrown into the fiery furnace they knew the special presence of the Son of God with them. Likewise, when we are tried and tested, our Saviour is especially close to us and we can enjoy times of very special close fellowship and communion with Him. However, it may be that, like Job, we do not always recognize the close presence of God during the trial, but we must exercise our faith and trust Him, and He will reward us.

Periods of trials and afflictions are not sent by vague or random chance, but by the specific command of God for our sanctification. In Isaiah 52:7 we read "thy God reigneth". We should acknowledge His overruling in all the events of our lives. Hitherto He has safely and profitably kept us through all our troubles and He will continue so to do. Let us give Him our praise and thanks for His goodness and mercy.

Bill Norton