

Grace & Truth

“For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ”

Magazine
of
North Uist & Grimsay
Free Church of Scotland
(Continuing)

Vol. 1 No. 6

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Minister's Message: *Our Day of Rest*

An important matter that is often neglected today is Sabbath-keeping. The Bible shows us that after He had made man God established three 'creation ordinances' – work, marriage and the Sabbath. If the first two remain relevant after the fall then so does the Sabbath. We should not think of it as a Jewish or Old Testament institution. Rather it is God's wise provision for all men in all places in all ages.

The appointment of the Sabbath is in these words: "And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made" (Gen.2:3). It is true that the actual word 'Sabbath' is not found here but the institution certainly is. When the fourth commandment says "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy" (Exod.20:8) it plainly refers to a day already in place and not unknown.

That God blessed the seventh day means that He declared it good and will do good to those who keep it. If we "call the sabbath a delight" then the Lord will cause us to "ride upon the high places of the earth" and feed us with "the heritage of Jacob" (Isa.58:13,14). There is a blessing for the individual, family or community that keeps the Sabbath out of love to God.

Originally the Sabbath was the last day of the week. After Christ came it was changed to the first day of the week, the day when our Saviour rose from the dead. The church met for worship then (Acts 20:6; 1Cor.16:1). The Sabbath once honoured the work of creation. Now it honours the more glorious work of redemption by Christ which brings about a new creation. We should never refer to it as 'Sunday': it is the *Lord's* day (Rev.1:10).

God has 'sanctified' the seventh day or set it apart for a holy use. God made us so that we only function properly when we conform to His prescription of six days of work and one day of rest. Incidentally there is no 'weekend' in Scripture: the pattern is not *five* days of work and *two* days of rest. If we try to disrupt God's pattern we will only bring about misery.

Some will say, "I give every day to God." So we should but let us not be wiser than the Lord. God has put His mark on one day of the week and made it special. There are things that belong to the Sabbath that do not belong to other days, in particular the preaching of the gospel.

God 'rested' on the seventh day as an example to us. The Sabbath is our day of rest but it is not a day for idleness. We are to leave aside our worldly cares and concerns in order to devote ourselves to God. Works of necessity and mercy such as feeding the hungry and healing the sick may be done (Matt.12:1-13) but it is mainly a day for works of *piety*. We should devote ourselves to God in the exercises of public and private worship.

We read of those who stopped gathering with God's people on the Sabbath (Heb.10:25). Some attend church when it suits them but do not let it interfere with their leisure, travel and so on. Our priorities must be right. The welfare of our soul comes before our enjoyment of this world.

Men are trying to overthrow the Sabbath. They may desecrate it but they cannot destroy it. It is a solemn thought that if we despise the Sabbath then we are unfit to dwell with God in heaven. May God therefore grant us all His gracious salvation in Christ. □

Helps to Devotion (Rev. James Smith)

SANCTIFICATION. *“The very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”* (1 Thessalonians 5:23)

What a comprehensive prayer is this: Where is the Christian whose heart does not adopt, and often use it? Our justification is complete at once, for the whole righteousness of the Lord Jesus is placed to our account, and we are fully and eternally acquitted from all charges brought against us, by our good and gracious God. But our sanctification, which is begun in our regeneration, needs the constant presence, power, and operation of the Holy Spirit, to carry it on and complete it. We cannot be more justified, but we can be more sanctified. Our hearts, therefore, should be set on a deep and thorough work of sanctification. The God who sanctifies us is at peace with us; he has accepted the blood of his Son as an atonement for us, and has thrown open the fulness of his grace to us. O thou peaceful and loving God, our heavenly Father, we beseech thee to deepen the work of sanctification within us. Make us more holy. Conform us exactly to the image of thy spotless Son. Give so much grace to us, and by thy Spirit constantly work so powerfully in us, that our entire persons—body, soul, and spirit—may be preserved blameless until Jesus comes; and when he comes, may we be presented to him without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, holy and without blemish. And then, O then, may we be presented faultless before the presence of thy glory with exceeding joy. O for a full preparation for the coming of Jesus in his glory, that we may then be invited to enter into the joy of our Lord! May we daily, with unveiled face, behold as in a glass the glory of the Lord, and be changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord. □

Parables of Jesus: 6. The Sower

(Please read Matthew 13:3-23)

This is one of our Lord's most famous parables. Known as the parable of the sower, the lesson is in what becomes of the seed. Where does it fall and how does it grow?

Preaching the gospel is like sowing seed. A man takes a handful of truth from the Bible and casts it forth in a sermon. He aims at men's hearts, praying that God would bless the good news to their salvation. Like a farmer who has sown a crop, the preacher must wait patiently for the increase. Will there be a harvest?

Way Side

In the parable some seed landed on the footpath instead of in the field. This ground was well-trodden and hard: hungry birds soon swooped down and ate the precious seed. There was of course no growth.

The church is full of people like this. They have heard the truth often but have not believed it. Their hearts are 'sermon-trodden' and 'gospel-hardened'. Remember that the devil likes to go to church too. His business there is to distract our minds and to stifle anxious thoughts (v.19). How successful he is in his work!

Stony Places

Other seed came to rest upon better ground. There was a soil, but it was stony and shallow. Shoots came up quickly but then withered away in the heat. There was no proper root.

The message of the cross makes some men regret their sins. In a way they believe in Jesus as Saviour. The hope of eternal life appeals to them. Yet all converts must be tested by time. To be faithful to God's word means trouble from an unbelieving world and so many fall away. The "root of the matter" – a new heart – is not in them (Job 19:28).

Thorns

Yet more seed fell upon ground that had not been properly cleared and was full of weeds. The seed appeared to germinate but the thorns and briars sprang up strongly and overcame the true crop. Though there seemed to be growth in the end it produced no fruit.

Are you are trusting in Christ to take away your sins? Does your life show it? Do not make the mistake of loving this world more than the

next and of giving God's word no room. Jesus said, "Ye cannot serve God and mammon" (Matt.6:24). Be careful that your heart is not divided.

Good Ground

The remaining seed fared better. It found deep, well-prepared soil. Crucially Jesus says that it fell *into* the good ground (v.8). There it came to life, was nourished, and grew up to give a fine, bountiful crop. It was the same seed as was sown in other places. The secret was in the soil.

With the gospel the secret is in the *soul*. When grace is given a man understands God's word. He sincerely believes and repents of sin. His life is totally changed. Have you a good heart, prepared by the Holy Spirit? Do you "receive with meekness the engrafted word" (Jam.1:21)? □

Sermon: Christ Crucified (Rev. Thomas Halyburton)

(The substance of a sermon preached on a Communion occasion.)

"But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God." – 1 Corinthians 1:23,24

Now from the words we offer this doctrine. 'Christ crucified, held out in the gospel dispensation, is the powerful means whereby God, in his wisdom, effectually saves all them that are called.'

The doctrine needs no text to prove it; it is plain in the words; the context is full of it; the whole Scriptures are so, as we shall see afterwards. In speaking to it,

I. We shall offer some remark about Christ crucified:

Firstly, Our Lord was indeed the Christ of God, the Messiah, the anointed; him had God solemnly set apart, and fully furnished to be the Saviour of sinners. He is the holy child Jesus whom thou hast anointed, says the joyful congregation in their song of praise. Compare Matt. 1:21 with Luke 1:74.

Secondly, The Christ of God, whom he ordained to save the world, was in the world, and by the world crucified, put to death. Jews and Gentiles, rulers and people, church and state, elect and reprobate, Acts 4:37; a full representation of the world concurred to crucify the Saviour of the world.

This is a common, but a very strange truth. Be astonished, O ye heavens, at the monstrous ingratitude of the world below. What a strange thing also is it, that he who was ordained, anointed to save the world, should die! the Prince of Life lose his life! the Saviour be destroyed, as it were! But this is not all: for,

Thirdly, The Christ of God was sent into the world by God, to die, to be Christ crucified. God spared him not; he delivered him up: he gave his enemies power against him, as our Lord insinuates to Pilate. He bid the sword awake against him; he put him to grief, and bruised him. Strange! the Christ of God, by the determinate counsel of God, crucified! What must the matter be? which leads me to remark,

Fourthly, The Christ of God was not crucified for any sin of his own: He “was holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners.” He needed no atonement for his own sins, Heb. 7:26,27. He was “cut off, but not for himself,” Dan. 9:26: his enemies could find no fault with him: heaven proclaims him innocent. Accursed, therefore, are the notions that now spread among us, That there were rebellions in his lower faculties, etc., and the apologies for this are no better.

Fifthly, Christ was crucified, in the stead of sinners; for “he was cut off from the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken;” that is, not merely for our good, as Socinians speak: nor was it only or principally to leave us an example of suffering: but it was in our stead, in our place. This, Socinians, and they who of old and of late fall in with them, oppose: and I wish that some amongst ourselves, with their new and useless disputes about the sense wherein Christ bore our persons, had not contributed too much to the darkening this glorious truth, whereon all the power of Christ’s death toward our salvation hangs. I shall tell you what the scripture says in this matter plainly:

1. Christ was made, or admitted by God, to be our surety, Heb. 7, whereas we only were at first bound by and to the law: he was now allowed to come in our bond, and was made under the law, Gal. 4:5, whereby he became liable to answer all that the law required of us: and to this he willingly agreed. Though he was in the form of God, “he made himself of no reputation, took the form of a servant, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross,” Phil. 2:6-8; Psa. 40:6-8.

2. Our sins were charged on him; “God laid on him the iniquity of us all,” Isa. 53:6 and he bare them, even our sins, v.11.

3. He was punished for those sins, he was cut off from the land of the living, Isa. 53:8, not for himself, Dan. 9:26, but for the “transgression of my people was he smitten, Isa. 53:8.

4. The punishment he suffered for these sins was the punishment threatened by the law. "He was made a curse for us, to deliver us from the curse of the law," Gal. 3:13.

5. His design in bearing this punishment was, that we might be delivered from the curse, as we see in the words last quoted.

6. His death is reckoned ours, that is, as undergone and suffered for us, and whereof the benefit should accrue to us. "If one died for all, then are all dead," 2 Cor. 5:14,15. We are crucified with him, buried with him.

7. His death and punishment, we are instructed to plead as payment, or satisfaction, when we are accused and called to an account; and we are to plead his resurrection as our discharge, as to all that can be required of us, in order to our justification. See Rom. 8:34,35.

II. Let us see who they are for whom Christ was crucified, and to whom he is the power of God. This is a dispute. I shall give you some plain scripture characters of the persons.

Firstly, They are such as were given to him of the Father. His power is to give life to as many as are given him, John 17:2, who shall all in time come to him, and none of them be lost, John 6:37,39.

Secondly, They are in the text, those who are called, not merely externally, as those mentioned in the verse above, but internally and effectually, in opposition to them, and who are the same with the chosen, vv.26,27, compared with the text.

Thirdly, They are such to whom Christ is in time given, and with him all things, Rom. 8:32. Here is the order. Christ, 1. Is delivered for us. 2. Given to us. 3. All things with him.

Fourthly, They are such as believe on him, receive him; to them the gospel is the power of God, Rom. 1:16.

Finally, I might tell you, they are God's people, Isa. 53:8. Christ's sheep, John 10:11. The Church of God, etc.; but I pass these.

III. I shall now show, in some instances, that Christ crucified, or the death of Christ, is the power, and the wisdom of God to their salvation.

Firstly, Christ's death, held forth in the gospel, is the power of God, the powerful mean, whereby sinners are called or converted. What is the great thing that prevails on sinners to turn to God? Why, it is the offer of a slain Saviour, Acts 2:42. Three thousand are converted! Well, what was it that prevailed on them? Look at the chapter; it is a sermon about Christ crucified. Who converted most to God? I believe never any did convert so

many as our Apostle. Well, what means used he? It was the preaching of the cross, as he tells us in this context.

Secondly, Christ crucified is the power of God to justification. This our apostle dwells on in the first five chapters of the epistle to the Romans, and frequently elsewhere. The case is this, guilty man is called to account, accused for his sins before God. What plea shall he make; where shall there an answer be got that will effectually clear him? If judgment is given against him, he is undone.

The wisdom of men, heathens and Christians, have laboured to find pleas, and to this day new defences are still sought. Some are for pleading not guilty, denying. Others for excusing, extenuating faults, like Adam. Some for making amends, by vows to do better in time coming. Some promise to do more than is required. Some pretend to expiate their sin with their tears. Some are for penances. Some run to sacrifices of beasts. Others to barbarous human sacrifices. Others, to the sacrificing their own children. And some fearing all this not enough, would be content to go to impossibilities, Mic. 6:6. Some place much in acts of charity. Others are for monastic vows, retirement, and mortification, as they falsely call it, or, to use the modish word, doing penance. Some to trusting to their own faith. Others to their sincere obedience, such as they can give. And, in effect, here they all land. We owe pounds, and we will pay pennies. You see there are two advantages.

1. God shall not have it to say, that he freely forgave them all.

2. They may say they have paid some, though not what they ought, yet what they could, and it were cruelty to exact more. Finally, some fearing all this not enough, run to a purgatory, or, in the new language, a state of purification. Look how hard man's wisdom is put to it, and yet not one of all, nor all these together, have power to justify and bring us off.

The wisdom of God by the gospel reveals the righteousness of God, Rom. 1:17. If a sinner that believes is charged, threatened with condemnation for sin, it bids him plead, Christ has died for sin, that is, has obtained a discharge, and is in heaven to make it good, Rom. 8:34. This will powerfully bring us off; no other plea will; they are weak and foolish.

Thirdly, Christ's death is the power of God to sanctification. This must be cleared in an instance or two, especially as to mortification.

1. Christ's death is a satisfaction for sin, for the guilt of all their sins, that are partakers of it, and hereby sin loses its claim to their service. It is the power of God, to disable the foundation of sin's dominion. Sin has no right that prejudices God's, but sin and Satan both have a sort of lawful dominion over us by our own consent, according to the rule, Rom. 6:16; but

as soon as we are partakers of Christ's sufferings and death, Phil. 3:10, and so dead with him, Rom. 6:4,5; 2 Cor. 5:14, who died for sins, if sin pretend to reign, and say, we have yielded ourselves servants to obey it, we may now answer, We are dead, 2 Cor. 5:14, and so are no longer bound; for the law binds a man no longer than he lives, Rom. 7:1. Again, our consent is declared null, our surety has suffered for it among the rest of our sins, and so it is dead, binds no more. Finally, sin, thou art condemned as a traitor, when we were, or our surety, was condemned for our submitting to thee, judgment was thereby given against thee; our old man is crucified with Christ, Rom. 6:6; no service is due to a dead master, one legally dead. Thus we see the meaning of Rom. 6:6. "He that is dead is freed," or, as the Greek has it, "justified from sin." He is powerfully secured against any right that sin claimed to his service.

2. Christ's death, as the price of our redemption from the power of sin, has powerfully purchased, that is, effectually, or really merited the communication of the Holy Spirit, who actually breaks the power of sin, by planting, actuating, supporting, strengthening, reviving the opposite principle of grace, the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, whereby we are freed from the law of sin, and sin is mortified, Rom. 8:2,3. Now, Christ's death, as a price, purchased this, Gal. 3:13,14, and through him it is shed on us abundantly, Tit. 3:6. Christ crucified is the power of God in a meritorious and real sense, to our salvation from the power of sin.

3. Christ's death, as an atonement, secures the acceptance of our service, and so removes discouragements, and affords the most effectual arguments to enforce holiness. Our labour is not in vain in the Lord, 1 Cor. 15:58, but acceptable through him, 1 Pet. 2:5, see 2 Cor. 5:14,15. Thus it is morally the power of God to sanctification.

4. Christ's death, as held forth in the gospel, is the mean made use of to make us holy, and so it, instrumentally, as it were, is the power of God to sanctification, 2 Cor. 3:18. It is a principal part of that glory that changes us when we see it: we might allege many other instances of its influence in sanctification, as the patron of the destruction of the old man, Rom. 6:4-6, and the like. No wonder souls that desire to be holy join with the apostle's desire, Phil. 3:10.

Fourthly, Christ crucified, or his death, is the power of God, to our consolation, being the great pledge of God's love to us. God commended his love to us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us, Rom. 5:8, and this will bear much; see the context, vv.6,12. This is the spring of consolation.

Fifthly, Christ's death is the power of God, to assure us of all the other

blessings of the covenant. It is the pledge that makes us sure that all the rest shall be given in their season; direction, strength, support, provision, protection, light, life, love; see Rom. 8:32.

Sixthly, Christ crucified is the power of God to secure our acceptance, and obtain us safe access to the holiest, Heb. 10:16. We are safe, having the Lamb slain betwixt us and hazard. He has “borne the iniquity of our holy things,” and we have “access,” i.e. safe access, “into the holiest by his blood.”

Seventhly, Christ’s death is the power of God, to the overthrow of Satan, “by death, he destroyed him that had the power of death, that is, the devil,” Heb. 2:14. This may be understood by what was said about sanctification; Christ pays the debt, and so,

1. Satan the jailor loses right to detain us in prison.

2. We have a right to crave power to free us from the wrongous detainer.

Eighthly, Christ’s death powerfully delivers from the sting of death, and that is, the guilt of sin. This has been cleared before, when we spoke of justification, Heb. 2:15.

Ninthly, Christ’s death is the meritorious price of our inheritance; “he died that we might receive the promise of eternal inheritance,” Heb. 9:15.

Tenthly, Christ’s death confirms the testament, and so secures all grace and glory to us, Heb. 9:16,17.

IV. We might speak further of its power in crucifying the world, and the like: but we pass these, and come to the application. Now, from what has been said, we may,

Use 1. For information learn,

Firstly, The manifold wisdom of God, that by a mean, so unlikely and foolish in men’s apprehensions, brings about so many glorious effects; this is what the angels look into, and the redeemed round the throne fix their eyes on, the Lamb that was slain. Again, we must learn,

Secondly, That the doctrine of Christ crucified and its power, is a great, yea, the principal part, the glory of the mystery of the gospel, of the Christian religion: all models of religion that shorten its power cramp it into narrow bounds, pretend zeal for what they will, misrepresent the Christian religion, nay, miss it wholly; for all the power of our religion arises from the roots that the powerful death of Christ has in it; and therefore, the Jesuits in the Indies who conceal it, the Socinians, Quakers, modern mystics, who leave little room for the power of the death of Christ, if not as an example, or a notable act of obedience, in a difficult duty, teach not the gospel.

Thirdly, The more directly and evidently any gospel ordinance represents or sets forth Christ as crucified, or Christ in his death, the more

glorious, useful, and valuable it is. How great then is the glory of this ordinance ye are now preparing for! How is he evidently set forth as crucified, in express words of revelation, and signs of his own appointment!

Fourthly, We may learn, that it is a great privilege to have those means whereby Christ is thus set forth evidently in his death; for these are the channels whereby all this saving power is conveyed to them that are called. There is no experience of this power, but by faith, “it is by faith we are saved,” Eph. 2:8, and where there is no divine command for a warrant, no institution to lay stress on, no promise to grip to, but a “Who hath required this?” staring us in the face, there is no place for faith. It is cursed doctrine many are now drinking in, that every mean we may fancy useful for this or that end, e.g. mortifying sin, etc. may be used, this will bring in crucifixes, penances, and I know not what, yea, all the Pagan rites, this is a shoe for any foot: but, blessed be God, we have the means of God’s own institution, that are the channels of this power, the ministration, the Spirit applying it, and “of these we are not ashamed,” Rom. 1:16.

Fifthly, We may learn, that our religion is an experimental religion; it is a discovery of a saving remedy to perishing sinners, a remedy that is all power, and works many effects that may be, nay, that must be felt. Well then, if ye have no experience of the power of the death of Christ to those ends mentioned, ye are no Christians. Notions of truth make no man such, it is experience of the power of God, and sight, conviction of the wisdom of God herein, that does. The kingdom of God is not in word, but in power.

Use 2. For trial. Is Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God, to them that are called? Then try whether ye are called.

Firstly, Your duty, at this time, is not to look at bread and wine; but to discern and remember Christ’s death, and that as the power of God, and wisdom of God. This is plainly the apostle’s discourse that you hear read at these occasions. Now, none can discern this, but those who are called, to others he is foolishness.

Secondly, This is what communicants are bid try; why they are bid examine themselves, whether they are in such a case as to discern the Lord’s body? Now only these that are called, are so. But how shall we know this? I answer,

1. Were ye ever made sensible of, so convinced of your lost condition, your sin, your guilt, that ye could get no peace, no rest, no relief in your fig-leaf aprons; your excuses, promises of amendment, and other your best duties, nor nothing else, till ye got from the Lord a powerful discovery of Christ crucified? Nothing relieved the poor convinced sinners, Acts 2:37, till this came, Acts 2:38.

2. Have ye ever got such a discovery of the power and wisdom of God in the death of Christ, Christ crucified, as makes you not only not contemn it with the world, but makes you delight in it, dwell on it in your thoughts, place all your comfort and hope, in life and death, in duty and trials on it, counting all but loss, so you may get an interest in this, and find the power of it? Phil. 3:8-10.

Use 3. For exhortation Now, to you, who upon trial, dare say you are called, we have a word of exhortation. Is Christ crucified the power of God, and the wisdom of God? Then,

Firstly, Think upon the death of Christ, remember it! Nay, I had almost said, can ye be Christians and think upon any other thing? It is a wonder that the thoughts of Christians can fix upon any other thing almost, that they are not full of this that is the channel of their salvation, and of all saving mercies. Will ye not think on that whereon all depends, for which all is given you that ye want or expect? I know there are some that say, ministers preach too much of the death of Christ; we would have them press morality, we would have them preach duties, holiness, mortification to the world, love to God. O poor ignorant souls! Is there any other way so effectual to bring about these ends as this? If Christ crucified is not preached, if he is not received, they will never be compassed. If we dwelt more here, we should be more holy, humble, mortified, love more. Other things will never do it; it is ignorance of the gospel that makes people prefer other things, and postpone this.

Secondly, Celebrate the memorial of the death of Christ; has he bid you remember it, prescribed a way to do it in, and will ye not do it, and do it in the way of his appointment?

Thirdly, Prepare to remember it, prepare for the celebration of it; there is manifold wisdom to be seen, many powers to be felt in it: we have need to be prepared to discern, to improve, to claim them. How shall we prepare? What preparation is meet? I answer,

1. Ye that are learned men, scholars, students, learn to know this night that you are lost sinners, as well as others; and that your wisdom, your learning will not save you: the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. I design no reflection upon learning; nay, I would, were it needful, commend it to you: but I say this, because the want of this, as the verse preceding our text, made the learned Greeks cast at Christ. Learn then that you are lost, and that Christ crucified is the power of God, and the wisdom of God to salvation; this will be a meet preparation.

2. As to others, nay, to you all, learned or unlearned, we say, look out, what are your hazards, dangers; here is to be presented to you Christ

crucified, the power of God, the wisdom of God to save you from the guilt of sin, the power of sin, of Satan, of the world, fears. Look out what are your wants; here is a death that is a price for all your need, here is a rich testament, here is a confirmed testament without expenses, all is cleared: here ye may have a pledge that the testament is confirmed, that your name is in it. Nay, here ye may enter to possession, and obtain what ye need. Prepare room to receive, eyes to discern, dwell upon the thoughts of this, turn your eyes from other things. Here many things offer, but I may not encroach upon you, or others, who may entertain you better.

Fourthly, One word more, and I have done with you. Ye that are called, show forth his death, openly profess it; be not ashamed of it, avouch it before the world, that ye look on the death of Christ as the glory of your religion, and the power of God to salvation, now when it is contemned, when it is stumbled at. I must leave other inferences to be drawn by yourselves, I only offer this concluding exhortation. Is Christ the power of God to salvation? O labour for experimental acquaintance with this power; power that may be felt, let it be seen by your life that Christ is power, and that you have an interest in it; seek an experience of it this night for quickening grace, love, faith, repentance, and killing sin, and this will prepare you. □

Christian Doctrines Explained: 6. The Decrees of God

Q.7. What are the decrees of God?

A. The decrees of God are, his eternal purpose according to the counsel of his will, whereby for his own glory, he hath foreordained whatsoever comes to pass.

Q.8. How doth God execute his decrees?

A. God executeth his decrees in the works of creation and providence.

Having considered what God is we now look at what He *does*, beginning with His decrees. In explaining the creation and what takes place within it, we must start here. As God alone is self-existent it follows that everything is subject to His will.

Divine Purpose

To say that the universe is directed by nothing more than random or impersonal forces is to deny that it has real meaning. Some look no higher than 'luck' or 'chance' but the Bible reveals an intelligent God who has purposed and planned all things. He has an end in mind and has devised

means to bring it about. Things are “predestinated” (Eph.1:5) or “foreordained” (1Pet.1:20). We read of “the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God” (Acts 2:23). God knows all things because He has decreed them to happen.

God’s purpose was formed and fixed in eternity. He is not changing His plans from day to day, as men do, for they are perfect. “Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world” (Acts 15:18).

Sovereign

In making His decrees God consulted with no-one but Himself and so they are “the thoughts of his heart” (Psa.33:11), “the counsel of his own will” (Eph.1:11). He was not under internal compulsion, from His own nature, for He is self-sufficient. Nor was He under external constraint, for He is independent. His decrees are “his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself” (Eph.1:9).

Comprehensive

Everything that belongs to creation and providence is covered by God’s decrees. Great and small things, good and evil things are embraced. The rise of a nation is by the hand of God but so is the fall of a sparrow to the ground (Matt.10:29). What men view as ‘fortunate’ or ‘accidental’ – the flight of an arrow (1Kings 22:34), the casting of a lot (Prov.16:33) – is also determined by the Lord. The time, place and circumstances of our birth, life and death are fixed by God. The eternal destinies of men and angels are appointed by Him.

Wise

God’s decrees are profoundly wise. As His eternal plan is unfolded in time the believer sees this. The history of redemption makes us marvel and say with awe, “how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!” (Rom.11:33). Events which are mysterious now will one day be understood.

Glorifying

We speak of different decrees respecting different things but to God there is one simple act whereby He has foreordained everything. The decrees involve a multitude of individual objects but there is ultimately one great purpose to them all – to bring glory to God. In performing His decrees in the works of creation and providence God displays His attributes. At the last the glory of His justice will be seen in the punishment of the wicked and the glory of His grace in the salvation of His own. □

The Reformation in Scotland: 6. The Death of Cardinal Beaton

(The articles in this series are taken from “History of the Church of Scotland” by William M. Hetherington, first published in 1842.)

Thus died George Wishart, one of the most amiable, eloquent, and truly pious men that ever endured the tortures and obtained the crown of Christian martyrdom. But his death, while it seemed the triumph of the Cardinal's power, proved to be the consummation of his guilt, and the knell summoning him to judgment. While the fierce popish faction extolled the zeal and the courage of the Cardinal, in thus, by his own authority, exterminating heretics, and avenging the cause of holy mother Church, a great body of the people were stirred with indignation against the shedders of innocent blood, and several men of birth and influence began to talk openly of the necessity of putting an end to the bloodthirsty career of the Cardinal, unless they were willing tamely to yield themselves up to be butchered at his pleasure. Of those who thus talked, the chief were John Lesly, brother to the Earl of Rothes; Norman Lesly, son to the same earl; William Kircaldy of Grange, who afterwards acted a distinguished part in the Reformation; Peter Carmichael; and James Melville, of the family of Carnbee. To these were joined several other men of less note, but equally determined; and they began to plot how they might best succeed in their determination to put the Cardinal to death.

The Cardinal was not unaware of the indignation which his cruelties had excited; but his haughty spirit determined him to brave the hostility which he had provoked. For this purpose he gave his illegitimate daughter in marriage to the Earl of Crawford, thereby to confirm his personal influence; and began to fortify more strongly his archiepiscopal palace, or castle, at St Andrews. This latter scheme, from which he hoped security, prepared the way for his death. The conspirators came privately and separate from each other, so as to avoid causing suspicion, to St Andrews, on the evening of the 28th of May. Next morning, as the workmen employed in fortifying the castle were assembling, they entered separately, till the whole number, sixteen in all, had obtained admission. They then seized the porter, took possession of the keys, and secured the gates; and going from room to room, either put out the domestics or locked them up. Having thus mastered the castle, they proceeded to the apartment occupied by the Cardinal, who was still asleep,—so quietly had the whole affair been conducted. Starting at length out of his slumbers, the Cardinal demanded the cause of the noise;

and learning that the castle was in the hands of his enemies, he at first attempted to escape, and finding that to be impracticable, he barricaded his chamber-door, and then held parley with those by whom it was assailed. The assailants refused to promise him his life; and, as the door resisted their efforts to force it, they called for fire to burn it open. Upon this the door was opened, and the Cardinal throwing himself despairingly into a chair, cried out, "I am a priest, I am a priest; ye will not slay me!" John Lesly and Peter Carmichael struck him hastily with their daggers, but James Melville interposed, and, putting them aside, said, "This work and judgment of God, although it be secret, yet ought to be done with greater gravity." Then turning to the Cardinal, and presenting the point of his sword to his breast, he continued, "Repent thee of thy former wicked life, but especially of the shedding of the blood of that notable instrument of God, Mr George Wishart; which, albeit the flame of fire consumed before men, yet cries it for vengeance upon thee, and we from God are sent to avenge it. For here, before my God, I protest, that neither the hatred of thy person, the love of thy riches, nor the fear of any trouble thou couldest have done to me in particular, moved or moveth me to strike thee, but only because thou hast been, and remainest, an obstinate enemy against Christ Jesus and his holy evangel." With these words he struck the wretched and trembling man twice or thrice through the body; whose expiring breath was spent in crying, "I am a priest, I am a priest! fy, fy, all is gone!" Thus died David Beaton, cardinal, and archbishop of St Andrews, without uttering one word of repentance or of prayer, on the 29th day of May 1546, leaving behind him a name unrivalled in Scottish annals for the fearful combination of evil qualities of which his character was composed,—unscrupulous ambition, far-reaching treachery, deliberate malice, gross licentiousness, and relentless cruelty.

Scarcely was the Cardinal dead when a tumult arose in the town, caused by those who had been expelled from the castle; and a large body of the populace collected and began loudly to demand to see the Cardinal, or to know what was become of him. To allay the tumult, the conspirators exposed the dead body from the same window, or over the same part of the battlements, where the Cardinal had, a short time before, reclined in haughty state, gazing on the martyrdom of Wishart. Thus were the prophetic dying words of the martyr fulfilled; and many of the people, when they beheld the strange spectacle, remembering at the same time the previous prediction, began to regard the event as a signal instance of the just judgments of God, and, abandoning all thought of tumultuary revenge, returned quietly to their homes.

That the death of Cardinal Beaton was an act of deliberate murder, and therefore in itself highly criminal, no right-thinking man will deny. At the same time, it ought to be kept in mind, that such actions bear in our eyes a much blacker aspect than they did in the estimation of the men of that period. Some of the conspirators may also have been excited by resentment for private injuries, others by motives of state policy and the influence of English gold; but a desire to deliver their country from his oppression, and especially to avenge the death of Wishart, seems to have been unquestionably the predominating feeling by which they were impelled to the deed. The attempt which has been recently made, by a modern historian, to blacken the characters of all parties concerned, and even to implicate the martyr Wishart himself, deserves no other answer than to be at once indignantly repelled, or, if an answer, not more than may be contained in a brief appended note. To every reader accustomed to investigate moral evidence, the true nature of the transaction will at once be manifest; and by all such, a fair estimate of the moral delinquency of men who thought themselves called upon to avenge the wrongs of their country and the murder of their friend, by committing a deed of lawless justice on the person of a criminal too high for the reach of law, will, without difficulty, be formed; and with these remarks we quit the subject. □

Precious Psalms: 6. God's Mercies

“Return, O Lord, deliver my soul: oh save me for thy mercies’ sake.” (Psalm 6:4)

In his experience the believer goes up and down, from high, sunlit mountain-tops to deep, dark valleys. This has always been so. At times David had joyful “songs in the night” (Psa.42:8) but here his tune is very different. “All the night make I my bed to swim; I water my couch with my tears” (v.6). It is a lament and a cry for help. His plea is for mercy (v.2). In fact it is for *mercies*, for his needs are many and great. Our need of God’s mercies is very great too.

Depths

Sin has brought our race down to the depths. Misery and distress of every kind result from our disobedience. Is it not plain that our first need is to have our sins forgiven? In His tender mercy God sent His Son to bear His people’s sins. The mercy of God in Christ meets us at the

very point of our need, delivering us from the hell we deserve and relieving us of our burden of guilt. No matter how low we have sunk the mercy of God is able to lift us up in salvation.

Anger

God's redeemed children need mercies too, for there are dangers all around. God magnified His mercy to Lot, taking him out of wicked Sodom (Gen.19:16,19); in mercy He healed Epaphroditus, a minister who was "sick nigh unto death" (Phil.2:27). Like David we sin, sometimes grievously. Then God's anger is "hot" toward us: our soul is in trouble, our comforts disappear, we fear that death is near. We must call upon the "Father of mercies" (2Cor.1:3).

Mercyseat

In the tabernacle there was a golden "mercy seat" which the High Priest sprinkled with blood each year to make atonement. God said: "There I will meet with thee" (Exod.25:22). Christ is our mercyseat. He shed His own blood to save sinners. As sinners we may have free access to God by Him. "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb.4:16). □

For Young People: *Birds of the Bible*

6. The Swallow – Bird of Fellowship

"The sparrow hath found an house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even thine altars, O Lord of hosts, my King, and my God" (Psalm 84:3)

When a person, even a young boy or girl, is converted to Christ then we expect to see changes. The Bible says of the Christian, "old things are passed away...all things are become new" (2Cor.5:17). Old desires, habits and friendships come to an end. There are new interests, activities and companions. It is God's grace that makes the difference.

One new thing that the believer experiences is fellowship. A Christian is someone who comes to know, love and enjoy God and God's people. We see this in Ruth. When faced with the choice between living in pagan Moab, her own home, or in Bethlehem, the home of Naomi her mother-in-

law, her mind was clear. She said to Naomi, “thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God“ (Ruth 1:16). She wanted to be where the true God was worshipped.

I remember visiting an old meeting-house on the Isle of Skye. Its doors had long since closed for worship. Slates were missing from the roof and the rain was coming in. But inside were the pulpit and pews just as when the people went there to praise God. Sadly the spirit of worship had departed from the community. The building was empty, yet lodged against the pulpit was evidence of at least one ‘worshipper’ who was still frequenting the house of God. A bird had built its nest there!

This reminds us of a bird in the Bible. In the Book of Psalms we find David far from Jerusalem, unable to go to the tabernacle for worship. It was a place he loved dearly. So much so he was envious not only of those who served at its altars but even of the swallows which he used to see on his visits, flying near the building and nesting in the structure. How I long to be in God’s house myself! he says.

The swallow is one of our most familiar summer birds. It begins to arrive from Africa in ones and twos in early April. Perhaps you have heard the saying, “One swallow does not make a summer“. These words are based on close observation. Only at the end of April and into May do swallows appear in large numbers, swooping up and down to catch insects on the wing. Then we know that summer is really on the way. These are the lessons we can learn from studying God’s creation. But there are spiritual lessons too.

Swallows, like swifts their cousins, are careful nest-builders. They often choose the roof of a building, finding a space on a rafter or ledge. The nest is made of mud and grass and then lined with feathers. The swallows David saw had perhaps built their nests high in the corners of the tabernacle where they could not easily be reached. In such a secret place their eggs could be laid safely and their young kept from becoming a prey. It was a good home for the swallow. These things can teach us about *fellowship*.

Like the swallow, we should use the house of God. It is true that we can worship God anywhere - at home, on the hills or in the fields. We can pray, sing psalms and read the Scriptures by ourselves or with our family. In these ways we have fellowship with God. But in church there is more. There is the preaching of the word and the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s supper, through which the blessings of salvation especially come to us. And there is the companionship of all the other believers in the congregation.

As the swallow with its young, so young people should be brought up in the house of God. This is a good place for you also! It is sad when boys

and girls are left at home or have their own entertainments while public worship is taking place. We all need to draw near to God, sit at the feet of Jesus and listen to what the Holy Spirit is saying in the preaching of the gospel. Good ministers try to follow the example of the first disciples: "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ" (1John 1:3).

We are living in a wicked world and there is sin in your heart and mine. We must seek and find the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. The best time to do this is when we are young. "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth" (Ecc.12:1). United to Christ by faith we shall be preserved from every enemy. A believer can say confidently: "I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for thou, Lord, only makest me dwell in safety" (Psa.4:8).

Finally, like the swallows David remembered, in fellowship with God we have real freedom. The swallow is a free-flying bird. David saw it circling around the house of God in its graceful, powerful flight, always with its eye on home and always returning there. This is how the believer should be, dwelling in the presence of the Lord, walking in the ways of life and looking to his final home in heaven.

"I was *glad* when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord" (Psa.122:1). □

Gàidhlig: Focal an Tighearna – 1 Peadair 1:24,25 **(Seonaidh Mac'ill Eathainn)**

Tha na gleocaichean air an cuir air an ais agus gu cinnteach tha an latha nas giorra agus sinn a'faicinn dorachadas na h-oidhche a'tighinn oirnn mar gum biodh nas traithe. Nach saòl thu fhèin nacheil cho fada ann bho bha gach aon againn a'deanadh gairdeacheas ri blàths an t-samhraidh agus sinn a'faicinn fàs anns na gàraidhean agus anns na machraichean. Bha na seallaidhean seo na thogail inntinn dhuinn uile air dhoigh a choireigin. Dh'fhaodadh e bhith gum bi cuid dhen òigridh a' coimhead nas motha ri fasain an latha agus gu de an t-aodach a bu choir dhaibh a' bhi cuir orra seach a' bhi coimhead ri ailleachd an àite. Tha aon nì cinnteach a measg gach àois: gu bheil atharraichaidhean a' gabhail àite ann am beatha gach aon. Chì sinn seo agus fairichidh sinn seo mar as sinne a'bhios sinn a' fàs.

Dhaindeoin s' na chì sinn de dh'atharraichean a' gabhail àite na'r beatha tha sinn cho dualach a' bhi cuir cudthrom cho mor air nithean diomain na beatha seo agus gun sinn a toirt an àite bu choir dhuinn do na

nithean a' bhuineas don t-siorruidheachd mhòr a' tha air thoiseach oirnn uile. Tha an fhìrinn ag innseadh dhuinn cho tric gur e an duine glic a bheir fanear agus a'choimhdeas ri suidheachadh anam. Tha fios againn gun tig an latha anns a'feum sinn uile coinneachadh ri Dia agus cùntais a' thoirt air mar a' ghiulain sinn sinn fhèin anns a' bheatha seo. Nach ioma uair a tha sinn a' toirt an aite shonraichte sin do 'ur co-chreutairean agus gun speis again do Dhia neo ni air bith a'bhuineas dha.

Bhiodh e cho freagarrach dhomhsa agus dhuitsa gum bitheamaid a' cuir an Tighearna na 'ur sealladh an tuilleadh agus an tuilleadh agus a' bhith tabhairt dhàsan gach clìu agus moladh. Tha an Tighearna air slighe fhosgladh dhàibhsan a'chuireas an earbsa agus an dochas annsan agus sin ann an Iosa Crìosd, 'ur Slànuighear. Tha e na mhisneach mhòr dhuinn nuair a leugheas sinn nach tig atharrachadh sam bi air focal an Tighearna. Oir is e seo am focal tha ag innseadh dhuinn nach seas ni air bi anns an t-saoghal seo dh'aindeoin 's an ire ruigeas sinn neo co bhios ga'r moladh. Tha an t-abstol Peadar a' deanadh seo gu math soilleir dhuinn: "Oir tha gach uile fheòil mar fheur, agus uile ghlòir dhaoine mar bhlàth an fheòir. Seargaidh am feur, agus tuitidh a bhlàth dheth: Ach fanaidh focal an Tighearna gu sìorruidh." Gum bitheamaid uile a' coimhead ri Iosa Crìosd agus gur annsan a' chuireamaid ar dòchas. □

Congregational News

Services

God willing our Harvest Thanksgiving service will be held on Wednesday 26th November at 7.30pm. The Commission of Assembly which met in October appointed a Day of Humiliation and Prayer to be held throughout the church and it is hoped that in our congregation this day will be observed early in December: details will be given nearer the time.

Fellowships

Our monthly fellowships this year have been devoted to the theme of 'The Worship of God' with the emphasis on public worship. The final two meetings in November and December (D.V.) will look at the subjects of Psalm-singing and the Sacraments respectively. Further details will be intimated in due course. The meetings are held in the manse beginning at 8.00pm and are open to all who are interested. For more information visit our website: www.northuistandgrimsayfcc.org.uk □

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Services:

Sabbath: 12.00noon; 6.00pm

Wednesday: 7.30pm

Communion: 2nd Sabbath in April and September

All services are held in the church at Bayhead.

Website: www.northuistandgrimsayfcc.org.uk

Sermons preached in the congregation are recorded and may be downloaded from the website. Alternatively they are available in CD or tape format. Please contact the minister for further details.

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