



STORNOWAY
REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

CHRIST JESUS CAME INTO
THE WORLD TO SAVE SINNERS
(1 TIMOTHY 1:15)

October 2020 Newsletter



WELCOME

LORD'S DAY

Morning Worship—11.00am

Evening Worship—6.30pm

PRAYER MEETING

Thursday—7.30pm (Currently meeting via Zoom)

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WORD FROM THE MANSE

Dear congregation,

Due to COVID-19 churches have had to respond to various restrictions that have been imposed since March. The major shift in most congregations is that all church activities have been moved online. This virtual presence has undoubtedly been a witness to many people who never darkened a church door. Nevertheless, not everything that comes along with virtual church is good. One area in particular is virtual communion.

Virtual communion is an utter contradiction in terms. In the Lord's Supper we have fellowship on both the vertical (God-ward) and horizontal (man-ward) directions. How is it possible to commune with your brothers and sisters without being next to one another at one table, without physically passing the bread and the cup from hand to hand? 1 Corinthians 11 is explicit, "when you come together as a church...therefore when you come together in one place...therefore, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another."

Virtual communion makes a mockery of the unity of the congregation. As a congregation we are to partake of one bread and one cup, signifying our unity in Christ. When the Supper is celebrated in private homes this is impossible. One home will use white bread, another will choose brown; one home prefers Merlot, another uses port. Is this taking the Supper for better or worse? The minister is to hold up the bread and say, "Take, eat!" The congregation is to eat of that bread. The minister is to hold up the cup and say, "Drink!" The congregation is to drink from that cup.

Virtual communion removes the oversight of the Session. Anyone who is watching the online service can participate in eating bread and drinking wine. Someone who is openly wicked or someone who is ignorant of what the Supper is or even of the Gospel could partake without the knowledge of the elders. The keys of the kingdom have been given to the Session to open and shut, to fence the table, to guard both the integrity of the Supper and the well-being of the people. Online communion would in one stroke remove any disciplinary measures imposed by a Session, leaving individuals free to do as they like. Elders shouldn't disregard their responsibilities lest it allow people to eat and drink judgement to themselves.

As much as it is painful to miss a communion season it is necessary if all things are to be done decently and in order.

Every blessing,
Stephen

NEWS & EVENTS

SYLVESTER KONTEH UPDATE LETTER

The following is an update from Sylvester Konteh, who is pastoring a church in Brikama, the Gambia, and studying via Distance Learning at the Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Pittsburgh:

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I am very pleased to write this letter to you all. I have often prayed for the opportunity to come to Scotland and meet you. I have this longing to see you, as Paul would say, "So that I may come to you in joy by the will of God and find refreshing rest in your company" (Rom 15:32).

So much has happened during the past two years of my seminary education. I am particularly grateful to God for your kind support to me and my family, as well as all the children here in The Gambia who have benefited from your kindness and love. It has not been easy to learn from a distance, but the presence of Ian at the Seminary in the US makes me feel like a campus student. He has been of tremendous help and support to me. I pray that the Lord will continue to strengthen and keep him and his newly wedded wife.

These are challenging time for the entire world, I share in your pain and loss in Scotland over this pandemic. I am particularly grateful to God for the Monday Zoom Prayer Meetings organised by Rev. James Gracie of the FCC. This has helped me to strive together with brethren in Scotland and beyond in prayers to God, and has given me a sense of belonging to a wider family.

The church here has recently resumed and members are glad to be back. The kids' Sunday school is going through the Shorter Catechism and a series of teaching on creation, fall and redemption. To encourage them we are organising a graduation at the end of this series with certification. The Pastors' Fellowship, which usually takes place monthly, will hopefully resume shortly. Please pray for more reformed pastors in The Gambia.

Classes have now resumed at RPTS and I am studying Spiritual Development, Old Testament Exegesis, and Elementary Greek. I have to write an exegesis paper on Psalm 23, which will be very challenging. I solicit your prayers for that, and the successful completion of my seminary education.



Pastor Konteh teaching the children before morning worship

I want to thank Scott and the Presbytery Gambia Commission for their mentorship and continued support. I want to appreciate Rev. Stephen McCollum, Rev. Stephen Steel, Rev Donald Macdonald, and all the Pastors who have done my sermon appraisals. Today when I look back I see a great change in my preaching. Before it was making a lot of noise with no content, but today I can listen to my own sermons and thank God. I still see myself as a learner and pray for my preaching to improve every day.

My wife and children send their love to you. My first son John is particularly interested in becoming a reformed pastor one day and has just sat the grade 9 exams to go to grade 10 in a new school. Pray for him to pass successfully and complete his secondary education. He went for a holiday to his Aunt's recently and started leading a prayer meeting. He reads and write the Hebrew alphabet and can recite some scriptures in Hebrew. He loves the Lord and is obedient at home. I pray that this passion of his would become a reality.

Schools are reopening mid-October. With the COVID- 19 challenges we are required to do a lot of new things in and around the Brikama Nursery School, which is under the auspices of our church. The school has opened a wide door for ministering to children from different denominational backgrounds, and today the doctrines of reformation are being shared with both the children and their teachers in the Teachers' Fellowship.

In conclusion, I will summarise a few prayer points that I would like you to pray for us.

1. My exegesis paper and completion of my seminary education.
2. Church and school discipleship including ministry to different groups including our Pastors' Fellowship.
3. My son John aspiring to become a reformed pastor.
4. That all our nations will repent and embrace true biblical reformation.

May the Lord bless you all,

Sylvester Konteh

GLEANINGS BY BILL LUCAS

TRIALS

The Lord trieth the righteous. (Psalm 11:5)

All events are under the control of Providence; consequently all the trials of our outward life are traceable at once to the great First Cause. Out of the golden gate of God's ordinance the armies of trial march forth in array, clad in their iron armour, and armed with weapons of war. All providences are doors to trial. Even our mercies, like roses, have their thorns. Men may be drowned in seas of prosperity as well as in rivers of affliction.

Our mountains are not too high, and our valleys are not too low for temptations: trials lurk on all roads. Everywhere, above and beneath, we are beset and surrounded with dangers. Yet no shower falls unpermitted from the threatening cloud; every drop has its order ere it hastens to the earth. The trials which come from God are sent to prove and strengthen our graces, and so at once to illustrate the power of divine grace, to test the genuineness of our virtues, and to add to their energy. Our Lord in his infinite wisdom and superabundant love, sets so high a value upon his people's faith that he will not screen them from those trials by which faith is strengthened.

You would never have possessed the precious faith which now supports you if the trial of your faith had not been like unto fire. You are a tree that never would have rooted so well if the wind had not rocked you to and fro, and made you take firm hold upon the precious truths of the covenant grace. Worldly ease is a great foe to faith; it loosens the joints of holy valour, and snaps the sinews of sacred courage. The balloon never rises until the cords are cut; affliction doth this sharp service for believing souls. While the wheat sleeps comfortably in the husk it is useless to man, it must be threshed out of its resting place before its value can be known. Thus it is well that Jehovah trieth the righteous, for it causeth them to grow rich towards God.

ABIDE IN ME

CH Spurgeon

"Let not your heart be troubled," said Jesus to his disciples (John 14:1). He could see fear etched on their faces and hear quavers of anxiety in their voices as they talked together. Why were they so disturbed? Because their Master was leaving them. He had already told them more than once that he was going to die, but they had been reluctant to take him seriously. Now, however, the message was unmistakably clear. "Little children, yet a little while I am with you ... Where I am going you cannot come" (John 13:33). And they were horrified.

How would they manage in his absence? For three years he had been a constant presence in their lives. They had watched him, listened to him, learned so much from his example and teaching. His love had touched them, his purity had challenged them, and they had been awed and excited by his miracles. He had strengthened them when they were weak and guided them in time of uncertainty. How could they cope when he was with them no longer?

"Because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart" (John 16:6). Christ said. For he knew, and wanted them to realise that he knew, exactly how they were feeling. And so, in chapters 14-17 of John's Gospel, in what is often called "The Farewell Discourse", we find the Lord encouraging them: "I will come again and will take you to myself ... I will not leave you as orphans, I will come to you ... it is to your advantage that I go away." (John 14:3,18; 16:7).

This is the context, often overlooked, of Chapter 15, with its command, "Abide in me" (v.4). No words could have been calculated to hearten these apprehensive men. For what Christ is telling them is that, in the truest sense, he is not leaving them. Through the ministry of his representative, the Holy Spirit, they will continue to experience the blessings of His presence.

And it is this experience to which we now turn. For being in Christ is more than having a new legal status in God's sight. It is richer than "considering" our new identity, grasping it by faith and acting upon that basis. We are meant to sense it, to luxuriate in it, to realise within ourselves, in every aspect of our beings, that we are actually "in him" -- what the old theologians called "union and communion". In John Murray's words: "The life of true faith cannot be that of cold metallic consent. It must have the passion and warmth of love and communion, because communion with God is the crown and apex of true religion."

This intimacy, this personal knowing and enjoying, is expressed in the Lord's words "Abide in me".

CONTENTMENT

Professor Ted Donnelly, (Life in Christ).

Abide in me, says the Lord, and I will be in thee strength in thy weakness, love in thy lovelessness, grace and beauty in thy uncomeliness. ~From me is thy fruit found," (Hos 14).

Teach me to be content to do your will, not looking this way or that to compare myself with others, seek their commendation, or escape their censure. May your voice be my only law, your smile my only reward.

SILENCE

A quote from Elie Wiesel: "Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented."

He said: "People should think about the moral costs of remaining silent when everything around them otherwise demands strong words and actions."

BELIEVING AND SUFFERING

"For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for His sake". (Phil. 1:29)

Often God pairs suffering with salvation. When we view suffering as His gift, our acceptance of it leads us to experience a deeper fellowship with Christ, attaining a greater knowledge of Him. Being identified with Christ is a great privilege and gives value to our suffering. Knowing that suffering is temporary and light compared to our future eternal weight of glory, let us allow it to strengthen, motivate, and fill us with hope.

George Ferrier

LORD'S SUPPER

"Take eat – costly bought, freely given."

John "Rabbi" Duncan

ALEXANDER DUFF'S SHIPWRECK



Rowland E. Prothero's little book, *The Psalms in Human Life* (London: John Murray, 1920), is a gem to be treasured by everyone who loves the Psalms. In this volume, Prothero compiles historical accounts of the blessing God's songbook has been to saints through the history of the Christian church. Here's a brief but powerful story from the life of Alexander Duff:

“High in the roll of missionaries stands the name of Alexander Duff, the eloquent speaker, the educational statesman, and the first missionary sent out to India by the Presbyterian Church of Scotland. An incident on his voyage confirmed, if it did not shape, his career. On October 14th, 1829, he and his wife sailed from Ryde, on board the Lady Holland. Four months later, in rough, boisterous weather, the ship approached the Cape of Good Hope, and made for Table Bay. At midnight, February 13th, 1830, she ran aground. Her back broke; her masts were cut away; waves dashed over the wreck: the position seemed desperate. It was not even known whether the ship had struck on a reef, the mainland, or an island. All around were boiling surf and foam. With great difficulty, one of the boats was launched, manned, and dispatched to find a landing-place. Three hours passed. Hope was almost gone, when the boat returned, reporting a small sandy bay. At this haven, which proved to be on Dessen Island, the passengers and crew were safely landed, but all that they possessed was lost.

In the search for food and fuel, a sailor found two books cast by the waves on the shore. One was a Bible, the other a Scottish Psalm Book. In both, Duff's name was written. To the shipwrecked party the books seemed a message from God. Led by Duff, they knelt down on the sand while he read them Psalm 107, "Whoso is wise will ponder these things," etc. On Duff himself the effect was lasting. All his library was lost. With it had gone all his notes and memoranda, everything that reminded him of his student life. Only the Bible and Psalms were preserved. Henceforth, as he read the message, human learning was to be only a means and not an end. In this spirit he founded his College, to teach in the English language everything that was educationally useful, and to hallow secular teaching with the study of the Christian faith and doctrines” (p. 336-337).

What makes this story the more powerful is understanding Duff's background. I've reflected briefly on him previously. He is notable for his missions philosophy in India. Duff determined that it would be more efficient and effective to teach Indians to learn English and thus tap into the great store of Western learning and technology rather than seek to translate the same into the many Indian languages. Thus, he took a different approach from William Carey. In some ways, echoes of the debate continue to play out in current Indian political tensions. Hindu nationalists want to reinforce historical norms by promoting the use of the Hindi language. Those who promote a more cosmopolitan Indian ideal see English as the lingua franca of choice.

When Duff shipwrecked and his Bible and Psalter were recovered, he doubtless turned to the 107th Psalm because he was reminded of the merchants who go to sea seeking a profit in Psalm 107:23-32. Like Duff and his companions, those merchants went to sea seeking to do good in their trade. The Lord caused the storm to rise up to show the sailors their powerlessness until they cried out to the Lord in their trouble (v. 28). Then, the Lord stilled the sea and brought them to their desired haven. Thus, the sailors were to give God thanks for his steadfast love and to respond in worship with the assembly of God's people (v. 31-32).

Duff himself sought to bring great profit to India spiritually and materially by teaching the Indian people English. He wanted to help them grow by building on the progress made by others in the West over many centuries. The Lord sent the storm to demolish Duff's library and "tool bag" off the coast of Africa on the way and to turn Alexander to Psalm 107 to contemplate the Lord's priorities at the outset of his work. God left him with a Bible and a Psalter to remind him that all progress and development must lead back ultimately to the haven of God's word and worship of his name with his people.

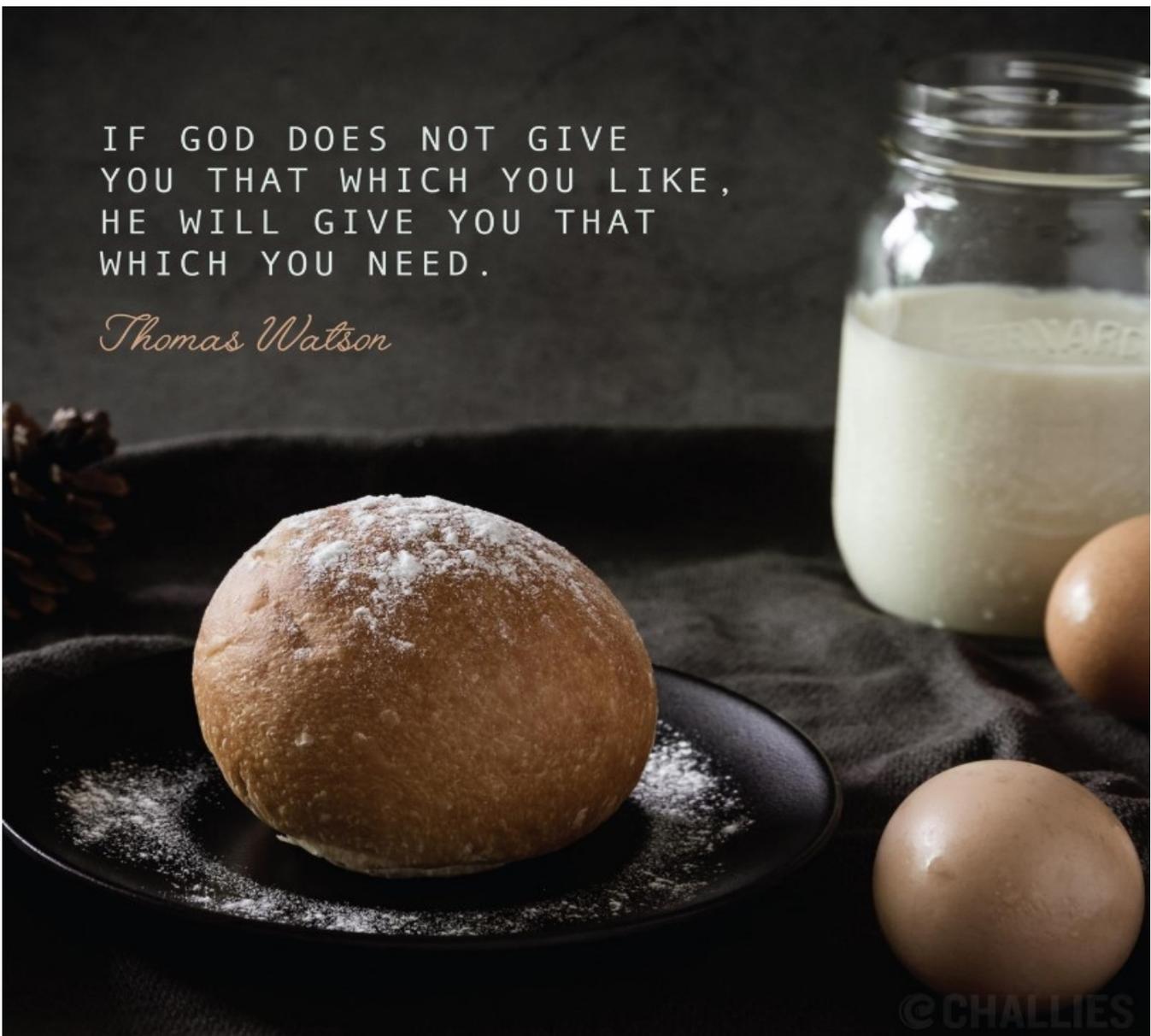
It's not just Alexander Duff who should consider these things:

Whoever is wise, let him attend to these things; let them consider the steadfast love of the LORD. - Psalm 107:43

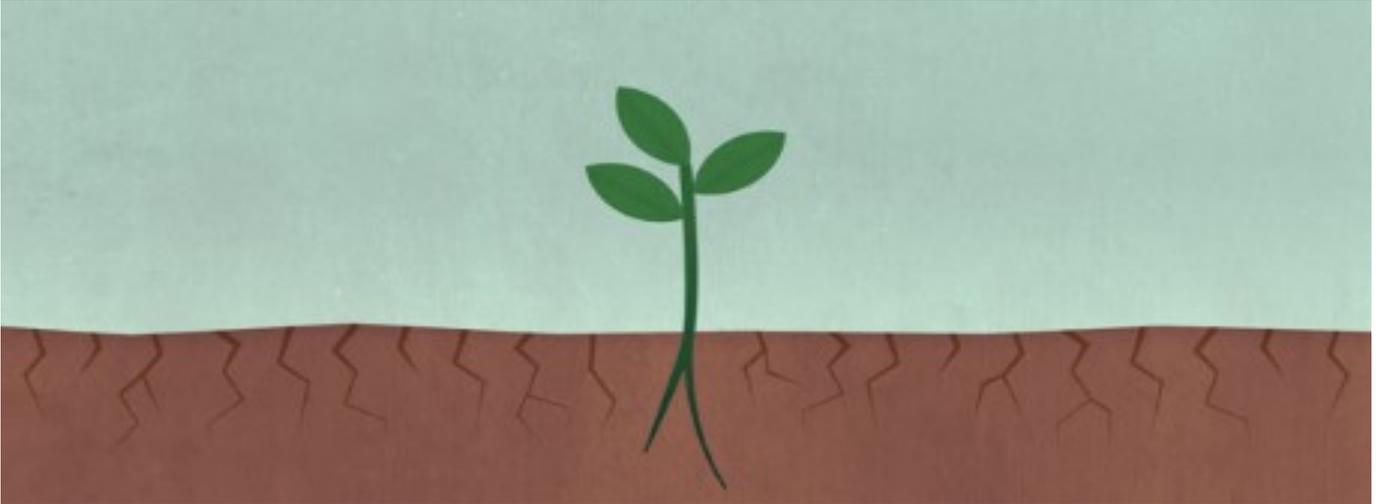
**Rev. James Faris, Second RP Church Indianapolis, Indiana.
www.gentlereformation.com**

IF GOD DOES NOT GIVE
YOU THAT WHICH YOU LIKE,
HE WILL GIVE YOU THAT
WHICH YOU NEED.

Thomas Watson



REGENERATION IS MONERGISTIC



There may be no truth in the Bible more deeply loved and greatly cherished than the subject of the new birth. Here is the grace-centered message of a new beginning for those whose lives have been ruined by sin. Here is the life-changing truth that sinful men can be made new. When the new birth is caused by God, old things pass away—old practices, old cravings, old habits, old addictions, and old associations. Behold, new things come—new desires, new pursuits, and new passions. An entirely new life begins. Nothing could be more positive than this. It is no wonder that the truth of the new birth is so beloved.

Yet despite its great appeal, the new birth may be the most misunderstood doctrine in Scripture. Most people naively imagine that there is something they can do to cause themselves to be born again. They hear a well-meaning person say, “Believe and be born again,” and suppose that they can. So they try to effect their own regeneration. But this they cannot do. In attempting it, they are like someone who imagines he caused himself to be born physically. Did he meet with his parents and ask to be born? Did he initiate his own birth? Of course not. The truth is, the initiative in birth lies outside of the one being born. He is merely part of a process that started long before he came into being. His parents acted, then God acted. And as a result, that individual was brought into the world. He did not cause his own birth to happen.

The same is true regarding spiritual birth. If you have experienced the new birth, it is not because you initiated it. Rather, it was an event that God brought about in you. More specifically, you were not born again because you exercised faith. In truth, the new birth preceded your faith and produced it. Saving faith is the fruit of regeneration, not the root of it. The biblically correct order of salvation—known in theological language as the *ordo salutis*—is not “Believe and be born again,” but the very opposite: “Be born again and believe.” The living God must act upon the spiritually dead soul and cause it to be born again. The new birth is by divine choice and sovereign initiative. God’s will affects the human will, not vice versa. Scripture intentionally uses the imagery of birth to underscore this essential truth of the sovereignty of God in regeneration.

John Murray, one of the foremost theologians of the twentieth century, affirmed the divine initiative in the new birth when he wrote:

8 “For entrance into the kingdom of God we are wholly dependent upon the action of the Holy Spirit, an action ... which is compared to that on the part of our parents by which we were born into the world. We are as dependent upon the Holy Spirit as we are upon the action of our parents in connection with our natural birth. We were not begotten by our father because we decided to be. And we were not born of our mother because we decided to be. We were simply begotten and we were born. We did not decide to be born.... If this privilege is ours it is because the Holy Spirit willed it and here all rests upon the Holy Spirit’s decision and action. He begets or bears when and where He pleases.”

Murray goes on to write, “Regeneration is the act of God and of God alone.” In other words, regeneration is monergistic, meaning that “the grace of God is the only efficient cause in beginning and effecting conversion.” The key word here is only. God is the only cause behind the new birth. The opposite of monergism is synergism. This latter word is derived from the Greek word synergos, meaning “working together.” According to the theory of synergistic regeneration, both the divine and human wills are active, and each must cooperate with the other. But what does the Scripture teach? According to James 1:18, “Of his own will he brought us forth”—an unmistakably monergistic statement. John 1:12–13 reads, “All who did receive him, who believed in his name ... were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.” This view of the new birth could not be more monergistic. John 3:8 says, “The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.” Man does not effect the movement of the Spirit—God does. First Peter 1:3 says, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” Clearly, regeneration is monergistic, the activity of only one will—namely, the divine will.

In the latter epistles of the New Testament, this truth of regeneration appears with intentional regularity (James 1:18; 1 John 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:1, 4, 18). This is a fundamental teaching within the doctrines of grace. It reveals that God must implant new life within your soul. God must effect a spiritual conception within you. God must impregnate your heart. In short, God must cause you to be born again.

Dr. Steven Lawson, Ligonier Blog

**SATAN GREATLY APPROVES OF
OUR RAILING AT EACH OTHER.**

GOD DOES NOT.

CHARLES SPURGEON



THE ULTIMATE LOVE IN A WORLD OF TOXIC SELF-LOVE

Our culture constantly suggests to us that the key to happiness is unconditional self-love. The implication is that this is the ultimate love and it will guarantee us success and security. This creates what one writer has called a toxic culture of self-love that will never satisfy. We do not need to go to the opposite extreme, instead we need to turn from focus on self to the ultimate love Christ has for His own. It is self-denying, self-sacrificing love for the unlovely, dealing with rather than accepting sin. Those who are His own turn from sin and by grace depend on Him alone by faith. There is very much to be gained from contemplating this ultimate special love that Christ has for His people.

We have a description of this love in John 13:1: “when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end”. This is one of the first passages that Thomas Goodwin makes use of in his book *The Heart of Christ in Heaven Towards Sinners on Earth*. He says that although Christ’s thoughts were on leaving this world, yet they were also on His own who were in the world. The words “his own” reflect the nearness and dearness with which He considers them. His love will not be diminished in any way by departing from the world “having loved them, he alters, he changes not, and therefore will love them forever”. He will be mindful of them still and His heart in heaven has the fullness of love that He demonstrated then for them. He will love His own to the end. George Hutcheson draws out something of the fullness of comfort that John 13:1 offers to us in the following updated extract.

1—CHRIST’S LOVE FOR HIS OWN IS INFINITE

The infinite love of tender-hearted Christ is the allowance and portion of all His special ones; for, “he loved his own”.

2—CHRIST’S LOVE FOR HIS OWN ANSWERS THE TROUBLES OF THIS WORLD

Christ leaves His children in this tempestuous world to be humbled with remaining sin and tossed with the tempests of time. Yet that neither takes away their claims on Him nor His love toward them; for, “he loved his own...in the world”.

3—CHRIST’S LOVE FOR HIS OWN IS THE SAME IN HEAVEN

The disadvantages of saints (particularly being left in the world when Christ went out of it) do not hinder His love toward them. Rather it is a reason why He should love them and let out more of His love. It is not only not a hindrance of His love; it is a reason: He loved His own because they were in the world. And especially now in His farewell, He gives proof of it, considering the dangers to which they were left exposed.

4—CHRIST’S LOVE FOR HIS OWN IS CONSTANT

It is not enough to see Christ’s love towards His saints in particular past experiences. They must also labour to see its uninterrupted course from the time of their conversion onwards. Therefore, now at His farewell, He makes His past love clear to them that He had loved them until now and was to give a proof of it. He “having loved his own which were in the world...loved them unto the end”.

5—CHRIST’S LOVE FOR HIS OWN IS KNOWN IN EVERY CONDITION

Christ’s love is not to be measured only by our satisfaction with a felt sense of the tender ways it is given to us. The sum of all His dealings towards His own is love. It ought to be read in every condition and all His dealings. Love had been maintained in His tender heart for all this time. There had been many various past experiences between Him and His disciples (some of them very contrary to their preferences). Yet all is summed up in this, He had “loved his own”.

6—CHRIST’S LOVE FOR HIS OWN IS UNCHANGEABLE

Christ’s special love toward His own is unchangeable and incessant until they are perfected and enjoy its fulness.

Having loved His own, He loved them to the end. He continued His love from the beginning until now. He is to die for them and depart from them and continues it even then. He will do so until they are brought to the end of their journey.

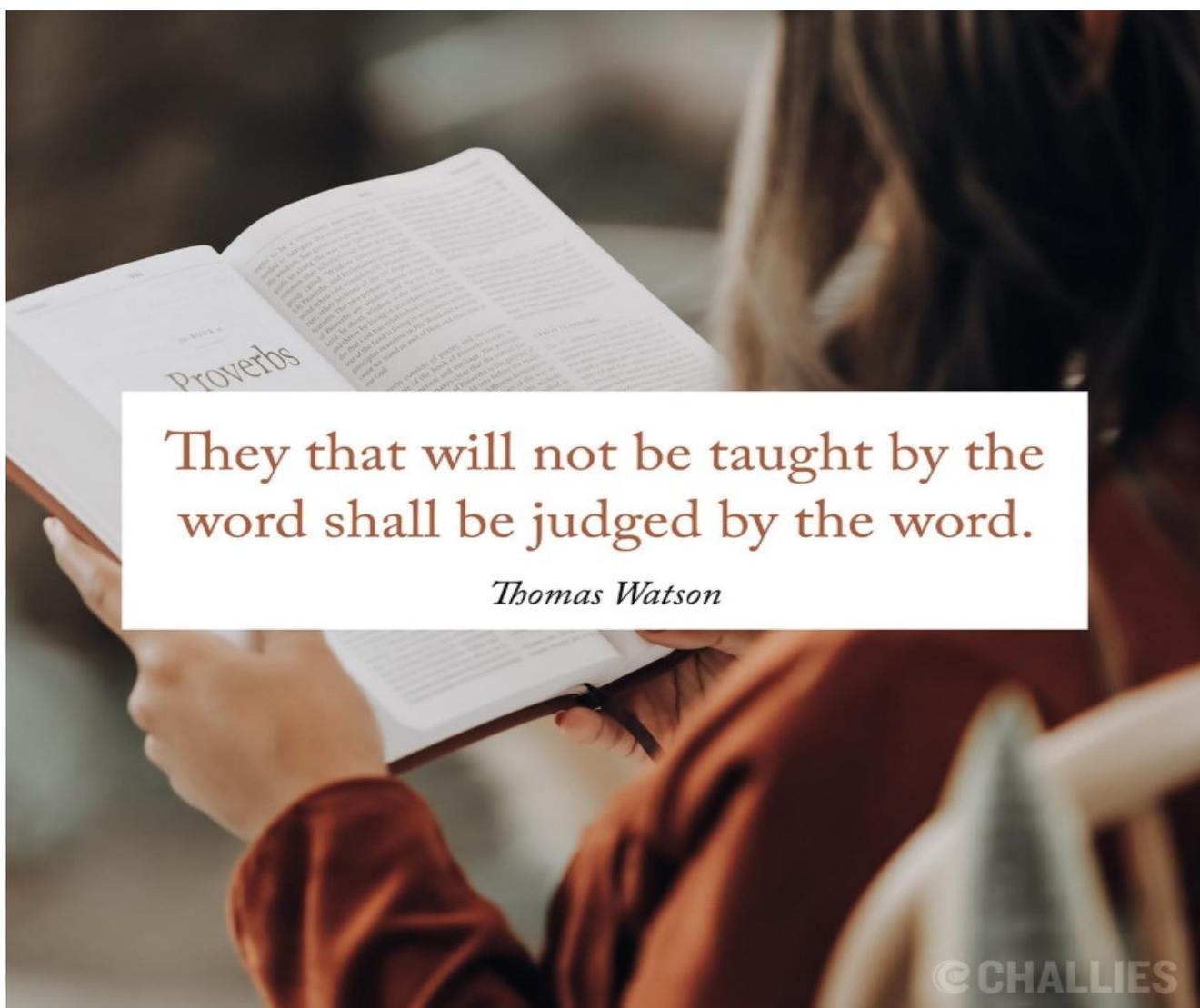
7—CHRIST’S LOVE FOR HIS OWN IS EVERY GROWING

Christ’s love is not a declining love, but a love that continually grows in what it effects. Nor is it only a love that consists only in good affection and wishes. It breaks out and expresses itself in notable ways. This is evidenced by His dying for His own. He loved them to the end, even to the death He suffered for them. And in so doing, He loved them perfectly (as the Greek word translated “end” can also mean). Thus, He proved that His love was a growing love in being manifested with such abundance at last.

8—CHRIST’S LOVE FOR HIS OWN PROVIDES ALL THEY NEED

When Christ’s followers are in any danger unchangeable love will be active to cover their infirmities during trials. He will provide invigorating medicines for them and testify His special care for them. His love is noted as a cause why He will reveal His love now (when He is to depart and they will be scattered, shaken with trials and left desolate). He will let out much of His heart and give them such sweet instructions in explaining the sign of washing their feet. Indeed, His love suffers much to ensure what is necessary for His disciples. If there were no more, His love is enough to move Him to see them well cared for.

www.reformationscotland.org



Children's Corner



Dear Children

Would you like some puzzles this month? Some of them are a bit difficult but I have given you the chapters where you will find the answers. I hope you enjoy exploring the Scriptures and learning more about the stories of old people and young people recorded there.

Bible Children

1. Who was the first baby to be born into the world? Genesis chapter 4
2. Who was born 6 months before Jesus? Luke chapter 1
3. Who was Jacob's twin brother? Genesis chapter 25
4. Who was brought up in Pharaoh's palace? Exodus chapter 2
5. Who heard God calling his name and thought it was the priest? 1 Samuel chapter 3
6. Who was the little girl Jesus raised from the dead? Mark chapter 5
7. Who was Joseph's younger brother? Genesis chapter 46
8. What did a boy give to Jesus to feed 5000 people? John chapter 6
9. What was the name of Moses' brother? Exodus chapter 4
10. What was the name of Moses' sister? Exodus chapter 15

Dreams and Visions

1. What did Jacob see in a dream? Genesis chapter 28
2. What two dreams did Joseph see? Genesis chapter 37
3. Pharaoh had a strange dream. What did he see? Genesis chapter 41
4. King Nebuchadnezzar had two dreams. What were they? Daniel chapters 2 and 4
5. What did King Belshazzar see? Daniel chapter 5
6. In his dream what did Peter see coming down from heaven? Acts chapter 10
7. Saul of Tarsus had a vision of Jesus as he was travelling on a road to a certain city. What city? Why was he going there? What did he see? What did he hear? Acts chapter 9
8. In a vision, Paul saw a certain man. Where was he from? What did he say to Paul? Acts chapter 16
9. Stephen saw Jesus as he was being stoned to death. Where did he see Jesus? What two prayers did Stephen pray? Acts chapter 7

My dear children keep reading the Scriptures and learning more about God, about His people and especially about His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. May God bless you and reveal Himself to you as you do so.

With my love and prayers,

Granny M