

Scripture Truth



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The Judgment-Seat of Christ
The forgiveness of sins:
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"For this reason the Father loves Me"

SCRIPTURE TRUTH

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Christ, the eternal Son

There are some who hold that Christ was only Son as come into this world, but you lose all that the Son is, if the relationship only belongs to Him when incarnate; and besides lose as well all the love of the Father in sending the Son. This is of immense import, because I have not the Father's love in sending the Son out of heaven, if He was not Son before being born into this world. Hebrews and Colossians are conclusive; in both it is the Son who created (Hebrews 1:2; Colossians 1:13-16). The words of our Lord also bear witness to His being Son in the eternal state, "I came forth from the Father and am come into the world: again, I leave the world and go to the Father" (John 16:28, KJV). The denial of the eternal Sonship would also deny the eternal Father for you have no Father if you have no Son. God is love, it is His eternal nature, and love cannot be without an object, hence the Son addressing the Father in John 17:24, says, "Thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world". That the Son came forth from the Father is the source of the deepest joy of the

saints, as it will be their witness to the world when glorified (John 17:23), "That the world may know that Thou hast sent Me." It is the knowledge of this that makes the notion of Sonship in Christ only when incarnate so abhorrent to those who have communion by the Spirit in the truth, for it is destructive of the holiest and sweetest relationship which it is our privilege to know, and into which Divine grace has brought us, and made known to us in its fulness by the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of Sonship. As born into this world, Christ is called "...the Son of God" (Psalm 2:7; Luke 1:35), because in becoming flesh He did not change the relationship which was His eternally. "Son of the Father" (2 John 3), and "Son of God" are essentially the same, only the first is relationship and the second is nature. It is this that makes our Lord Jesus Christ unique in His manhood, for though His grace has made us sharers in His own holy relationship to the Father and we are sons, He is ever "The Son" being God over all, blessed for ever.

From Scripture Truth 27 (1935), p.101; author not stated.

“For this reason the Father loves Me”

David Hughes

“God is love!” I suspect most readers will be aware of this verse. If you were to be asked to name a characteristic of God, love would surely rank pretty highly. Do you notice what this verse from 1 John says, though? *God is love*. Not that God is loving, or God loves something, although both of those statements would be true. But John says that God, in His essential being, *is* love. This is such an important part of John’s message that he mentions it twice (4:8,16; whereas “God is light” occurs only in 1:5).

Let’s explore that a little further. This means that even before God ever created anything, He was love. Before there was anything created to set His love upon, God was love. We can understand that this is true because we believe that God is a Trinity – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In fact I think it would be true to say that, unless we believe in the Trinity, it would be impossible to say that God is love whilst there was nothing created for God to love. Love requires an object. Even before creation, within the Trinity there was love. John reveals this to us in his Gospel, when he records the words of the Lord Jesus, “You loved Me before the foundation of the world” (John 17:24).

John has probably more than any other writer to say about the love that God the Father has for His Son, and the love that the Lord Jesus has for His Father. This article has been largely prompted by reflecting on John 10:17: “Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again” (NKJV). The ESV has it as, “For this reason the Father loves Me...” I was initially surprised to read this verse. Didn’t the Father always love the Son? Could the Father really love the Son any more than He already did?

Of course Scripture records that the Father loved the Son. Let’s take some time to marvel at how the Bible records the love between the Father and the Son. We’ve already mentioned John 17, which records that the God the Father loved God the Son since before the foundation of the world. John 3:35 records that as a sign that God the Father loves His Son, He gave all things into His hand. He loves the Son eternally, and accordingly, before anything was created, He gave all things into His hand. Similarly chapter 5 records that the Lord Jesus was privy to knowledge of all things His Father did precisely because He is loved – eternally loved (v.20).

For this reason the Father loves Me...

*Unless we believe in the Trinity,
it would be impossible to say that God is love*

At the Lord’s baptism, and on the mount of Transfiguration, God the Father speaks from heaven and declares that Jesus is His “Beloved Son” (see for example Matthew 3:17, 17:5), words that so moved Peter that, even many years later, he would write of them in 2 Peter 1:17. In picture-form, and at various points in the Gospel accounts, the love of God the Father for His Son is hinted at. Think of the picture of the vineyard owner in Mark 12 and Luke 20: “I will send my beloved son. Probably they will respect him” (NKJV). In addition Matthew clearly links Isaiah’s prophecy (42:1) with the Lord Jesus and, making God the Father the Speaker, declares “My beloved, in whom My soul is well pleased” (12:18).

It must be clear by now that there was never any question of God the Father not loving His Son. On reading through the Gospels, it’s not hard to see why this would be the case. You’d be forgiven for thinking that nothing could add to the love already described. I’d like to suggest to you, though, that it’s in the cross that the love within the Trinity is most spectacularly displayed.

Firstly, the love of God the Father for His Son. Think again about the words of John 10. Why does Jesus say that His Father would love Him? Because He would lay down His life. There was something in the sacrificial death of the Lord Jesus that caused His Father to love Him.

We need to be a bit careful with language when we speak about God and try to explore the depths of some of the statements of Scripture. Our logic and words can’t fully reflect the greatness of God. Despite this, surely a reflection on the Lord draws our hearts closer to Him, and helps us appreciate Him more, and worship Him with more wonder.

Two small examples might help us get a little closer to understanding how the Father could love the Lord Jesus more for laying down His life. Recently my son was born. In the first few days of his life two incidents with my daughter helped me in thinking about our verse. Firstly, I could see it was difficult for her. I could see she was suffering because her Mummy was in the hospital and she was stuck with Dad. I could see she was suffering because our attention and that of many visitors were naturally on our new baby. But I was impressed by how she was trying to get on happily with these new circumstances, even though they were clearly hard for her. In some sense I loved her even more. Prior to my son’s birth I wouldn’t have thought it possible to love her any

more, but seeing her suffering made me love and appreciate her in a way I had not observed before.

A few days later came bath-time for our new son. Because he was so small he had a bath in a small tub, about the size of a washing-up bowl. Down came our daughter with a handful of her bath-toys, which she promptly deposited in the small tub. There was no room for them, and he was obviously too small to play with them, but as she announced that these were for him to play with, I realized that she wanted to share with her new brother things that brought her pleasure, and I loved her more for it!

These examples are clearly trivial and not worthy to be compared with the Lord’s death but I wonder if we can understand John 10:17 a little better by thinking that the Father loved the Son as He watched the suffering He endured in obedience and as He saw the desire of the Lord Jesus to share His good things with many people throughout the ages. As God the Father looked down from heaven to the cross, His heart burned with love for His Son as He saw Him willing to endure such suffering “for the joy that was set before Him” (Hebrews 12:2). And as the Father looked down from heaven, His heart was filled with fresh appreciation and love for His Son who was dying to bring many sons to glory. Even as the Lord would cry from the cross, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken me?” we hear the words of John 10:17 ringing out, “My Father loves Me because I lay down my life.”

Let’s now think about the love of the Lord Jesus for His Father. The Bible has less to say about this, but we can look again to John’s Gospel and to the Lord’s words to the disciples in the upper room. At the end of chapter 14, John records the words of the Lord, “But that the world may know that I love the Father... Arise, let us go from here.” At this moment, immediately before the Lord would go to the cross, what is on His mind? He wants the world to know that He loves His Father. If there could ever have been any doubt, here was definitive proof of the Lord Jesus’ unfailing love, devotion, and obedience to His Father. As He became obedient to the point of death, we hear the voice of John 14:31 saying clearly, “I love the Father”. As He learnt obedience through the things that He suffered, His actions shout above it all, “I love the Father”. There are echoes here of the Hebrew servant of Exodus 21, “I love my master, my wife, and my children: I will not go out free” (v.5). Surely our hearts are moved as we think about the love of the Lord Jesus for His Father. The Lord

That the world may know that I love the Father...

Jesus loved His Father, and would die so that others could also see the greatness of the Father and come to know Him, and so that He would have people for all eternity to praise Him and admire Him. On the cross then, we see fresh love burning in the hearts of the Father and the Son.

What then is the point of these reflections? Why does it matter that the Father loves the Son, or that the Son loves the Father? Let's finish the article with a few practical implications that make this truth worth considering.

1. It gives added meaning to the love the Lord has for us. John 15:9 reads, “As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you.” If we were to ever question whether the Lord really loves us, this verse would stop us in our tracks. At least in some kind of way, the way in which the Lord loves us is similar to the way in which the Father loved the Lord Jesus! Could that love ever be called into question? Never! I hope this article has convinced us that it couldn't. Neither can the love of the Lord Jesus for all His people be called into question.
2. It makes the price paid for our salvation far more precious, and highlights how much the Father loved us. “God so loved the world” – if salvation had been possible by any other means, wouldn't God have chosen it? This was not just the giving of someone God the Father liked quite a lot. It was the giving of His beloved Son for our sakes.
3. It highlights the seriousness of sin. Our sin was so abhorrent to God that only the death of His beloved Son could satisfy the required judgment. If nothing else, this should make us think seriously about areas of unjudged sin in our lives.
4. It assures us of future blessing. Colossians states, “He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love (v.13).” The believer's place is as part of God's kingdom. The descriptive feature of this kingdom according to Paul is that it is the kingdom of the Son of His love. It's the kingdom that belongs to the Son whom God the Father loves. A kingdom given by God the Father to the Son He loves. That must be good!

You'll find that often in John's Gospel, the Lord links the love between the Father and the Son with the love between God and man, but also with the love that we should have for the Lord Jesus. As we meditate on the love between the Father and the Son, my prayer is that our love for the Lord Jesus may increase.

Preach Him

Peter Ollerhead

“When it pleased God... to reveal His Son in me...” (Galatians 1:15-16, KJV)

The title of this short paper is taken from an article in *Scripture Truth* for 1935, which is based upon the above verse.¹ The writer was Inglis Fleming¹ (1859-1955), and his exercise was the danger of preaching an “*It*” gospel, instead of preaching *Him*. I quote.

“Is there not a danger of our preaching some “*It*” instead of preaching *Him*? The “*It*” may be precious indeed and valuable beyond words to express, but while through it the conscience may be reached and purged, the heart may be left unattracted by and unattached to Him who is the true centre of the gospel story.”

Fleming goes on to say that it is important to preach repentance, forgiveness of sins, justification, peace and all the other glorious truths, but all these should be subservient to Christ Himself, for *He* is the gospel.

I have been exercised for many years about the substance and essence of the gospel, so the article in question chimed with me when I came across it one morning at the STP premises in Crewe. I have long been persuaded that the Person of Christ as the incarnate Son of God, and His great triumph over death, is what the apostles preached as they went out into a hostile world. We should never separate the death of the Lord from our gospel message, but it seems to me that we often leave out the identity of the Sin-Bearer, and also His victory over death.

In an article in *The Christian Witness* for 1839² J.N.D. writes that the fundamental truth of the gospel is the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and the fundamental truth of the whole of Christianity is the Person of Christ.² If this is so: are these truths being preached when we reach out with the gospel? When Paul was converted, the message he preached was “Christ... that He is the Son of God” (Acts 9: 20). Peter’s first sermon in Acts 2 is full of references to the resurrection, and concludes with the triumphant declaration that God has made Jesus both Lord and Christ (v.36). Paul, in his Letter to the Romans, states,

¹ Inglis Fleming, “PREACH HIM. Gal. 1.16. A word to fellow-workers”, *Scripture Truth*, 27 (1935), pp.173-4. Fleming’s missionary grandson Peter was one of the five killed by “Auca” warriors in 1956.

² J.N. Darby, “The Fundamental Truth of the Gospel”, *The Christian Witness*, vol. 6 (Plymouth, 1839), p. 35.

“That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved” (10:9, KJV).

Darby makes it clearer still, for he translates the above as “...confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord”. It could be argued that anyone can articulate the words “Jesus is Lord”, but we are all aware that when we believe that Jesus of Nazareth is the risen, triumphant Son of God, a work of the Spirit of God has taken place in our souls. Paul, writing to the Corinthian church, confirms this:

“Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed: and that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost” (1 Corinthians 12:3).

When the disciples were asked by the Lord who they thought He was, Peter replied that He was the Christ, the Son of the living God. He was immediately told by the Lord that flesh and blood had not revealed that truth to him but His Father in heaven (Matthew 16:15-17).

In my experience we are in danger of preaching a two-stage gospel, where stage one covers us accepting Jesus as our Saviour by trusting in His blood, then sometime later He becomes our Lord. I am aware that the personal Lordship of Christ over our lives can be a journey, where we are prompted by the Spirit, through the ministry of the word, to yield more of our time and resources to the Lord Jesus Christ. This is not what I am concerned with here, but rather the greatness and glory of Jesus and the supremacy of His person as the Son. He is Lord, whether I make Him so or not. In other words, to believe that Jesus is the Son of God is a conversion experience, or it ought to be. God in His grace deals kindly with us, as many who came to simple faith while children know. We



Is there not a danger of our preaching some “It” instead of preaching Him?



Christ Himself is the gospel



In my experience we are in danger of preaching a two-stage gospel





*I am not asking
that we cease to
preach the cross
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not leave out
the Person of
Christ*



*So much
preaching is
“man-centred”.
Repentance
becomes little
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remorse*



gladly admit that there were those, in our past, who taught us and led us on in truth, with the result that sooner or later we came to believe in the unique greatness of the Lord Jesus.

To further reinforce my exercise, I quote the reason why John wrote his Gospel:

“But these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God: and that believing ye might have life through his name” (20:31).

Those words confirm to us that the apostle John wanted to pass on the supreme importance of the identity of Jesus of Nazareth as the Son of God, and to proclaim that He is the Christ, the long promised Messiah. It was an element in the baptismal confession of the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:37), and it is part of our confession.

While we are considering Philip’s evangelism, can I draw your attention to verse 5 of chapter 8, where the Scripture says that Philip preached “Christ”, and again to verse 35, where he preached “Jesus”? Once more it is the Person being set forth as the object of our faith. When the angels met the shepherds they proclaimed that a Saviour had been born who is “Christ the Lord”. (Luke 2:11). The apostles continued to spread this message, as we can read in Acts 5:42,

“And every day, in the temple and in the houses, they ceased not teaching and announcing the glad tidings that Jesus [was] the Christ” (Darby Trans.).

Peter, preaching to Cornelius, took his listeners through the life, death, and resurrection of the Lord before stating ‘that everyone that believes on him will receive through his name remission of sins’ (Acts 10:43). As Fleming wrote, “His person was the object of faith”.

At Antioch in Pisidia Paul preached the resurrection and the Sonship of Christ (Acts 13:32-37), *before* announcing that "...through this man remission of sins is preached to you ...in him everyone that believes is justified" (vv. 38-9). Similarly at Philippi: when the jailer asked how he could be saved, Paul's reply was, "Believe on the Lord Jesus..." (Acts 16:31; see also 11:17; 22:19; Romans 4:5, 24). Writing to the Roman church the apostle states that he was

"...separated to God's glad tidings...concerning his Son (come of David's seed according to flesh, marked out Son of God in power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by resurrection of the dead) Jesus Christ our Lord" (1:1-4).

Notice that here Paul is emphasising that Jesus is the Son, emphasising His resurrection, and emphasising that He is Lord.

Amongst the last letters included in the New Testament are those written by John, where one of his main concerns is the supremacy of the Lord. I quote 1 John 4:2 & 3,

"Hereby ye know the Spirit of God: every spirit which confesses Jesus Christ come in flesh is of God; and every spirit which does not confess Jesus Christ come in flesh is not of God:"

There are other verses from John's letters that would support this quotation, but I finish this short article with 1 John 5:13,

"These things have I written to you that ye may know that ye have eternal life who believe on the name of the Son of God."

John first gained this truth from the Lord Himself, as we can read in his Gospel, chapter 17, verse 3.

In all of the foregoing, I am not asking that we cease to preach the cross, for Paul and the other apostles preached Christ and Him crucified (cp. 1 Corinthians 2:2). What I am pressing for, is that we do not leave out the Person of Christ. So much preaching is solely "man-centred", as we ask people to accept that they are sinners and that the blood of Jesus can save them. Repentance then becomes little more than remorse. No mention is made of believing in *Him*, which must include His resurrection and the glory of His person as the Son of God. Three biblical examples of repentance – Isaiah 6:5, Job 42:4-6, and Luke 5:7-9 – all include glimpses of the greatness and glory of the Lord Jesus. We know from John 12:40-41 that the One whom Isaiah saw was the Lord Jesus; and from Hebrews 1:2 we may well understand the Creator whom Job finally saw as the pre-incarnate Son. May we all continue to experience the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ! The wonder of grace is that we have this knowledge in earthen vessels.

A place for the Lord

F.B.Hole

Many a youth vows that, when fairly launched in life, he will do this or that in order to secure wealth or fame, and so establish for himself a secure place in the world. As a youth David also made a vow, but his was to “find out a place for the LORD” (Psalm 132:5, KJV), and not a place for himself.

In this he was in strongest contrast to his predecessor, Saul. Samuel gave Saul “the chiefest place” because the LORD had told him to anoint Saul king. And Saul clung to that “chiefest place” long after the LORD had rejected him from it (1 Samuel 9:16,22; 15:23); he fought with bitterness to retain it. Saul’s motto was, “A place for myself.” David’s was, “A place for the LORD.”

“Lo, we heard of it at Ephrath” (Psalm 132:6). Ephrath was the ancient name of Bethlehem (Genesis 35:19), and David’s birthplace. But what was it that they heard about? Clearly, the ark which is mentioned in verse 8; for verse 6 adds, “we found it in the fields of the wood”, referring to Kirjath-Jearim,¹ whence ultimately he did bring up the ark to Jerusalem (1 Chronicles 13:6). This psalm therefore reveals to us that David, knowing that the ark (which was God’s throne in Israel) had never been properly reinstated following its return from the land of the Philistines, vowed in his earliest days that he would give himself no rest until he found that place for the LORD where the ark of His presence might rest.

Now that is the kind of “man after God’s own heart” (1 Samuel 13:14), not the man that is merely seeking a good place for himself! Shall we test our own hearts and live in the light of this as another year opens before us? We shall find it spiritually healthy to do so. The earth was never more full of place-hunters than it is today. Nations, classes, individuals are all in furious competition. Moreover, there are not a few who have considerable grounds for their [literal] place-seeking, for they belong to the unhappy category of “displaced persons,” and we may all feel the sincerest sympathy for them.²

The fact is that in the present epoch everything is out of place as far as the earth is concerned. Christ is not yet in the place which is rightly His, reigning as King of Israel, and over the whole earth as Son of Man. The church is not in the place of her destiny – the heavenly places – but still in the place of her pilgrimage.

¹ Kirjath-Jearim means “city of forests”: see *The New Bible Dictionary* (London, IVP, 1962). [Ed.]

² True in 2017, just as it was after the Second World War! [Ed.]

Israel is not in the land where her place is.³ The gentile nations are not in the “places” which God has assigned them as subsidiary to Israel. Nothing will be in its place until the Lord gets His place. We may well cry, “Come, Lord Jesus!”

But we do well to remember that while we wait for Him there is a way in which we may give Him His place. For has He not said, “Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them”? (Matthew 18:20) When He comes again there will occur our “gathering together unto Him” (2 Thessalonians 2:1); but while we wait we may gather together in His Name to the exclusion of all other names; owning His authority, and recognizing His presence in the midst. In doing this, we shall, in a spiritual way, be happily finding “a place for the Lord.” Having so done we must carefully see that He has His rightful place in all our thoughts, our heart’s affections, our service, our lives.

The men of the world will look upon us as fools. They will tell us that if we do not bend all our energies to establishing our place in the world no one is going to do it for us, and we shall lose our footing. We quite understand their thinking and speaking thus. How foolish the disciples must have looked as the Lord drew to the end of His earthly path. They had given up all – fishing boats, the table for the receipt of custom, and other things – to follow Him. They had lost their footing in Palestine, and now, what was before them? Their Messiah was going to die! Amongst His closing words, however, were these: “Let not your heart be troubled ... I go to prepare a place for you” (John 14: 1, 2). The place He has prepared for us is sure and excellent beyond words.

Be it ours to catch a little more fully the spirit of David!

From *Scripture Truth* 36 (January, 1947), p.1; slightly abridged and edited for style.

³ Does this sentence reflect the immense pressure of Jewish illegal immigration into Palestine at that time? However it does not seem to anticipate the declaration of the State of Israel in May 1948. [Ed.]



Saul's motto was, "A place for myself." David's was, "A place for the LORD."



Nothing will be in its place until the Lord gets His place



The importance of Ephesus in the New Testament

Part 3: Timothy at Ephesus

David Anderson

Introduction

In my previous two articles about Ephesus,¹ I looked at Paul's gospel activity in the city and his teaching ministry in the assembly there; and then at the letter he wrote to them in later years from prison in Rome. The opening words of the Letter to the Ephesians, "Paul...to the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 1:1, ESV) indicate their faithful continuance in what he had taught them about the Christian faith and its practice.

However he had previously prophesied to the Ephesian elders that false shepherds would arise from amongst them (Acts 20:28-31). Sometime later, after his release from the house-arrest in Rome mentioned in Acts 28:30-31, he must have travelled near to Ephesus and been made aware of the advent of such men in the assembly. He therefore instructed his trustworthy fellow-helper, Timothy, to stay in the city, and he gave him the difficult task of rescuing the saints from these disciple-makers. "As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine..." (1Timothy 1:3).

This was no knee-jerk reaction by the apostle, nor did he select the wrong person. In fact, Timothy was called by the Lord for this very work. "This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare" (1:18; see also 2 Timothy 1:6).

By looking at Paul's two letters to Timothy we discover what was happening in the Ephesian assembly during that period of its history; and how Timothy had to act in this very challenging situation.

In this article I analyse these two main themes of both letters.

¹ "Part 1: Gospel work, Christian doctrine, discipleship", *Scripture Truth*, October 2012, pp.8-13. "Part 2: Letters to Ephesus from Paul and from the Lord", *Scripture Truth*, April 2013, pp.47-52.

“Some” and “all”: the state of the Ephesian assembly

In the first of these letters Paul focused on “some”² in the assembly, who were teaching things contrary to the faith and the gospel:

- Some were spreading false teaching based on spurious interpretations of Old Testament Scriptures, especially of the Law of Moses (1 Timothy 1:3-7). They had deliberately swerved, or deviated, from the practical expression of the faith and wandered into vain ideas.
- Some others were teaching that practical conformance to the faith was not important. They had blatantly rejected the need to maintain “faith and a good conscience”, and so had made shipwreck of their faith. Two of them, Hymenaeus and Alexander, are named by Paul as being the most vocal – blasphemers in fact (1:19-20).
- Some were affected by the above disconnect between confession of Christ and conduct appropriate to the Christian, and had abandoned their dedication to Christ in the sense that they cast off its accompanying social responsibilities. They had in effect denied, despised, and contradicted the faith, and turned away to Satan (5:8, 11-16).
- And some were ensnared by the craving for money. Pursuit of money had caused them to stray from the faith, with all the sad consequences of such actions (6:9-10).
- Finally, some had embraced the philosophy, or “false knowledge”, of the Gnostics, and this made them “swerve from” the faith (6:20-21).³ (KJV translates “false knowledge” as “science falsely so called”. This is somewhat prophetic of much that present-day hypothetical science propagates, with the same devastating effects.)

² See 1:3 & 6, 19; 4:1; 5:15; 6:10, 21 (KJV).

³ See similarly Colossians 2:8 & 20-23.



*Some
rejected the
need
to maintain
“faith and a
good
conscience”*



*Some were
ensnared by
the craving
for money*



But, to Timothy, Paul's statement in 4:1 would be the most disturbing of all:

“Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart [apostatise, Darby Trans.] from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons.”

This indicated that there would be an ever-present opposition in the assembly to the work of the Lord that Timothy and the “faithful men” whom he instructed (see 2 Timothy 2:2) were enjoined to do.

By the time Paul wrote his second letter to Timothy, the situation in Ephesus and the other assemblies in the greater region of Asia⁴ had deteriorated further. The “some” had become “all”. What had been a trickle of defection from the Pauline teaching of Christianity had become an unstoppable landslide:

“You are aware that all who are in Asia turned away from me, among whom are Phygelus and Hermogenes” (1:15).

Furthermore Hymenaeus and others had again (see 1 Timothy 1:20) been active. Their false doctrine had spread like gangrene. They had become heretics:

“Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have swerved from the truth [erred, KJV], saying that the resurrection has already happened. They are upsetting the faith of some” (2:17-18).

Another opponent to the gospel was Alexander the coppersmith, who did Paul great harm. Paul told Timothy to beware of him because he fiercely opposed their teaching (4:14-15).

What was Timothy to do?

Timothy's first and foremost task was to remonstrate with those in the Ephesian assembly who were beginning to teach these dangerous things,⁵ things which were contrary to sound (that is, to spiritually healthy or wholesome) doctrine and to the gospel (1 Timothy 1:3, 18; 2 Timothy 2:14). Some others were to be confronted (1 Timothy 5:20). Timothy had to engage in spiritual warfare and “fight the good fight of the faith” (6:12 cp., 1:18 & 2 Timothy 4:7) by countering false teaching with spiritually-healthy doctrine in a firm, but not quarrelsome, manner (1 Timothy 1:19 & 6:14 with 2 Timothy 2:24-26). He had to teach and exhort these things because such good teaching came directly from, and originated with, the Lord Jesus Himself, and harmonised with true godliness (1 Timothy 6:3, 6-7).

⁴ As stated in Part 1, Ephesus was the centre from which Paul worked, from which “all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks” (Acts 19:10).

⁵ See John Barnes, “Departure from the Faith. A study in 1 Timothy”, *Scripture Truth*, 46 (May, 1978), pp. 139-144.

Moreover he had to persist with Paul's commandment in a manner which was both spotless and irreproachable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ (6:14). By so doing, he would "be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being trained in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine that [he had] followed" (4:6). He had to be both discerning and impartial (5:21). But he had to avoid, indeed purge himself from, those who were void of the truth, who taught error and practised impiety (5:22 & 2 Timothy 2:16, 19-21; 3:5).

Sound doctrine and godliness

The maintenance of healthy doctrine is extremely important, because it leads to godliness! It produces those three essential elements of godliness that together defined the aim that Paul prescribed for Timothy's ministry (1 Timothy 1:5), namely,

- A pure heart. Our hearts are the seats of our wills (motives), and must be clean and clear of any sinful contamination; and true to God's will.
- A good conscience. We must have that well-being of conscience whereby we know within ourselves that there is nothing in our lives that He would take exception to (cp. 1 Peter 3:9).
- A sincere faith. Our faith must be genuine and unfeigned. Nothing about it should be disguised; everything should be without any hypocrisy or pretence.

Godliness is that attitude towards God which always seeks to do what is well-pleasing to Him. It is the sense of an awareness of Him in our lives; and it is the whole manner of life which is appropriate to our profession of Christ. Christ Himself is the secret to success in godliness according to 1 Timothy 3:16 – we find it perfectly expressed in His life.

Paul stated that he wanted Timothy to know and teach godliness, so that all in the assembly at Ephesus would be equipped to practise it:



*Timothy's
first and
foremost
task was to
remonstrate
in a firm,
but not
quarrelsome,
manner*



*He had to
avoid those
who taught
error and
practised
impiety*



“I am writing these things to you so that...you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God” (3:14-15).

The psalmist stated, “Holiness befits your house, O LORD, forevermore” (Psalm 93:5). God requires believers to be holy in lifestyle as well as proper in conduct in assembly meetings (cp.1 Timothy 2:1-6, 8-12, 15; 3:1-13).

Timothy Himself

Timothy himself had to be right in heart and conduct if he was to be capable of instructing others. The two letters were personal, each addressed “To Timothy” (1:2 in each). Many times in these letters Paul’s remarks were directly, and sometimes emphatically, addressed to Timothy himself.⁶

He told Timothy to treasure, guard, and hold onto the deposit of truth entrusted to him (1 Timothy 6:20 & 2 Timothy 1:14). He must do this by the indwelling Holy Spirit. To be effective, he had to know and understand this sound teaching, and follow it (2 Timothy 1:13). To this end he must possess it in the form of a pattern, or clear outline, in his mind. He must continue in everything he had learned from the Scriptures from his mother and grandmother, as well as in what he had subsequently been taught regarding the faith by Paul (2 Timothy 3:10, 13-15).

Initially Timothy was to remind, teach, and command the Ephesians by public reading of the Scriptures and by exhortation (1 Timothy 4:6, 11, 13). But later, once the majority in Ephesus had refused to repent and had abandoned Pauline doctrine, Timothy was instructed that he must hold fast, and strive to continue as ever, “rightly handling the word of truth” (2 Timothy 1:13; 2:15; 3:14). He was charged by Paul to “preach the word” throughout all of the ensuing difficulties at Ephesus (4:2-4), and soberly to fill out the full potential of his ministry (4:5).

But, just as Paul’s conduct had complemented his teaching (3:10); so must Timothy’s! He also was required to practise what he preached:

“...Set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. ...Practise these things, devote yourself to them. ...Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers” (1 Timothy 4:12, 15-16).

⁶ By name in 1 Timothy 1:18 & 6:20. Then by use of the personal pronouns: (a) Yourself: 1 Timothy 4:7, 16; 5:22; 2 Timothy 2:3, 15. (b) You (singular): for example, 1 Timothy 1:3, 18; 3:14-15; 4:6,12, 14, 15, 16; 5:1, 21; 6:11*-13, 20; 2 Timothy 1:3-5, 13-15, 18*; 2:1*, 2, 3, 7, 23; 3:10*, 14*, 15; 4:2, 5*, 11*, 13, 15*, 21). *denotes emphatic pronouns (see *The English-Greek Testament*, by Thomas Newberry).

This practice would directly contrast with that of the false teacher, and so it would exhibit genuine Christian teaching:

“It is through this craving [for money] that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs. But as for you, O man of God, flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness” (1 Timothy 6:10-11).

“Evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it” (2 Timothy 3:13-14).

“For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but, having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfil your ministry” (4:3-5).

Notice the contrastive “As for you” in all three quotations above.

How to be men and women of God

We undoubtedly live in the difficult, perilous, and grievous “last days” described in 2 Timothy 3:1-7. The problems that arose in the first (“Ephesus”) period⁷ of church history are fully-developed, and ever-present issues in today’s world. Therefore we must face the challenges of remaining true to the Lord that these two letters to Timothy present to us (2 Timothy 2:11-13).

In contrast to the many mere professors, whom Paul describes as “departing from”, or “denying”, or “swerving from” the faith, and as “reprobate” (1 Timothy 4:1, 5:8, 6:10, 21; 2 Timothy 3:8), we are called upon to keep the faith (1 Timothy 1:19; 3:9; 2 Timothy 4:7). Our resources for the difficult task of living “godly in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 3:12) and fighting “the good fight of the faith” (1 Timothy 6:12) are the same as they were for Timothy, and are set out in the second Letter:

- Reliance upon the Person central to the gospel (2 Timothy 2:8). “Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel.”
- The deposit of truth of the Christian faith that has been taught to us by faithful men (2:2).
- The grace that is in Christ Jesus (2:1).
- The strength that this grace and His presence provides (4:17-18, with 22).
- The pursuit of godly living (2:22).
- The fellowship of like-minded saints (2:22, 4:9, 11, 19-22).
- The hope of the Lord’s coming again (4:8, 18).

⁷ See Revelation 2:1-7; also the second article in footnote 1, p.51

The Judgment-Seat of Christ

George Stevens

In a previous article¹ we considered an unjust and perverted judgment-seat – that of Pilate. Here we will consider, by contrast, the Judgment-Seat of Christ, under four headings:

1. What is meant by the Judgment-Seat of Christ?
2. The Judgment-Seat relative to things we've done.
3. The Judgment-Seat relative to our judgment of others.
4. The Judgment-Seat relative to the local assembly.

1. What is meant by “the Judgment-Seat of Christ”?

The Greek word *bēma* is translated as “judgment-seat” in English. According to W. E. Vine in his *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* it literally means “foot-room”, hence a step, and from this it was used to denote a raised place or platform. As we have seen, the word was later applied to the tribunal of a Roman magistrate or ruler (Matthew 27:19). Others believe that the noun also referred to the raised platform where athletes of old received rewards for their victories. In like manner the marathon of each Christian's life will be judged at the Judgment-Seat of Christ.

The Judge at the Bēma

The Judge, or Examiner, at the Judgment-Seat will be Christ. He will bring to light the true nature of our walk and works when we stand before Him. In Romans 14:10 the apostle called this examining time the “Judgment-Seat of God”,² while in 2 Corinthians 5:10 he called it the “Judgment-Seat of Christ”. In John 5:22-23 we find that the Father has committed all judgment to the Son because all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. Furthermore Christ has been given the authority to execute judgment because He is the Son of Man. Nobody will be able to use their human weaknesses as an excuse when judged by Christ, because He Himself has experienced manhood. So the Lord Jesus Christ, who is both God and Man, will be the examiner and rewarder of Christians.

Where and when?

This event will occur in the heavens between the rapture of the church (1 Thessalonians 4:16-18) and the marriage of the Lamb (Revelation 19:7). This

¹ “The Judgment-Seat of Pilate”, *Scripture Truth*, January 2017, pp. 123-128.

² Where the KJV has “Christ” in Romans 14:10, the critical text has “God”. See Darby Trans., etc.

must be so, because the bride of Christ will be seen in her perfection at the end of that time. The fine linen in which she will be dressed represents “the righteousnesses” [“good works”] of the saints (v.8, Darby Trans.). There will be no flaw present here! So the flaws must already have been dealt with at the Judgment-Seat of Christ.

It is important to see that Christians are able to do good works once they have been saved. In fact in Ephesians 2:10 we read, “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (KJV). A good work may be said to be “a selfless work done in the will of God to benefit others, with God getting the glory”.

2. The Judgment-Seat relative to the things we have done

Walk by Faith

In 2 Corinthians 5:1-10 the apostle Paul has been considering how believers yearn for the new bodies that await them in heaven. He expresses the thought that it is far better to be absent from our present bodies and to be present with the Lord. He also states that “the earnest of the Spirit” has been given to believers: the Holy Spirit’s indwelling of us is the divine guarantee of what’s to come. In the meanwhile, Paul tells the Christians to walk by faith; and then he adds (vv.9,10),

“Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.”

Here we find the “Judgment-Seat of Christ” specifically mentioned relative to everything we have done as Christians here on earth. For the things we have done that were acceptable to the Lord there will be a reward (even if it were something as small as a cup of water given to another in the name of Jesus – Mark 9:41). However if aspects of that life of ours were not pleasing to the Lord (that is, not done in harmony with His ways and will), then there could be no reward. Such things may have appeared to be fine to us or in the sight of others, but were not done in the way that truly glorified God.

The “Judgment-Seat”, of Christ is the place where our attitudes and actions in the Christian life are assessed

This judgment does not concern our sin. The punishment of this has been borne by Christ Himself

Attitudes and Actions

So the *Bēma*, or “Judgment-Seat”, of Christ is the place where the assessment of our attitudes and actions in the Christian life and in our service for God is realised. Christ among the lampstands in Revelation chapters 2-3 gives us an idea of what He considers in relation to our faith, conduct, and works.

We could compare the judgment of a “work for the Lord” to the judgment of a rose cultivated by a gardener for entry into a floral competition. The following aspects of the rose may be examined by the judges: form, colour, substance, stem and foliage, balance / proportion, and size. The Lord Jesus will have a perfect range of criteria by which to examine our Christian lives. Those of our actions that fulfil these criteria will result in a prize for the servant. In our simple minds, we may consider whether a work was done selflessly in love, faith, righteousness, and obedience.

Sin and the Judgment-Seat

This discerning judgment of the *Bēma* does not concern the question of our personal sin. The punishment of this has been borne by Christ Himself on the cross. Scripture teaches that Christians are under grace and shall not come into judgment for their sin (John 3:18; 5:24; Romans 8:1). The penalty of their sins (past, present, and future) was exhausted at the cross (Romans 8:3; Hebrews 10:12; 1 Peter 2:24). The Christian is accepted in the perfection of Christ (1 Corinthians 1:30; Ephesians 1:6; Colossians 2:10; Hebrews 10:14) and loved of God as Christ is loved (John 17:23).

We emphasise, the *Bēma* relates to the reception of rewards for good we have done as Christians and the loss of rewards for the things we have done that God classes as worthless.

But while the question of sin’s judgment does not arise at the Judgment-Seat, our sins in this life may have consequences at the Judgment-Seat because sin leads us away from:

But our sins may have consequences because sin leads us away from the will of God

- the will of God,
- the ways of God, and
- the work of God.

In other words, our service in this life will have been tainted, hindered, or reduced by our sin, and therefore, as the number of works for examination will be limited, so also our rewards. Because sin adversely affects our attitudes and actions in the Christian life while we are here, we might not have cultivated our own salvation as effectively as we should have (cp. Philippians 2:12).

As God is omniscient He knows what might have been. Therefore He knows the blessings that would have accompanied obedience, fellowship with Him, the work of faith, and the labour of love. These are the things that please Him. Therefore those of our works that are marked by such characteristics are acceptable to Him.

The apostle John stated, “And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming” (1 John 2:28). If our will, walk, work, witness, and warfare are tempered by the will of God then we abide in Him. We shall not be disgraced at His coming.

At the Judgment-Seat Christians will acknowledge the assessment of Christ as true. They will realize that the putting-away of any unacceptable works is the final preparation for the glory ahead. This, and the rewards gained for other labours, will be the source of boundless joy.

3. The Judgment-Seat relative to the judgment of others

In Romans 14:5-14 we find two kinds of Christian. First, the strong Christian who has liberty in Christ and, second, the weak Christian who limits himself in his attitude to eating and drinking or to the observance of certain days.

Things like these prevailed in the apostles’ days because many of the converted were Jews who would have found it difficult to overcome the traditions formed by their previous duty under the Law to observe rules relating to meats and the observance of days. Therefore Paul directs that, in matters where no doctrinal

*If our will, walk, work, witness, and warfare
are tempered by the will of God
we shall not be disgraced at His coming*

*Paul uses the Judgment-Seat as a lever
to get Christians to forbear with one another*

or moral question was concerned, each believer must be left free to act before the Lord without interference from another.

Obviously the Roman believers were judging one another in these minor matters. Paul firmly tells them not to do so and to remember that one day each of them would have to give an account of their own lives before God. He uses the thought of the Judgment-Seat as a lever to get these Christians to forbear with one another in these things.

4. The Judgment-Seat relative to the local assembly

In 1 Corinthians 3:1-17 we find the Corinthian believers lacking spiritual discernment and the conduct relating to it. They were behaving more like unregenerate people, being governed by the old nature, the flesh. They had not grown in the faith – they remained babes (infants). They were steered by worldly wisdom. Therefore these carnal Christians were unable to discern deeper spiritual truths. They had to be taught basic truths.

Furthermore, there were divisions which were giving the honour due to God to the men whose service they preferred. This was putting men (who were nothing without God) on a pedestal.

The field and the building

Paul went on to introduce the local assembly as God's field and God's building (vv.6, 9, 10), both being spheres of practical service. Similarly, in Ephesians 3:17 believers in Christ were encouraged to be "rooted" and also "grounded" in love. "Grounded" suggests the idea of "foundation", and emphasises that God designed and built them together as a spiritual structure, and then uses them as servants to continue the building themselves. The Lord Jesus associates "fruit" with the field, and "light" with the "house" (Matthew 5:15; 13:23).

Each servant stands or falls before his Lord (cp. Romans 14:4). He is "paid" according to his personal labours (cp. 1 Corinthians 3:8), but has the privilege of labouring with others in the united work God had given them to do (v.6).

In fact, it was through Paul's work that the Corinthians had become God's tillage (land under cultivation) and God's building in the first place. The structure that is the local assembly has as its foundation Jesus Christ (vv.9-12). He is also the foundation of the universal church which was laid by the apostles

and prophets (Ephesians 2:20). But here in 1 Corinthians we are dealing with a professing representation of that universal church in one particular place. Unlike the universal church, in the sight of God local assemblies are not perfect. They are spheres of Christian service.

By the grace of God, Paul had been instrumental in giving the Corinthians the teaching concerning Christ's Person and work. In this role he calls himself a "wise master-builder" (v.10). This shows that his work had been of the kind that passes the test of fire (v.13). He is an example of a good builder who receives a just reward (v.14). This also shows that the subsequent builders would include teachers, because the master-builder himself has laid out the doctrine relative to Jesus Christ which they are to build upon.

Of course, the people-gifts like pastors and evangelists were also given so that the local church could be built, established, and edified. Furthermore, there were those endowed with spiritual gifts, who would help. Elders were in important positions of authority, and were responsible to shepherd and oversee those in the local churches. So we have to conclude that many in a local assembly build on the foundational, apostolic truth.

In the first instance, it is the *way* in which the structure is built that is emphasised. It has to be with due care. It has to be done with the foundational teaching of Christ pervading all.

Good and bad builders

The value, or quality, of the workmanship of these servants is then described in verses 12-13, but in relation to the care being exercised. The gold, silver, and precious stones are valuable materials in building. Where this kind of material is being built on to the foundation, it means that the motives, means, and make-up (doctrinal content) of the work are all acceptable to God. Such will withstand the assessment of God's testing fire. Those who use these materials in their building will have their reward in the future. They are good Christian builders who receive a just reward!

Those who build with wood, hay, and stubble are Christians, but bad builders. Their work shall be burned away in the testing judgment to come. They receive no reward; but they themselves are saved (v.15). It is worth saying that a servant may have built with both sets of materials at different times; but only that pleasurable to God shall gain its reward.

In conclusion, let us live lives that are wholly acceptable to God, provoking to love and good works, and using the gifts and skills God has given us. In this way we will build up and protect the local assembly.

The forgiveness of sins

A dispensational history (2)

T. Balderston

God is a forgiving God. Forgiveness is expressly mentioned more often in the New Testament than in the Old, but not that much more often.¹ The forgiving heart of God is essential to both Testaments. In the previous article² we noted this in discussing the centrality of Exodus 34:6-7 to God's dealings with Israel in the OT. However we had to note that what these verses instituted was a "forgiving but not clearing" regime. "Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin; and that will be no means clear [the guilty]" (v.7, RV). The words "the guilty" are said not to be in the original. Instead, the "forgiven" and the "not cleared" are the same group of people.

We saw this especially in Moses's appeal to these very verses when the people resolved to return to Egypt upon hearing the report of the spies (Numbers 14:4,10,18-23). The people as a whole was forgiven: the LORD relented of His purpose to disinherit them and instead make of Moses a greater nation to bring into the land. But all the adults who had left Egypt would be denied access to the land, and even their children must trudge round the wilderness for thirty-eight years till these adults had passed off the scene. This was the "not clearing"; and the reason for it was to maintain His own glory (vv.21-22). "Not clearing yet forgiving" is the repeated lesson of the book of Judges, and why it says in Isaiah 40:2 that Jerusalem has received of the LORD's hand double for all her sins. But God forgave; this was the only way that Israel survived the dispensation of Law. Prayer for forgiveness was central to Solomon's prayer of dedication in 1 Kings 8.

Yet some individuals in Israel did know, by faith, of a "forgiving and clearing" regime:

"Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity..." (Psalm 32:1-2, quoted in Romans 4:7-8).

"Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases" (Psalm 103:2-3).

The second Scripture is surely echoed in the healing of the paralysed man (Matthew 9:2-8). The man was surely forgiven *and* "cleared". Paul explained why in Romans 3:24ff:

¹ The frequency in the New Testament is about 1.75 times that in the Old, after eliminating the duplications in the Synoptic Gospels – e.g. Matthew 9:2 / Mark 2:5 / Luke 5:20.

² "The forgiveness of sins: a dispensational history (1)" in *Scripture Truth*, January 2017, pp. 135-140.

“...being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God set forth to be a propitiation, through faith, by his blood, to show his righteousness, because of the passing over of the sins done aforetime, in the forbearance of God; for the showing, I say, of his righteousness at this present season: that he might himself be just, and the justifier of him that hath faith in Jesus.”

Before the cross, sins were “passed over” in the forbearance of God. Forgiveness was granted, yet the real atoning basis for the forgiveness was as yet unclear. There is little or no connection in the Old Testament between atonement and the forgiveness of sins, unless they were sins of ignorance. For sins of ignorance the priests made atonement through the offerings (e.g. Exodus 30:10; Leviticus 4:2ff and many other places). But in the true propitiation God Himself took the initiative: “...Christ Jesus, whom God set forth to be a propitiation”. Because there was no atonement adequate in the Old Testament for the forgiveness of deliberate, so-called “presumptuous”, sins (Numbers 15:30), there had to be a reconciliation of this forgiveness with the glory of God, whose Name had been dishonoured and word flouted. This happened through governmental judgments, generally on the nation as a whole, but sometimes on individuals (Psalm 99:8).

But at the cross the compassion of the LORD and His glory are one; the compassion no longer needs to be tempered by consideration of the glory, for in the cross God *is* glorified. “Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him”; “I have glorified thee on the earth, having accomplished the work which thou hast given me to do” (John 13:31; 17:4). The glory of God no longer demands a “by no means clearing” clause as in Exodus 34:7. Our Lord was followed *immediately* into paradise by a violent, but repentant, criminal! The Lord’s first words on the cross had been, “Father forgive them.” He subsumed the sin of those who nailed Him to the cross and who also, presumably, had recently abused Him, under the sin of ignorance (Luke 23:34). But His words applied not just to rough soldiers but even to Israel itself. For Peter also subsumed the sin of the covenant people under the “rubric” of a “sin of ignorance” (Acts 3:17).

In the Lord Jesus there came (as it may be translated), “grace in place of grace” (John 1:16). “The law came by Moses” – but only by the repeated grace of forgiveness could Israel survive under the Law. “But grace and truth subsists through Jesus Christ” (verse 7, Darby Trans.). The grace of forgiveness repeatedly extended to Israel under the Law paled into nothingness in the presence of this grace that at last revealed the truth, and in particular the true heart of God in the cross of His Son incarnate, Jesus Christ.

And this takes us back to the overcrowded little room in Capernaum with which the first article started. How could that paralysed man be simply forgiven?

John had “preached the baptism of repentance unto remission of sins” (Mark 1:4). I take this to mean that he preached a baptism which would signify the people’s repentant preparedness for the day when the LORD would finally forgive Israel her iniquities (Jeremiah 31:34; 33:8). But when the Lord Jesus came without stately form or majesty (Isaiah 53:2, NASB), even John himself was unsure, and sent his disciples to inquire, “Art thou he that cometh, or look we for another? (Matthew 11:3; Luke 7:19). Was it really through this One that God was going to remove Israel’s iniquities?

It was. When James and John were pressing their claims for honour and authority in the Kingdom, the Lord replied, “...The Son of man came not to be ministered to, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28). “Son of man” is indeed a title of rule and authority, whether in relation to Adam originally (Psalm 8:4ff) or to the Son of man who would receive “dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations, and languages should serve him” (Daniel 7:14). But when the Son of man first came it was “not to be served, but to serve”.

He came in such a way as to be “rejectable”; and He was indeed “despised and rejected by men”. In this “rejectable” guise He was despised by the scribes and the Pharisees for pronouncing the forgiveness of the paralysed man’s sins. They called Him a blasphemer (Mark 2:7). This was the first time they did this; the last time was when He pointedly told the high priest that He *was* that “Son of man” of whom Daniel spoke (14:62-64), giving the Sanhedrin the pretext it needed to press Pilate for crucifixion.

Sin was seen in its truest form in the murder of the One who came with forgiveness. The leaders of Israel were the instigators of His death; but, it being still “the times of the gentiles” (Luke 21:24), Pilate, the representative of the Caesar who in Biblical terms was the successor of Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 2), pronounced His consent The crucifixion was Israel’s darkest offence against the covenant; in it the rulers of Israel allied themselves with the kings of the earth against the LORD, and against His anointed (Psalm 2:2; Acts 4:25-28). And indeed we were all convicted at the cross. The Son of man had not come to reign, but “to give His life a ransom for many,” and He did this in the way that, whilst it freed God to offer complete forgiveness of sins, also convicted mankind as such of the ultimate sin.

“‘God is love’ I surely know
In the Saviour’s depth of woe:
In the Sinless, in God’s sight,
Sin is surely brought to light.”³

There was another way in which absolute forgiveness of sins was known about in ancient Israel, namely, as a hoped-for, future, national forgiveness connected

³ R. C. Chapman (1803 – 1902).

with Israel's future final deliverance and restoration to enjoy the full blessings of the covenant. In this context the LORD spoke these beautiful words in Jeremiah 50:20,

“In those days, and in that time, saith the LORD, the iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found: for I will pardon them whom I leave as a remnant.”

Similarly with Micah's famous words in 7:18-20. Here Micah plainly speaks of pardoning *and* clearing in the ultimate fulfilment of the Abrahamic covenant: “Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.” Consider too the “blotting out” of Isaiah 44:22.

But when Peter preached forgiveness on the day of Pentecost, his words were carefully chosen. He instructed those “pricked in heart” to “save yourselves from this crooked generation” (Acts 2:37, 40). “Crooked generation” recalls Deuteronomy 32:5. A “generation” is a people who share a certain moral character, and the Lord had said that people with the moral character of those who secured His crucifixion would not disappear from Israel “till all these things be accomplished” (Matthew 24:34).

And so it proved to be. The main theme of the Acts is threefold: firstly, the repeated rejection of the gospel on the part of what we might term “organised Israel”; secondly, the fact that in every place some Jews believed, albeit a small minority; and, thirdly, Paul's repeated turning to the gentiles (e.g. Acts 13:46; 18:6; 28:26-28). In this last reference he quoted the grim words of Isaiah 6:9-10.⁴ As a result of its unbelief, Israel as a nation, we might say, remained under the “forgiving and not clearing” regime. The “Father, forgive them...” of Luke 23:34 was not rescinded, but it could have no force as long as the nation did not repent, and exercise the faith of the paralysed man and his four friends. Israel looked on the One whom they had pierced, but malevolently (John 19:37). The nation was forgiven even the cross in the sense that God would remain faithful to His covenant despite their seemingly fatal crime against it (Romans 11:29). Nevertheless the “not clearing” aspect was expressed in the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 (Matthew 22:7; Luke 21:20-24).

But a time will come when Israel shall say, “Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord” (Matthew 23:37-39), when they shall believingly “look unto me whom they have pierced, and... mourn for Him” (Zechariah 12:10). The blood of bulls and goats can never take away sins (Hebrews 10:4), but Paul, citing words from Isaiah 27:9, wrote of a day when *God* would take away their sins (Romans 11:27). (The verb “take away” in this last verse is one often translated “forgive”.) And the “not clearing” clause is not annexed here! In that day God will blot out their sins for His own sake (Isaiah 43:25; cp. 1 John 2:12), and not remember

⁴ On this see “Making the people's heart fat. The story of a solemn dispensation – of grace!” *Scripture Truth*, January, 2016, pp.23-28.

them (Jeremiah 31:34; 33:8). He will indeed be the God plenteous in mercy (i.e., covenant-kindness), and truth (i.e., faithfulness to the covenant) towards His covenant people.

The symmetry of Scripture, and indeed of grace, demands that the very nation which broke the covenant should be the nation, albeit in remnant form (Jeremiah 50:20), that is fully forgiven. This is one aspect of the import of Romans 11:32. “For God hath shut up all unto disobedience, that he might have mercy upon all.”

All. The other aspect of Romans 11:32 is signified by the fact that persons whom the Lord most directly forgave from the cross were the gentile soldiers (Luke 23:34). They were presumably Roman auxiliaries, perhaps Syrians, maybe even some Samaritans. There is little mention of gentiles being forgiven in OT times (even if Job 7:21 strongly implies that there were such). And there is no recorded case of the Lord forgiving a gentile “in the days of his flesh”. But the first people to be expressly forgiven from the cross were almost certainly gentiles.

I don’t suppose that any prayer of the Lord was refused, and on this basis deduce that these soldiers did subsequently repent. As a consequence of the cross, “God’s ‘whosoever’ takes *us* in”. His eternal purpose formed before the foundation of the world could be realised, a purpose that includes even us (Ephesians 1:12-13). We are lifted into heavenly places to be holy and blameless (no “not clearing” here!) before God in love,

“to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he has taken us into favour in the Beloved, in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of offences, according to the riches of his grace” (Ephesians 1:6-7, Darby Trans.).

The division of the text between verses 6 & 7 tends to obscure the connection: we have redemption (i.e., a buying-out from the place of condemnation) through the blood of God’s Beloved. God could pay no higher price for our redemption than this; so He Himself is glorified in it.

The forgiveness without remainder is “according to the *riches* of his grace”! In 1 John 2:12 the apostle wrote, “I write unto you, children, because [your] sins are forgiven you for his name’s sake”. It is “for his Name’s sake”. The connecting of the Name of God with forgiveness in Exodus 34:6,7 was the reason why a “not clearing” clause had to be included: the glory of that Name demanded it, as was seen at the golden calf, after the spies’ report, and throughout Israel’s history. But now the Name of Jesus entails our absolute forgiveness: “The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). We are the totally undeserving recipients of this full forgiveness, because, through the cross, the grace and the glory are one; so that our being “taken into favour in the Beloved” can be “to the praise of the glory of His grace”! Hallelujah!

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Grace and Gratitude

I thirst, but not as once I did,
The vain delights of earth to share;
Thy wounds, Emmanuel, all forbid
That I should seek my pleasures there.

It was the sight of thy dear cross
First weaned my soul from earthly things;
And taught me to esteem as dross
The mirth of fools, and pomp of kings.

I want that grace that springs from thee,
That quickens all things whence it flows,
And makes a wretched thorn like me
Bloom as the myrtle or the rose.

Dear fountain of delight unknown!
No longer sink beneath the brim;
But overflow, and pour me down
A living and life-giving stream.

For sure, of all the plants that share
the notice of thy Father's eye,
None proves less grateful to his care,
Or yields him meaner fruit, than I.

Hymns, no. XXXVII, in *The Poems of William Cowper*, ed. J.S. Mems (Glasgow and London, 1873), p.557.