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The New Year

In the kind providence of the Lord we have been brought to the beginning of another year in time. The Lord in his long suffering has spared us until this time in the land of the living. In view of this it is proper for us to consider the Lord's goodness to us in the past and also to think of the prospects for the future.

In considering what is past we have reason to praise the Lord for His great goodness to us in the manifold blessings He has bestowed upon us in providence. He has provided for our temporal needs day by day so that we have not experienced the lack of food and water and clothing which has been the lot of many of our fellow creatures in different parts of the world. As we consider the goodness of the Lord in this way, we have to acknowledge that it is not for any worthiness in us that the Lord has so dealt with us. If He had dealt with us according to our sins how awful would our situation now be. He has shown to us so much of His goodness notwithstanding our sin and rebellion and backsliding. How we ought to lay this to heart. To others it was said: "Despisest thou the riches of His goodness and forbearance and long suffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?" This is the fruit that the long suffering of God ought to bring forth in our lives, that is, the fruit of repentance. Such manifestations of the Lord's kindness ought to bring us to see the enormity of our sin as against a God of infinite goodness and love. What reason we have to mourn over the multitude of our iniquities and to cry for mercy to a God who is merciful and slow to anger.

In looking to the past we have cause to set up our Ebenezer and say: "Hitherto hath the Lord helped us." Also, "It is of the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, it is because His compassions fail not; they are new every morning." The receipt of so many temporal favours ought to remind

us of the shortness of time and that these temporal favours are not to last forever. We will need to be in possession of something better than temporal blessings when it comes to facing death, judgment and eternity. Therefore however good it is to be receiving daily of the blessings and benefits which are for time, we are to seek something better. If we are yet without Christ and without a well grounded hope for eternity, it is time at the beginning of another year to seek the Lord as the portion of our soul. He only can satisfy the needy soul. None other can deliver from the wrath to come, but He is able to do this. He is able to rescue from the lowest hell, for that is what our sins deserve. We must come to saving belief of the truth, and to a resting upon Jesus Christ alone for eternity. In Him is everlasting salvation from sin and death. None who trust in Him shall perish.

In looking forward at the beginning of another year, the future may look very dark. The Lord's Cause is low and appears to be getting lower. The enemies of Christ and His Cause appear to be multiplying in our day. What hope can we see for the living Church of God in the turmoil of the last decade of the 20th century? We do not know what the Lord has immediately in store for His Church. It may well be that things will get darker still. That is all in the Lord's Hand. He can in a moment revive and refresh His weary heritage. He can pour His Spirit forth and renew the face of the whole earth. To Israel He said: "I will yet be enquired of the house of Israel to do it for them." What need there is then to plead with the Lord that He would pour His Spirit forth and grant refreshing showers. He is to build up Zion, according to His promise. That promise He will fulfil. Let His people, therefore, pray to Him for it so that "the desert shall rejoice and blossom as a rose." May times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord come in the days which lie ahead. May the year now opened prove a turning point in the history of the Church of God in raising up Jacob when he is small and prove a time of the ingathering of multitudes of Jews and Gentiles to Jesus Christ.

In the affairs of our nation and of the nations of the world many things look very threatening. So far as the nation is concerned we are moving further and further away from the acknowledgment of the One living and true God. In the last 30 years the nation has apostatised at an alarming rate from God. The house of God is to a large extent abandoned by the large majority of the people and evils of every kind are breaking out on every hand. The sins of the nation are crying out for divine judgments. The long-suffering of the God of heaven has delayed these judgments but for how long we know not. There is a loud call to repentance. How suitable

is Habakkuk's plea: "in wrath remember mercy". In world affairs the situation is no less threatening when the nations are on the brink of war in the Middle East where an awful conflagration may break out at any time bringing death and destruction to thousands. Men's lust for power remains the same, leading to confrontation. Only One can intervene to resolve the crisis and prevent bloodshed but how unwilling men are to look to that One for help. The Lord sits King upon His throne and ever shall. Let the nations quake before Him. Christ has not handed the reins of the Government of the world into men's hands. He is still, as Nebuchadnezzar found out doing according to His will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the world. May He intervene in these critical times for our deliverance. As we face another year let our trust be in the Lord and let His people go on in strength of God the Lord recording His righteousness and His only. May they say each one with the Psalmist:-

"I will sing to the Lord Most High,
so long as I shall live;
And while I being have I shall
to my God praises sing."

Ps. 104: 33.

New Year's Day Sermon

By C. H. Spurgeon

"From this day will I bless you." — Haggai 2: 19

Methinks, as soon as ever I read that promise, your heart would leap towards it, and you would spontaneously say, "Lord, be this the day, — the first day of the year, and that day the Lord's day, — make this the day from which thou wilt begin to bless me in a very especial manner!" God's blessing is the richest gift which his creatures can receive; to be deprived of it is their greatest calamity. What is hell? It is the place where God's blessing cannot come. What is heaven? It is the place where God's blessing is constantly enjoyed without admixture. My God, were there a choice between thy blessing and heaven, I would sooner choose thy blessing, and be out of heaven, than be in heaven, if such a thing were possible, unblessed by my God. The highest felicity of a creature is to be blessed by its Creator; and the very highest felicity of the child of God is to have his Father's blessing on his head and in his heart.

In a certain sense, dear friends, we cannot tell the time when God began to bless his people. If you go back to the day before all days, when there

was no day but the Ancient of days; if you get back to the time when there was no time, when eternity alone existed; you find, in the council chambers of Divinity, that God was blessing his people. If I might suppose a day in eternity, I might say of it, "From *this* day will Jehovah bless his people." When Jesus Christ appeared in human flesh, though you and I were not born, yet were we written in the Book in which all the members of Christ are written; and from that day when he bowed his head, and said, "It is finished," and yielded up the ghost, a channel was opened for those mighty streams of grace which sprang from the divine decree; and it might be peculiarly said that, from that day, God began to bless us. When you and I were born, from the first moment that our face received the air, and our eyes were opened to the light, mercies were waiting for us. A tender mother received us on her bosom; a kind father provided for the needs of our weakness and infancy. I may say that, from the cradle, the Lord has said, "From this day will I bless you." But, to some of us, there has been a second birthday, a day in which we passed from death unto life, from darkness into light. Happy day! We can never forget it. Next is it in happiness to that day in which we shall see the face of Christ without a veil between. The happiest day of our existence was that when we saw Christ hanging on the tree to bear the punishment of our sins. Truly may I say, as I stand at the foot of the cross, and remember the day when Jesus first met with me here, that he then said to me, "From this day will I bless you."

Passing, however, over all these times and seasons upon which we might well be tempted to linger, I shall use my text, first, *to seeking souls*. The time is come, even to-night, when God will bless them. Then I shall use it *to individual Christians*. May the same be their case! Then I shall apply it *to this church as a whole*. May this church realise the blessedness of the promise!

I. First, I shall use the text TO SEEKING SOULS.

I remember well, when my heart was seeking after God with intense earnestness, my never-ceasing desire and my daily cry was, "Oh that I knew where I might find him!" And I would ask the Lord, "How long shall I cry unto thee, and thou wilt not hear me? How long shall I seek the face of Christ in vain?" This gives me sympathy with others in a like condition. You have been for a long time seeking rest, and finding none. You are weary and heavy laden; and you are saying to-night, "When will God bless me? When shall I be privileged to see my Father's face in Christ Jesus, and to know that my sins are forgiven?" My beloved brethren and sisters, there is a period known to God, when he will show his face to

his people. That period, when it does arrive, will certainly bring you comfort. It is written concerning Christ, "He must needs go through Samaria;" and there is a similar necessity that, to every chosen sinner, a day of grace should come, that he may see Christ, and be saved through him. That fixed and delightful time shall yet arrive to you. I pray that it may arrive to-night.

If you want to know when it is likely to arrive, let me give you some signs by which you may foresee it.

You are likely to have the whisper of God's love in your heart *when you have given up all confidence in the flesh*. It may be that you have some indistinct reliance, at the present moment, upon your own prayers. You are not so foolish as to trust in your baptism, or your confirmation, or your church-going, or chapel-going, but there lurks within you the traitorous thought that there is some efficacy, some usefulness in your Bible-reading, in your tears and repentance, or something else that comes from you. Now, remember, you will never know the fulness of Christ until you know the emptiness of everything else but Christ. All that was ever woven by man God shall unravel; all the sticks and stones that human energy can build, in the matter of eternal salvation, must be plucked down by Jehovah's hand, for it is Christ alone who must build that house; unless he shall do so they will labour in vain that build it. I say that this may be only an indistinct matter, but I pray you to cast out every particle of this old leaven, for Christ and thy soul never can be agreed until thou art willing to take him to be thy sole and only reliance; and if thou hast a shadow of a dependence anywhere else, Christ can never be a Saviour to thee. See to that matter.

The time to bless you is probably come *when there is a clean divorce between you and all your sins*. This it is which keeps so many poor sinners in trouble, because, though they have given up many sins, there is one favourite sin which they still hold. But, sinner, thou canst not love Christ and thy sins too. I know thou art quite content to give up all the outward sins of the flesh, but there may be some worldliness, some covetousness, some little sin which thou art loth to part with; but thou must slay every one of these, in the purpose of thy heart, or thou never canst be reconciled to thy Father and thy God. One unrepented sin, one sin indulged in and delighted in, will as effectually stop the gates of heaven against thy soul as if thou shouldst live in fornication, adultery, or murder. Thy heart must hate all sin, and thy heart must love all holiness. When this comes to pass, from that day God will bless thee.

There are some who have never obtained peace through Christ, *because*

they have not sought it in earnest. "I have prayed," you say, "in earnest. I have groaned and cried, and wrestled." Yes, I know you have done so at times; but your earnestness has been of the spasmodic order. The gates of heaven open to all who are really believing in Christ; but they must know how to knock, and to knock again and again. When thy soul has come to the point when thou canst say, —

"I can no denial take,

For I plead for Jesus' sake," —

then thou shalt have no denial. O soul, think of the hell from which thou wouldst escape! Will not that quicken thy slumbering spirit? Then think of the heaven of which thou wouldst be a partaker. Will not this fire thy sluggish soul? Come, I pray thee, and meditate for a little while upon thy state and condition, upon time, eternity, death, heaven, hell, and let thy soul begin to bestir herself. If thou art cold, and lovest not prayer, God will not bless thee; but when thy soul comes to a devout enthusiasm, from that day will God bless you.

I think you are quite sure to get a blessing *when you are willing to have it in God's way*. Some of you do not intend to believe in Christ unless you feel very deep conviction. If God will condescend to alarm you with dreams, you will then go to him. If you have made up your mind that you are to be saved in a certain stereotyped fashion, and you will never believe in Jesus unless he shall be pleased to manifest himself in that particular way, the day of your blessing will tarry long before it comes; but when your soul says "If I can but look to Jesus, I will not ask for this experience nor for that. Only save me, Lord; do but take me into the ark, and let me escape from the destruction that is coming upon all who are outside, and my soul will lay aside her whims, her wishes, and her proud will, and bless thy name for what thy grace has done." When your heart lies before God as the wax under the seal, ready to take any impression that the divine hand chooses to put upon it, then will God say, From this day will I bless you."

To sum up everything in one, — if there be a sinner here who says in his soul, "Truly, I will take Christ to-night, and rest upon him; I see clearly that I have nowhere else to fly to, and I, therefore, fly to the cleft in the Rock of ages, and find a shelter there," from this night God will bless you. If thy faith is built on Christ, and Christ only, go thy way, thy sins, which are many, are forgiven thee, and thou art an accepted soul; and neither death nor hell shall ever divide thee from thy Father's love. Rejoice with joy unspeakable, for a long train of mercies shall be yours, world without end.

I think I have said enough on that point. Pray, you who understand

the power of prayer, that God may bless these simple, feeble sentences to the comforting of some captives, and to the loosening of their bonds.

II. And now I shall turn TO GOD'S PEOPLE and address a few words to them.

Present in this assembly, to-night, are many saints who know their blessedness in Christ Jesus, but they are pining after a higher state of spiritual life; they want more communion with Christ, and greater conformity to his image, and so on. Dear friends, you are wanting to know when you may expect this choice favour, when you may dare to walk in the light of your Father's face. Let me answer you. *When your spirit is entirely resigned to the divine will*, then, from that day God will bless you. It is very hard to bring down my Lord Will-be-will to be a contented servant of the King of kings. It is an easy thing to stand up here, and sing, —

“If thou shouldst call me to resign
What most I prize, — it ne'er was mine;
I only yield thee that was thine:
‘Thy will be done!’ ”

But it is not so easy to say that when you are looking into the face of a dead child, or have to follow to the grave some dearly-beloved wife or husband, or some brother or sister upon whom your soul was set. To stand to our surrenders then is hard work. We say, “Thy will be done;” but when God's will is being done, we do not always use Job's language and say, “The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord!” When you see a Christian man in the furnace, you cannot expect that he will get out by asking, “When will this flame abate?” But the fire will soon be over when a man, in such circumstances, can say, “The Lord's will be done.” It is a sign that the metal has been properly fused, and that the dross has gone, when you can see the image of the Refiner in it, — when the heart reflects the face of God, and says, “Not as I will, but as thou wilt.”

Beloved, depend upon it, our miseries grow at the root of our selfishness. Where selfishness begins, sorrow begins; and where selfishness is dead, grief is dead. Do you comprehend me? If our souls had wholly given up everything to Jehovah's will, we should never lose anything, for we should already have given it up. We should never murmur if we could say, as the old Puritans said, “I always have my own will, because God has helped me to make his will my own will.” It proved the good state of the beggar's heart when someone said to him, “I wish you a good day,” and he replied, “I thank you for your wish; but I always have good days. I do not know that one day is better than another when God is with me.” “Well,” said the one who was speaking to him, “surely there are some

days that you like better than others." "No," said he, "there are not; all days please God, and what pleases God pleases me." "If," said one, to an aged Christian woman, "you had your choice whether you would live or die, what would you choose?" She replied, "I would not choose at all." "But suppose you were forced to choose?" "I would then ask God to be good enough to choose for me." Still, you see, she would avoid the choice, and leave it to the Lord. When thy heart becomes like that, then, from that day will God bless you.

As Christians, we may expect great blessing *when it is no longer a matter of talk with us that we will give our all for the service of God, but when we really do so*; then, from that day, God will bless us. I need not say, probably, that there is no giving so acceptable to God as that which is most costly to us. The widow's mite was precious, not because it was a mite, but because it was all that she had. The old proverb says that "the liberal man gives until his hand sweats". There are not many of that sort. True liberality begins when the hand begins to feel, when some sacrifice is caused by what we have given to the Lord our God. Do I feel, to-night that all I am and all I have belongs to my Master? Can I say truly that, if a life of pain and poverty would glorify him, I would desire to live in pain and poverty; and if my death would more honour him, I would be willing to leave health and comfort at once, and to bear the stroke of the sword of death? Do you feel that —

"There's not a lamb among the flock
I would disdain to feed;
There's not a foe before whose face
I'd fear his cause to plead"?

Can you make, over again to-night, that solemn declaration of allegiance to your God that you made when first you came to Christ,—

" 'Tis done! the great transaction's done;
I am my Lord's, and he is mine:
He drew me, and I followed on,
Charm'd to confess the voice divine"?

If so, then, from this day God will bless you.

There are some particular days on which God is pleased to grant a new lease of blessing to his people. Sometimes, it is *when they have been specially engaged in prayer*. I suppose you have all some landmark, if I may so call it, in your life, to which you can refer as being the starting-point of your spiritual career, and also seasons of peculiar spiritual enjoyment. On such a day, for instance, one of you can say, "I had sweet communion with Christ; my soul was ravished with the glance of his eyes." Well,

dating back from that, you feel that there was a period of peculiar enjoyment. Now, I hope that, to-night, at the communion table, we shall be favoured with such a season, and equally so to-morrow in private prayer. A certain Highlander began to entertain doubts as to his salvation. He could not, however, rest in doubt, but went to the top of a high mountain, and continued there all night wrestling in prayer, and was so taken up in devotion that he remained there the whole of the next day; but, from that time forth, he was never vexed with doubts any more. His mighty struggle with Satan upon the top of the mountain seemed to end for ever the period of his doubts and fears; and from that time a clear shining set in upon him until he was taken home. It were well if we were to have some seasons set apart for seeking communion with Christ, for at such times he would bless us.

I believe, too, that *many Christians have dated new spiritual life from some particular act in their history*. I do not like to tell my own secrets, but there has been such a day with me from which I have had to date a sort of new life. Our friends know little of it, perhaps; but I recollect one Sabbath evening, when, for some weeks, the collections in support of the College had not amounted to more than £2 or £3, and there were some twenty or thirty young men to maintain, and all that I had had been spent, and there was no money that I knew of to pay for another week. That evening, I learned to walk by faith in God in temporal things, a lesson that I had not so fully learned before. That very night, I went out from here, and said to one of my brethren, who is sitting behind me, "Now my bank is exhausted." "No," he said, "your Banker is the eternal God, and he can never be exhausted." "Well, at any rate," I said, "I have nothing in hand." "Still," he said, "cannot you trust your God?" We opened a letter that was then lying on the table, totally unknown to him or to me either, and found in it £200, sent by some donor whose name I never heard, and probably never shall hear until the day of judgment. From that moment to this, I have trusted God in that matter; and, mark my words, though I have found funds to be wanting for this or that, there has never been any real want of money, for, whenever it is needed God sends it. I have considered that, from that very night, my heavenly Father took that work into his own hands, and he said, "From this time will I bless you."

Some of you may have had a comfortable income, and you got on very well, but it was all taken away from you, and you seemed to be cast adrift; but then, for the first time, you began to live by faith; and though, as men call it, it is only a hand-to-mouth way of living, yet you have had

greater blessedness in it than you ever had before; and, though you may not be so rich as before, yet you have had such inward comfort, and such peace of conscience, that you have felt that God from that day has blessed you. If there are any Christians here who are dallying midway between faith and sense, I conjure you to snap the chain. Worldly people will say to you, "Let well alone," and so on; but the best prudence in the world is to be a child, and the highest wisdom is that which the world thinks folly. "He who runs straightforward makes the best runner," was the saying of a German when he was resting upon his God in one of his works of piety, and very true is it. Do not go roundabout, here and there, and ask, "Is this or that true?" but go straight to your God in the simple path of duty, in the holy way of faith. Take that course, and "from this day," saith the Lord, "will I bless you".

III. And now, to close. I think there is a time when EVERY CHURCH may hear the voice of God saying, "From this day will I bless you."

I believe it will hear that voice as soon as ever it is bent upon getting a blessing. It is a difficult thing, however, to get a church into that state. I know some country churches where the ministers' efforts are almost certain to be fruitless, not so much because of the congregation as because of the church. My brethren in the ministry sometimes say to me, "I tried to get a prayer-meeting, but they would not come. I wanted to have some special meetings, but an old deacon said, 'We never had such a thing, and we ain't going to have any now.' I wanted to get them to do something by way of evangelising the neighbourhood, but they said they could not afford it; they had as much as they could do to keep up their own cause, and they would not do it." Now, such churches never can expect a blessing; but I believe that, in this church, we have only one mind, and that one mind is this, — we mean to plead before God until he opens the windows of heaven, and pours us out a blessing. We feel, every one of us, upon this subject, that we will wrestle with the covenant angel until he gives us our heart's desire; and we feel, too, that Christ will never be satisfied till many more jewels are put into his sparkling crown. Well, I believe that, if this be true, from this very night God will bless us.

God is sure to bless his people *when every one feels that he has something to do and means to do it*. Do not say, "My brother ought to do so-and-so; and my minister ought to do this and that." Of course, you can speak like that if you wish to do so, but that is not the way to get a blessing. The main business of each Christian should lie in his own personal responsibility. I have heard of a man, who, as he went by the plate one collection Sabbath, said, when he was asked what he gave, "What I give is

nothing to anybody." Somebody said he thought that was exactly what he did give. Now there are some people who, in what they do, come up to the same standard; they do no good to anybody. They live for themselves; and when they die, their existence will have been purely a selfish one. Such people bring a curse, rather than a blessing, to the church; but if you feel, brothers and sisters, to-night that each one of you has a niche to fill, and resolve that you will try to fill it; if you realise that there is something to be done, and in God's name you mean each of you to do it, then, from this time God will bless you.

And there is sure to be a blessing *when there is a strong current of prayer*; and there is that current in this church just now. There will be that current, I hope, to-morrow evening when we meet together specially for prayer. I hope that every one may come up with a heart like a censer full of sweet incense, smoking with holy prayer. Brethren and sisters, we must pray more in private. Here, perhaps, we fail. We must be instant in season and out of season in prayer, if prayer can ever be out of season. And then, we come together at our prayer-meetings, there must be wrestling times, — times in which the blessing must surely be won from God by holy wrestling. When love and concord reign, when each member assists each other member, when the whole united church seeks nothing but the glory of God in the conversion of souls, *then* will the blessing come. I am not a prophet, nor the son of a prophet, but I do venture to foretell a great blessing upon this church in the year which has so happily commenced. We ended the last year by wrapping it up in a shroud of prayer; we will give this year the wings of praise; but we will still continue to pray for a visitation of the Spirit; and we shall surely have it, and the Lord's name shall be glorified.

Notes of Induction Sermon

Preached at Daviot by the Moderator of Northern Presbytery, Rev. A. F. MacKay, at Ordination and Induction of Rev. John Goldby to the congregation of Daviot, Tomatin and Stratherrick.

"Wherefore holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus, who was faithful to him that appointed him, as also Moses was faithful in all his house" — Hebrews 3: 1, 2.

The apostle introduces in the two previous chapters of this Epistle the

Lord Jesus Christ as the Mighty Redeemer, the only begotten Son of God, the Lord of angels, the Creator of the world to whose words practical heed should be given for instruction, for comfort and peace and hope by his brethren. The present chapter opens with the counsel that we consider the Saviour in his saving office. Let us make a few remarks with the Lord's help on these three subjects of our text — the Person we are called to consider; the brethren address; and consideration of Christ Himself.

The Person in the text. This is the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the Apostle sent by the Father into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He was divinely appointed. "Whom shall we send and who shall go for us? Here am I send me" — Isaiah 6: 8. Christ is the Word Incarnate. "The word was made flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." "In the volume of the book it is written of me, to do thy will O God" — Hebrews 10: 7. Christ is the elder brother, "the brother born for adversity." "The friend that sticketh closer than any brother." Christ is the great Forerunner who went by the way of the cross to heaven. "I go to prepare a place for you and if I go and prepare a place for you I will come again and receive you to myself that where I am ye may be also." He cast open the gates of heaven that His people — the righteous nation that keepeth the truth — may enter in. Christ, in virtue of His atoning work, opened the way to heaven for his saints — He is himself the way. "No man cometh unto the Father but by me." This is the way his people have travelled since the Gospel was preached even from the early days of Abraham to the present time. The multitude of the redeemed have found peace with God when, under conviction of sin, they first believed in Christ, and when Christ as Judge will take his seat upon the Judgment Throne, He will delight in surveying the white-robed multitude standing at His right hand. An Advocate once assured his landlady that, for all the kindness she had shown him, she could count on his help if ever she needed legal aid. Such a day came many years later, but he shook his head sadly and said: "I am no longer an Advocate, they have made me a Judge."

While the day of the Gospel lasts, let us seek the salvation that is now available to us in Christ. He who was the Saviour of the world will soon be the Judge seated upon the Great White Throne. Those who have tasted of salvation are the friends of Christ; they are called "Holy Brethren" separated from an ungodly world by the call of Christ "Come out from among them and I will receive you." They are called "Partakers of the heavenly calling." Christ is their personal Saviour. They are called

disciples, apostles, followers of the Lamb, servants yet more than servants, friends. "Henceforth I call you not servants for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth, but I have called you friends for all things that I have heard of my father I have made known unto you." John 15: 15. "They are partakers of the heavenly calling. They are called to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling" — Phil. 2: 12. They are called to serve the Lord — His servants shall serve Him. Consider Christ, the Saviour with faith and repentance — Faith uniting them to him in the eternal saving union and Repentance, the grace by which they renounce the world, never to return to its service. "We are not of them who turn back unto perdition, but of them who believe to the saving of the soul," Heb. 10: 39. They consolidate their saving state by growing in knowledge of Christ by study and meditation and they enjoy the blessing of God resting upon them. "Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness for they shall be filled." His people are ruled by the constraining love of Christ. They can say to the daughters of Jerusalem "This is my beloved and this is my friend" — Song 5: 16.

They wait for Christ's coming from heaven by preparing themselves for Christ's Second Coming which we believe refers, not to His making a personal physical appearance in the world, but to Christ's final coming to judge the world. Meantime his people, in weakness and humility but in love to Christ, his people and cause, make a confident profession of their faith before an ungodly world. It is required in stewards that they be faithful and his people are the stewards of the "mystery of the faith" — 1 Tim. 3: 9.

APPLICATION

1. We are brought to the conclusion that the study of Christ is the greatest and noblest study in the world — "My meditation of him shall be sweet." Psalm 104: 34.
2. The meditation on the things of our most holy faith and especially upon Christ is found by his people to be the means of grace to sanctify them and make them like their beloved Saviour.
3. Faithful waiting upon Christ is the path they follow through life. They have the spirit of prayer; the Throne of Grace to go to; the ordinances of the gospel; often made to their souls the means of grace which are especially enjoyed in the company of the Lord's people.

The Religion of the Cross

by Gardiner Spring

The religion of the cross is full of Christ. Christ is associated with all its duties and all its hopes. Christ is its centre. Christ is its living head, and it lives not, any more than an amputated limb, when severed from Christ. Only as its roots strike downward, and clasp this Tree of Life, does it bear fruit. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature." The Christian is nothing, has nothing, can do nothing, without Christ. It is a bastard Christianity that owns not Christ as its parent. It is an ignorant Christianity that looks not to Christ as its teacher, and that follows not his teaching. It is an unpardoned Christianity that looks not to Christ as its priest. It is an impure Christianity that is not washed in the blood of the Lamb. It is a disloyal Christianity that does not recognise Jesus Christ as its king, and that hesitates to obey where he commands. It is a wayward Christianity that looks not to Christ as its example, and that does not follow where he leads the way. The knowledge of the Christian is the "knowledge of Christ." The love of the Christian is "the love of Christ." All his graces find their element at the cross. Christ crucified is his glory and joy. Christ in his uncreated glory — Christ in his humanity — Christ in his obedience and temptations — Christ in his death and resurrection — Christ in his kingdom and on his throne — Christ in his weakness and his power, his reproach and in his honour, in his past history and his coming triumphs — is the mighty magnet that attracts his heart, that moves and fixes it, that fills it with grateful astonishment and devotion. Christ, in the word and ordinances, is meat indeed to him, when he is hungry, and when he is thirsty, it is drink. In the storm and tempest, Christ is his hiding-place; in the parched desert, he is as rivers of water; under the noon-day sun, he is as "the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." Christ near him is his consolation in sorrow; in joy, his triumph. Christ in him is the hope of glory. He seeks supplies only from the fulness of Christ. In death, Christ is his life, and his resurrection in the grave. When he stands in the judgment, Christ is his Judge; and, through interminable ages, Christ is his heaven. The religion of the cross is full of Christ; and this renders it so peaceful and so happy a religion, and imparts to it, not indeed the paroxysms of ecstasy, but "the peace of God, which passeth all understanding." It begins and takes root in the soul, not until it has first felt the burden of sin and a sense of its condemnation; not until it has learned to cry for mercy at the foot of the throne; and not until it has found relief in believing in the Son of God, and receiving him as all

its salvation and all its desire. Then its peace is as a river, and its joys are as the waves of the sea. It is the counterpart of heaven. It is the cup of joy from the river of life, which clear as crystal, flows from the throne of God and the Lamb.

Allow me affectionately to ask, Do you possess this religion of the cross! You may not be a favourite with the world if you do; but what is unutterably more important, you are the friend of God. This religion comes to you as a suffering, perishing creature, and would make you happy by making you holy. Make the trial of everything else if you will, but there is a voice within your own bosoms that dispels the delusion. And I hear your own response to it: No, I cannot be happy, without the religion of the cross? I may well afford to forego anything, everything, rather than the religion of the cross!

Christ in the Psalms

by Rev. Alex. MacPherson, London.

(A paper given at a meeting of the Society for Biblical Principles held in London on 6th October, 1990).

Orthodox Christians have always accepted that Christ's Person and mediatorial work are the subject, in whole or in part, of some of the Psalms of Scripture. There is, however, not the same agreement over which Psalms fall into this category. Those Psalms, or portions of Psalms, which are applied to Christ in the New Testament are clearly Messianic. Even here, though, there may be difficulty. For example, verse 20 of Ps. 34 reads, "He keepeth all his bones: not one of them is broken." Some take this to be a source of John 19: 36: "For these things were done that the Scripture might be fulfilled, A bone of him shall not be broken." Against this view is the fact that the Psalm gives no other appearance of being Messianic, and that the quotation can be traced to the Passover Lamb. In other Psalms which are not quoted as Messianic, it is the subject matter which closes us into the view that they are.

The Messianic Psalms that I have identified are 22 in number. They are Psalms 2, 8, 16, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 40, 45, 47, 50, 68, 69, 72, 80, 89, 98, 102, 110, 118, 132. What I have tried to do in this paper, is show what aspects of the Saviour's Person and work are spoken in these Psalms.

DEITY

The natural starting point has to be Christ's deity. It was the Son of

God who became man in order to his being the Saviour of a sinful people. We find, therefore, God saying in Ps. 2, "Thou art my Son." And in Ps. 89 the Son in our nature says, "Thou art my Father, My God, and the rock of my salvation." In Ps. 45, Christ is addressed in this manner, "Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever," and when these words are quoted in Heb. 1: 8, they are followed by a quotation from Ps. 102 which refers to the Son's creative activity: "And thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth," etc.

INCARNATION and HUMANITY

The coming of the Son of God into this world is stated in his own words in Ps. 40: "Then said I, lo I come, in the volume of the book it is written of me." Here, in divinely inspired words is another revelation of the mystery of godliness, "God was manifest in the flesh." The eternal "I" speaks of coming into the world, and says further that the whole of God's Book witnesses to the fact, from the first promise of the woman's seed to Malachi's prediction of the coming of the messenger of the covenant.

With the incarnation of God's Son can be linked his human nature whose reality is referred to in several Psalms. In his sermon on the Day of Pentecost, Peter quotes Ps. 132: 11 which reads, "The Lord has sworn in truth to David; he will not turn from it: of the fruit of thy body will I set upon thy throne." Peter's application of the words kills any speculation that David's words refer merely to the succession of human monarchs who would succeed him. "Therefore, (David) being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit upon his throne." (Acts 2: 30).

Two verses in Ps. 89 teach the same truth: verse 19: "I have exalted one chosen out of the people," and v. 26: "He shall cry unto me, Thou art my Father, my God, and the rock of my salvation." In the latter sentence we see how the man Christ Jesus was ever conscious of his identity as the Son of God. He can properly address the Most High as his Father, and at the same time, because of his being made under the law and owing obedience to it, views his Father as his God, the Lawgiver and Judge. Other words of Christ, spoken on the cross while seeing the glorious end of his redemptive work, are those of Ps. 22: 22: "I will declare thy name unto my brethren: in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee." He is brother to his sinful brethren.

The importance of the truth that Christ is God and man in two distinct natures and one Person forever (the two aspects dealt with so far), is

something that not only does Scripture bring out, but is learned by every person whom Christ saves. The Person whom the Holy Ghost reveals to the soul at regeneration, is perceived to be truly a representative Man who bore his people's sins upon his own body on the tree. And by the same divine light shed upon this wonderful Person, the new-born soul perceives that it was his deity which gave infinite merit to Jesus' obedience, sufferings and death. In every case of regeneration, Christ's own words in John 6: 40 come true: there is a seeing of the Son and a compulsive believing on Him.

Perhaps I should add two other portions that refer to Christ's mediatorial Person. One is that part of the 8th Psalm, from verse 4 to the end, which so wonderfully blends the Person, and works, and elevation of Christ with a description of his people from their sinful to their glorified state. "What is man that thou art mindful of him," etc. The other reference is verse 2 of Ps. 45: "Thou art fairer than the children of men." The moral perfection of Jesus of Nazareth was more than purely human, inasmuch as He was The Holy One of eternity. At all points, his humanity was pervaded with his divinity.

MORAL CHARACTER

Which leads me on to say that the Psalms elsewhere refer to the moral character of the God-man. The fact of his perfect **obedience** that was as necessary to his acquiring righteousness for his people is evident in Ps. 40: "I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart." Christ came in a delighted obedience to his Father's entire will and commission. As man, bound to love God and man, He differed from fallen man in that He had a heart-love to the moral law, a love that would never fail as Adam's did.

In Ps. 45: 4, the grace of **meekness** is ascribed to the Saviour: "And in thy majesty ride prosperously because of truth, and meekness, and righteousness." Meekness is the ability to maintain a quiet spirit in face of provocation. With humility it was one of the qualifications claimed by Jesus when calling men to be taught by Him: "Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart." The divine Teacher's need of meekness implies the provoking slowness of learning that marked the first disciples, and all subsequent learners of Christ's salvation. Paul in 2 Cor. 10: 1 extols "the meekness and gentleness of Christ."

The very fact of God's Son coming into the world to save sinners bespeaks **infinite love** on his part, so that specific mention of that love is scarcely necessary. In fact the word is not found in the Messianic Psalms.

But in Ps. 72: 14 it is certainly Christ's love that is spoken of: "He shall redeem their soul from deceit and violence: and precious shall their blood be in his sight." Likewise, the words in Ps. 69: 9: "For the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up," reveal the intense passion felt by the Saviour for those who make up the spiritual temple for whose sake He bore reproach and suffered death.

There is a fashion much followed by biographers today to search into the lives of notable persons now dead, to try to find marital infidelity, or sexual aberrations, or even indulgence in horrid vices. And, at the same time to make out that the victims of their character assassination were in some ways worthy of respect and praise. The fashion has gone so far that wicked individuals have imputed sins to the Lord Jesus Christ. If such persons do not repent of their depraved imaginings and devilish slanders, they will eventually meet the One they blasphemed and be shattered by the sight of his divine majesty and holiness. In Ps. 89: 19, 20, God in prophecy speaks of the coming Saviour as holy: "Then thou spakest in vision to thy holy one, and saidst, I have laid help upon one that is mighty: I have exalted one chosen out of the people. I have found David my servant; with my holy oil I have anointed him." Christ's moral purity is expressed also in Ps. 45: 7: "Thou hast loved righteousness and hated iniquity." Holiness marked Him all his days in this world; had it not, there would be no salvation for any.

"The Teaching of the Valley"

Psalm 84: 6. John 13: 7

I Have been through the valley of weeping,
The valley of sorrow and pain,
But the "God of all Comfort" was with me,
At hand to uphold and sustain.

As the earth needs the clouds and the sunshine,
Our souls need both sorrow and joy,
So He places us oft in the furnace,
The dross from the gold to destroy.

When He leads thro' some valley of trouble,
His Omnipotent hand we trace;
For the trials and sorrows He sends us
Are part of His lessons in grace.

Oft we shrink from the purging and pruning,
Forgetting the Husbandman knows
That the deeper the cutting and paring,
The richer the cluster that grows.

Well He knows that affliction is needed:
He has a wise purpose in view,
And in the dark valley He whispers,
"Hereafter thou'lt know what I do."

As we travel thro' life's shadow'd valley,
Fresh springs of His love ever rise;
And we learn that our sorrows and losses,
Are blessings just sent in disguise.

So we'll follow wherever he leadeth,
Let the path be dreary or bright;
For we've proved that our God can give comfort:
Our God can given songs in the night.

The Scriptural Bounds of Liberty of Conscience

Rev. D. M. Boyd

(This article consists of extracts from the paper given at the Theological Conference in December 1989. Some additional material is supplied in the footnotes.)

Introduction

The full title of the paper is quite extensive, but, as I wish to lead up to current issues, I shall not cover theory as much as I should like; nor do I intend developing at length what should be well-known positions. I shall try to point in the directions to which thought should be given for, apart altogether from its topicality in connection with the recent schism¹, this is a subject that impinges on the Church at large in a multi-cultural, pluralistic, multifait, so-called post-Christian era, in which religious syncretism and the New Age movement are trying to take over.

One might have thought that such a book as Samuel Bolton's *The True Bounds of Chirstian Freedom*² (1645; Banner of Truth, 1964, 1978)

1. In May 1989, the Associated Presbyterian Churches separated from the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland because of the decision in the much-publicised Lord Mackay case, but ostensibly on the grounds of liberty of conscience.

2. This book is one of the Banner of Truth's top-selling paperbacks at present, possibly, I suppose, because of the demand from the Christian Reconstruction movement in America. "Across Iain Murray's Desk", an insert with the July 1990 B.O.T. magazine.

would more than supply the material for such a paper as this, but sadly this is not so. It does not deal with conscience so much as with the place of the law in the Christian life. For the purpose of this paper, its conclusions will be taken for granted.

Before I open the subject, let us remind ourselves of the terms that are thrown around as if they are synonymous. These include conscience, liberty of conscience, the right of private judgment, the application of Christian faith to daily living, and the liberty of the Christian believer. If one adds to these ideas the concepts of liberty, religious toleration, freedom of religion, freedom under the law, freedom of thought, freedom of expression, freedom of speech, freedom of the press and freedom of will, one can see that confusion will reign unless we are careful to define and distinguish our terms. I do not intend to define all these. My aim is simply to remind us to ask ourselves what subject is being spoken about at any one time.

Conscience

1. What is conscience? Conscience is the faculty of a rational creature to judge between right and wrong. This is a moral judgment. There is a difference between judging, on the one hand, between true and false and, on the other hand, between right and wrong. For example, whether a particular newspaper was published on a particular Sabbath, or a particular shop was open or a train ran on a particular Sabbath, are matters for investigation that will result in a judgment as to their truth or falsity. Such a judgment depends on the available evidence, to which we apply our understanding so as to arrive at a judgment. Given the same evidence, most people will come to the same conclusion. However, if one now asks whether these activities are right or wrong, there will be a wide variation in the judgments made. Here we are asking people to make a *moral* judgment.

It is the exercise of the conscience to make moral judgments. It does so, not merely in relation to evidence but in relation to a standard, by which it makes the judgment as to whether something is right or wrong.

In the past, it was accepted that man should make his moral judgments by the standard of the law of God, as the One to whom we are accountable. Because of the prevailing agnosticism in society this standard has disappeared, and new standards have replaced the law of God. So people now judge whether a thing is right or wrong by their own feelings, or society's opinion, or by its consequences, such as whether or not it brings the greatest happiness to the greatest number of people. Society has gone

through various phases in the formulation of its moral judgments, a subject which is worthy of more study. Utilitarianism and, now, situation ethics are the basic mix out of which our society forms its moral opinions.

The formation of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland can be traced to the subject of conscience when we remember that the plea in the old Free Church was about conscientious scruples in subscribing the Westminster Confession of Faith. Rev. D. Macfarlane wrote an article called *The Declaratory Act in Court* in which he demonstrated the rôle of conscience in the Declaratory Act movement.

The Declaratory Act movement began in the United Presbyterian Church of Scotland, a mainline heir of the Secession churches. The *Testimony* of the Original Secession Church bears witness to the misuse of conscience when in its preface it refers to the "modern dogma of sovereignty of the conscience as distinguished from its liberty."⁴ We shall look at liberty later, but notice that men frequently make the mistake of considering their conscience to be itself the standard and judge by which actions are weighed. The common expression, "I cannot do it, for it is against my conscience to do so" has resulted in unthinking people accepting the view that this means that conscience is the supreme arbiter and standard.

Conscience is not itself the standard. It makes moral judgments by reference to a particular moral standard. The important question is: what moral standard are we to use? Conscience is not the standard or rule of life; "The only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him" is not one's conscience but "the word of God, which is contained in the scriptures of the Old and New Testament." (Shorter Catechism, Answer 2). In *The Declaratory Act in Court*, Declaratory Act is asked the question, "What do you mean by liberty of conscience?" He replies, "I mean that everyone should act according to his conscience." Mr Faithful rejoins, "Conscience is not the rule of action, but the Word of God."

2. Let us now notice that conscience is defiled in fallen man. Darkness has invaded his understanding, so that the thoughts of the imagination of his heart are only evil continually. The heart of man is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, so that it is naturally biased in its own favour and cannot give an impartial judgment on moral things with respect to itself. However, it will often judge others, from which Paul, in Romans chapter 2, shows that man is inexcusable. By showing that he has the capacity to judge others, he condemns himself, who does the very same

3. *The Declaratory Act in Court, Notes of a lecture at Kishorn*, by the Rev. D. Macfarlane, Dingwall (Rbt Carruthers, Inverness, 1928); *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, 1927, Vol 31, pp 374-380, 408-414.

4. *A Testimony to the Truths of Christ*, Edinburgh, 1896.

things. At the same time, man tries to suppress the knowledge of God and, consequently, the law of God. However, the Apostle shows in Romans chapter 2 that, in spite of all his attempts, the knowledge of that law is still in man. Therefore man is a responsible creature who will give an account for suppressing or ignoring that law as his standard. Further, man can sear his conscience: repeated ignoring of the voice of conscience can lead him to consider that what he does is not wrong.⁵

3. In the effectual calling of the elect by the Spirit of God, a radical change begins to take place. The sinner, being called by God's grace, begins to recognise God's sovereignty over him and propriety in him. In conviction of sin his conscience begins to measure himself, his thoughts, words and actions, by the standard of God's Word and finds himself wanting. Conscience then begins to accuse him and to show him his guilt in the sight of God. This experience is preparatory to that godly sorrow which is to lead to evangelical repentance through faith in Christ as God's appointed Saviour. Practical knowledge of the workings of conscience is therefore elementary to those who have been called effectually by God's grace.

We speak metaphorically of light being brought into the understanding by the effectual work of the Holy Spirit as He uses the Word of God to convince the sinner of its authority and claims. He is taught to humble himself, to renounce his own opinions and to submit to the authority of God's Word. We speak, therefore, of an enlightened conscience, or an informed conscience. There is also a well-informed conscience, as we shall now come to notice.

4. The expression "a well-informed conscience" draws attention to the development or growth in the ability of the conscience to judge. The believer endeavours to bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ (2 Cor 10: 5). This is a lifelong process: firstly, to discover what is the revealed will of God in Scripture; secondly, to find the grace necessary for the bringing of every thought into captivity. This leads to believers growing in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and to becoming mature Christians "who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil" (Hebrews 5: 14). It is this which makes the difference between those who are weak and

5. Bunyan has described the development of debauchery in conscience in his character, Mr Recorder, near the beginning of his classic, *The Holy War*. Repeated references are made throughout the book to Mr Recorder, or Mr Conscience; Sovereign Grace Union and Evangelical Press edition, London, 1968, pp16-19 (his debauchery), 103-106, 108, 111, 116-118, 124-132, 138, 143, 171 (his limits and a caution), 172 (his liberty), 191, 193-5, 223, 261. See also *The Method of The Divine Government Physical and Moral*, James M'Cosh, Edinburgh, 1850, Book Third, pp 282-466; and *The Works of Thomas Goodwin, D.D.* Vol 10, Book 7, *The corruption and defilements of conscience*, Edinburgh 1865.

those who are strong in the faith (e.g. Romans 14).

It is clear, then, that conscience is the faculty of the soul which makes moral judgments based upon a standard. Conscience is not itself the standard of morality.

Liberty of Conscience

When we speak of liberty of conscience we do not mean the conscience's right or ability to judge as it pleases. This is to verge towards licence rather than liberty. We are, on the contrary, referring to a divine right conferred upon man which is summarised in the Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter 20, section 2, in those well-known words, "God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men, which are, in any thing, contrary to His Word; or beside it, if matters of faith, or worship. So that, to believe such doctrines, or to obey such commands, out of conscience, is to betray true liberty of conscience: and the requiring of an implicit faith, and an absolute and blind obedience, is to destroy liberty of conscience, and reason also." I have quoted the whole passage because the shorter form is becoming something of a Shibboleth which is degenerating, in the mouths of those that use it, into a cliché. The grandeur of the statement is worthy of full quotation, and of committing to memory.⁶

What divine right is this? It is the right of every man to say that he will have no Lord of his conscience but the only, living, true God. In practice, this applies to doctrines and commandments being imposed upon people, which is why the Confession goes on to mention these: "He has left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men." But the realm in which it is free is carefully circumscribed: "which are, in any thing, contrary to His Word; or beside it, if matters of faith, or worship."⁷

Any thing that is contrary to the Word of God cannot be imposed upon the conscience of men. The phrase, "or beside it, if matters of faith, or worship", can best be recognised and understood if we remember that it is referring to the Regulative Principle.⁸ If any thing is a matter of

6. This is the text from the original manuscript written by Cornelius Burges, 1646, edited by S. W. Carruthers.

7. In the, more familiar, Dunlop's edition of the Westminster Confession of Faith this well-known quotation reads: ". . . contrary to his word, or beside it, in matters of faith or worship." The sense is not different.

8. At the 1860 American General Assembly, there was a dispute between Dr Charles Hodge and Dr James Henley Thornwell over Church Boards. Thornwell used the Regulative Principle in his argument, and Hodge later, (mistaking the principle for something else) attacked it with liberty of conscience. See *The Collected Writings of James Henley Thornwell*, Banner of Truth 1986, Vol 4 p632, Thornwell adroitly turned the tables on him by giving not only a masterly explanation of the Regulative Principle, but also by demonstrating that the Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter 20, section 2, supports the Regulative Principle at this very point, i.e. concerning liberty of conscience. *ibid.* p244-245.

faith, or worship, then it needs the positive sanction of the Word of God before it can be imposed upon the conscience; it is not enough that it is "beside the Word", (that is, neither commanded nor forbidden by the Word of God but, nevertheless, in addition to it)⁹.

One can see that liberty of conscience respects practical things; in this sphere it shows itself to be different from the right of private judgment which is an inner, more personal thing. I believe that the confusion of these two contributes to the passion generated by those who think the right of private judgment is being infringed by the lawful regulation of liberty of conscience.¹⁰

The Bounds upon Liberty of Conscience

Reference has already been made to the illegitimate appeal to conscience. What sets bounds upon the conscience is the law of God or, more generally, the Word of God. There can also be an illegitimate appeal to liberty of conscience. There are bounds upon liberty of conscience, i.e. there are areas within which it is circumscribed.

Notice that the Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter 20, section 2, deals with liberty of conscience in the context of "the doctrines and commandments of men." We are in the sphere of imposing upon the conscience by enforcing the doctrines and the commandments of men.

The purpose of God in giving liberty of conscience to man is to allow him to be free to worship and serve God; i.e. it is a right in order to obey God, it is *not* a right in order to *disobey* God. No-one can plead liberty of conscience in order to disobey God. God never gave him liberty of conscience for that purpose. This is what the Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter 20, section 3, reinforces: "They who, upon pretence of Christian liberty, do practise any sin, or cherish any lust, do thereby destroy the end of Christian liberty, which is that being delivered out of the hands of our enemies, we might serve the Lord without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him, all the days of our life."

Liberty of conscience is necessary in order to obey God because, in this fallen world, men in authority are continually endeavouring to command

9. The use of this phrase is demonstrated in the following sentence: "The Church has no authority in regulating the manner, appointing the form, or dictating the observance of worship, *beside or beyond* what the Scripture declares on these points, — the Bible containing the only directory for determining these matters, and the Church having no discretion to add to or alter what is there fixed." *The Church of Christ*, James Bannerman, Vol 1, pp337-338, Banner of Truth, 1974. See also, *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, Vol 41, p324.

10. "The due exercise of public authority, ecclesiastical or civil, in defending, promoting, settling, and supporting religion, does not imply a denial of the right of private judgment, or private liberty; but only a regulation and subordination of them in society, as the very nature and rules of it require. It implies no necessity of believing, no imposition upon conscience." *Statement of Difference*, 1871, Thomas M'Crie, p162. See also, *The Practical Philosophy*, Robert Lewis Dabney, 1897, Sprinkle Publications 1984, p350.

others to disobey God. Because it is necessary, God has given it to man.

Chapter 20, section 4, of the Westminster Confession of Faith goes on to deal with the lawful limitations upon liberty of conscience. At this stage I shall simply summarise the well-known position of writers upon this subject¹¹. These broad areas are well-known and do not need much explanation.

In summary we may say that the three authorities which circumscribe liberty of conscience are (1) Scripture, (2) lawful¹² civil authority, (3) lawful¹² ecclesiastical authority. The one under contention in the present dispute is the latter one.

(1) Scripture circumscribes liberty of conscience. When something is contrary to the Word of God, and one pleads liberty of conscience *not* to do that which is contrary to the Word of God, then it is contradictory to plead liberty of conscience in order *to do* that very thing! Liberty of conscience has been given in order *not* to do that which is contrary to the Word of God. It may seem, in the abstract, rather ridiculous to suggest this limitation, but we need to remember that we experienced a recent schism which pleads liberty of conscience in order to attend idolatrous worship and be identified with the idolaters in their idolatry, when the Scripture expressly commands, "Flee from idolatry."

According to Scripture, one does not have the right to think and do as one pleases and then to plead liberty of conscience. "It is nonsense to hold the view that it is 'liberty of conscience' to act contrary to the Word of God. The inalienable 'right of private judgment' can only be a 'right' if the judgment is in accordance with the revealed will of God in His Word" (*Free Presbyterian Magazine*, 1945, Vol. 49, p230).

Before moving to the next point, I would remind you here that Scripture puts bounds upon the exercise of individual liberty not only through the law of God but through *Gospel motives*. In the context of the strong and weak living together, Paul deals with this subject in Romans 14. It is important to recognise that the principles he enunciates there apply only in the sphere of "things indifferent". The strong are not to use their liberty in such a way as to make others stumble; considerations of love, peace and edification are above the right to exercise one's liberty. He also explains these Gospel constraints in 1 Corinthians, chapters 8 to 10.

(2) Lawful civil authority circumscribes liberty of conscience. During the poll tax rioting in March 1990, Mr Tony Benn made the comment,

11. e.g. Bannerman, Vol 1, p164-171.

12. The qualification "lawful" ultimately resolves itself into Scripture; i.e. lawful civil and ecclesiastical authority are determined by Scripture.

“Conscience is above the law.” The following letter was printed in *The Daily Telegraph*:

“Mr Tony Benn’s latest comment on conscience only demeans this important subject. The old argument that ‘conscience is above the law’ is more fully and accurately stated that it is above the law of man when this law contradicts the law of God — ‘We ought to obey God rather than men.’

The use of conscience by Mr Benn (effectively, we ought to obey conscience rather than men) will destabilise society. In order to restore stability there will be a suppression of spurious conscientious objection which may affect the genuine thing, if we are not careful.”

Mr Kinnock, the leader of Mr Benn’s party, responded to Mr Benn by saying that men ought to examine their consciences.¹³

(3) Lawful ecclesiastical authority circumscribes liberty of conscience. Liberty of conscience is a plea not to be forced to act against one’s conscience. The Christian Church is to respect this, for “whatsoever is not of faith is sin.” However, it also recognises that there are weak and strong. Among the godly, there are different views which lead to difficulties. We have already noticed the development in the Christian conscience, which is a source of differences. This was known and recognised by the Apostolic church, and certain guidelines were laid down.

1. Apostolic authority solved many matters, but as Thomas Witherow has shown in *The Apostolic Church* (1856, 5th ed 1881, Free Presbyterian Publications ed 1954, 1967), the Apostles demonstrated how to resolve disputes in the post-Apostolic church by the Jerusalem Synod in Acts 15 and, I may add, the Jerusalem Presbytery in Acts 21. This is the lawful ecclesiastical authority that was previously mentioned.

2. As time progressed and heresy arose, “the form of sound words” was devised, and subscribed in whatever way they did so. This was the beginning of creedal subscription and of the authority of the Church to require it.¹⁴

This draws attention to these two matters — the courts of the Church and the constitution of the Church (which embraces its confession, which office-bearers subscribe as ordination vows). Each of these has been attacked in the history of the Christian Church. The constitution of various

13. The original paper to the Theological Conference did not include anything on lawful civil authority, but this paragraph is now included not only as a natural interpolation with a recent example, but also as a surprising testimony to the readiness of a national daily newspaper to print the opinions of the Free Presbyterian Church on liberty of conscience so soon after the Lord Mackay affair!

14. The scriptural authority for creedal statement, confession and subscription is 2 Tim 2: 2, compared with 2 Tim 1: 13, explained in *The Westminster Confession in the Scottish Church*, a paper given to the Free Presbyterian Theological Conference in 1987.

churches and creedal subscription were attacked vehemently in the past, and these subjects enter into the *raison d'être* of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland. The authority of the courts of the Church has also been under investigation and attack in the controversy over Protest in our midst.

This still leaves the area of how the Courts of the Church are to come to their judgments without offending liberty of conscience and yet lawfully circumscribe it. This is where the Regulative Principle comes in, which I shall notice later, which is to ensure that the consciences of the godly, including the weak, are not offended. I may mention, in passing, that Presbyterianism, by its very nature, comes nearest to ensuring this — cf. Proverbs 11.14: “in the multitude of counsellors there is safety”; 15.22: “without counsel purposes are disappointed: but in the multitude of counsellors they are established”; 24.6: “in the multitude of counsellors there is safety.”

The limits on ecclesiastical authority are as follows:¹⁵

1. The source of its authority is Christ; therefore the key of discipline is the application of the Word of God to a particular case. It is simply ministerial and cannot act independently of Christ's Word.
2. It is spiritual, and cannot inflict bodily or temporal censures.
3. It has regard to the erring brother *as a brother*, not as an enemy, else he would be excommunicated. It is therefore remedial, and his edification is to be sought.

15. Bannerman, Vol 1, p247-248.

(To be continued — the second half of the lecture deals with the place of the Regulative Principle with respect to Liberty of Conscience; the APC idea of liberty of conscience is not consistent with that of the Westminster Confession of Faith and goes against the Regulative Principle; the Source of the modern idea of liberty and religious toleration; and the on-going challenge to the whole Christian community in the field of ideas.)

Notes and Comments

The Creeping Tide of Euthanasia.

Two recent cases in the Courts give cause for serious concern. In both cases persons admitted that they had put to death seriously ill close relatives, one a wife, the other a mother, yet they were not sent to jail. In one case the Judge gave a two-year suspended sentence and in the other the Judge in that case gave a conditional discharge. In the first case the Judge is reported as saying: “I accept entirely that there was no malice in what you did. What you did, though clearly very wrong, was out of love to your wife.” In the second case, the Judge in that case is reported

as saying that he was sure "that the distress of seeing your mother's suffering was overwhelming for each of you. I accept that she pleaded with you to end her suffering. I also accept that you debated long before you decided to embark on the course you did."

It would appear from these cases that to all intents and purposes legal sanction is being given to euthanasia. There does not appear to be anything in the treatment of these cases by the Judges involved which would act as any deterrent to others placed in similar circumstances from taking the life of a loved one. Obviously this type of killing has come to be regarded very sympathetically though it is still murder and violates the divine command: "Thou shalt not kill." It is to be hoped that such lenient sentencing of such serious crimes will be reviewed.

Another case which also gives cause for serious concern is that of a seriously handicapped baby in which the Judge ruled that if the child fell critically ill again doctors need not carry out life-saving treatment. The Court of Appeal upheld this decision but stressed that the Courts could never let doctors deliberately terminate a life, yet there were extreme cases where painful treatment to prolong the life of the child would be "so cruel as to be intolerable." The great danger in such cases as these is that the door will be opened for allowing seriously handicapped children to have their lives terminated soon after birth. Legal authority has already been given to terminate the lives of such children up to the moment of birth. The path to euthanasia or "mercy" killing is a slippery slope.

High suicide rate in Scotland

Scotland's suicide rate is 30 per cent higher among men and 20 per cent higher among women than in England and Wales. The reason for this is not known. However we may be sure that disbelief in a lost eternity is a very potent factor in persons taking their own lives. If men and women realised the consequences of self murder they would not be so ready to hurl themselves into a lost eternity.

Irish R.C. Church Leader

Bishop Cahal Daly has become the new Archbishop of Armagh and R.C. Primate of Ireland in succession to Cardinal Tomas O'Fiaich who died, ironically, on a pilgrimage to Lourdes. The new Archbishop is reputed to be opposed to I.R.A. terrorism. If this is so, then it would be a welcome sign if he would continue to denounce the murderous tactics of the I.R.A. Without the support of the R.C. Church in Ireland over

the years, it is difficult to see how the I.R.A. could have operated as it has done during that time.

A New Prime Minister

At the end of November Mr John Major, the former Chancellor of the Exchequer, succeeded Mrs Margaret Thatcher as Britain's Prime Minister. Though little known when she became Prime Minister, Mrs Thatcher proved a strong Prime Minister, steadfast in seeking to maintain Britain's interests and sovereignty, a firm upholder of the freedom of the individual, and a resolute opposer of systems of oppression and terror. Like many Prime Ministers before her, a solution to the Northern Ireland situation evaded her, her Anglo-Irish Agreement only exacerbating rather than alleviating the situation.

Mr John Major has formidable tasks confronting him, not least the threat of war with Iraq, the likelihood of which increases week by week. We would desire for the new Prime Minister the Lord's guidance and blessing in order that he may lead the nation in a way that would be glorifying to God. We ask the praying people of the Church to remember him and his Government at a Throne of grace.

Infallibility of the Bible

Dr James Matheson, a former Moderator of the Church of Scotland, writes in their magazine, (*Life and Work* Nov. 1990), that there are two things which contribute to the little response to the presentation of the Faith, "One of the serious barriers to faith is the idea, still prevalent, that to be a Christian one has to accept the infallibility of the Scriptures." Secondly, "I wonder if in our teaching we have given anything like enough emphasis to the Holy Spirit."

It seems that Dr Matheson has not given anything like enough emphasis to the Holy Spirit in the inspiration of the Holy Scriptures. "All scripture is given by inspiration of God . . ." (2 Tim. 3: 16); "Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (2 Peter 1: 21); "The scripture cannot be broken" (John 10: 35); "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth" (John 17: 17).

The Spirit of Truth was promised by Christ to His apostles, "When he, the Spirit of Truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth" (John 16: 13). This truth was recorded in writing by the supernatural influence of the Holy Spirit so that we have an infallible Bible. When the Spirit of Truth convinces sinners of their sins, He shows them the truth using the Word of Truth, so that when they are born again of incorruptible seed,

by the Word of God which liveth and abideth for ever, (1 Peter 1: 23), it is said, "of his own will begat he us with the word of truth" (James 1: 18). The godly are born again with the Word of Truth, by the Spirit of Truth and they become the children of Truth. "For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe" (1 Thess. 2: 13).

D.M.B.

Mission News

There was some excitement at Mbumba recently when it was announced that President Mugabe was to pay a visit to Mbumba Hospital. For a few days before the visit, various security men were at Mbumba making sure that all was in readiness for the visit. One thousand children were assembled to greet the President, who arrived by helicopter rather later than was expected. We have not yet heard what his impressions were.

The Rev. D. B. MacLeod expects to leave for Kenya during December and Mr Vermeulen and the Rev. A. B. Ndebele will join him there. After visiting Kenya and Malawi, Mr MacLeod will proceed to Zimbabwe, where he will D.V. spend two weeks.

The Prize-giving at the John Tallach School takes place this month. The prizes will be presented by the Secretary for Education, Mr Isaiah Sibanda, who received his Primary education at Zenka School, and spent one year at Ingwenya before there was a Secondary School there.

Miss Macaulay, in a recent letter, tells of having received an interesting letter from a Dutch lady who organises the 'Friendship Missionary Group' who send parcels to the Mission from time to time. The lady's name is Mrs Winters, and she said it was her father who used to publish the little booklets from the "Inheritance Publishers" which were often included in the parcels. The booklets contained sermons by Puritan Divines. Mrs Winter's father, on one occasion, visited Scotland and stayed with the late Rev. D. Beaton in Wick.

At the end of September the Communion was held at Ingwenya and the services were appreciated. The Rev. Z. Mazvabo was the assisting minister. Mention was made of a sermon on, "I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire" 'Christ is the Gold and we need him for time and eternity.'

Mr and Mrs Neil Murray are hoping to arrive in London on November

30th. Miss Marion Graham is also expected home early in December, if all is well.

J.N.

Church Notes

Presbytery Meetings (D.V.)

Australia and New Zealand: At Auckland on 25th January at 2.30 p.m.

Outer Isles: At Stornoway on 5th February 1991 at 12 noon.

Skye: At Portree on 12th February 1991 at 11 a.m.

Northern: At Dingwall on 12th February 1991 at 2 p.m.

Southern: At Glasgow on 19th February 1991 at 6 p.m.

Zimbabwe: At Bulawayo on 13th March 1991 at 2 p.m.

Outer Isles Presbytery Letter

2 November 1990

The Right Hon Margaret Thatcher PC MP
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London

Dear Prime Minister

European Community

When our Presbytery met recently, I was instructed to write and express our support of your stand against European political and monetary union.

We were resolutely opposed to our nation's entry into the European Economic Community at the time that the proposal was first made and nothing has happened since to make us feel that we were mistaken in our attitude. Our national sovereignty has been steadily eroded until the point is now reached where the formation of a European Superstate is openly declared to be the aim and policy of the majority of the member states. This, as we see it, poses a grave threat to our religious and civil liberties.

Our Prime Minister will be aware of the fact that the member nations are predominantly Roman Catholic and that the Pope claims to have been invested with both temporal and spiritual power over all nations. This claim was repudiated by many of the European nations, including our own, at the time of the Reformation, when the so-called Holy Roman Empire crumbled, but, neither then, nor since, by the incumbent of the papal throne. In our view, there is now an attempt being made to rebuild that

empire in the European Superstate and it is little wonder that we, as Protestants, and mindful of our history, are greatly concerned at the prospect.

We plead with you to stand firm on this issue and at the same time assure you of our prayerful support. "Them that honour Me, I will honour."

On behalf of the Presbytery

Yours faithfully

Rev. John MacLeod
Clerk

Acknowledgment of Donations

The Treasurers of the following Congregations acknowledge with sincere thanks the following donations:—

Breasclete: Anon., £20 for Door Coll.; Anon., £20 for Sust. Fd and £20 for Door Coll.

Broadford: C. M. £100 for Jewish and Foreign Mission Fund, in fond memory of loved ones.

Dingwall: Friend, Raasay £5 for Sust. Fd.; Mrs M., Strathpeffer £25; Mr and Mrs D. MacL., Strathpeffer, both for Church Fds., all per Rev. D. B. M.; Mrs G. £20 for Sust. Fd.; Anon £50 for Congr. Fds.

Edinburgh: Anon., £300; Anon., £50, both by post for church and Manse Fund; Friend of the Cause £20 (Glasgow Postmark); Friend of the Cause, Glendale £20; Friend of the Cause, Flashadder £10, all for Comm. Exps.; Anon., Edinburgh £30 for Jewish and Foreign Mission Fund (Envelope in plate); Skye Friend, Psalm 60: 4 £20; Residents of Ballifeary House £129, both for Church and Manse Fund; Go Forward £30 for Church and Manse Fund; Anon., £20 for Comm. Exps (envelope in plate).

Fort William: Mr and Mrs A. K. £20 for Comm. Exps.

Greenock: C. M., Glasgow, £10 for Communion Expenses, per Rev. L. MacLeod.

Inverness: Anon., £20; Anon., £10, for Bus Maintenance per envelopes in plate; Mr A. C. £50 for Congr. Fd. per E. Suth.

Kinlochbervie: Anon., £150 for Sust. Fd. £150 for Foreign Mission Fund.

Lairg: Anon., £50; Anon., £40; Friend, Lairg £10, all for Ch. Fds., last two per Rev. D. B. M.

Lochcarron: Anon., £200 for Russian Bibles; Friend, Carnoustie £50 for Congr. Fd; Mrs K. G. £10 per K. Mackay for Congr. Fd.

Oban: Friend, Glasgow £15; Friend, Skye £5; J. G., Oban £10; Envelope in plate £2, all for Congr. Fd.

Portree: Friend £100 per F. M.; Mrs A. M. £20 per S. Y. M.; F. R. S. £20 (envelope in plate), all for Congr. Purposes; Friend £10; Friend £10, both per F. M., both for Sust. Fd.; Anon., £10 (envelope in plate); Friend £10 per S. Y. M., both for Church Bus.; Anon., £10 for Trinitarian Bible Society (envelope in plate).

Raasay: Friend, Clachan £10 per M. D. MacKay; Friend, Inverarish £5 per Rev. J. R. T.; To loving memory of a loving brother £20 for comm. Exps (envelope in plate).

Staffin: Anon., £110 for Congr. Purposes per N. M. D.; Anon., Friend, Staffin £10, towards upkeep of Minister's Car.

Stornoway: M. McK., Chesterfield £10 per Rev. J. MacLeod.

Stratherrick - Daviot - Tomatin: A Friend £10 for Congr. Purposes.

Tain: Glasgow Friend £10 for Comm. Exps.

Uig (Lewis): Friend of the Cause, North Tolsta £10 for Church Door Coll.; Friend of the Cause, Breasclete £10; Anon., £5; last three per envelope in plate; Anon., £10 per M. M., last three for Comm. Exps.; Anon., £10 for Manse Expenses by envelope in plate; Friend, Stornoway £10 where most needed per Rev. D. J. MacDonald.