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PAST REDEMPTION POINT

A ship was once being towed across the Niagara River in America, some little distance above the well-known Falls. Just as she was in the middle of the river the hawser (or cable used in towing) parted and the ship began to drift down the river, stern foremost. Efforts were made to prevent this, but they all failed; and the ship drifted farther and farther down the river towards the terrible abyss. News of the ship's dreadful danger spread along the bank of the river, and in a very short time there were hundreds of people, and they soon swelled to thousands, looking on in breathless anxiety to see what was to become of the ship and her crew. There is a point that stretches into the river which bears the name of *Past Redemption Point* and it is commonly believed that nothing that passes that point can escape destruction. The current there becomes so strong, the influence so fatal, that whatever goes by *Past Redemption Point* is certainly and inevitably lost. The excited multitudes upon the banks of the river watched the helpless ship drifting down till within a few hundred yards of that fatal point. Frantic efforts were now made, one after another; but still she drifted. In just a few more moments she passed the point. A sigh of horror arose from the onlookers as they saw the ship gathering speed: they knew she was lost.

Yet, as she rounded the point, the captain felt a strong breeze smite his cheek. Immediately, he shouted at the top of his voice: "All sails set!" and in seconds every stitch of canvass on board the ship was stretched to catch the favouring gale. A cheer broke from the multitude on the shore as they realized what was happening. But would this desperate, final effort to save the ship succeed? The ship was still moving downstream, stern foremost, though the wind was blowing against her. It had become a battle between the wind and the current. With breathless anxiety people watched the result. "She slacks!" Another desperate moment – they scarcely dare shout it – "She stands!" Yes! – the terrible downward course was actually stopped. There she was, still as a log on the water. Another moment, and inch by inch she began to forge her way upstream; and one great shout burst forth from a thousand voices: "Thank God, she is saved! Thank God, she is saved!" In a few moments more,

considerable headway now upon her, she swept by *Past Redemption Point*, right into the still water, saved from what appeared to be inevitable destruction, just because, in the very moment of moments, she caught the favouring wind. That ship is so like the sinner who, by reason of sin, is helplessly drifting towards final and everlasting destruction. While every attempt is made to effect salvation, tragically all proves to be in vain. Then, in the mercy of God, and at the last moment, the Holy Spirit comes powerfully to the sinner with the Gospel of salvation, as “the wind (which) bloweth where it listeth” (Jn. 3:8), and the sinner then hoists the sail of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and “believeth in him” (3:16). In consequence, there is a turning around – an experience of conversion; and, most wonderfully, the believing sinner is saved from a catastrophic end, delivered from falling into hell. What does the Scripture say? Consider most carefully what it says – “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” (Acts 16:31).

ANNIVERSARY SERVICES, 2017

God willing, **the Church’s 64th and our Pastor’s 46th Anniversaries** will be held the weekend of **11th and 12th February, 2017**.

The guest preacher will be **Rev. Alasdair J. Macleod**, Minister of Knock & Point Free Church (Continuing), Isle of Lewis. (Mr. Macleod is the son of Rev. William Macleod of Glasgow.)

There will be a **preaching meeting on the Saturday at 3.30pm**, followed by the **Sabbath services at 11am and 6.30pm**. There will also be an **After Church meeting** on the Sabbath at approximately 8.30pm. We extend a very warm invitation to these services and meetings.

A SHORT TREATISE CONCERNING A TRUE AND ORDERLY GOSPEL CHURCH

Benjamin Griffith

Part 4

OF CHURCH CENSURES.

Having spoken of the gathering together of a particular gospel church, and its officers, and the rules whereby we are able to be guided in choosing and ordaining of them, and of the admission of members, etc. it is meet to give a short view of a church's duties and authority, in respect of censures of offenders.

First, of *Admonition*.

(1) Admonition is a holy, tender, and wise endeavor, to convince a brother, that hath offended in matter of fact, or else is fallen into a way, wherein to continue is like to be prejudicial to the party himself, or some others; where the matter, whatever it be, and the sinfulness thereof, with the aggravating circumstances attending it, is to be charged on his conscience, in the sight of God, with due application of the word of God, which concerns his condition: thereby leading him to his duty and true reformation.

(2) Admonition is private by one or more of his brethren, or more public by the whole church. (1) When one brother trespasses against another, the offended brother is not to divulge the offence, but to go in a gospel way to the offender, and to use his endeavor to reclaim his brother; and if he repents, the offended brother ought to forgive him, Matt. 18:15; Luke 17:3. But if the offending brother will not hear, then the offended brother ought to take two or three other brethren, and they such as may be the most likely to gain upon the offender; but if this admonition also take no effect, it is to be brought before the church, Matt. 18:16, 17. The church, when matters come thus before them, shall admonish and endeavor to reclaim the offender, in the spirit of meekness; and if the brother that offended continues obstinate and impenitent, the church is directed to exclude him, Matthew 18:17.

(1) From whence it follow, every church member has somewhat to do in his place, Heb. 12:15.

(2) In case of private offences it is preposterous to publish them, or acquaint the church or the elders thereof therewith, before the two lower degrees of admonition are duly accomplished, and the offender has neglected to hear.

(3) That when matters are thus regularly brought to the church, then private proceedings may cease.

(4) That when private offences are brought to the church without such proper private procedure, that the church may and ought to refuse it, as not coming according to the gospel rule aforesaid, in Matt. 18.

(5) But when those things that begin in private are thus regularly brought into the church, they must be received and adjudged according to the said rule, Matt. 18. So that it may and doth oftentimes fall out, that those things that begin with private admonition, do end in public excommunication.

Secondly, of *Suspension*.

(1) A suspension may be, when the church is informed that a member hath acted amiss, either in matters of faith or practice, and not having satisfactory proof whether the information is true or false, and the case requiring time to inquire therein, it is expedient to suspend such a person from communion at the Lord's table, until the elders of the church can make suitable inquiry; as might be signified by the law in the case of leprosy, Lev. 13th and 14th chapters.

(2) Suspension is rather to be looked upon to be, when a church doth debar a member from communion for some irregularity that he may be guilty of, which yet doth not amount so high as to be ripe for the great sentence of excommunication; but that the person, for such irregularity, ought to be debarred of the privilege of special communion and exercise of office, in order to his humiliation, 2 Thess. 3:6-7, 10-11, 14-15. Such is not to be accounted as an enemy, but to be exhorted as a brother in union, though not in communion: but if such a one remain impenitent and incorrigible, the church, after due waiting for his reformation, is to proceed to

excommunication, Matt. 18:17. That would be a not hearing the church in the highest degree.

Thirdly, of *Excommunication*.

Excommunication is a judicial act or censure of the church, upon an offender, by the authority of Jesus Christ, and by his direction, delivered to his church by himself or his apostles, in the New Testament, which a gospel church ought to put in practice, when matters of fact require, according to gospel rule, as:

First, when a member, after all due admonition, continues obstinate, and will hear no reproof, Matt. 18:17.

Secondly, when a member hath committed a gross sin, which is directly against the moral law, and being notorious and scandalous, and proved beyond dispute, 1 Cor. 5:4,5; 1 Tim. 5:24; 2 Cor. 10:6; then a church is immediately to proceed unto censure, notwithstanding any present signs of conviction or remorse, for the necessary vindication of the glory of God, the vindication of the church also, and their holy profession: and to manifest their just indignation and abhorrence against such wickedness, 1 Cor. 5:1-13.

Thirdly, when a member is found to be erroneous, defective, or heretical in some fundamental point, or to swerve from the right faith, in the principles of the Christian religion, 1 Timothy 1:19, 20.

The manner of proceeding unto this great and awful instituted ordinance, is: the church being gathered together, the offender also having notice to come to make his answer and defence (if he comes not, he aggravates his offence by despising the authority of Christ in his church), the body of the church is to have knowledge of the offender's crime fully, and the full proof thereof as of plain matter of fact; and after mature deliberate consideration, and consulting the rules of direction given in the word of God, whether the offender be present or absent, the minister or elder puts the question to the whole church, whether they judge the person guilty of such crime now proved upon is worthy of the censure of the church for the same? To which the members in general give their judgement; which, if it be in the affirmative, then the judgment of the members in general being had, or the majority of

them, the pastor, the minister, or elder, sums up the sentence of the church, opens the nature of the crime, with the suitableness of the censure, according to gospel rule; and having thus proceeded, a proper time is fixed to put the sentence in execution, at which time the pastor, minister or elder of the church, as his place and duty requires, is to lay open the heinousness of such a sin, with all the aggravating circumstances thereof, and showing what an abominable scandal such an offender is becoming to religion, what dishonor it is to God, etc. applying the particular places of Scripture that are proper to the case, in order to charge the offence home upon the conscience of the offender if he is present, that others also may fear; showing also the awful nature of this great censure, and the main end thereof, for the salvation and not the destruction of the soul, and with much solemnity in the whole society, calling upon God for his gracious presence and his blessing upon this his sacred ordinance; that the great end thereof may be obtained; still expressing the deep sense the church hath of the fall of this brother, with the great humiliation of the church, and great sorrow for, and detestation of the sin committed. The said pastor, minister, or elder, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, in the presence of the congregation, and by and with the consent and according to the judicial sentence of the church, cuts off, and secludes such an offender by name, from the union and communion of the church, because of his offences: so that such a person is not thenceforth to be looked on, deemed or accounted as a brother or member of such a church, until God shall restore him again by repentance.

Which exclusion carries in it the full sense of our Lord's words, Matt. 18:17. *Let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican;* or of the apostle, 1 Cor. 5:5. *To deliver such an one unto Satan;* which is an authoritative putting of such a person out of the communion of the church, the kingdom of heaven, into the world, the kingdom of Satan, the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience, in order to his being humbled and broken under a sight and sense of his sins, which is meant by the destruction of the flesh, and to the end that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.

Amongst the many disorders which church members may be guilty of, and for the obstinate continuance therein, a church may and ought to use the power that Christ hath given to exclude them from her communion, that is one, which is when a member doth seclude himself, and that not in any regular

way, but contrary to all rule and order; for when a church member, by reason of some offence he hath taken at the church, or some of the members thereof, and hath not done his duty according to the rule of the word, or else is a dying away in religion, by one means or another, as by the love of the world, change of condition in marriage, or not having his expected preferment in the church, or the like, doth, as it were excommunicate himself, the church according to their duty, ought to use their endeavors to reclaim such; which endeavors, if they prove fruitless, and the party obstinate, the church ought not to acquiesce in his irregular departure from them, as if all their bonds of relation and duty were over, and no more was to be done, seeing the party has usurped the power of the keys to himself: the church, therefore, must maintain the power that Christ hath committed unto it, though it cannot hinder the inordinate and unruly passions of such a one, if God leaves him to it. He will run away from the church, rending himself schismatically off, breaking through all order and covenant obligations, in opposition to brotherly endeavors to hinder him, and to stay him in his place; the church, is to proceed judicially to turn the key upon such a sinful, disorderly departure; and publicly declare, that as such a one by name hath been guilty of such a thing, naming his disorders, he is no longer in their communion, nor under their watch and care, etc. and that such a person is not to return to their communion until he hath given satisfaction to the church, Rom. 16:17. Such a separation or departure is very sinful, for these and the like reasons:

(1) Because the church is a corporation privileged with laws and rules for admittance, which ought to be observed, Matt. 18. Rom. 12:4,5.

(2) Such a departure is rude and indecent, therefore dishonourable, 1 Cor. 14:40.

(3) Because, if members may take this liberty, all the officers of the church, ministers, ruling elders and deacons may take the same liberty, which would soon unchurch any church, or at least be destructive to its beauty, comfort and edification, John. 6:67.

(4) All members do covenant the contrary, Isa. 44:5, and therefore it is a breach of covenant, which is a black character, 2 Tim. 3:3.

(5) It destroys totally the relation between elders and people, which God hath ordained, Matt. 9:36.

(6) It is a usurping of the keys, or rather stealing of them, Amos. 6:13.

(7) It is schism: if there is such a thing in the world, it is of particular churches, 1 Cor. 11:18; 12:25.

(8) It is high contempt of Christ in the government of his church, Jude 18,19; 2 Peter 2:10,11.

(9) It is to break the staff of beauty [*covenant*] and of bands and brotherhood too, Zechariah 11:10,14.

(10) It argues either some great undiscovered guilt lying on the party, or some by-ends in his first seeking admission into such a church.

All which put together, it declares the great unity of a congregational gospel church, and the sinfulness of such disorderly persons in breaking off without a just cause: but if any church becomes heretical in principles, or idolatrous in worship, or immoral in life, it is lawful for persons, after they have discharged their conscience and duty in reprovng and bearing witness against such gross defections, to depart, 2 Cor. 6:17, 18.

Other disorders and causes of discords in churches are these, and many of the like:

(1) When members of churches, by their ignorance of the rules of discipline and right government of the church of Christ do not act according to their duty; particularly when that rule, Matt. 18:15,16 is not observed; and that is, either (1) When offended members instead of going to the offender to tell him his fault, will be divulging it disorderly to others, whether members or non-members. (2) When offended members instead of acting according to the said rule, do conceal the matter from the offender and everybody else, lest they should be looked upon as contentious persons: and thereby they suffer sin upon their brother, and are become guilty of other men's sins, and thereby they suffer the name of God, their holy profession, and the church to lie under a reproach by their neglect; either of which ways is very sinful, as being

contrary to the express rule given by our Lord Jesus Christ; and such ought, as being thereby offenders themselves, to be in a gospel way dealt with.

(2) When an elder or a church do know that some of the members are immoral and scandalous in life, or heretical in matters of faith and judgement, and yet bear with them, or connive at them.

(3) When members of churches take liberty to go to hear at other places, when the church is assembled to worship God, which is directly contrary to Hebrews 10:25, and is no less than breaking covenant with the church they belong unto, and may soon dissolve and unchurch any particular church; for, by the same rule that one member takes such liberty, another may, yea, all the members may, until their assembling entirely cease. And, moreover, it is casting great contempt on the ministry of such a church, and may cause others to be disaffected to the doctrine taught in such, though sound and orthodox. Yet no restraint ought to be laid on members going to hear at other places, where sound doctrine is taught, at other times.

(4) When members take liberty to go to hear men that are corrupt in doctrine, and so such in some unsound notions of religion, and endeavor to corrupt others with what they have imbibed themselves. And, alas! How many in our unhappy days are corrupted with *Arminianism*, *Socinianism*, and what not? Such cause trouble and great disorders.

(5) Another disorder that may cause discord, is, when members are received without the general and unanimous consent of the church; or when any are admitted, with whose confession, or life and conversation, the generality of the members are not satisfied: or when elders and ministers, or leaders of the church, are remiss and careless in reception of members.

(6) When a church shall receive a charge against a member, it being an offence given by one brother to another brother, before an orderly procedure has been made by the offended brother, according to the rule, Matthew 18.

(7) When judgement passes with partiality, or some are connived at out of favor or affection, and others censured out of envy without due conviction. Levi was not to know his father, mother or children in judgement, Deuteronomy 33:9.

(8) When the charges of a church are not equally borne by the members according to their several abilities, but some are burthened when others do little or nothing.

(9) When accusations are received against an elder contrary to the rule, 1 Timothy 5:16, which requires two or three witnesses as to matter of fact.

(10) When any members shall divulge to persons not of the congregation, nor concerned in those matters, what is done in the church meetings: the church in this respect, as well as in others, is to be a garden enclosed, a spring shut up, a fountain sealed, Canticles 4:12. This often occasions great grief and trouble, and therefore such disorderly persons should be detected. Is it not a shame to any to divulge the secrets of a family? But far greater shame do such persons expose themselves unto.

(11) When days of prayer, fasting or thanksgiving, or days of discipline appointed by the church, are not carefully observed and kept.

In all these, and many other things of like nature, the members of particular churches ought to give all diligence to walk worthy of their vocation, and according to the rule and direction of the word of God, that disorders may be prevented, and that church communion may be maintained in peace and purity, to the edifying of the body of the church of Christ in love.

To be continued

THE SECRET OF THE LORD

Dr. John Kennedy (1819 – 1884)

Dr. Kennedy along with many of his contemporaries, especially in the Highlands, believed that God was able, in a spiritual and extraordinary manner, to communicate His mind to His people and thereby seal instruction on their hearts. As 'Rabbi' Duncan once said, "Given a spiritual world, a living God and a living soul, is it incredible that there should be such intercourse between them; that the soul should speak to a hearing God, and hear a speaking God? This, indeed, is the very kernel of experimental religion." In Dr. Kennedy's great sermon, "The Secret of the Lord", printed below, he shows that this element of Christian experience is

taught in the Scriptures and that, in the past, it has enriched the lives of many godly men and women. (M.H.W.)

“The Secret of the Lord is with them that fear him.”

Psalm 25:14

Part 2

2. True Christians differ from all others, because with them only is “the secret of the Lord.” “The secret” which is with them is hidden in the mind of God from all to whom He does not reveal it. “Thou hast hid these things,” saith Jesus to the Father, “from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.” Matthew 11.25.

This surely means more than that they have the Bible in their hands. True, in it, there is a complete revelation of the will of God. It is by it, too, that God communicates all the knowledge of His mind to which men shall attain on earth. But many have the Bible in whom the fear of the Lord is not found, and to whom the secret of the Lord is not given. They who fear the Lord “have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God.” It is thus that they “made to differ.”

“He will manifest to them His covenant.” This covenant – the covenant of grace – was once known only to God Himself. It was then written only in the volume of the book which contained a record of eternal counsels of the Godhead, and on which no eye looked but that of God himself. But He gradually revealed the plan and provision of that covenant, when earth was formed, and men were, and were sinners, on it. The revelation of that covenant, intended for men on earth, is now complete. A clearer light from heaven shall never shine on earth than that which now illumines these last gospel days. “The word of the Lord,” as it now is, “abideth for ever.” But not only does the Lord shine with gospel light on them that fear Him, as He does on all around them; He hath also shined into their hearts, giving them the light of the knowledge of His glory in the face of Jesus Christ. 2 Cor. 4. 6. He has taught them their need of the grace of the everlasting covenant. He has made known to them its plan and its provision. They, and only they, have “tasted that the Lord is gracious.” But they know only a little. They need that

He would still continue to manifest His covenant unto them. And He will do so. Into all truth the Spirit of God shall guide them. All the lessons appointed by their Father shall be learned by them; and all their darkness and folly shall, at the last, be utterly removed. John 16:13.

The Spirit who makes known and applies the provision of the covenant, and who, in doing so, first quickeneth the dead, hath given unto these the peculiar knowledge which they have. Their knowledge, therefore, is spiritual; not merely because the Spirit gave it, but because they were made spiritual in order to receive it. It is the spirit born of the Spirit that takes knowledge of the things of God. It is the life of God in their understanding that perceives the mind of God in his Word. That same life in the heart seeks the enjoyment of what is known. This desire accords with God's gracious design; for His people have been enlightened to know, just in order to partake of the things of God. They are, therefore, helped to receive them by faith. And their faith is not exercised in vain. The fulness of covenant grace in Christ is reached and communicated, and out of that fulness they receive, "and grace for grace." John 1.16. As the High Priest in heaven pleads, "Sanctify them through thy truth," so under His government and by His Spirit, they on earth receive; and "beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord," they "are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." 2 Cor. 4. 18.

But is there nothing more intimate than this in God's intercourse with His people? Is this all that is implied in the secret of the Lord being with them that fear Him? Is this peculiar privilege exhausted in their receiving a saving knowledge of the covenant of grace as revealed in the gospel? Is this all the proof given of their being the favourites of heaven? Is it what is barely necessary for their salvation (that) God gives to His beloved people? Giveth He no assurance to them of His love to themselves individually? Do they remain ignorant of His mind in reference to the cases which they carry to His footstool, and there spread out before Him? Is God silent when they plead for others? Does He altogether hide from them, as He does from the world, the bearings and coming issues of His providence? Surely they are deceived who think that these things are so. And yet how many there are who would evacuate the communion of the Lord with his people of all special proofs of how near and dear to Him they are, and who regard the privilege, referred to

in the text, as enjoyed merely in the attainment of what is essential to salvation.

It is one extreme statement that God reveals aught to His people apart from the Bible, but it is another that He makes known to them only what is there directly revealed. We must not expect to know the mind of God but by means of the written Word. "The law and the testimony" must be our only guide in knowing, our only standard in judging of the things of God. To that light must we repair to examine what is of God, and to that rule to try what professes to be of Him. Isa. 8. 19, 20. But surely God does make known to His people what is not directly revealed in His Word; although He does not do so except by means of what is written.

He often maketh known their election to them who fear him. He acquaints them with His everlasting purpose to save them; yet this is not directly revealed. The fact of the election of any particular individual is not found in the Bible; and yet by means of the Word in connection with His work of grace, He by His Spirit, maketh it known to the believers. The secret of His everlasting purpose of mercy is thus with them that fear Him. Of His special covenant love to themselves individually they are made assured, but in a manner very different from that in which they are persuaded of His "good will to men." Tokens of that love the Lord giveth to His people; but His way of doing so is a secret hid from all who do not receive them.

Thus, too, by means of the written Word, does God often reveal to them who fear Him the issues to which He will bring their cases when they deal with Him by prayer. Applying to their case "a word in season," he excites an expectation of such a result as that word doth indicate, and thus His purpose of dealing with them in a particular way is made known. They are thus enabled to anticipate an event in their own spiritual history, without receiving any revelation of God's unfulfilled purposes apart from the light of Scripture.

A mere outside Christian is an utter stranger to any such intimations of the Lord's will by the special application of the statements or promises of the Bible. He judges that communion with the Lord is a one-sided matter. He thinks that in dealing with the Hearer of prayer the speaking is all on his own side. He is so enamoured of his own utterances that he cares not whether

God speaks or not. But it is far otherwise with those who truly fear the Lord. It is when they hear the Lord's voice speaking words of truth and mercy that they can venture to utter words of faith and hope. "Take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth; for I have hoped in thy judgements." "Cause me to hear thy loving-kindness in the morning; for in thee I do trust." "Be not silent to me." "The companions hearken to thy voice; cause me to hear it." There are times when, in the face of His silence, as surely as in the face of His frown, they who fear Him cannot advance nor speak to the Lord. And when they have presented their suit, they look up for an answer in peace. This, in the meantime, the Lord often gives them by "a word in season" spoken to their heart. It may, sometimes, please Him not to give any intimation of His acceptance of their prayer till the time for granting their request has come. But it is not always so. Many seem to think that all that is allowed to petitioners at the footstool of mercy, at any time, is liberty to hope because of God's character and His general promises of grace; and that they must wait, without any more special encouragement, till the course of providence has borne to them an answer to their cry.

"The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him," as to the cases of others, for whom they plead. The Spirit of prayer may suggest, and often does, the case of a particular individual, to the mind of one who is pleading at the footstool of mercy. With the suggested case may come a suggested portion of Scripture. In the light of the latter, the former is considered; and, as thus seen, is laid before the Lord. To the case thus presented, the Lord may apply a passage of Scripture to indicate His mind regarding it, and to give to the pleader a favourable or unfavourable anticipation of the result. That premonition may be more or less distinct; but, even when assuring, it is something very different from the inspiration of the prophet. It results entirely from an adaptation by God himself of His own written Word.

They who fear the Lord are not blind, as others are, to the indications of His mind in the dealings of His providence. They are acquainted, as others are not, with the principles of His moral government. They have the sensitiveness of spiritual life under the workings of His great hand, while others lie unaffected in death. They watch and walk with God, while others live without Him in the world. They speak to Him about His doings, and He speaks to them, while others are dumb and deaf before Him. Shall they not therefore know the bearings of God's providence, as others cannot? May not one, who

fears the Lord, who is much given unto prayer, whose heart is charged with care about the interests of the cause of Christ, who watches over the movements of providences with a feeling of intense interest, who looks on God's work in the light of His Word, and of His recorded antecedents, and who has acquired the blessed habit of speaking about his doings to the Lord himself, seem to penetrate a future, all dark to others, as with a seer's eye, while, with all truth and honesty, he may disclaim being either a prophet or the son of one? "They are little acquainted with the ways of God," says the godly and judicious Dr Love, "who imagine God has ceased to give His people assurance as to future events. God has not bound himself in this manner; and there have been many things intimated to, and known by the most eminent saints, before such things came to pass."

It is well to mark the difference between the knowledge derived from the direct teaching of the Bible, and that which is only indirectly obtained by means of it.

It would be a great mistake to attribute equal certainty to the information received in each of these ways. In the former case, the intelligence comes to me directly, and lies before me plainly written in the Word of God. And is it not well that it is the knowledge which is "life eternal" that is thus obtained? In order to "believe to the saving of the soul," I must know Him in whom salvation is to be found, the terms on which His salvation is bestowed, and the warrant given me by God for casting my lost soul into the hands of "His anointed." And all this is clearly and directly revealed. In times of doubting, the Christian can repair to the Bible, and find, plainly written there, what he requires to know regarding the object and warrant of his faith.

But his own personal interest in Christ is not a matter of direct revelation. In acquiring information regarding this, much depends on the mode of God's dealing with his soul. The fruit of God's secret work, as well as the matter of His open revelation, must be taken into account in seeking information of his being a child of God. He is sometimes so assured of this as to be free from all doubting regarding it; but never is his hope of this so fixed and unvarying as his persuasion of God's goodwill to him as a sinner.

More uncertain is his knowledge of God's mind regarding the cases which he brings to the mercy-seat. All depends here on the special application of the

truth being verily by God. What is plainly written in the Bible I know to be of God. But I have not the same ground for saying that the suggestion to my mind, and the application to my case, of what is written, is of God; and on these depends the goodness of the information, which, in this instance, I think I possess regarding the mind of the Lord. Verily the Lord can give an assurance of this. He can so impress a soul with His authority. He may so disclose the treasures of His grace, and may so help one to appropriate what the word conveys to him, that there is no room left for doubting. But the man cannot fall back on this again, when misgivings arise, as he can on the direct teaching of Scripture regarding the way of salvation. So much depends, in the former case, on his own discernment, on his spirituality of mind, on his nearness to God, and in his sensitiveness to God's dealings with his soul, that he feels a vast difference between the hope of everlasting salvation, founded on the call of the Gospel, and the hope of a particular result in this life, founded on a word of promise, which seemed to have come from the Lord.

Still greater is the uncertainty of the information which he thinks the Lord has given him, regarding the prospects of others for whom he was pleading in prayer. He cannot, in this case, claim, as a promise given to himself in Christ, the word which has been suggested to his mind. He cannot now, when afraid to receive the word as from God, fall back on his warrant to receive Christ, and embracing Him anew in the gospel offer, approach, on the ground of His right, to the grace of the promise suggested to his mind. His information depending, as it is, on his own spiritual sensitiveness and discernment, partakes of the comparative uncertainty that attaches to all that is subjective.

And greater still is the uncertainty of the information which guides him in anticipating a certain result from a course of providence. Even in the case of those grand results that are indicated in the unfulfilled prophecies of the Bible, and which form the great landmarks of the future, how uncertain is the light in which he tries to forecast them. And when examining providences on which the light of prophecy does not shine, while he is so dependant for any just anticipation on his own spirituality of mind, his nearness to God, and his ability to discern the mind of God in the word which is suggested to explain the doings of His hand, how far removed from the certainty of his knowledge, regarding what is essential to salvation, is any information, regarding the future, which he may think he possesses.

But while this is true, it is quite as true that, in all the ways that have been indicated, “the secret of the Lord” may be “with them that fear Him.” And let us not limit the Holy One, as if He were not able, in all these instances, to give infallible direction and “much assurance.” The comparative uncertainty of the information in some of these is altogether due to the subjectivity of the mode in which it is obtained. It is in these cases, therefore, that the truth of the test is most manifestly proved. It is in connection with them that the Christian most thoroughly realises that, in order to know “the secret of the Lord,” he must be of “quick understanding in the fear of the Lord.”

It is not difficult to find the reason why those, who are themselves strangers to communion with God, are so ready to denounce as “superstition” all faith in the reality of information from heaven, besides that which is given in the direct teachings of Scripture. They cannot bear to think that those who fear the Lord have reached any attainment beyond themselves, and to which, by any amount of painstaking, they cannot advance. This wounds their pride, and tends to make them uneasy in their alienation from God. They may allow that unusual knowledge is attained by those who are “disciples indeed,” from the direct teaching of Scripture, for this they can hope to imitate. Their own unsanctified knowledge of what is written they can make to appear, to themselves at least, not unlike to what these have obtained immediately from the pages of Scripture. They could hold up their heads among the godly if this were all their attainment. The most convenient way of getting rid of their uneasiness is to regard as superstitious the attainment that is beyond them. They can make out a case, with a plausible surface, in support of their opinion.

“It is pretending to know,” they say, “what is not revealed in Scripture.” This sounds well. It seems, at first sight, due to the Word of God, as the only complete revelation of His will, that we should at once regard as false all information regarding the mind of God not derived from the plain import of Scripture. They have never gone beneath the surface in their thinking on this matter, who have not discovered the extremeness of this view. But, backed by this false assumption, some will quote, with an air of triumph, the pretensions to inspiration, the claims of the gift of prophecy, the faith in dreams and visions, of those whom all acknowledge to have been deceivers and deceived. To minds that have always kept far off from the realities of a life of godliness, that look from a distance on the communion of His people

with the Lord, the difference between the baseless pretensions of deceivers and the God-given privilege of the righteous is utterly impalpable. All kinds of intercourse with the Invisible are classed by these together, and to them all who claim the privilege of communion with the Lord appear as deluded fanatics. More triumphant still is their air, when they can quote, in support of their position, the mistakes of those who were truly godly. But, surely, it is not difficult to discover a very good reason why the Lord should allow even these to be sometimes deceived in their anticipations, and in their readings of the page of Providence. Such mistakes only prove that they are always prone to error, when the correctness of their information specially depends upon their own spirituality. They need to learn this, and their falls will teach them. And their painful experience of their proneness to wander here, will help to make all the more precious to them the certainty attaching to what is the standing ground of their hope – a plain “thus saith the Lord,” on some page of Scripture.

1. Let none forget that “the secret of the Lord is” only “with them that fear Him.” Let no one dare to claim the privilege of having “the secret of the Lord” who seeks not to walk in His fear. Of all pretensions this is the vilest. While disregarding the Lord’s claims to our homage it is impious to claim his secret. It is sacrilege to lay a dishonest hand on the peculiar privileges of His people; and it is daring hypocrisy to deck oneself with a counterfeit of these before the eyes of men, and to walk in pride under this disguise, beneath the gaze of the Omniscient, who, looking down from heaven, sees within a heart that is an utter stranger to His fear.

There is something, in the more peculiar attainments of the righteous, which excites an unholy and dishonest ambition in those who seek “the honour that cometh from man.” Men have pretended to know, as others knew not, the mind of the Lord, who exhibited no such difference, between themselves and the world, as there is “between him that feareth God and him that feareth Him not.” When out of sight they have pretended to be holding converse with God, but their faces did not shine when they came down from the mount. But “from him that hath not” the true fear of the Lord “shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have.” The wise course is to seek to have the fear of God within us, to pray for grace to keep that fear in exercise, and to leave in the hands of Him, who divideth “to every man severally as He will,” to determine to what extent “the secret of the Lord” shall be with us.

2. Let none of the Lord's people settle down into formality in their intercourse with God on the foregone conclusion, that it is not legitimate to seek, with deference to the Divine sovereignty, the more peculiar attainments to which reference has been made. The time was, when, during a close walk with God, some of His people enjoyed such nearness to Him, that it would have surprised them if they received no token of His favour whenever they bowed themselves in prayer before Him; if they were overtaken with a trial, of which, through the Word, they had no previous intimation; and if a brother or sister were in trouble, and they found not their case on their spirits. But there is now a change. They have backslidden from the Lord. They hear not His voice now, as in other and better days. They are becoming content without any such tokens of His love as once were given them. They are beginning to be satisfied with a "peradventure" as to their interest in Christ. They are inclining to think that beyond the vague encouragement derived from the general tenor of the Gospel, and the aspect of God's character as therein revealed, they ought not, as they care not, to seek anymore definite and personal intimation of His favour. Or they have learned to handle, in cold easy formality, the precious promises of grace, without caring to taste their sweetness or to feel their power. The liberty and songs of their youth are now no longer theirs; nor will they recover them till their backslidings are healed. Hosea 2.15. The fear of the Lord must be revived within them ere His secret shall again be with them.

Let all beware of an unlawful employment of the Word of God, as well as of an entire ignorance of its sweetness and its power. There are those who find it easy to appropriate to themselves without misgiving the precious promises of the Word, not caring to ascertain their right to them in Christ, to be rightly informed of the mind of God as expressed in them, or to be strengthened to take hold of the truth and power and grace of Him who gave them at His footstool. There are others who lay themselves open to the suggestion of "a word" as they crave encouragement or direction; and who, if a scripture saying which seems seasonable comes abruptly into their mind, conclude, because of its suitability and suddenness, that it is a message to them from

heaven. These care not whether their application of it accords with the scope of the passage in which it occurs; they realise not His authority whose Word it is; and they desiderate no experience of its sanctifying power. It is convenient for them to get it, and it seems to them safe to take it, and this is all about which they care. There are others still who have settled down in the conviction that a speculative acquaintance with what is written is all that it is wise to seek. Utter strangers to the seasonable suggestion of the truth by the Lord, blind to the wonders of grace which the Word unfolds, without any exercise of appropriating faith in Christ whom it reveals, and destitute of all experience of its power to kill or quicken, to wound or heal, to cast down or to raise up, to burn as fire or to break as a hammer – these go on at their ease, without joy in the communion, or profit from the Word of the Lord.

But let it be ours to be dependent on the gracious and effectual teaching of the Spirit of truth, under whose guidance even fools can be kept from wandering, and who can make it impossible that even they can be deceived. Let us not think that, amidst the multiform delusion which prevaleth, there is no genuineness and no security. There are a people who have an unction from the Holy One, and who know all things. These have genuine wisdom, and they have good security from error. Let us seek to have fellowship with them. Let us not be content with what is barely necessary to salvation in our intercourse with God. From unholy aspirations after being like the Christian in some of his attainments, without being like him in his character, may the Lord deliver us. May we be kept athirst for communion with the Lord, and seeking grace to prepare us to enjoy it. Let His Word be precious to us, and may we be wise to use it for the ends for which it is given. Let us aspire after clearer views of its wonders, a simple faith in its truth, a more ravishing sense of its sweetness, and a deeper experience of its power. And thus may we be guided by its light, moulded by its form, fed by its manna, and cheered by its comforts, “until the day dawn, and the day star arise in our hearts”; till perfect likeness to Christ is attained; till the land of promise and of plenty is reached, and the fulness of pleasures enjoyed, at the right hand of God.

Concluded

CHRIST'S SURETYSHIP AS ILLUSTRATED IN THE BOOK OF PROVERBS

William Luff

Christ is said to be "a Surety" (Heb. 7:22). What is a surety? Let us take two illustrations, outside the Book of Proverbs, that may enlighten us upon this word. Rueben became surety to his father for Benjamin, saying, "Slay my two sons if I bring him not to thee" (Gen. 42:37). He thus became responsible for his brother, and used his relationship as a plea with Joseph: "Thy servant became surety for the lad unto my father, saying, If I bring him not unto thee, then I shall bear the blame to my father for ever" (Gen. 44:32). May we not apply the very words of Judah to the Lord Christ, who says to His Father of every believing sinner, "I will be Surety for him; of My hand shalt Thou require him: if I bring him not unto Thee, and set him before Thee, then let Me bear the blame for ever" (Gen. 43:9).

The second illustration is in the New Testament, when Paul became surety for Onesimus, the runaway slave he was sending back to his master Philemon, with this message: "If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account; I Paul have written it with mine own hand, I will repay it" (Philemon 18 and 19). This may also be applied to reveal the suretyship of Christ. We have wronged and robbed our Master; but the good Saviour saith, "Put that on Mine account; I will repay it." From these two instances we gather a fair idea of suretyship, and are prepared to look at the subject in the light of Solomon's wisdom. The wise man seems to have had a wholesome dread of this thing, and to have realised its terrible consequences. "*Be not thou one of them that strike hands, or of them that are sureties for debts*" (Prov. 22:26). "*He that hateth suretyship is sure*" (Prov. 11:15). Certainly, judged in the light of cold wisdom and prudence, this is good advice; but love, real love, does not so judge. Our Jesus knew perfectly well the seriousness of His undertaking, and that if He would save Himself He had better not enter into any such relationship; but love conquered. Himself He could not save.

“This was compassion like a God,
That when the Saviour knew
The price of pardon was His blood,
His pity ne’er withdrew.”

Solomon’s advice to all who have been led into suretyship for those of whom they know little is that they escape from the danger at once: “*Give not sleep to thine eyes, nor slumber to thine eyelids. Deliver thyself as a roe from the hands of the hunter, and as a bird from the hand of the fowler.*” (Prov. 6:1-5). Christ thought not so. He had a baptism to be baptised with, and said, “How am I straitened till it be accomplished” (Luke xii: 50). Draw back! Deliver His soul! No! That He knew the sorrow awaiting Him is evident from Matt. 16:21; 17: 22; 20:18; 26:2; yet “He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem” (Luke 9:51). Especially to warn those with little of this world’s good against becoming sureties: “*If thou hast nothing to pay, why should he take away thy bed from under thee?*” (Prov. 22:27). Our Surety had the means to meet all demands; but it took all, and reduced Him, as man, to abject poverty. “Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich” (2 Cor. 8:9). So poor that He had “nothing to pay” tribute with, until a fish ministered unto His need; while the very bed seemed taken from under Him, as He said, “The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head” (Matt. 8:20). He gave His glory; but the demand said, “More!” He gave His life of manly toil and blessing; but more was required to pay our debts. He gave His back to the smiters; but still the cry was, “More!” The blood flowed from His scourged shoulders and thorn-crowned brow; but justice was not satisfied. At last He “poured out His soul unto death” (Isa. 53:12), and the law that had said, “The soul that sinneth, it shall die” (Ezek. 18:4), accepted the soul of the Surety in the stead of the soul of the guilty, and exclaimed, “It is enough!”

“To this dear Surety’s hand
Will I commit my cause;

He answers and fulfils
His Father's broken laws:
Behold my soul at freedom set!
My Surety paid the dreadful debt."

Isaac Watts.

"He that is surety for a stranger shall smart for it" (Prov. 11:15). Are we not the strangers? – "strangers from the covenants of promise" (Eph. 2:12). Christ as our Surety had to "smart" indeed. Take the words that suggest suffering in Psalm 22 and we shall get a glimpse of how Christ smarted: "Forsaken," "reproached," "despised," "troubled," "compassed," "pierced." Think of such expressions as these in the same psalm: "Thou hearest not," "I am a worm," "A reproach of men," "Trouble is near," "There is none to help," "Bulls have beset Me round," "I am poured out like water," "All My bones are out of joint," "My heart is like wax," "My strength is dried up," "My tongue cleaveth to My jaws," "Thou hast brought Me into the dust of death." Our Surety was thus smarting under the desertion of friends, smarting under the spite of enemies, smarting under the curse of sin, and smarting under the wrath of God. All this for me, a stranger, for whom He had become Surety! Truly He smarted for His lovingkindness.

The marginal reading of this verse is perhaps even more emphatic: *"He that is surety for a stranger shall be sore broken."* Hence we find Christ saying, "I am feeble and sore broken" (Ps.38:8). A fair vessel, but shattered into fragments (Ps. 31:12). "Reproach" hath meant suffering; but physicians tell us our Lord died of a broken heart. "A broken spirit drieth the bones" (Prov. 17:22).

Such was the breaking of our Surety. Let us quote one other verse: *"Take his garment that is surety for a stranger; and take a pledge of him (or, hold him in pledge that is surety) for a strange woman"* (Prov. 20:16). "Hold Him in pledge," said the Jewish priests and Roman guards, and to secure their prize they sealed the stone of His sepulchre. "Hold Him in pledge," cried Death and he walked night and day unseen in the garden where Christ lay. "Hold Him in

pledge,” roared Satan, as he gathered his forces about the tomb. But ere the resurrection dawn wakened the sleeping world, an earthquake shook the prison. The debt was paid! the Surety free! and forth He stepped into life and liberty.

Christ as my Surety undertook all my payments and repayments; as my Surety He was held in pledge while payment was presented; then as my Surety He burst the prison gates – nay, that might have looked like an unlawful escape – an angel was sent to roll away the stone, a liberating officer from the High Court of Justice (Matt. 28:2).

John Berridge has a thought upon the first clause of this verse which is worth repeating; his quaint lines shall serve as a finish to this interesting subject:

“Through native pride I could not see
My soul was banished, Lord, from Thee,
And in a dungeon pent;
Born like my neighbours vain and blind,
I could not view my frightful mind,
And so remained content.

“But now through Jesus’ help I view
My helpless state, and feel it too,
And my own nakedness;
To screen my back, and warm my side,
No raiment can my hands provide,
No real righteous dress.

“Yet some fond hope ariseth still,
That Jesus Christ in mercy will
Relieve my ragged case;
He bids me take a Surety’s coat,
Who for a stranger gives His note,

And stands in debtor’s place.
“A friendly word the Lord has spake,
And sure I will Thy garment take,
For Surety is Thy name;
Thy garment will exactly suit,
And clothe me well from head to foot,
And cover all my shame.

“So clad, I shall outstrip the moon,
And shine in splendour as the sun,
And may to Court repair;
No robe like this in heaven is seen,
No angel’s coat is half so clean,
Nor may with it compare.”

WHICH WILL IT BE?

In the Cathedral at Worcester, there is an ancient slab, bearing as its inscription the solitary word: MISERRIMUS – “Most miserable.” Down in the Catacombs – those vast underground chambers of the dead, in which the early Christians endeavoured to hide from their fierce persecutors – engraven on a stone embedded in the wall, stands this beautiful word, FELICISSIMUS – “Most happy.” If you were to be laid in your grave today, which of those Latin inscriptions would most truly and accurately represent your condition?

EPILOGUE

“The Lord is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him.” Nahum 1:7

Nahum begins his prophecy with the Lord’s judgement on Nineveh. The Lord is jealous, and will take revenge upon his adversaries and enemies, executing His fierce anger upon them. The Lord’s people may have feared that they would be “swept up” in this judgement and come to fearful harm. But this verse shows the care and concern that the Lord has for His people. The first truth we must remember is that “the Lord is good”. He is always good towards those that love and seek to serve Him in sincerity and truth. Secondly we must recall that the Lord is “a strong hold in the day of trouble”. When the ungodly come under the judgement of God and suffer His fierce anger (upon their sins), the godly are preserved. The judgement will pass over them – just as the angel of death passed over the Israelites in Egypt when he saw the blood on the door posts and lintel. The third truth is that the Lord knows those that trust in Him. Christ says that He is the “Good Shepherd” and He knows His sheep. John 10:14. The Shepherd knows each and every one of His sheep by name and cares and provides for them. For the ungodly this is a verse devoid of any comfort. On such the sentence will be given, ‘I never knew you; depart from me ye that work iniquity’. Matthew 7:23. They will never know the stronghold in which the believer finds such comfort or know the God who is so good.

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