



May 2020 Newsletter



WELCOME

LORD'S DAY

Morning Worship—11.00am

Evening Worship—6.30pm

(Currently not meeting, but new sermon recordings are being uploaded to Sermon Audio)

PRAYER MEETING

Thursday—7.30pm (Currently meeting via Zoom)

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WORD FROM THE MANSE

Dear congregation,

At times during this lockdown my thoughts have turned to words that Samuel Rutherford wrote when he was in exile in Aberdeen far away from his congregation:

“My closed mouth, my dumb Sabbaths, the memory of my communion with Christ in many, many fair days in Anwoth, whereas now my Master getteth no service of my tongue as then, hath almost broken my faith in two halves.”

While we are apart from one another I trust that we are still one in spirit. We are thankful for the technology that we have today. Indeed, I wonder what Samuel Rutherford would have thought of the possibilities we have due to the internet, while he was restricted to writing letters. In the providence of God, however, we can be grateful for the rich piety and pastoral heart of his epistles that we can still read today.

For many of us the technology currently available has allowed us to access services and sermons of other congregations. In our home we have been enjoying “worshipping with” fellow Reformed Presbyterian congregations in Scotland, Ireland, America, and Canada. For example, due to the time difference we have been able to listen to a morning service in Ottawa (Dr Andrew Quigley) just after our girls get up from their afternoon nap. We also were able to join a livestream of a morning service in California after we put the girls to bed in the evening. Rev Stephen Steele in Stranraer also has a livestream of his services.

While we do not prefer our current circumstances, it is beneficial to be able to listen to faithful ministers from across our denominations. You can find the link to these various services at www.rpglobalalliance.org. You may be interested to watch our former theological students, Craig Scott and Gary Gunn, who are both livestreaming their services (with the time difference Grand Rapids is at 3pm and Meadville at 4pm in our afternoon). There are plenty of other options there too.

While it is not public worship in the strictest sense and we are merely worshipping individually or in family units, such services are a help to keep the Sabbath day holy.

Every blessing,

Stephen

NEWS & EVENTS

CHRISTIAN MINISTER HUMILIATED BY HOTEL OVER MARRIAGE EVENT TAKES LEGAL ACTION

A Christian minister is suing a Belfast hotel after it ordered him to halt a public meeting in support of traditional marriage.

Hotel staff interrupted the event, attended by more than 50 members of the public, and told Revd Harry Coulter (Carrickfergus RP Church) to finish immediately.

Revd Coulter told The Christian Institute, who are supporting him in his case, that the incident left him feeling “humiliated” and he is now taking legal action for unlawful discrimination and breach of contract.

Marriage matters

The minister hired the hotel’s Grand Ballroom for his ‘Marriage Matters’ event in October last year.

He said hotel staff were “closely involved” with setting up the meeting and “did not express any concern” about the meeting or its content.

Despite writing to the hotel twice and then sending a legal letter, the hotel has failed to investigate what happened or offer compensation.

He is now taking formal legal action, and his lawyers have stated the incident left the minister with feelings of “shock, disappointment and frustration”.



Rev. Harry Coulter

Discrimination

Leading Belfast legal firm Carson McDowell is acting on behalf of the minister. In a letter threatening court action, they told the hotel that Revd Coulter was a clear victim of discrimination.

They wrote that the only reason the event was stopped “was because it was promoting and supporting the proposition that marriage should only be between a man and a woman”.

Revd Coulter said it is important that regardless of their beliefs, people are able to express their opinions and views, “otherwise, we get very close to censorship and to state control.”

He is being assisted in his legal case by The Christian Institute.

The Christian Institute

WOMAN STOPS HER ABORTION PROCESS AFTER READING PRO-LIFE ARTICLE

A woman has revealed that she pulled out of an abortion after reading an article by a pro-life blogger and is now the mother of a five-year-old girl. In 2014, Matt Walsh, who writes for The Blaze and The Daily Wire, read a ‘goodbye letter’ from a mother to her unborn child, posted online days before she was set to have an abortion. Walsh responded with a letter of his own, reminding her of the love she already had for that child, and the potential future she would cut short if she went through with the abortion.

‘Desperation’

In her emotional letter, the woman said she was not ready to have a child, and that she would not be able to provide the life that she would want the child to have. After trying in vain to contact her directly, Walsh wrote an open letter to the anonymous woman explaining that he felt both the sadness and hesitation in her words.

He wrote: “I felt the uneasiness. I felt the sense of loss. I felt the desperation. And I felt the love. I did. I really did. “You love your child. You want your child to be happy. You said that yourself, and I believe you. But this is not the way, friend. This is not the way.”

Future

While the mother said in her letter that she would meet the child again when she was next pregnant, Walsh pointed out that wasn’t true. “You still have a choice. Please, give your child a chance. Choose life.” “You can choose death or choose life, but there will not be a redo or a second chance. This is it. This is everything.

“You can have other kids, but you will never have this one again. This one, with her vast potential and incredible promise. She is here now, she is living now, and there is a place in this world for her.”

He pleaded with her to consider the potential future she would be missing out on, concluding: “Think about the future. Think about your little one. There is still time to change your mind. You still have a choice. Please, give your child a chance. Choose life.”

Choosing life

Five and a half years later, Walsh was contacted by a different woman who had read his article when it was first published.

When she read it, she had just taken an abortion pill, but reading Walsh’s article had made her reconsider her choice as she tried to come to grips with the enormity of ending the life of a child she still loved.

Later that night, she saw an advert for abortion pill reversal, and chose to try to save her baby.

Walsh said: “Long story short, her daughter turned 5 this year. She now has a beautiful family. She chose life and does not regret it, to put it mildly.”

Abortion pill reversal

He added: “What amazing courage. The role I played was very small but I’m grateful to know that at least one thing I’ve published in my years of doing this made a difference for at least one family.

“Most of all I’m grateful that one child was spared the fate 60 million others have suffered.”

Medical abortions involve taking two abortion pills. It is sometimes possible to reverse the effect if the woman has taken the first but not the second. Taking progesterone soon after the first pill (which blocks the body’s natural progesterone production) can sometimes save the pregnancy.

The Christian Institute

GLEANINGS BY BILL LUCAS

CHASTISEMENT

"No chastening seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it." (Hebrews 12:11)

Afflictions are always painful, and days of affliction are often gloomy. But as we are training for eternity, as we are maturing for Heaven, and as afflictions are necessary discipline, we must be afflicted. If chastisement were not necessary then our loving Father would never use the rod. But as every one of us needs correction, He chastens every son whom He receives. God's chastisements are intended for our instruction, they are designed to teach us: the evil of sin, our need of grace, the holiness of God, the preciousness of Jesus, the emptiness of the world, and the blessedness of Heaven. These are lessons of the deepest importance to us, lessons that we are slow to learn; and therefore we must have line upon line, and stroke upon stroke.

Heavenly Father, help us to bow to Your sovereign will, to bear with patience every stroke of Your rod, and to learn the holy and important lessons which You intend to teach us. May we not only submit to Your discipline, but, seeing the love which ordains it, and the need there is for it, even acquiesce in it. Keep us from fretting at pain, repining at losses, or giving way to too much grief at bereavements, knowing that all these things come from You, and that You design them for our good. Help us to understand that every trial and every trouble is a blessing, and will end in eternal glory. Sweet thought!

O for grace to yield ourselves to You, and to sweetly acquiesce in all Your paternal dealings! "Blessed is the man whom God corrects, so do not despise the discipline of the Almighty." (Job 5:17)

James Smith, 1859

DIVINE PUNISHMENT OR DIVINE CHASTISEMENT?

There is a threefold distinction between divine punishment and divine chastisement.

The first lies in the character in which God acts. In the former, God acts as Judge. In the latter, God acts as Father. The second distinction lies in the recipients of each. The objects of the former, are His enemies. The objects of the latter, are His children. A third distinction is seen in the design of each. The one is retributive -- the other remedial. The one flows from His anger, the other flows from His love.

Chastisement is designed for our good, to promote our highest interests. Look beyond the rod to the All-wise hand that wields it!

Arthur Pink

THE CHOOSING PLACE

"I have chosen you in the furnace of affliction!" (Isaiah 48:10)

The furnace of affliction! It is God's meeting place with His people. "I have chosen you," says He, "in the furnace of affliction. I will keep you there, until the purifying process is complete; and if need be, in a 'chariot of fire' I will carry you to heaven!"

4 Some fires are for destruction, but the furnace of affliction is for purification. He, the Refiner, is sitting by the furnace regulating the flames, tempering the heat; not the least filing of the gold but what is precious to Him! The bush is burning with fire, but He is in the middle of it; a living God in a bush; a living Saviour in the furnace!

And has this not been the method of His dealing with His redeemed people in every age? First, trial -- then blessing. First, difficulties--then deliverances. First, Egyptian plagues, darkness, brick kilns, the Red Sea, forty

of desert privations -- then Canaan! First, the burning fiery furnace--then the vision of "one like the Son of God!" Or, as with Elijah on Carmel, the answer is first by fire -- and then by rain. First, the fiery trial--then the gentle descent of the Spirit's influences, coming down like "rain upon the mown grass, and as showers that water the earth."

Believer! be it yours to ask, "Are my trials sanctified?" Are they making me holier, purer, better, more meek, more gentle, more heavenly-minded, more Savior-like? Seek to "glorify God in the fires." Patience is a grace which the angels cannot manifest.

By patient, un murmuring submission, remember, you, a poor sinner, can thus magnify God in a way the loftiest angelic natures cannot do! His design is to purge away your dross, to bring you forth from the furnace reflecting His own image, and fitted for glory!

John MacDuff, "The Rainbow in the Clouds"

CAREGIVERS

Casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you (1 Peter 5:7)

Today we hear much of "caregivers." I know a number of dear ones who care for loved ones. As I have seen the tender love and care that is given to a spouse or parent, it makes me think of my heavenly caregiver. How precious to think of the above verse and to know that my Lord is there to respond to my every need. Dear caregiver, be encouraged, you are displaying the beauty of our Lord as you gently look after your loved one.

Mary Robbin

PRAYER

Go often to the quiet place of thine own heart in prayer,
For in the shelter of its peace, God is waiting there.
Commit thyself with childlike faith unto His loving hands,
Be still and know that He is God, who loves thee best and understands.

Author Unknown

TRACTS

Behold, now is the day of salvation (2 Cor. 6:2)

"Tracts everywhere!" exclaimed a young man in disgust as he was handed one by an earnest Christian worker. "No," replied the worker softly, "there will be none in hell." The words, "none in hell" reverberated through the young man's mind until he finally accepted Christ. Today you could be saved by repenting of your sin and accepting the Saviour. Oh, may this be your day of salvation!

Arnot P Mcintee

WHAT A TEACHER

"Or sometimes strangely I forget;
And, learning o're and o're
A lesson all with tear-drops wet,
Which I had learnt before.
He chides me not, but waits while;
Then wipes my heavy eyes;
Oh, what a Teacher is our God,
So patient and so wise!"

F.R. Havergal

VIRTUAL CHURCH



“I joyed when to the house of God” (Psalm 122:1)

As the world attempts to come to grips with the Coronavirus pandemic, a new term has thrust itself into our vernacular. “Social distancing” - the maintaining of a physical distance between people and the refraining from gathering together in groups - has become commonplace throughout the world in a way that few could have predicted. Word(s) of the Year, referring to the most important word(s) or expressions(s) in the public sphere during the course of a year, have in recent times boasted such selections as “selfie” in 2013 and “fake news” in 2017, with social distancing no doubt a likely contender in 2020.

Social distancing, however, is by no means a new concept. Almost 700 years ago the Bubonic Plague, or Black Death as it later came to be known, originated in China and spread west along trading routes, eventually arriving in the British Isles in June, 1348. As the overwhelmed doctors and health workers fought against this devastating outbreak, the implementation of some of the world’s first anti-contagion measures were put in place, foreshadowing today’s social distancing practices.

SOCIAL DISTANCING AND THE CHURCH

Throughout history the Church has gathered together to worship God corporately. The Church is not a physical building, as many would consider it to be - the Church is a group of people called out of the world and into one another’s fellowship. The church is a community that meets, assembles, and gathers. God calls His Church to physically gather together to worship Him corporately, “when you come together as a church” (1 Corinthians 11:18). Note, it is “when” and not “if” you come together. God has commanded us not to “forsake the assembling of ourselves together” (Hebrews 10:25). Indeed He promised His presence in such gatherings, “for where two or three are gathered together in my name, I am there in the midst of them.” (Matthew 18:20)

It is certainly true that an individual can worship God sincerely and meaningfully in solitude. Though alone, banished to the Isle of Patmos, the apostle John evidently engaged in the act of worship for he was in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day” (Revelation 1:10). However, whilst we can experience and enjoy great times of communion and blessing with the Lord when we are alone, there is a particular blessing associated with the corporate gatherings of the Church. Martin Luther, the 16th Century reformer, when facing spiritual hardship found great uplifting in corporate worship: “at home, in my own house, there is no warmth or vigour in me, but in the church when the multitude is gathered together, a fire is kindled in my heart and it breaks its way through.”

Since March, the Coronavirus lockdown has seen Church doors remain firmly shut both throughout Scotland and most of the world. Some services were suspended voluntarily, prior to the lockdown, whereas government measures quickly ensured the ceasing of all Church services throughout the land in an effort to slow the spread of this virus plaguing our nations. On the one hand, social distancing is a sensible and responsible approach towards slowing the spread of the virus, yet, on the other hand, social distancing is very much at odds with God’s call for the church to gather together corporately.

Prior to the lockdown, you would be hard pressed to find many churches who didn't make their audio sermons available online, for instance on SermonAudio.com. Furthermore, some Churches had already been in the practice of live video streaming their services on platforms such as YouTube. Generally speaking, however, this was never intended as a substitute for the physical corporate gathering of the local church. It was, instead, intended for those who were unable to be present at public worship or for others to watch and benefit from, over and above their attendance at their own local services.

Since the lockdown, many churches throughout Scotland have made a sudden and unforeseen move towards online video streaming. Under normal circumstances, some may never have entertained the notion, given that coming together as a church requires a physical gathering, and given a concern that live streaming services may give people the impression that they are genuinely participating in church, when in reality they are actually only observing it. Yet with social distancing, and a looming period of isolation stretching into months, almost overnight we have become a virtual Church.

THE SHORTCOMINGS OF VIRTUAL CHURCH

By definition, corporate public worship cannot be conducted individually, in small groups, or online. As the local church is a gathering together for worship a virtual church is really a contradiction in terms. However, at a time of social distancing and mandatory isolation, we can - and must -continue to worship at home, despite the undoubted shortcomings of doing so. As we cannot physically meet, this means, for instance, that we cannot partake of the sacraments of baptism or the Lord's Supper, which cannot rightly be administered online. This is keenly felt here in the Western Isles given that the Communion Season is so emphasised in our Island churches. There have been recent cases of wedding postponements and, grievously, also of funerals being restricted to immediate family only, giving little chance to mourn with those who mourn the loss of loved ones.

There is a definite difference between live streaming preaching and a gathered congregation, physically sitting together under the preached Word. There is a difference for the minister who preaches into a mic in an empty building or looks into a camera, rather than into the faces of those he has been called to shepherd. There is also a difference for the hearer as the gravity of sitting under the Word in a gathered congregation, much like when Christ preached at the Sermon on the Mount or Peter on the Day of Pentecost, is removed.

If you have attempted to partake in virtual congregational singing, over Zoom for instance, an online video and audio conferencing platform, you will know just how disjointed and unworkable these platforms can be for that purpose. At a time like this, we are reminded of the blessing of participating in and hearing the collective voice of the gathered congregation, however large or small that gathering may be. Furthermore, Scripture makes known to us that in singing the Psalms in the gathered congregation, Christ Himself is present, and actually participating in the sung praise, "in the midst of the assembly I will praise You" (Psalm 22:22).

THE BLESSINGS OF A VIRTUAL CHURCH

Throughout the history of the Church, Christians have been very adept at using new technology for the glory of God. In the days of the early church, the Roman roads were built for the purpose of trade and carrying soldiers, but the Church saw it as a way to send missionaries out with the Gospel. At the time of the Reformation, Christians harnessed the printing press as a means of furthering that Reformation. The same can be said in relation to the internet, which has for many years been used by the Church, not only to reach out with the Gospel, with online sermons and publications, but also of making doctrinally sound reformed material widely available.

Notwithstanding the very evident shortcomings of a virtual church, the current crisis does serve to highlight our need to give thanks to God for the positives of modern technology. Whilst technology is an evil master, it can be a great servant. At a time like this, technology can genuinely help us keep virtually connected at a time of isolation and social distancing. Aside from online video streaming and audio services, many of us have been able to make use of Zoom and similar platforms for prayer meetings and fellowship, which wouldn't have been possible in years gone by.

THE AFTERMATH OF VIRTUAL CHURCH

Conversely, there are dangers inherent in an enforced virtual church. One such danger may be the temptation for some to remain online, rather than returning to gather together, after the lockdown has been lifted. The incentive of watching preaching in the comfort of your own home may attract some to take such a step – as may a perceived lack of accountability. We must remember that there are graces and blessings which God only gives when gathering together with other believers. We would forfeit such graces and blessings if we “forsake the assembling of ourselves together” (Hebrews 10:25).

We must ask ourselves this question: how will we emerge from this pandemic? For too long many of us have taken public worship for granted. Some have attended infrequently, whilst others have neglected it altogether. Perhaps we will sympathise more with those who are older or unwell, and can no longer attend public worship as they once did? Maybe we will understand in a small measure what much of the global church experience, unable to meet together due to the very real threat of persecution. We ought to love, be thankful for, make full use of, and highly value public worship as we gather together as Christ’s Church - our own small part of the great and glorious mystical body here on earth and gathered in heaven. Finally, perhaps in the future the singing of these words will take on greater significance for us:

“I joyed when to the house of God,
Go up, they said to me.
Jerusalem, within thy gates
Our feet shall standing be.” (Psalm 122:1-2)

Scott Maciver

THE REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF IRELAND (1)

The Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland has forty congregations arranged in four presbyteries (Northern, Eastern, Southern, and Western). The four presbyteries make up the Synod which is the highest court of the RPCI. While most of the congregations are in Northern Ireland, seven are in the Republic of Ireland. There have been eight new church plants within the last 25 years, the most recent of which are Gateway (Derry), Cookstown, and Woodstock (East Belfast). Besides mission in Ireland, the RPCI has a work in Nantes (France) and is exploring work in Spain.

The denomination has 1,853 communicant members, with 1,960 attending morning worship on an average Sabbath. Across the denomination in 2019 there were 38 baptisms. The number of ministers is as follows: 32 active, 11 retired, and 3 without charge. Additionally, there are 3 men studying for the ministry at the Reformed Theological College. The denomination has 182 ruling elders.

Reformed Theological College was established in 1854 (then known as the Reformed Presbyterian Theological Hall). Previous to this date Irish men studied in the Scottish RP Theological Hall. The professors at the College are also ministers of RP congregations or else are recently retired. Adjacent to the College is the Covenanter Bookshop.

There are various summer camps for young people that centre around the teaching of God’s Word. One in particular, Theological Foundations for Youth, focuses on the doctrine and distinctive principles of the church. Each year Go Teams are organised to help weaker congregations with practical work and outreach.

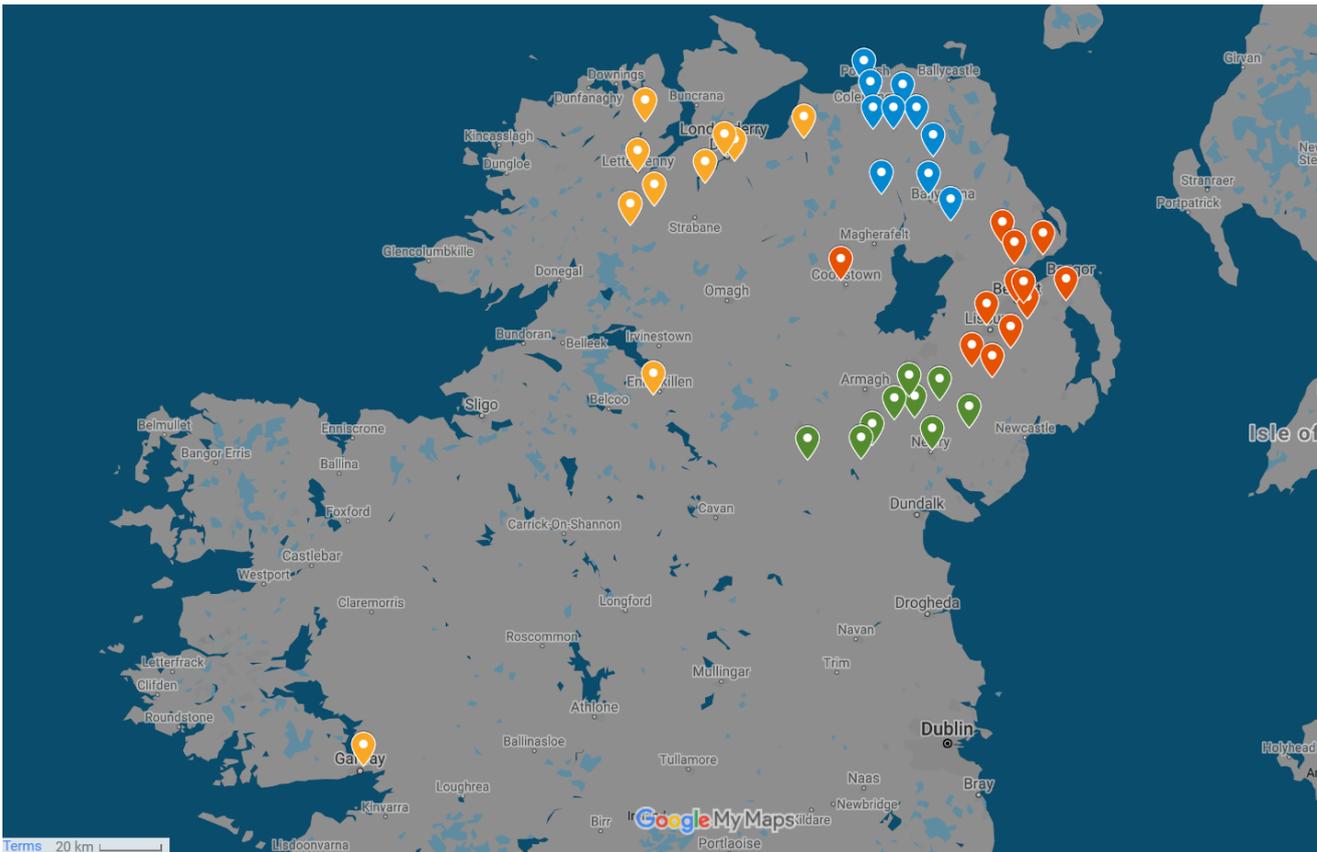
The RPCI is active in speaking out against moral evils (most recently against abortion and same-sex marriage) and meeting with political leaders showing its belief in the continuing obligation of the Covenants (1638 and 1643).

Over the next four months, we will look at each Presbytery in turn to see how we can pray for them.

Rev. Stephen McCollum

Key to map

- Blue Northern Presbytery
- Red Eastern Presbytery
- Green Southern Presbytery
- Yellow Western Presbytery



WHAT IF THE CORONAVIRUS COMES TO YOUR HOME?

It's hard to avoid being at least unsettled by the constant focus on Coronavirus and its progress. It has been estimated that 40-70% of the world's population will contract the virus this year. Whether or not they do, the impact in many other ways is likely to be significant. Suddenly, even praying for our daily bread can seem a far more immediate concern. We should, of course be concerned to preserve the life and health of ourselves and others carefully and lawfully. This is part of what the sixth commandment requires. What should be our response in a climate of panic and alarm when we don't know what the future may hold? Perhaps we are inclined to shrug it off as hype and exaggeration. But neither panic nor carelessness are the right response. How do we express a confident trust in God's sovereign care in a way that is not merely glib?

Christians have been in similar situations before. It is important to recognise that Coronavirus is nothing like as devastating as the plague. We can still learn, however, from how Christians responded to it. Jeremiah Burroughs was one of the members of the Westminster Assembly. He lived through various outbreaks of the plague. In 1625 41,313 died in London and between 1640 and 1646 there were 11,000 deaths. During those years he preached a series of sermons from Philippians 4:11 on the subject of attaining contentment. He speaks of how contentment is possible, even in times of prevailing plague panic. These sermons were later published and have been valued by many as the book *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment*.

What did he mean by contentment? “Christian contentment is that sweet, inward, quiet, gracious frame of spirit, which freely submits to and delights in God’s wise and fatherly disposal in every condition.” Such contentment is active trust not a frozen fatalistic resignation. It does not mean mere passivity, we can use means in a way that follows God’s providence. The key matter is to submit to God’s will in such a way that “our wills are melted into the will of God”. “One drop of the sweetness of heaven is enough to take away all the sourness and bitterness of all the afflictions in the world”. He said that “a murmuring spirit is a greater evil than any affliction, whatever the affliction”.

Burroughs identifies the plague as the saddest affliction of all. When it visited your home it meant almost certainly that the family would all be taken. What could possibly make up for so great an affliction? Burroughs tells us in this updated extract that God’s Covenant and its promises are enough in such circumstances.

1. LOOK FOR GOD’S PROMISES

There is no condition that a godly man or woman can be in, but there is some promise or other in the Scripture to help him in that condition. Contentment goes out to the promises and can fetch from the promise that which will supply its needs. This is the most real thing in the world to a gracious heart. When they find a lack of contentment they go to the promise and the covenant. They plead the promises that God has made.

I will only mention one situation that is the saddest affliction of all; the plague visiting the home. In other afflictions they might have their friends and other things to comfort them. But in this they cannot have their friends come to them or other comforts because of the plague. Psalm 91:10 is a promise regarding the plague and also Psalm 91:5-6. It is a portion of Scripture for those in danger of the plague. But you will say “this is a promise that the plague shall not come near to them”. But notice that it also speaks of no evil coming on them, in other words the evil of it shall not come near you.

But you will say, “It does come to many godly people, and how can they make use of this portion of Scripture. It is rather a Scripture that would trouble them, because it is a promise that it will not come near them and yet it has. What good is there in such a promise?” You are under the protection of God more than others. But you also have this comfort, that the evil of it shall be taken from you. If God will make use of this affliction for other purposes, He will do it in such a way as He will make it up to you in some other way. Perhaps you have given your children something, but afterwards you need it back. So you say, “I will make it up to you some other way”. Your child does not think that your love is any whit less to them. So it is when God by His promise gives you His protection yet something happens. It is only as if a father should say, “I gave you that indeed, but let me have it and I will make it up to you some other way that will be as good”. God says “let me have your health and liberty, and life, and it shall be made up to you some other way”.

2. LOOK FOR GOD’S PURPOSES

When the plague comes to those that have such a promise, it is for some special and notable reason. God requires them to search and examine His purpose in a special way. There is so much to be learned in the promise that God has made concerning this particular evil that the people of God they may come to calm their hearts in this affliction. They can say “I read in this Psalm that God has made a promise to His people to deliver them from the plague. Yet I find it has come. It may be I have not made use of my faith in this promise before now. If God brings afflictions on me, yet God will make it up some other way. God made a promise to deliver me or at least to deliver me from all the evil of it.

Now if this thing does afflict me and yet I have a promise from God, certainly the evil of it is taken away. This promise tells me that if it does happen to me it is for some notable purpose. God has the use of my life and intends to bring about His glory some way that I do not know of. If He comes in fatherly chastisement, I will be satisfied. So a Christian heart by reasoning out of the Word, comes to satisfy their soul in the midst of the hand of God being so heavily on them and being in such a distressed condition as that.

Ungodly hearts do not find the same healing power in the Word to heal their worries and troubles of spirit. But

when those that are godly come to the Word they find a plaster for all their wounds. So they come to have ease and contentment in such conditions that are very grievous and miserable to others.

3. LOOK TO GOD'S COVENANT

In 2 Samuel 23:5 David says that although he does not find his house to be as in every way as he would wish he has contentment. It is in the face that God has made with him an everlasting covenant. This is what helps everything. I am not so with God, nor is my house and family as I hoped it might be with God. Perhaps there is this or that affliction on my house. Suppose you would have the plague come into your house, and your house is not safe. You do not have that outward comfort in your house as formerly you had. But can you read this portion of Scripture and say the following?

“Although my house is not so blessed with health as other people’s houses are. Although my house is not so, yet He has made with me an everlasting covenant. I am still one in covenant with God. The Lord has made an everlasting covenant with me. As for things in this world, I see they are but momentary, they are not everlasting. I see that in a family when all was well only a week ago, everything is down now and the plague has swept away a great many of them. The rest are left in sadness and mourning. We see there is no rest in the things of this world, yet the Lord has made with me an everlasting covenant ordered in all things. I find disorder in my heart and in my family; but the everlasting covenant is ordered in all things. Yes and that is sure. There is nothing sure in these earthly things. I can be sure of nothing here, especially in these times”.

We know that we can be sure of little that we have. Who can be sure of what they possess? Some have lived well and comfortably, all was well, yet within a day or two all was taken away. There is no sureness in the things of this world. But the covenant is sure. Notice what follows, “this is all my salvation”. Why David do you not want salvation from your enemies and outward dangers, from pestilence and plague? The frame of his spirit is quietened, as if he said “if that salvation comes, well and good, I shall praise God for it, but what I have in the Covenant, that’s my salvation, I look on that as enough”. “This is all my salvation, and all my desire”. Why David is there not something else you want besides this covenant? “No”, he says, “it is all involved in this”. Surely those who have all they desire must live contented lives. This holy man says, “this is all my desire”. Even if God does not make my house to grow, I have all my desires.

Thus you see how a godly heart finds contentment in the covenant. Many of you speak of the covenant of God, and of the covenant of grace, but have you found it so effectual for your souls? Have you sucked this sweetness from the covenant and contentment to your hearts in your sad conditions? It is a special sign of true grace in any soul, that when any affliction comes to them they naturally go to the covenant. Just like a child goes to their mother or father as soon as it is in danger. So as soon as a gracious heart is in any trouble or affliction their new nature carries them immediately to the covenant. There they find ease and rest. If you find your heart running to the covenant, it is an excellent sign of the reality of grace.

CONCLUSION

Burroughs points us to the promises of God in times of trouble. There are various promises for the heart to find contentment in times of affliction such as Isaiah 43:2, Isaiah 54:17 and Joshua 1:5 (Hebrews 13:5 shows this applies to us as well as Joshua). Burroughs says that every time a godly person reads the Scriptures and encounters a promise, they ought to put their hand on it and say “this is a part of my heritage, it’s mine, and I am to live upon it”. This will make you to be contented. Other promises include Psalm 34:10, Psalm 37:6. Isaiah 58:10. We have to learn this lesson of contentment, as Paul did (Philippians 4:1) and we can only do it by grace. Burroughs says, “the Lord teach you thoroughly by His Spirit these lessons of contentment”. Here are some vital counsel for helping to quieten our hearts and strengthen our faith in troublous and uncertain times.

Children's Corner



Dear Children

Since I last wrote you a lot has happened not just in our island but across the whole world. This is something that your parents and even your grandparents have never experienced. It is all so strange. We are under so many restrictions (things we can't do) and so many people are dying across the world.

You will have learnt new words too – Coronavirus, pandemic, lockdown. So what has caused all this upheaval? The Coronavirus, you will say and in one sense you are right. Where did the Coronavirus come from? From China, you will say but all of you should know that everything that happens in the world is under God's ordering and control. The Shorter Catechism Question 7 puts it in these words: "He has fore-ordained whatsoever comes to pass". So, if God is in control, why do you think He has allowed this virus to affect the whole world? Is He not saying something to us?

God has told us in His Word that we have all sinned against Him and that we need to turn to God, confess our sins and ask for His forgiveness. We are all afraid of catching the Coronavirus but we are all already infected with a worse virus – the virus of sin – and, just like the Coronavirus, if we are not delivered from it, it will not only lead to our physical death but to our eternal death. The Apostle Paul says in Romans chapter 6 and verse 23 : "The wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." That is a wonderful promise – the promise of eternal life! It is a free gift! It doesn't cost you anything! My dear children, ask the Lord to deliver you from the virus of sin. That can be your experience by putting your trust in "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world".

At a time like this, when everyone is doing everything they can to protect themselves – and that is wise – we need to remember that God is in control. He wants us to trust in Him and believe that He cares for us in the midst of danger. He wants us to pray to Him, tell Him all our fears and ask Him to look after us. This month I am asking you to read the first 16 chapters of the Book of Exodus. I think I can hear you say: Wow! That many? Well, you could read one chapter a day, couldn't you? In the days of long ago, when there weren't many books written, the Bible was often the reading book that children had. That was how many of them learnt to read and by doing so they learnt about God. Now you have many books to help you learn to read but don't forget God's book. In these chapters in Exodus you will see what God did for the Children of Israel when they were oppressed (treated harshly) by the Egyptians and how God delivered them. It was through the blood of the Passover lamb that they were delivered. Everyone who sprinkled the blood of the lamb on their doorposts and lintels was safe. In the same way, the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ shed on the cross for His people will save us from the virus of sin. Make sure, my dear children that you trust in Him for your salvation.

I hope that you are making good use of your time at home by doing your schoolwork diligently, by learning new skills from your parents, by asking your grandparents questions on the phone or on Skype or whatever technology you use, and also by learning more about God and His Word. Memorising God's Word is a very useful activity and one that will benefit you for life. As David says in Psalm 119 verse 105: "Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."

12 May the Lord bless you and keep you safe.

With my love and prayers.

Granny M

