

Free Church **Witness**



OCTOBER 2011 ISSUE



Human Impediments to Coming to Christ

Dr Joel Beeke



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Encouragement in Discouraging Times

We live in a needy world. Around us we see people following all kinds of religions, cults and false churches which oppose or undermine the gospel. The masses make a god out of money, material things, work, the body and pleasures. People's lives are miserable because of addiction to drugs, alcohol and gambling. Deep loving relationships are rare with the majority living in immoral partnerships and such marriages as exist break down easily. Recently we had riots on the streets of our English cities and saw young people behave like savages. Most people's lives are meaningless and empty. The millions around us are going down to hell without any hope of deliverance.

What are we to do? We feel weak and helpless. There is an answer – the gospel of God's saving grace – but no one wants to hear it. It is not a new problem. The prophet of old mourned, 'Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?' (Is.53:1). The Messiah, Himself, cried, 'I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought, and in vain' (Is.49:4). We suffer no temptation but He is able to sympathise for He 'was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin' (Heb.4:15).

We feel like giving up in despair but that is not the answer. Christ said something which we would do well to consider: 'Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father. And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son' (Jn.14:12-13). Surely the answer to our fears and disappointments is here. All the mighty power of God is available to us. Jesus even promises that we will do greater works than He did.

The Call to Believe

'Verily, verily' or 'truly, truly', means the Head of the church has a very important truth for us here. Listen! Believe on me, He said, and mighty things will happen. Christ laid a huge emphasis on faith. The chapter begins with the words, 'Let not your heart be troubled ... believe' (Jn.14:1). The future is uncertain. Trials, disappointments, death and judgment lie before us, but the answer is 'believe' in God and in Me. 'I go to prepare a place for you' (v2). I am the way – the way to God and the way you must walk; I am the truth about the way, the map, the Word, the directions, and I am the life to enable you to walk on the way (Jn.14:6). So here in verse 12,

He that believeth on me, not just in My existence but on Me or in Me as their great Priest and King, will have a wonderful future. 'What must I do to be saved?' Paul and Silas replied confidently, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house' (Acts 16:30-31). But believing must not stop the moment you are converted. Keep on believing. Live the life of faith, resting daily on Christ, growing in Him, empowered by Him and so persevering to the end. 'Lord, increase our faith' (Luke 17:5).

The Mighty Works of the Believer

Our Lord said, 'the works that I do shall he do also'. What works were these which He did? He walked on the water, He stilled the storm, He fed the 5000 with five loaves and two little fish and He healed all kinds of sicknesses. How could Jesus say that we would do these? We can't perform miracles. But if only we prayed and believed wonderful things would happen. Some have escaped from great danger, survived awful storms and obtained food when hungry. Sometimes doctors have given up on the sick and prayer has been made and they have been healed. Jesus assured us, 'Verily, verily', and He never tells lies. Believe and you will see miracles taking place. Do not give ground to the Charismatics with their pretend miracles. Our God answers prayers in amazing ways when it pleases Him.

Greater Works done by Believers

What could be greater than the works Christ did in giving hearing to the deaf, sight to the blind, making the lame to walk and raising the dead? Actually, there is something greater – saving souls from hell. It takes greater power to raise the spiritually dead than the physically dead. The new birth requires the mighty power of God. We cannot of course bring about this miracle but God can do it through us, using His Word in our mouths. Jesus said, 'the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works' (v10). We perform the greater works through the Father who dwells in us and He dwells in us by His Holy Spirit. The Trinity is beautifully set before us. The three persons are intimately united in the one God. 'Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father' (v9). He added, 'I am in the Father, and the Father in me' (v11). Also we are united to God: 'I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide

'The new birth requires the mighty power of God.

We cannot of course bring about this miracle but God can do it through us, using His Word in our mouths.'

with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth ... he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you' (vv16-17). He added, 'I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you.... If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him' (vv20, 23). Because of God dwelling in us we can do the greater works.

The Wonderful Promise

We have here a wonderful promise: 'And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son' (v13). Our prayers will be answered in an amazing way. Why? 'Because I go unto my Father' (v12). Christ, having risen from the dead, ascended to heaven with as it were His own blood and there intercedes for us. He pleads that we will be blessed on the basis of His finished work. We have an Advocate with the Father. When we pray, Christ takes our prayers and purifies them and presents them to the Father with His own merits. His blood is mingled with our prayers and so they are pleasing to God. Our prayers are in His name, based on his righteousness whose name is as ointment, or perfume, poured forth (Song of Sol.1:3). Jesus said 'I will do it'. He is the great King. 'God also hath highly

exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father' (Phil.2:9-11). 'All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth' (Mt.28:18). He said 'If ye shall ask anything in my name I will do it' and what a promise this is! Ask for the 'works' to be performed – troubles sorted, enemies silenced and the sick healed. But also ask for the 'greater works than these' – souls saved, men and women delivered from Hell, both individuals and multitudes. Why don't you and I pray more, far more, and with greater expectation? O ye of little faith, ask believing!

The purpose of all this

The purpose of all this is 'that the Father may be glorified in the Son' (v13). Why did Christ come, preach, perform miracles, die and rise again? It was to glorify God. Why are we to pray, do works, do these greater works? It must be all to the glory of God. The failure of our efforts in ministry and evangelism is due to the fact that we do what we do for our own glory.

Burial or Cremation?

Pastor Malcolm H Watts (Salisbury)

*Last month Pastor Watts looked at the arguments of cremationists.
This month he presents the Scriptural case for burial.*



The Scriptural Case for Burial

Not one of these arguments for cremation is in any way convincing, based as they all are upon human reasoning. A question of fundamental importance must now be asked: 'What saith the Scripture?' (Rom.4:3).

(1) Immediately after the Fall of Adam, God made it clear that, because of his sin, man was to be interred in that earth from which he originally came: 'In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken' (Gen.3:19). As Francis Roberts once correctly observed, 'Here man is not only sentenced to death, but also to the grave'.

God's Word still stands. Adam and all descended from him must 'return' to this appointed place (Ps.90:3; 104:29; Eccl.12:7). A grave belongs to every man. Hence that Scripture which says, 'His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth' (Ps.146:4).

(2) Not a great deal is known about very early funeral rites and customs, but enough evidence is available to show that cremation was certainly the ancient and widespread practice of the heathen world. We know, for example, that among the Babylonians 'cremation, mostly incomplete, was the practice' (A Dictionary of the Bible edited by Sir William Smith). Among the Greeks it was also usual to dispose of the body in this

way: 'Greeks burned the bodies of their dead, and deposited the ashes in graceful urns or under Stelae (tall tablets)' (Black's Bible Dictionary). The Romans too seem to have preferred this method and 'during the first four centuries of the empire, the body was, in the great majority of cases, consumed by fire, and the ashes consigned to the tomb in an urn' (A Manual of Roman Antiquities, by William Ramsay). In modern heathendom little has changed. Buddhists still bring their dead to the pyre; Hindus do the same. This connection with heathenism becomes a strong argument for rejecting it. God has said: 'Learn not the way of the heathen' (Jer.10:2; cf Lev.18:3,30; Deut.18:9).

(3) From the beginning God's people rejected the heathen way of treating the dead. As Dr Alfred Edersheim observed: 'Cremation was denounced as contrary to the whole spirit of Old Testament teaching'. The Jews believed very strongly that burial was divinely appointed and this became the universal custom among them (Gen.25:9; 35:29; 50:13; Josh.24:30; 2Kgs.13:20; 2Chron.9:31), the only exceptions being when there was fear of mutilation by an enemy (1Sam 31:12) or when it was physically impossible in a time of plague (Amos 6:9-10). That the Jews always chose 'to bury rather than to burn their dead bodies' is a fact noted by Tacitus, the Roman historian; but we really do not need the testimony of secular history: Scripture itself tells us that 'the manner of the Jews'

'God has shown that burial is fitting and right.'

was 'to bury' (Jn.19:40).

Although the burning of the dead prevailed throughout the Roman Empire when Christianity first appeared, the early Christians strongly objected to it. Accepting, as they did, the main Jewish arguments against cremation, they believed that in the burial of the Lord Jesus, an example had been given to the church (1Cor.15:3; cf Rom.6:5 – 'we shall be... in the likeness of his resurrection'. It would seem fitting to be like Him in His burial too) and so their dead were deposited very carefully in sepulchres. After the death of the first martyr, for example, we read how 'devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him'. (Acts 8:2; cf. 5:6,10). Municius Felix, an early defender of the Christian faith, no doubt spoke on behalf of the whole church when he said: 'We observe the old and better custom of interment'.

The church's opposition to cremation eventually brought about change. It is an indisputable fact of history that 'when Christianity began to increase, the funeral flames did cease, and after a few emperors had received baptism, there was not a body burnt in all the Roman Empire' (John Pearson).

(4) The Bible teaches that when the soul returns to God at death, the body enters the grave as into a new 'house' (Job 30:23; Is.14:18). This is represented as a vast house, with many private rooms or apartments called 'chambers of death' (Prov.7:27) and in these the dead 'rest in their beds' (Is.57:2; 1Chron.16:13-14).

This language, so descriptive of burial, would be quite inappropriate – in fact, devoid of all meaning – once cremation is considered. This also applies to the apostle's illustration in 1 Corinthians 15, where he likens the body to a seed: 'that which thou sowest' (1Cor.15:36-44). Since all these allusions point to burial as the proper mode, we certainly do not feel at liberty to institute the very radical change required by cremation.

(5) Throughout history, the burning of the body has been associated with hatred and enmity. With horrifying cruelty men have inflicted punishment and shown contempt by means of fire (Jer.29:22; Ezek.23:25; Dan.3:6; Amos 2:1 – this last verse is very relevant to the subject in hand). In marked contrast, love has been thought chiefly responsible for the burying of the dead (2Sam.2:5-6; 21:10-14; Mt.14:12. See also Mk.14:3-9). Since love was appointed by our Lord as the distinguishing mark of His disciples, by which this world might know us (Jn.13:35; cf 2Tim.3:3 – 'without natural affection'), we surely ought to seize this special opportunity of manifesting it. Who knows what effect it might have upon unbelievers? Before summarily dismissing that question, a remark once made by Julian, the Roman Emperor (AD 361-363), ought to be considered. He said that, in his opinion, the spread of Christianity was at least partly due to the early Christians' 'forethought about the burial of the dead'.

(6) If and when burial takes place, believers are able to make profession of their faith even in death. A silent but impressive testimony can be made to 'those things which are surely believed among us', such as: Creation (Gen.2:7), the Fall (3:19),

Redemption (1Cor.6:20 – our bodies belong to Christ as much as our souls), Union with Christ (6:15), Indwelling by the Holy Spirit (6:19), Preservation (Jn.6:39-40), Resurrection (Ps.17:15), and Eternal Life (Jn.5:28-29). Since there is one final opportunity to declare faith in all these truths, ought it not to be taken? Only burial enables you to do so. Then let burial be the choice and 'glorify God in your body'.

(7) Fire has always been connected with judgment. Sacrificial victims, charged with sin, were burnt (Lev.4:12; 6:30). Idols and images, so hated and abhorred by God, were thrown contemptuously to the flames (Exod.32:20; Deut.7:5). The bodies of people guilty of heinous crimes were consigned to devouring fire (Gen.19:24; Lev.10:2; 20:14; 21:9; Num.11:1; 16:35; Josh.7:15). Related as it is to punishment, it is not at all surprising to find that fire is the element of torment in hell (Mt.13:50; 25:41; Lk.16:24). It must surely be wrong to use fire in disposing of the body. For the Christian, whose sins are all pardoned, it is so dreadfully inappropriate.

Burial - Fitting and Right

God has shown that burial is fitting and right. When there was nobody around to arrange for the disposal of Moses' body, God saw to it Himself and 'he buried him in a valley in the land of Moab' (Deut.34:6). We should take very careful note of the fact that it was Satan who objected to this, desiring to deprive God's servant of a decent and honourable burial (Jude 9).

In the light of all that God has revealed, a decision must be reached. That done, we really ought to make it absolutely clear to those with charge of our affairs that our wish is to be buried. That was what Joseph did when he 'gave commandment concerning his bones' (Heb.11:22). Many have wisely followed his example, including John Calvin in whose Will the following words appear: 'I desire that after my passing, my body be buried according to the customary form, in expectancy of the day of the blessed resurrection'.

We close with a further quotation from John Pearson's *Exposition of the Creed* (1659): 'The first Christians wholly abstained from consuming of the dead bodies with fire, and followed the example of our Saviour's funeral... The description of the persons which interred Christ, and the enumeration of their virtues, and the everlasting commendation of her who brake the box of precious ointment for His burial, have been thought sufficient grounds and encouragements for the careful and decent sepulture of Christians. For as natural reason will teach us to give some kind of respect unto the bodies of men, though dead, in reference to the souls which formerly inhabited them: so, and much more, the followers of our Saviour, while they looked upon our bodies as living *temples of the Holy Ghost*, and bought by Christ, to be made one day like unto His glorious body, they thought them no ways to be neglected after death, but carefully to be laid up in the wardrobe of the grave, with such due respect as might become the honour of the dead and comfort of the living. And this decent custom of primitive Christians was so acceptable unto God, that by His providence it proved most effectual in the conversion of the heathens and propagation of the gospel'.

Why Keep the Lord's Day?

Rev John W Keddie

*Last month Mr Keddie looked at the question, Why keep the Lord's day?
This month he looks at how in practice the Lord's day is to be kept.*

What is to be in our hearts with reference to the first-day Christian Sabbath? We assume that the Sabbath commandment is of permanent obligation. This is not to promote legalism. It is clear that keeping this commandment, or any of the commandments, saves no one. The letter to the Galatians, for example, establishes this decisively. But one of the uses of the moral law is that it is God's prescribed way of life for mankind. Certainly the spiritual person will love the law of God after the inward man (Romans 7:22). The believer will show love and loyalty to their Lord by his or her regard for the moral law in their lives. The proper observance of the Lord's day, our Sunday, is summed up as rest and worship. It is to be *remembered*, and it is to be *kept holy*. This day provides an opportunity for giving ourselves as far as possible to the concerns of our souls, as well as not giving ourselves as much as possible to what can very well be done on other days (eg daily work, sports and recreations, entertainments, chores, unnecessary travel). The believer should think in *positive* terms of the benefits it affords when properly used to advance the life of God in the soul. They will say to themselves: 'How can I make the best use of this day to advance spiritual religion in my life?' 'How can I advance my understanding of the Word of God?' There will be as far as possible a laying aside of normal duties, except such as are merciful and necessary.

It is sad that professing Christians and churches are not more concerned with the use of the Lord's day. After all, this is not a notable age for piety. It appears to be a day in which there is a low ebb spiritually. This seems all the more reason to emphasise the spiritual benefits of the Lord's day rather than argue against it! Let it be a day in which the people of God give attention to their souls; in which they attend the ordinances; in which they meditate on the Word; in which they pray and humble themselves before the Lord. Let it be a day of joy and gladness; a day for the Lord. Let us be clear too, that it is a day for *all* to keep. I know one cannot force people to observe the day. But people can be encouraged to rest and worship, and give time to their families on Sundays, and be *shown* by faithful believers how it can be used. Professing Christians need to be bold today, like Nehemiah in his day (13:15-18). Let the right impression be given, that this is a jewel of days, a treasure, for the individual and for the family and for the nation – and of course the church. Who is so advanced in the ways of the Lord that they can do without the Sabbath in whole or in part? Let the church and the Christian seek to limit the intrusion of distractions such as the media, and let them have a heart for this 'market day of the soul'.

WHAT IS THE PRACTICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF LORD'S DAY OBSERVANCE?

(1) *It encourages a proper recognition of God and His claims upon us, especially in relation to our use of time. It is a day which*

used aright will keep a society from the corrupt influence of complete secularism.

(2) *It encourages man's relationship with Christ.* For it gives opportunity for worship in private and public not found so directly on other days.

(3) *It provides rest from weekly toil* even for people who are aged or retired. And the first-day Sabbath emphasises the priority of the heavenly over the earthly (important as the earthly has its place in terms of the 4th commandment).

(4) *It is an index of the state of a person's soul.* The Sabbath is respected and observed by lively Christians. 'There is no surer sign', says one writer, 'that a young man (or older person) is declining from faith and personal religion when he (or she) begins to find his own pleasure and do his own way on the Lord's holy day' (Alexander Whyte).

(5) Finally, *it points people forward to heavenly rest.* It will be – ought to be – treated as a foretaste of heaven. This is basically the perspective of Hebrews 4 ('There remains a keeping of the Sabbath to the people of God'). Yes, an eternal Sabbath 'Where congregations ne'er break up, and Sabbaths never end'. And here the question may legitimately be asked: if we have little or no appetite for our earthly Sabbath, what real taste can there be for the Heavenly state? If we find the Christian Sabbath drags, as the traders did in Amos's day (8:5-6) or in Nehemiah's day (13:20ff), then we should look to our souls and seek the Lord. But someone may say, 'I do my very best to keep the Lord's day – I always have, and I deplore all the changes in attitudes to this day'. We should not imagine, however, that Sabbath keeping will save one's soul. It may be possible to be as careful as any human being might be in outwardly observing the Lord's day and yet be a stranger to God and to grace. The first priority is the one thing needful – having Christ in the heart by faith. It is not of course either/or but both/and.

We close with the moving words of Robert Murray McCheyne from his tract, 'I love the Lord's day':

'When a believer lays aside his pen or loom, brushes aside his worldly cares, leaving them behind him, with his week-day clothes, and comes up to the house of God, it is like the morning of the resurrection, the day when we shall come out of great tribulation into the presence of God and the Lamb. When he sits under the preached word, and hears the voice of the shepherd leading and feeding his soul, it reminds him of the day when the Lamb that is in the midst of the throne shall feed him and lead him to living fountains of waters. When he joins in the Psalm of praise, it reminds him of the day when his hands shall strike the harp of God.

'When he retires, and meets with God in secret in his closet, or, like Isaac, in some favourite spot near his dwelling, it reminds him of the day when "he shall be a pillar in the house of our God, and go no more out".

'This is the reason why we love the Lord's day. This is the reason why we "call the Sabbath a delight". A well-spent

Sabbath we feel to be a day of heaven upon earth; for this reason we wish our Sabbaths to be wholly given to God. We love to spend the whole time in the public and private exercises of God's worship, except so much as is taken up in the works of necessity and mercy. We love to rise early on that morning, and to sit up late, that we may have a long day with God. How many may know from this that they will never be in heaven! A straw on the surface can tell which way the stream is flowing'.

This is a spirit and attitude which surely needs to be recovered in our churches, and amongst professing Christians today.



'When a believer lays aside his pen or loom, brushes aside his worldly cares, leaving them behind him, with his week-day clothes, and comes up to the house of God, it is like the morning of the resurrection, the day when we shall come out of great tribulation into the presence of God and the Lamb.'

Obituary

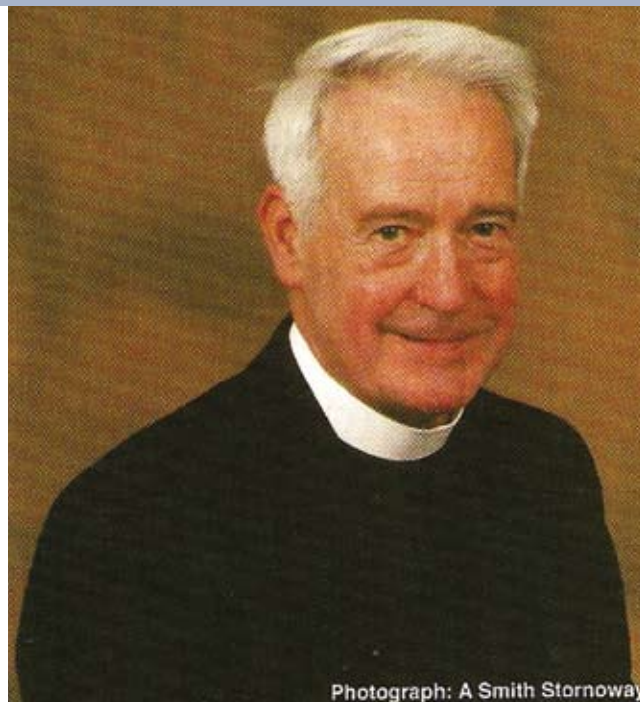
Rev Kenneth Smith, Senior Minister of Knock and Point

Kenneth Smith was born on September 15th 1930 and died in the early hours of August 11th 2011, his wife Catherine having died earlier this year. Mr Smith had suffered from Parkinson's Disease for the last 20 years, but this did not affect his mind and he continued to contribute articles to the church magazine, such as the article on the Authorized Version a few months ago. He leaves behind a son, Kenneth and a daughter, Paula. He has two brothers still living, one, Rev Angus Smith, a minister of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland.

Mr Smith was converted in his early twenties while serving as a second engineer at sea on a nine-month trip. He began to read the Word of God in his cabin at every opportunity and, despite strong temptations to desist, he persevered in reading and prayer until he found peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. He professed his faith in Christ in the Free Church in Govan and afterwards applied to be accepted as a student for the ministry. He was subsequently ordained and inducted to Campbeltown Free Church in 1968. He later served in the charges of Lochalsh & Glenshiel, Kilmuir and latterly in Knock, Lewis. Upon retirement, in 1996, he dwelt in Upper Bayble, Point. He was faithful and fearless in proclaiming God's Truth.

In January 2000, conscientious to preserve his ordination vows, Mr Smith associated with the reconstituted Free Church and in November 2000 he adhered to the newly constituted congregation of Knock & Point. After being locked out of the Knock village meetinghouse (which, having lain derelict for 10 years has now been condemned as a building) Mr Smith and the congregation began a Fabric Fund to erect a new church building for the congregation. A site was soon chosen and the building is now erected.

Mr Smith attended the worship services for as long as he was



Photograph: A Smith Stornoway

physically able to do so and supported the congregational outreach in Aird. He was a constant source of encouragement to the congregation and of counsel to the Pastor. Those who visited him at home and in hospital came away spiritually warmed. He 'fought a good fight' and he 'kept the faith'. There can be no higher commendation for a minister of Christ. Our heartfelt condolences go to the children, Kenneth and Paula, and we pray that they may yet come to follow the God of their parents.

Rev James Clark

Human Impediments in Coming to Christ

Rev Dr Joel Beeke

Despair due to Backsliding

Some people refuse to come to Christ because they believe their backsliding has disqualified them from doing so. They believe they have committed the unforgivable sin. They think they may have been saved at one time, but now all hope is lost because they have committed a terrible transgression. They have sinned against the Holy Spirit, and thus they are cast off forever.

Oh backsliding friend, come to Christ, for He says, 'Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out!' This includes you. There are no exceptions in Christ's promise. All whom the Father gives to Christ, He will raise up. The Lord said in Jeremiah 3:12, 'Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the Lord; and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you: for I am merciful, saith the Lord, and I will not keep anger for ever'. Matthew Henry wrote that these words reveal 'God's readiness to pardon sin and to receive and entertain [welcome with blessings] returning repenting sinners'. He is ready to forgive you when you come to Him. Remember that Christ taught that we must forgive the sin of a brother, 'until seventy times seven' (Mt. 18:22). Divine forgiveness must exceed such a human standard.

You may object: 'I am clearly not one that the Father has given to His Son. For if I was, I would not have backslidden so grievously'. Dear friend, do you long after Christ? Do you despise your sin? Do you feel remorse for what you have done? If you say yes, the gospel promise is for you. But if you continue to push it away, saying, 'It can't belong to me', think of David or Peter, and many others who returned to Christ after a lapse into gross sin. You, too, are not beyond the reach of sovereign grace. Heavy-laden as you are, come to Christ and cast your burden at His feet. 'If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness' (1Jn. 1:9).

Confusion about Election

Some people refuse to come to Christ because they do not think they are among the elect of God. They say, 'If Christ only saves His elect, and I don't think I'm elect, then all my attempts to come to Him will fail'. You, dear friend, have misunderstood the doctrine of election. This doctrine does not keep people away from Christ; when rightly understood, it draws people to Christ. Without the glorious doctrine of Christ's free election, no one would come (Rom. 3:10-12). Election is the friend of sinners; it paves the way for sinners to come to Christ. The door is open.

'But it is not open to me', you say. Dear friend, do not let your election decide your coming; let your coming decide your election. Joseph Alleine wrote, 'You begin at the wrong end if you first dispute about your election. Prove your conversion, and then never doubt your election Whatever God's purposes be, which are secret, I am sure His promises are plain.... Do not stand still disputing about your election, but set to repenting and believing'.

The doctrine of election should drive us to Christ. Come to Christ and He will enable you to make both your calling and your election sure (Acts 5:31).

Ignorance of the Gospel Call

Some people refuse to come to Christ because they have never heard the command to come to Christ; they have never repented of their sins and have never felt the Spirit open their hearts to embrace the Christ offered in the gospel. For such persons there is a message of warning and a message of hope. The message of warning is that if you continue in your ignorance and unbelief, you will perish in it, and there will be no hope of coming to Christ. The door of the kingdom of heaven will be barred fast. You will be kept far away from the Lord Jesus Christ, forever and ever. To you, I lovingly exhort, learn of Christ, come to Christ, and trust in Christ, while there is time to do so (John 6:37).

Unbelief

All of these impediments – and there are many more – are rooted in the soil of unbelief. Unbelief is the 'mother sin' of all sin, the root and receptacle of all sin. Unbelief is the belief of Satan's lie. Unbelief makes us cling to the world rather than to Christ. Unbelief is the ultimate reason for not coming to Christ.

John Calvin wrote, 'The blindness of unbelievers in no way detracts from the clarity of the gospel; the sun is no less bright because blind men do not perceive its light ... Unbelief makes us rebels and deserters; [it] is always proud ... Our own unbelief is the only impediment which prevents God from satisfying us largely and bountifully with all good things'.

Matthew Henry said, 'Nothing is more offensive to God than disbelief of His promise and despair of the performance of it because of some difficulties that seem to lie in the way ... Unbelief may truly be called the great damning sin, because it leaves us under the guilt of all our other sins; it is a sin against the remedy'. Ultimately, it is unbelief that will drag to hell all those who refuse to come to Christ. 'No sin makes less noise, but none so surely damns the soul, as unbelief', said J C Ryle. I once pastored a man who strove hard against his unbelief. With tears streaming down his face, he cried out, 'I hate my unbelief! O my cursed, cursed, cursed unbelief!' Do you hate and curse your unbelief? Do you flee to Christ from it as that which is most offensive to God (John 6:37)?

Reject the world's Pig Food

Rowland Hill (1744-1833), a popular, evangelical, English preacher, hit a low point in his ministry for a few months in the midst of his ministerial career. He was sorely disappointed with the lack of fruit in his ministry. One day he looked out of his study window and saw a pig farmer going to market. To Hill's amazement, the pigs followed the farmer straight into the slaughterhouse. When he later saw the farmer emerge from the slaughterhouse without the pigs, Hill went out to meet him. The minister said, 'How did you get those pigs to follow you

to their own death? I cannot get people to follow Christ to their eternal life'. The farmer replied, 'Didn't you see that as I walked along I had some pig feed in my pockets and that I just dropped a few crumbs every few steps as I walked? For a few crumbs of food they followed me to their death'.

Will you believe and follow Satan for a few crumbs of this world's pleasures to your eternal death? Or will you believe in and follow the Saviour to eternal life who said, 'I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst' (John 6:35)?

Take to heart the words of Charles Spurgeon, 'Unbelief will destroy the best of us. Faith will save the worst of us'. If, by grace, you do come to Jesus, think of what you will have. David Clarkson said, 'You shall be admitted to such union with Him, such a relation to Him, as will not only engage His tenderness and love, but His joy and delight ... He will join you to himself in an everlasting covenant, a marriage covenant, that shall never be broken, nor you ever divorced'.

Be a willing slave of Christ

A wealthy Englishman went to California in the 1850s to enrich himself during the gold rush. After much success, he left to go back to England. He stopped at New Orleans on the way home, and, as all tourists did at that time, visited the infamous slave-trading block. As he approached the place where people were sold for cash, he saw a beautiful young African woman standing on the block. He overheard two men, who were trying to outbid each other for her, talking about what they would do to her if they could buy her. To their surprise the

Englishman joined in the bidding by offering twice the price. The auctioneer was astonished. 'No one has ever offered this much for a slave', he said.

After purchasing her, the Englishman stepped forward to get her. When he helped her down to his level, she spat in his face. He wiped away the spit and led her to a building in another part of town. There she watched uncomprehendingly as he filled out forms. To her astonishment he handed her some manumission papers and said, 'There, now you are a free woman'. She spat in his face again.

'Don't you understand?' he asked, as he wiped her spit away again. 'You are free! You are free!'

She stared at him in disbelief a long while. Then she fell at his feet, and wept. And wept some more. Finally, she looked up and asked, 'Sir, is it really true that you paid more than anyone has ever paid to purchase me as a slave, only to set me free?' 'Yes,' he said, calmly.

She wept some more. Finally, she spoke: 'Sir, I have only one request. Can I be your slave forever?'

Come to Jesus Christ, for He will not cast out those who come to Him. He alone has purchased them with the price of His own blood. He alone can set them free from bondage to sin and death. He alone can lead them to eternal life. And in so doing, He makes them willing and ready to live unto Him, as His willing servants in this life and for ever (Ps. 110:3).

March 2011 *The Banner of Sovereign Grace Truth*



'He alone can set them free from bondage to sin and death. He alone can lead them to eternal life. And in so doing, He makes them willing and ready to live unto Him, as His willing servants in this life and for ever.'



News



Court of Session, Edinburgh

Appeal in the Broadford Case

The decision on the appeal in the Broadford Case has now been issued. The finding appears to be to the effect that the trust deed for the Broadford property grants the property to the organisation which holds the

title '*the Free Church of Scotland*'. In the concluding paragraph of his opinion, however, Lord Drummond Young argues that it would be reasonable and appropriate that irrespective of who holds the title, the use of the property

might be shared with the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing).

The full finding is to be found at <http://www.scotcourts.gov.uk/opinions/2011CSIH52.html>. Paragraphs 76, 77, 130 and 131 are particularly relevant.

Desk



The Legal Committee are disappointed at the major aspect of the finding, and are currently giving very careful consideration to its implications. A fuller statement will be issued after consultation with the Legal Team. Rev G Craig and Rev D Fraser comment: 'Although convinced of the righteousness of our actions, which culminated in the purported removal of many ministers from the ministry of the Free Church for seeking to uphold their ordination vows, it is another thing to prove some matters before a Court of Law in regard to Church property. In this respect we have failed so far. However, a review of

the events of 2000 will remind any right-thinking person that there was serious wrong going on in the Free Church and that we were unfairly dealt with. Sadly, since that time, the drift in the residual body of the Free Church has become more evident. We long for the healing of the breaches in Zion, but this seems further away than ever'.

The Pilgrim's Progress Translated into Maltese

For the first time ever Bunyan's classic work "The Pilgrim's Progress" has just been translated into Maltese. This is a deluxe hardback edition running to 289

pages of very clear print and improved with fine old black-and-white drawings to illustrate the progress of Christian from a state of sin to a state of grace, and from a state of grace to a state of glory. The book is every way a pleasure to handle and to hold. In Maltese Bunyan's great work reads as: 'L-Avanztal Pellegrin'. Endorsements of this classic work, done also into Maltese, are given from CH Spurgeon and John Newton, among others. The work of translation has been done by Joseph Farrugia, who is a native of Malta and who has made this work available to his fellow islanders

for their spiritual good. All who read Maltese should read this wonderful book. Those who do not might do well to learn Maltese!

Riots

Mike Judge – Christian Institute

The England riots are not just a breakdown of law and order, they are the consequences of a breakdown of morality in our society. We have all been appalled to see the shocking absence of respect for human life, for lawful authority and for private property. Why are these values so absent? In what social institution do people learn respect for their fellow human beings? Where do people learn to respect authority? Where do people learn respect for others' possessions?

It is in the family that these values are passed down from one generation to another. It is in the family that these lessons are instilled in people from an early age. To be more specific, it is in families headed by a father and a mother who have committed themselves to each other, and are committed to raising the children they themselves have procreated and are biologically attached to. Fathers are especially responsible for their sons. Boys need solid and reliable male role models. If a person's formative years pass by without these values being instilled in them, then trouble lies ahead.

Of course there will always be families that – through no fault of their own – do not conform to the ideal model. And there can be delinquent parenting within intact families. But an anything-goes attitude to the family should not be celebrated as progress. Yet this is what has happened. The institution of the family has been relentlessly undermined by successive Governments in recent



Statue of John Bunyan, author of Pilgrim's Progress in Bedford.

decades. Politicians are nervous of supporting marriage too strongly. People's biggest problem is a spiritual one, and only the saving grace of Jesus Christ can answer that. But God also cares for people through his common grace. He instituted the family and governing authorities for people's common good. It is our Christian duty to follow the character of our Heavenly Father and care about these matters too; and also pray for those in authority (Romans 13, 1 Peter 2, 1 Timothy 2).

India – Persecution

Barnabas

Over 60 violent anti-Christian attacks were recorded in India during the first half of 2011 as Hindu extremists continue to target churches, pastors and Christian families.

In one incident in Jharkhand state at the end of May, five Christian families fled their homes in fear after being beaten up by Hindu extremists. One woman was hospitalised, suffering internal injuries, while another woman – a mother of three – was abducted and held for a month until a court ordered her release. Police have failed to make any arrests in connection with this incident.

In April, an angry mob of 150 Hindu extremists attacked a Christian worship meeting in Delhi and indiscriminately beat up participants, including women and children. Two Christians required hospital treatment for head injuries. The assailants also destroyed furniture and vehicles.

Saul Pradhan, a 45-year-old Christian pastor, whose house was torched by Hindu fundamentalists two years ago, was found dead in Kandhamal, Orissa state, in January. The police claimed that his death was due to cold, but Saul's body bore marks of assault.

The southern state of Karnataka, which is governed by the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), has been worst hit by the anti-Christian violence; of the 64 incidents recorded throughout the country, 20 happened in Karnataka. These include pastors and Christians being threatened and beaten, church services being disrupted and the buildings ransacked, and Christian property being seized or destroyed.

Eritrean Christian threatened in Saudi Arabia

Barnabas

An Eritrean Christian who was threatened with execution in Saudi Arabia for sharing his faith with Muslims will now be deported to his homeland, where he may face prison, torture and even death. Eyob Mussie was arrested at a mosque in Saudi's second largest city, Jeddah, on 12 February. He had gone there to meet and talk with local Muslims after speaking about Christianity at the Eritrean Embassy for three days.

He was threatened with the death penalty for allegedly preaching to Muslims. But now the Saudi authorities have decided to deport him to Eritrea, which can be regarded as one of the worst places in the world to be a Christian. So although he has been given a temporary reprieve from execution, further danger awaits him in Eritrea. He is being held in a deportation centre while arrangements are made for his return.

Mussie has shown great faith and courage during his ordeal. He told Barnabas Fund in April: 'May the purpose of God be done in my life... I'm trusting in the grace of God, which is enabling me to stand bold in a very traumatic situation'. He said that

he had felt compelled to share his faith despite the danger, and that he is prepared to die for his faith in Christ.

Eritrea Persecution

Barnabas

Thousands of Christians are believed to be imprisoned without trial in horrendous conditions in Eritrea; many are held in metal shipping containers or underground prisons, where they suffer extreme temperatures, malnutrition, torture and beatings. Those who fall ill may have medical treatment withheld unless they agree to renounce their faith. Some die in custody. Christians are viewed by the Eritrean authorities as a threat to national unity because they give their ultimate allegiance to God and not to the state. Towards the end of last year a local governor ordered an 'end of year purge' against Christians; a spate of detentions ensued. Among the most recent include a group of 26 college students from Mai-Nefhi College, who were arrested on 2 June, and 64 believers detained in the village of Adi Abeyto near Asmara, in May.

Government Consultation on Marriage

Christian Institute

A controversial consultation examining the possibility of radically redefining marriage in England and Wales is set to begin in the autumn, a spokesman for the Westminster Government has revealed. The Scottish Government announced similar plans to launch a consultation by the end of 2011. The spokesman, speaking in response to an enquiry, said: 'We are at the early stages of this work and will be, from the autumn, looking to discuss with a range of stakeholders how this work can move forward'.

Earlier this year Michael White, assistant editor at *The Guardian*, said: 'Aside from all the theological, moral and cultural freight, there's an important practical distinction here which goes to the root of any society – namely that heterosexual marriage is there to produce and raise children in a more or less stable environment'. Mr White, writing on *The Guardian's* politics blog, went on to warn that no amount of technology could "eliminate the need for a female egg and a male sperm to make a baby. On that fact rest all successful societies since the year dot'. And Edward Leigh MP has also questioned why the Government is trying to 'mangle' marriage, warning that it could lead to further complications.



Stinging Nettles

T J Pocock



The Lord spoke at times in parables, using natural things to illustrate divine truth. A few years ago I believe He showed me a parable as I was working on my allotment garden. As I paused for a rest and looked around me, I noticed that the man working on the next allotment was on his hands and knees, hand-weeding his seedbed. He had a difficult task, for all over it there were little stinging nettle plants.

Reaping the consequences of neglect

The first lesson from this was when I remembered that the previous year he had left the weeds to go to seed. Now he was reaping the consequences of that neglect, for many of those seeds had now grown into weeds. If we are not given the grace of faith in Jesus Christ, by which alone sin is overcome, we become like the field that Solomon saw: 'I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding; and, lo, it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall thereof was broken down' (Prov.24:30,31). Sins that are not overcome by grace, grow and produce 'seeds' which very quickly germinate so that sin is multiplied. May we be given grace to recognise sin, to feel the evil of it, to seek the help of the Lord to mortify it, and not give up till He applies to us all the benefits of the sin-conquering sacrifice of His Son. We each have wicked natures that love sin and desire that what we call 'little sins' may be spared. If we are allowed that, one day we shall reap the consequences of our folly.

Hardening the conscience

As I watched that man working on his allotment, I was surprised to see that he was pulling up all those stinging nettles with his bare hands. I expect you know from your own experience that you only have to touch a stinging nettle to get stung, and this can be quite painful, especially on the fingers which have extra sensitive nerve endings. Curious to know how this man could do what he was doing, I walked over to speak to him. I asked him: 'How can you bear to do that with your bare hands – aren't you getting stung?' His reply was: 'I have been stung so many times that I do not feel it any longer'. Immediately I saw and felt the deeper solemn truth in what he had said. That is just how it is with each of us, unless the Lord in mercy makes us different by His grace. The sting of the nettles represents the sense of guilt and the realisation of the consequences of sin when it is felt in the conscience. All people have this. Even those who have not the grace of God 'show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another' (Rom.2:15). Our nature is so corrupt and deceitful that left to ourselves we find a 'remedy' for the sting of a guilty conscience – we harden ourselves against it,

and soon we have been stung and hardened ourselves so many times we do not feel it any more. This begins very early in life. The young child that tells a 'little' lie or says something unkind to a brother or sister or disobeys his father or mother may feel very guilty to begin with. But unless the conviction is of the Holy Spirit, they never come to God in confession, asking Him to forgive them and to keep them from sinning. Later when they sin again, the conscience produces a decreasing feeling of guilt. False comfort is taken from the fact that God has not inflicted some terrible judgment upon them, or from some presumption of God's pardon, and so the sense of sin is gradually diminished. Meanwhile, greater and greater sins are committed till in some cases the most awful things are done with no feeling of guilt or remorse.

There is only one remedy for this. The person needs the new heart and the new spirit that the Lord promises to give to His people. If they have previously been given this, they need it renewed as David prayed in Psalm 51:10: 'Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me'. David had become very hardened so that he did not feel guilt concerning the awful sins he had committed, but God in great mercy saved him from this by convincing him of his sin with the words: 'Thou art the man'. Now he felt the sting of his sin, because God had come to him and made him feel it. When God comes in this way to His people, He comes not only to wound with the grace of conviction, but to heal with the grace of pardon.

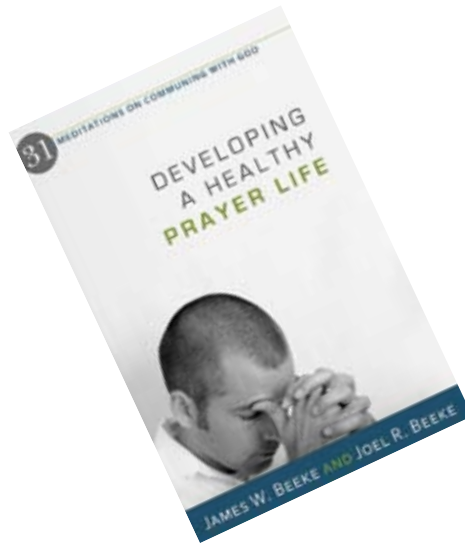
The remedy nearby

This brings me to something else I have observed over the years regarding stinging nettles. Very often, where nettles grow, so do dock plants. If you are stung by a stinging nettle, a dock leaf moistened with water (or saliva) and placed upon your skin can counteract the sting, relieving the pain. In creation God causes the dock to grow near to the nettle to illustrate that where He makes a sinner feel stung by sin, the remedy is not far away, as the Holy Spirit goes on to point the sinner to Jesus Christ whose sin-atonement blood is the only completely effectual remedy. But just as the dock leaf must be applied to the sting to receive the benefit, so the blood of Jesus Christ must be applied to the heart and conscience wounded by sin for the benefit to be felt. We cannot do this ourselves; it can only be done by the Holy Spirit who reveals Jesus Christ to the stung sinner by living faith. The Lord promises to give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him (Lk.11:13). The alternative is awful, for the sting of death is sin. If we are not pardoned through Christ's sacrifice, we must suffer the sting of hell forever.

From the *Friendly Companion* February 2011



Books



heaven's eternal conversation'. 'True prayer ever feels that it is not sufficiently deep, thorough and unbosoming'.

William Macleod

John Knox and the Reformation

D M Lloyd-Jones & Iain H Murray
Banner of Truth Trust
pbk, 130pp, £5.50

This short readable book contains three lectures. The first was given by Dr Lloyd-Jones in the Edinburgh Usher Hall on the occasion of the four hundredth anniversary of the Reformation in 1960. It stresses the great doctrines of the Reformation – the authority of the Scriptures, the sovereignty of God, the finished work of Christ, justification by faith alone, the possibility of assurance, the universal priesthood of believers and simplicity of worship.

The second lecture, also by Dr Lloyd-Jones, is on John Knox as the founder of Puritanism. Many think of Knox's work as largely confined to Scotland and forget that he was minister for a time in Berwick and Newcastle and later was a court preacher for Edward VI. More than anyone else he sowed the seeds of Puritanism. For example his sermon against kneeling to receive communion was very influential. He succeeded in getting the Prayer Book modified at this point. He was offered the bishopric of Rochester but refused because of his opposition to the very idea of monarchical bishops. His ministry on the Continent, in both Frankfurt and Geneva, to English refugees who had fled the persecution under Queen Mary, was a further encouragement to the Puritan movement. More than a century after his death, King Charles II who hated Puritan religion ordered a public burning of Knox's works (in Oxford in 1683).

The third lecture is by Iain H Murray. It is more generally biographical of Knox and is written in Murray's typical excellent style. Stress is laid on Knox's fresh innovative

Developing a Healthy Prayer Life

31 Meditations on Communing with God

James W Beeke & Joel R Beeke
Reformation Heritage Books
pbk, 91pp, \$10.00

Most of us at one time or another struggle with prayer. Here you will find a month of excellent daily devotional messages on the subject of prayer. The meditations are both Scriptural and enlightening. This book will be particularly helpful for the young Christian but everyone will find here something to inspire and challenge. Some of the topics covered are: 'Pray Boldly', 'Pray with Appetite', 'Wrestling in Prayer' and 'Waiting for answers to Prayer'. A typical statement would be: 'Unfulfilled prayer can serve as a means to produce far deeper and more valuable benefits than those we originally requested'. We are told: 'Prayer is a refuge from the storms of life. This is why Satan fears and hates private prayer and will fight with every possible device and argument to keep you from prayer.'

There is a final very useful chapter on '31 Marks of True prayer'. Some of these are the following: 'True prayer is not self-congratulatory, but self-condemnatory and Christ-congratulatory'. 'True prayer is fellowshiping with God. It is a foretaste of



thinking, his ministry of encouragement, his powerful preaching and his faith in the God who is working in history.

William Macleod

The Agency that Transformed a Nation

J C Ryle

Banner of Truth Trust

bklt, 16pp, £1.00

In his usual simple, yet weighty, style J C Ryle deals with lessons from the Great Awakening of the 18th Century. This booklet is the second chapter of his book, *Christian Leaders of the 18th Century*. What was it that transformed the people of England during the latter half of the eighteenth century? J C Ryle shows that God stirred up men, mostly from the Church of England, and made them into evangelists. They went round the country fearlessly preaching the same truths as Paul and the apostles. They preached simply, fervently and directly. They taught the sufficiency and supremacy of Scripture, the total corruption of human nature, Christ's death on the cross as the only satisfaction for man's sin, justification by faith, the necessity of the new birth, the inseparable connection between true faith and personal holiness and also God's eternal hatred against sin and love towards sinners. This message faithfully proclaimed and accompanied by the power of the Holy Spirit transformed a nation and can do so again.

William Macleod

Facing Grief

John Flavel

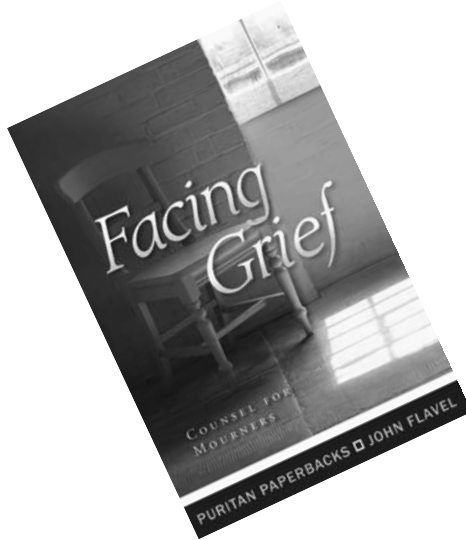
Banner of Truth Trust

pbk, 122pp, £5.00

This book sprang from the author's personal grief at the loss of his second wife. Taking the Lord's words in Luke 7:13 as his basis ('And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not'.) Flavel deals carefully but thoughtfully with grief and its attendant dangers to the soul.

In an area where it is far easier to simply allow whatever form of grief mourners choose, Flavel, in true Puritan style, seeks out a Biblical framework. In pursuit of this he marks what Scripture deems immoderate sorrow. He earnestly goes over the forms and extents of sorrow permitted for believers, and then warns of the dangers to sin when sorrow is left simply to take its own course.

He closes by suggesting rules to keep excessive sorrow in check. This is a



serious book, and one that is best looked at when the pain of grief is not too fresh. Flavel gives faithful warning, but being sinful creatures we are likely to feel injured by him rather than helped if we turn to this volume looking for warm sentiments in sorrow. Rather this little volume is likely to do us more good if seriously studied before we are in the furnace of affliction.

It is highly commended for personal study. It might however be medicine too strong to give to a friend while in the midst of deep grief. In this area preparation becomes us all, as for death, so for grief. This reviewer continues to wish that the Banner's 'light editing' did not include putting the words of modern Scripture translations into the mouths of Puritans and others.

A few quotes for a flavour of the work:

'The souls of some had been more beautiful and lovely if their bodies had been less so'.

'God is where He was, and what He was, though the creature be not'.

'When Jacob heard his Joseph was lord of Egypt, he rather wished himself with Joseph, than his Joseph with him in wants and straits'.

'The tender mother would not have [the child] abide one minute longer in her womb, however well she loved it; and is there not the same reason that we should be willing, when God's appointed time is come, to have [the child] delivered out of this state by death?'

Greg MacDonald

John MacArthur

Servant of the Word and Flock

Iain H Murray

Banner of Truth Trust

hbk, 246pp, £14.50

John MacArthur, by any standard, has

had, and continues to have, a remarkable ministry. Born in 1939, he became minister of Grace Community Church, Sun Valley, California in 1969 and has continued there ever since. That means he has ministered in the same congregation for over 42 years. Not many ministers have done that and continued to keep fresh and see blessing on their ministry. When he was inducted there were about 450 members with two morning services, as the sanctuary could only accommodate 300. There are still two morning services (as well as the evening one), but a new sanctuary has been built and the combined number attending the Sunday morning services is around 6,000. By 1999 over three million of his books were distributed, by 2002 some 13 million sermon cassettes were produced and by 2009 John MacArthur could be listened to 1,979 times daily from 1,502 radio outlets in 34 different countries.

What is the secret of his success? No doubt many things, including being in the right place at the right time and having around him a great band of gifted workers promoting the work. Above all else, of course, it is the blessing of God upon his ministry. One interesting point that should be mentioned, however, is his careful pulpit preparation. He sees as his main work the preparing of two new sermons each week. His midweek meeting is taken by one of the staff. On these sermons he spends two days each in careful preparation. His books and commentaries are largely drawn from his sermons. He occupies his days in the study of God's Word, reading good books and prayer.

It is interesting to note the trials he has endured. He spent several years in the 1980s being pursued with legal action by the Roman Catholic father of a young man who had attended his congregation and committed suicide. His wife had to endure a horrific car accident. There were times when he was tempted to leave the church and 'when even the prospect of digging ditches for a living had a certain appeal'. Campbell Morgan used to say, 'If you have no opposition in the place you are serving, then you are serving in the wrong place'.

We have here a very readable book written on the life of a contemporary minister from which all will receive profit.

William Macleod

Union and Communion with Christ

Rev Maurice Roberts

Based on an address given at the School in Theology in September 2010.

In John 15 the Lord Jesus Christ explains to us that Christians are united to Him in a spiritual union. Our Lord uses the illustration of a vine and its branches. The Lord supplies to all believers the grace of His Holy Spirit. This, like the sap, is the source of all the 'fruit' which is in the believer's life. By 'fruit' our Lord refers to godliness, love and profitable service in the church and in the promotion of the gospel. As the vine cannot produce fruit without the sap, so we who profess to be Christians cannot do anything spiritually profitable without Christ's Spirit.

Just as the expert gardener prunes the vine so as to increase its fruitfulness, so God the Father prunes and cuts back the unfruitful branches in the believer's life. This will be painful but also profitable. It is a procedure which involves us in being chastened and afflicted, yet enlarged in our usefulness so as to bring forth 'more fruit' (v2).

The branches which bear no fruit are removed and burned in the 'fire' (v6). These ominous words warn us all that an unholy Christian is a Christian in name only. Judas Iscariot, and all who are merely nominal Christians, will be removed sooner or later from the church and cast into hell. It is a most needful reminder to us in our own day that godliness, love and humble devotion to Christ are the genuine evidences of our being real Christians. The history of all churches shows that many who profess to be Christ's people are sadly deceived.

Christ's claim to be 'the true vine' (v1) shows, as all His great 'I ams' in John's Gospel, that He is truly God. As Head of the church He alone can supply grace to every believer and to every congregation. He alone is able to enlighten us, feed our souls, shepherd our lives, teach us His truths and, at the last, raise up our bodies to resurrection glory.

Christ's 'I ams' in John are encyclopaedic in their scope and vitally essential in their importance to our life as believers. To be ingrafted therefore into Christ is to enjoy the supply of the Spirit of life which He provides to every true believer. A man may have knowledge, gifts and church-office; but he is no more than a dead stick if he be not spiritually united to Jesus Christ.

Mystical Union

We refer to the union which believers have with Christ as the 'Mystical Union'. Christ and His Church are mystically united (Eph.5:30-32). The Bible speaks of other wonderful unions. Especially, it informs us of the union of the three Persons in the Godhead. Also, the Bible reveals to us the union of the two natures in Christ. We refer to this wonderful truth as the 'Hypostatic Union'. (The word *Hypostasis* in Greek means a person).

Each of these unions is very precious to the believer. We honour all three Persons of the Godhead as equal in power and glory. We confess that our Lord Jesus Christ is both God and Man. As to His Godhood He has no mother; as to His Manhood He has no father. The sweet truth of the 'Mystical Union' is that every believer, who is a true believer, can say:

'Christ is in me, the hope of glory'.

There is a difference between our union with Christ as believers and our communion with Him. Union is permanent and unchangeable. It begins as soon as we are united to Him in the New Birth. It will have no end. In this life we are spiritually united to Christ whom we have not yet seen. In heaven we shall see Him and we shall be united to Him in love, adoration and glory throughout all the ages of eternity. The church is, very wonderfully, described as 'the fullness of him that filleth all in all' (Eph.1:23). Hence heaven will be, for every believer, a world of love – Christ's love for us as those for whom He shed His precious blood.

Communion fluctuates

However, while our union with Christ is eternally unchangeable, our communion with Him in this life is liable to fluctuation. In other words, our 'felt sense' of Christ's love to us now in this life waxes and wanes. This is largely owing to our carelessness as believers. We may lose the sweetness of Christ's presence through carelessness, prayerlessness or disobedience.

So, when David had sinned, he cried to God, 'Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation' (Ps.51:12). Similarly, Peter, after his denials of Christ, needed to have the question put to him three times: 'Lovest thou me?' (Jn.21:15-17).

The Song of Solomon beautifully shows us that, when we have forfeited a sense of Christ's love through carelessness on our part, our Lord's love may be enjoyed afresh when we rise up off the bed of sloth and seek Him with all our heart (Song of Sol.3:1-3). Indeed, this lovely book, the Song of Solomon, is a description of how the believer enjoys Christ's love, sometimes loses a sense of it, seeks Him again, and enters afresh into a felt enjoyment of His love.

Hence, we say that our communion with Christ in this life is liable to fluctuation. In heaven, however, it will fluctuate no more. In glory, all believers will be forever filled with the sense of Christ's love in all its 'breadth, and length, and depth and height' (Eph.3:18).

Our present duty is to seek to have much of it now in this life. We can never enjoy Christ's love too much. It is our great loss when we learn, as Christians, to live with only small awareness of the love of Christ. Churches decline visibly when their members labour and work, yet are unaware that they have lost their 'first love' for Jesus (Rev.2:4).

Painful pruning

In the light of the above truths, we must as Christians not make a god of earthly happiness or peace. The greatest Christians have sometimes lived in times of affliction, trial and suffering. This would be true of the Apostles of Christ, of the Reformers, of the Puritans and of the Covenanters. Sanctified afflictions drive us closer to Christ. Our depraved and fallen natures need to be sanctified. But sanctification often involves painful pruning at the hand of God.

No wonder therefore Samuel Rutherford could say, 'Our pride

needs winter weather to rot it'. Again, Rutherford could write: 'We must have a devil to hold the saints waking'. Or again, Rutherford states: 'O what owe I to the file, to the hammer, to the furnace of my Lord Jesus!' Great saints, much like Daniel's three friends, have to walk with Jesus in the furnace and in the fiery flame.

The pruning hand of God will remove dead leaves and dry sticks from the life of the true believer. God loves us too much to leave us to go to sleep in the lap of worldly pleasures. Those whom He leaves alone in their carnal hypocrisy are not His true children. Those whom He leaves alone in their false profession of church membership are – O fearful thought! – no better than ecclesiastical firewood, fit for nothing better than the eternal fire at last. If we have no fruit of holiness and love we are not in union with Christ.

Blessings of union

Christ makes it clear that if we abide in Him we shall enjoy rich blessings in this life. Of greatest importance among the blessings of abiding fruitfully in Christ is this: 'Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit' (v8). So, what matters supremely is that we, as Christians, should study holiness. This emphasis can be easily lost in the thinking of Christians and churches. But we dare not risk losing this as our priority. Churches decline when godliness loses its place. And godliness comes only as we study to maintain our union and communion

with Christ.

Another blessing promised is that our prayers will be answered: 'Ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you' (v. 7). How sweet the truth here! The more we make fellowship with God in Christ our great objective, the more our prayers will be heard. We see this illustrated in the prayers of the saints in history. Abraham delivered Lot from Sodom; Joshua made the sun to stand still; Daniel shut the lions' mouths; the early church turned the world upside down; Luther smote Antichrist a deadly blow; Knox lifted Scotland up as a nation of truth.

Again, our Lord makes it clear that if we study to obey God's word and keep up our fellowship with Him we shall abide in His love (v10). J C Ryle puts it well: 'The man who makes conscience of diligently observing Christ's precepts, is the man who shall continually enjoy a sense of Christ's love in his soul'.

Since then Christ is the true vine and we the branches are members of His church, let us by all means seek to promote this wonderful relationship which we have in Him of union and communion. Those who do so will not live in vain but will be at the last honoured and rewarded by God. It is always better to suffer than to sin. It is always better to obey God than to obey men. It is always best to aim at that which glorifies God – namely, our own growth in grace and in the experimental enjoyment of the love of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour.



'Of greatest importance among the blessings of abiding fruitfully in Christ is this: 'Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit' (v8). So, what matters supremely is that we, as Christians, should study holiness.'

Congregational Remittances - August 2011

	2011 Aug	2011 Total	2010 Total to Aug			
Presbytery of Inverness				Outer Hebrides Presbytery		
Aberdeen	1,937	10,211	8,279	Cross	2,088	15,560
Duthil-Dores	2,486	15,302	14,226	Harris - Leverburgh	2,248	11,842
Inverness	2,000	18,000	20,000	Harris - Scalpay	3,156	18,104
Kilmorack & Strathglass	1,996	12,346	12,744	Knock & Point	1,804	11,295
Total Inverness	8,418	55,859	55,249	North Uist	703	9,204
Northern Presbytery				Stornoway	8,248	61,053
Assynt & Scourie	356	1,056	563	Total Outer Hebrides	18,248	127,058
Brora	3,243	15,886	14,192	Presbytery of Skye & Lochcarron		
Kiltearn	813	7,593	14,400	Bracadale	2,577	9,689
Tarbat	1,319	8,603	6,323	Duirinish (Waternish)	1,000	4,215
Total Northern	5,731	33,138	35,477	Kilmuir & Stenscholl	2,856	11,956
Southern Presbytery				Lochalsh	1,004	7,199
Arran	1,102	6,485	4,949	Poolewe & Aultbea	1,743	7,799
Ayr	569	2,128	1,548	Ullapool	33	81
Dumfries	0	0	0	Portree	5,148	13,548
Edinburgh	5,360	23,265	20,871	Snizort	3,042	14,528
Glasgow - Partick	5,517	25,017	21,000	Strath	327	875
Glasgow - Shettleston	2,709	17,684	12,643	Total Skye	17,729	69,890
Glasgow - Knightswood	3,473	17,347	17,064	Total Congregations		
Rothesay	0	0	147	Other Donations	1,553	20,354
Total Southern	18,731	91,927	78,222	Legacy	0	18,153
				TOTAL	70,409	416,378
				Including Gift Aid	30,669	77,560
						337,729
						347,196
						43,408

The Church of Rome and Evolution Unchanging or Self Contradictory?

Ewan Wilson



The Church of Rome occupies a unique place in the history of the church in general. She claims to represent an unbroken succession of supreme divine authority, embodied in the office of the pope, stretching right back to the Apostle Peter. And certainly at the Reformation it is true the Papacy could point to retaining a certain continuity with the institutions of power in the old pre-Reformed Church. However holding on to the levers of organisational control does not ensure possession of spiritual truth. As Paul cautions, the outward does not guarantee the inward reality! (Rom.2:28).

Our Reformed forefathers were clear that Popery, especially after its counter-Reformation Council of Trent which pronounced solemn curses on the Gospel, was emerging as the supreme anti-Christian counterfeit warned of in Scripture. Today, in these ecumenical, superficially-friendly times, people may be deceived into thinking Rome has moderated its

pretensions but closer inspection will reveal the very opposite to be the case. Her departure from Gospel truth only intensifies.

Considering most of us are in daily contact with Roman Catholics it surely is incumbent on us to equip ourselves with some knowledge of its faults and deviations from Scripture in order to witness powerfully to these neighbours, some misled about the Gospel by Rome's false message and made cynical, others trapped in false devotion. Prayerfully we need to wield the truth to help deliver them into the freedom of the Gospel.

Rome Unchanging?

One approach is to shake their confidence in Rome's claim to have infallible truth and so remain 'Semper Idem' or 'ever the same'. Indeed Rome even boasts that no inconsistencies can be found in her official definitions and throws down the gauntlet to Protestants to identify any. In a Catholic Truth

Society booklet dealing with Infallibility, Fr. F.J. Ripley confidently maintains: 'Much money has been spent by various Protestant bodies in the attempt to find one single Papal definition which has been proved wrong or to find where one Pope has contradicted another or a General Council. The records have been diligently searched by brilliant minds; nothing has been overlooked; not one minor detail has been ignored. The result has been a complete vindication of the [Roman] Church and the Pope'. Taking particular issues and doctrines it can be demonstrated conclusively that Rome's grasp of the truth is far otherwise – to the point of self-contradiction!

Evolution

A fascinating case in point is her changing attitude to Evolution. When Darwin published his *Origin of Species* in 1859 Pope Pius IX had already been on the papal throne for some eleven years and had already proved himself to be one of the most reactionary of pontiffs. He had enforced the doctrine of Mary's immaculate conception and sinlessness and was to go on, through the First Vatican Council, to steamroller the RC Church into accepting papal infallibility in 1870, and amongst other things reviling such things as democracy and freedom of religion and conscience!

In 1860, a year after Darwin's book appeared, the RC Council of Cologne issued the following unambiguous statement that unsurprisingly met with the Pope's approval: 'Our first parents were immediately created by God (Gen.2:7) Therefore we declare as quite contrary to Holy Scripture and the Faith those who dare to assert that man, in respect of his body, is derived by spontaneous transformation of an imperfect nature, which improved continually until it reached the present human state'. In 1869 this anti-Darwinian tendency was reasserted in one of the decrees of the First Vatican Council as follows: 'This sole, true God ... immediately from the beginning of time, fashioned each creature, out of nothing, spiritual and corporeal, namely the angelic and the mundane; and then the human creation, common as it were, composed of both spirit and body'. As RC anti-evolutionists themselves observe, this teaching must surely come under the umbrella of infallibility, being the united view of pope and bishops in concert and it repeats decrees from a previous Council, the Lateran IV of 1215.

Pope Leo XIII against evolution

Pope Pius was followed in 1878 by the aged and highly autocratic Pope Leo XIII who reigned indefatigably, producing prolific encyclicals [official teaching circular letters] until 1903, such was his grandiose view of the need for papal guidance. More intellectual than his predecessor, his conservative views on creation appear in an 1880 encyclical *Arcanum Divinae Sapientiae* in which Leo declares: 'We record what is known and cannot be doubted in any way, that God, on the sixth day of creation, having made man of the slime of the earth, and having breathed into his face the breath of life, gave him a companion, whom He miraculously took from the side of Adam, when he was locked in sleep. God thus ... decreed that this husband and wife should be the natural beginning of the human race'. Leo demanded obedience to the traditional, literal, non-symbolic record of creation as given in Genesis. Roman Catholics must not question it!

Pope Pius X against evolution

In 1903 perhaps the most reactionary pope of modern

times was elected – Pius X. He deplored the rise of Biblical criticism as an attack on the authority of Church and Pope. He infamously wrote: 'When we speak of the Vicar of Christ, we must not quibble, we must obey; we must not evaluate his judgments, criticise his directives, lest we do injury to Jesus Christ himself. Society is sick ... the one hope, the one remedy, is the Pope'. Alarmed at 'free thinking' within the Church and its clerical ranks, he set up a Pontifical Biblical Commission which reported in 1909 asserting creation as against evolution. Pius X instituted a reign of terror in the Roman Church and seminaries against what he dubbed 'modernism' which he saw as controlled by an evolutionary philosophy.

The change

Thus far the RC response to Darwin would appear to be constant and uniformly hostile. However when Pius X died in 1914 he was succeeded by a more open Pope Benedict XV, one of whose first actions was to disband the drive against modernism. From this inauspicious start the modernists, biblical critics and evolutionists were to gather momentum within the Church though largely covertly. By the 1990s and under both Pope John Paul II and Cardinal Ratzinger's influence, this was to tip right over into a more or less official embracing of evolution. A new official *Catechism of the Catholic Church* was issued in 1994 with minor revision in 1997 which much more boldly puts a pro-evolutionary slant on its view of origins. However, there is still a slight degree of equivocation in the language used, presumably to hedge their bets and try to satisfy both progressive and reactionary Roman Catholics! This new *Catechism* merely speaks of 'the many scientific studies' that have enriched our knowledge of 'the development of life forms and the appearance of man'. Of the Genesis account it is happy to emphasize its 'symbolic' status, as opposed, presumably, to its being a literal, factual record!

The present Pope in his theological works goes the whole hog. He categorically scorns the old creationist understanding of the RC Church and fully embraces evolutionary ideas. SDS Stephan Horn, writing in his 2008 book, *Creation and Evolution: A Conference with Pope Benedict XVI in Castel Gondolfo*, noted Benedict's memorable lines: 'The clay became man when a being for the first time was capable of forming, however dimly, the thought of "God". The first "Thou" that – however stammeringly – was said by human lips to God marks the moment that the spirit arose in the world. Here the rubicon of anthropogenesis [human origins] was crossed ... the theory of evolution does not invalidate the faith'.

This is the mind-set lying behind the words of the official Roman Catechism and is indeed a complete sea change from those earlier Popes and Councils. Leo XIII taught man came from the slime in the beginning of creation; Benedict evidently thinks our origins lie in a primordial creature that groped its way to 'God consciousness', 'however dimly' and 'however stammeringly'. This is wholly at odds with the ancient Genesis understanding of man as made in clear and perfect communion with his Creator.

The Roman Church has shifted on this issue and contradicts itself. We conclude its claims to absolute truth are false and a sham. Only the Reformation doctrine of *Scripture Alone* ensures we enjoy truth unchanged and unchanging, the true *Semper Idem!*



Stornoway and Knock & Point Congregational Outing *Summer 2011*

"For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me... for when I am weak, then am I strong."

2 Corinthians 12:8-10