

THE MASTER'S TRUMPET

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From the Editors

THE OPENING SERMON addresses the reality of false professions and dulled consciences among gospel ministers, warning us that no one may live in careless presumption. The author, John Hall (1806–1894), was a close friend of the Alexanders of Princeton Seminary, publishing two volumes of the correspondence of James W. Alexander, supplying the chair of pastoral theology on the death of Archibald Alexander, and then acting as a director of the Seminary from 1868 to 1883. He was pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Trenton, New Jersey, for forty-three years.

Ashbel Green (1762–1848) provides a brief reflection on the loss of a son who was taken away in early manhood and without having become a communicant. Green records the effect of this death on his judgment regarding what is of worth in the education and nurture of our offspring. Green was one of the most prominent Presbyterians in the early history of the United States, serving as minister of Second Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia, 1787–1812, clerk of the General Assembly, 1790–1803, and chaplain of the U.S. Congress, 1792–1800, when he dined with President George Washington once a month while Congress was in session. Green was also a main force behind the launching of Princeton Seminary in 1812. During his tenure as president of the College of New Jersey, at Princeton, 1812–1822, he faced the difficulty of disciplining a disruptive element among the students, and saw this followed by a revival of religion at the institution, one fruit of which was the conversion of Charles Hodge.

One of the finest studies of what a minister ought to ponder, when considering a call to a new field of service, is the statement prepared by John Macdonald (1807–1847) when he was approached to go to India as a missionary. Here is a spiritually sensitive examination of the diverse elements which constitute a call, including an intuition of how providential events correspond to an inward sense of direction, as well as a conviction that the church's "unceasing duty is evangelical aggression," and the need for ministers to be ready to suffer for the sake of Christ. Readers who are not ministers will also find much that is applicable to a prayerful deliberation about life-shaping decisions.

Four years after Macdonald's departure for Calcutta, he wrote to his former congregation about the great need of the church: "My dear friends, here let me speak plainly: I have found that which I expected, that a mission to India is a mission of *trial*. But how? I speak not of her climate, although I have felt its unhealthy power; I speak not of her people, although I have seen them to be an unlovely race, by reason of sin: but I speak of India's unbelief—her obstinate unbelief, her universal unbelief; for what are the *real* exceptions but a fragment, as one to a myriad? I speak of what I see and know in this vast metropolis: and I say of this, the most favoured place in India, that unbelief is its characteristic. No change of plans, no selection of schemes, alters this fact, save to make it more apparent than before. The chapel and the school alike bear testimony to the fact, that India hates God and hates his Son Jesus Christ. O that the church in Britain understood the awful deadness of India! then would she rise up and say (and one day she *must* say it), 'There is none can meet this case, save the Holy Ghost!' Then would our committees, assemblies, and halls resound with unceasing cries of supplication, instead of endless speeches and vain resolutions. Then would that Holy Ghost come forth, with converting power, to raise the dead; and in his divine train, riches and men, unbegged by human voice; and then, by the energy of the Spirit, would the Son be glorified, and God, as eternal Love, become India's chosen Lord. Oh, church of the living God! when shall that time come, in which thy God shall be thy *whole* expectation? till then, victory, farewell! For my own part I find the consolations of 'faith' more than sufficient for all the trials of 'sight'; and having been disappointed in nought that I expected, I am enabled to rejoice the more abundantly in all that still I hope for. Brethren, pray for India, pray for India, pray for India! were I now dying, I would endeavour to say, 'Ask the Holy Ghost for India!' and now, ask this, even whilst thou readest these lines."

The Castaway Preacher

John Hall

“Lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.” 1 Corinthians 9:27.

THE MOST IMMEDIATE, and to this audience, the most impressive suggestion conveyed in this half sentence is, that a preacher of the Divine Law and Christian Gospel may be a castaway.

Nay, when we remember who was the “I myself” that wrote these lines, we perceive that even an Apostle, an inspired preacher, was not, on that account, beyond the peril. We have the still more positive confirmation of fact; for an older Apostle than Paul, one of the original twelve, called and endowed with power by Christ himself, fell by transgression from “this ministry and apostleship,” perished by suicide in the field he had purchased with the reward of iniquity, and went from Aceldama to what was, in a more fearful sense, “his own place,” a castaway.

Every chapter of church history, down to the records of our own Synods and Presbyteries, makes the admonitory revelation, that like the Wandering Jew of the old legend, the Iscariot has made his footprints in every place where the Church has stood. Preachers of the Gospel have become heretics, blasphemers, infidels: they have died on the gibbet, not as martyrs, but as felons; they have been visited with “scourgings, bonds, and imprisonment,” not for their faith, but for their crimes.

Besides what comes to the light in these ways, we know that the Scriptures must be in the course of fulfilment, which declare that there shall be false men in the ministry, speaking lies in their hypocrisy; many Antichrists, besides the emphatic Man of Sin; deceivers sitting in the temple of God; vessels in the great house to dishonour; men teaching for filthy lucre’s sake, and for that price things which they ought not, going in the way of Cain, running greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perishing in the gainsaying of Korah; false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the Apostles of Christ.

But ah! my brethren, why need I cite these painful predictions, and historical instances; why need I use the mysterious phrases of whose

definite meaning the Church is uncertain, when we have our own consciousness to appeal to, our individual experience to testify within us? How easy it is for a preacher to become a castaway! Let us not judge one another; but looking at our common nature, the unfinished work of the sanctifying Spirit, the abounding temptations, the peculiar self-delusions to which we are professionally subject, does it not often come into our minds that if we are not already reprobate, we could easily become such? that we deserve to be such? Has not our very preaching, the very act of preaching, sometimes suggested this?

We may admit the allowances implied in the proverb, that no minister is as good as his sermons or his prayers; we may properly insist that imperfect men must not, through a consciousness of their own imperfection, in example and experience, hold back in their preaching the most complete representation of the Divine standard of Christian character; yet, while this is due to the third party with which we are connected, the very stress of the obligation we are under to present that fulness of our message, is adapted to bring it home to our souls with the irresistible logic of the epistle, "Behold, thou makest thy boast of God, and knowest his will, and approvest the things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the law, and art confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, which hast the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law: thou, therefore, which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself?" Thou that sayest, out of the Scripture, that one should do and not do, that he should believe and reject, that he should feel and be; dost thou, O preacher, dishonour God and his word and thine own sermons, and thine own sacraments, by saying and doing not? Oh, that is a *preacher's* reprobation which is set forth in the language of the Lord and Master himself, "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name, and in thy name have cast out devils, and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then I will profess unto them I never knew you; depart from me, ye that work iniquity." It is not "whosoever shall teach," but "whosoever shall do and teach," that shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

Indeed it is remarkable how jealously our Lord trained the twelve for their ministry with a view to their peculiar spiritual perils. It looks as if his benevolent but faithful mind, whenever he turned towards these

simple men, was affected by the secret perception of their weaknesses, their ignorance, their exposures, their coming trials, all so unsuspected by themselves, and to be learned mostly by surprising experience, and as if almost everything he said had at least a secondary aim at *their* special instruction and admonition. It is a great study of itself to follow the course of the Lord Jesus with this view. No system of pastoral theology taught in the schools can compare with the lessons of that daily walk of Christ with his “children.” John 21:5.

What a superhuman insight did the Lord show in not allowing himself to be deceived by the present amiableness, the zeal, the docility, the solemn assurances and gratuitous vows of these men! How often he took occasion to forewarn them of their unseen and unbelieved jeopardy; sometimes permitting them to discover it for themselves by letting them go a while without his prevenient and protecting grace! He held before them, not merely the disrepute, the ungracefulness, or the ingratitude of apostolic inconsistency, but the danger of apostasy and reprobation. “Simon! Simon! Satan hath desired to sift thee as wheat.” To that same Simon he said: “Get thee behind me, Satan!” and surely he was nearer being a castaway than we know of Paul’s ever being, after their respective conversions, when he cursed and swore, and protested three times that he knew not the man who was standing before Caiaphas. It was directly to the twelve, when he detected their latent envy, their ambition, their secular views, or it was in their hearing, in his more general discourses, that he spoke the parables of unfaithful stewards, indolent servants, dishonest agents, rapacious husbandmen.

I need not presume here to expound the exact meaning of the castaway of our version. You will remember that the same word is only so translated in this place, and that in the seven other places of the New Testament, it is once rendered “rejected,” and six times “reprobate.”

The image is, therefore, the familiar one of that which is cast aside because it does not come up to the quality or service required in the test of it. As reprobate or castaway metal is that which, being tried by the proper tests, is found to be either altogether spurious, or below the proper standard required for use, and as structures are tried, and abandoned, if they do not pass the appropriate test of their strength and capacity, so one is reprobate who, if tried by the evangelical standard, is rejected as deficient in the marks which designate the Christian. A

castaway preacher, in like manner, is one who, if judged by the tests appropriate to his official, superadded to his personal Christian character, should have to be stigmatized as not such a one as Christ acknowledges.

If we ask what are these peculiar tests, Church tradition will answer in one way; Scripture tradition will answer in another way. The one dwells most on imposition of hands, and of certain hands, the other on the spiritual character. The former is to be pursued in a series of voluminous controversies, the latter is not the subject of controversy at all, because the New Testament is at so little pains to treat of it as ecclesiologists would like to make it out. The New Testament shows the Divine Founder of Gospel institutions breaking up the old ideas of holy tribes and ecclesiastical genealogies, by taking for the first ministers of the Christian Church, no priest, no Levite, no official of the temple or synagogue, but men found in his common walks, then instructing them in doctrine, and especially disciplining their hearts, and laying so little stress on ceremonials, that he rather seemed to discountenance the whole idea when, in reference to a scruple of this very sort, suggested by the Apostles, he gave them the aphorism, "for he that is not against us is on our part." Oh, how the rebukes which our Lord gave so often to the Jewish Apostles, when they were reverting to the bondage of the old ceremonials, apply to us, in our more enlightened condition, when we turn day after day to the journals of his life, and find how little he said or did, or at least required to be put on the record, as to the points which disunite the Church and feed the perpetual flame of sectarianism!

Then the Acts and Epistles continue the Scripture tradition to the same effect. The tests of the ministry that stand out there in overshadowing prominence, are soundness of doctrine and purity of heart. So unsacramentarian is the chief of the Apostles, that he declares that Christ sent him not to baptize but to preach the Gospel; and so unassuming of prerogative or station, that he declares the highest honour of Christ's preachers is to be ministers' servants, by whom men believe. And so, when he writes still more immediately, and, as it were, officially, to ministers as such, the charge he commits to them, as involving the point of their standing or falling, is their holding faith and a good conscience; their being blameless, vigilant, sober, just, holy, temperate; not self-willed; of good behaviour; taking heed to themselves; reading and meditating for their profiting; giving themselves wholly to these

things; not covetous, or entangling themselves with the affairs of this life, but fleeing the worldly pursuits which had already caused some to err from the faith; to follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness; to fight the good fight of faith; not striving about words to the subverting rather than the converting of their hearers; not entering on questions (theological though they be) that gender strifes more than they edify; not novices, lest they be proud; having a good report of the world as to their moral standing; examples of believers, patterns of good works. The Church quarrels whether Timothy was bishop of Ephesus, or Titus of Crete, because Paul was more careful to let Timothy and Titus know how they ought to behave in the house of God, than to place beyond dispute how, and in what relations they were brought into the house. "If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things"—things conscientious and spiritual—"thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ," whether the hands of the Presbytery were of one or of many, whether the charge be a parish or a diocese.

Such is the test of the minister. The castaway is the minister who does not abide the test; who is so far opposite to, and different from, the standard thus established—whose faith, spirit, life—whose personal religion and official fidelity, are so wanting in these characteristic traits of a good minister, that, in the eye of Christ, he cannot be identified by the description. I say the eye of Christ, for human trial, and ecclesiastical inspection fail here, as in every other experiment of trying the heart. The inferior qualifications may be determined by a prescribed criterion, but it is only the omniscient sight that reaches to the root and foundation. "The fining-pot is for silver, and the furnace for gold, but the Lord trieth the hearts." They are the eyes that are as a flame of fire, and the countenance that is as the sun shineth in his strength, that behold and penetrate, while the infallible voice declares to the angel of each church: "I know thy works; I know thy works." That this is the purport of this inspection, that this is the standard, is as plain as the ten commandments. If, therefore, like our predecessors in apostolic conference with their Master at the table, we are disposed to say, "Lord, is it I? is it I?" the test is easily applied. According to that example, it is best applied by a direct, individual appeal to the Chief Shepherd himself. By an humble, contrite, approach to his feet, in opportunities of utter separation from the misleading influences of one's public ministrations,

can the minister best come to an impartial discovery of that point of points for his research,—his own actual standing in the sight of Christ.

The signs of a castaway preacher, so far as they are distinct from those of the trials of other Christians, will appear to be such as these: he has no cordial or practical belief in what his function compels him to preach; he feels an intellectual pride, and enjoys an ambitious gratification in preaching, but has no heart in it as the means of glorifying God and restoring man; with him the ministry is no more than a profession; preaching is his livelihood. If he labour for success, it is for the sake of maintaining his professional position; he is actuated, as men are in their secular vocations; he seeks for promotion; his choice of place and occupation, and his charges, are determined by the preponderance of personal advantages; he will not forego domestic comfort for the sake of ministering in obscurity to the least provided; he finds ready excuses for retiring from labour, or for indulging indolence; he counts his life too dear to run risks; he is always looking for material reward, even for his prayers and consolations; he resorts to tempting adventures, not merely from necessity, or while the necessity continues, but from the love of gain and the pleasure of accumulation; he hoards penuriously while he preaches liberality; he loves general literature more than theology, the society of the world more than the society of the Church; he preaches and prays, visits and writes for fame and notoriety; the pleasure and excitement of the act of preaching are the effect, not of zeal, but of self-complacency; and the gratification or disappointment which he experiences, does not relate to the souls of the people, but to his own vanity; he looks on his fellow-ministers as competitors and rivals; he is envious and jealous; mortified at being overlooked, and ever suspicious of slights.

But this is only a random sketch of particulars. Perhaps all may be comprehended in the phrase of the text by saying, that the character described is only a preacher to *others*. He may have the gifts of prophecy and knowledge, may speak in the tongue of angels, but he is not in himself such a preacher as Christ requires; his unction is not from the Holy One, and so he is disowned, rejected, castaway.

Or the first part of the whole sentence may be taken as giving a comprehensive sign of the castaway preacher in the declaration which introduces the “*lest* that by any means” of the text. “I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection, lest that by any means when I have

preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.” It is the predominance of the body, bodily consideration, the body as the symbol of whatever is secular, sensual, personal, selfish, the mortal in distinction from the spiritual,—it is this which, unsubdued, and not *kept* under subjection, makes men castaways, although they have preached to others, and perhaps saved others from the very abyss in which they themselves fall.

The perils of the ministry from this quarter are increased with the worldliness of the nominal church, or of church-supporters. The world gain much to their side by encouraging in preachers such views or habits as assimilate their teachers to themselves. In proportion as their flattery or liberality, their flexible principles and loose opinions make an impression on the yielding minister, their own course is more free, and the dangers of the pastor are multiplied. Their influences will appear in the most specious connections. Display, extravagance, luxury, pride are not confined to private habits; the simplicity that is in Christ may be violated in the most evangelical guise. A Bible Society may build a palace; a Sunday School Institution may be as financial as a bank; an ecclesiastical Board may have as much policy as a cabinet; a church may be as fashionable as a theatre. The preacher is in all these, and he must keep his body under, as to some of the subtlest insinuations of the social state which surrounds him, if he would not run uncertainly, or beat the air. Many a Demas has forsaken Paul, having loved this present world, and it is Paul who calls on the Church to mark them and avoid them, whosoever they be, that serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own carnality, even while by good words and fair speeches, it may be from pulpit, platform or press, they deceive the hearts of the simple.

What are the consequences of the rejection so declared in the text? That rejection may be considered either personally, as it relates to the man, or officially, as it relates to the preacher. The personal disowning would ensue upon his being found wanting when weighed in the balance which determines whether one is or is not a Christian. He cannot plead the laying on of hands, the sprinkling of baptism, the partaking of the Lord's table, the works of the pulpit, the study, the judicatory; he cannot plead his popularity, his titles, his success: he must, like the lowliest of his flock, be judged by the eternal test, which, as in every other case, will be applied both to heart and works. No minister will be castaway because he was less conspicuous, less celebrated, than others; but if such

should by any means be the fate of any, after having preached to others, it will be because they were unconverted men; because they entered the ministry, not at the call of God, but under a professional attraction, or as a last resource, or under stress of persuasion, or offer of reward, or recent excitement, or transient enthusiasm; and, perhaps, more than all other causes, because when, after preaching to others, they found reason to conclude that they were themselves unbelievers, they did not then so take to heart their own preaching as to be converted and healed, but continued, through shame, or fear, or habit, or dread of temporal consequences, to act wilfully as false apostles, with the evidences of reprobation constantly before their eyes in their own manuscripts, uttered by their own arguments, testified to God and their consciences by their own prayers, witnessed against themselves every time they dipped their hand into the font, or broke the mystical bread.

If, again, the rejection be considered specifically as that of the *preacher*, it is the decision of the Divine Head that the individual is not a true representative of his kingdom—that he is not an accredited ambassador. Whatever he may have said or done in the name of Christ, the sentence which disowns him is its own justification, “I never knew you.” His title, his licensure, his ordination, his instalment, have no more power to give him sanctity in the Divine view, than does the colour of his clothing. Are his ministerial acts valid? What is validity? No acts on the part of man, not even on the part of the Church, give of themselves either validity or invalidity before God, to what is said or done on earth. In human consideration, and as to their effect on the human mind, the official acts of a minister, standing fairly in the visible Church, though in the Divine judgment reprobate, may have all the effect of what is genuine. The children he baptizes are duly initiated; the communicants who, by their faith, receive the Lord’s bread and wine, are blessed in their devotion; the words of Bible truth he preaches may instruct, awaken, convert, and edify; the men upon whom he places his ordaining hand are truly set apart to their sacred office. All this is provided for the orderly convenience and the comfort of the Christian society.

But God acts independently of what is done or left undone by any of his ministers, the genuine or the spurious. None of their acts, and the acts of none, can be said to bind Him. No such unqualified claim as that can be pretended on the warrant of “whatsoever ye shall bind on earth, shall

be bound in heaven.” The best of ministers, by ignorance, by mistake, by indiscretion, do things and say things, even in the name of Christ, which pass as inoperative as their breath. A hypocrite may deceive the holiest session, and die in the confidence of the purest church, but the act of his admission to the Church, and his continued fellowship with true saints, had no “validity” in the Divine sanction to seal his redemption. If this be the construction of validity, his baptisms and communions were not valid. They availed him nothing. They were wasted upon him. That which is highly esteemed among men for some fancied intrinsic virtue, may not be preserved by its religious name from becoming, in particular instances, abomination in the sight of God; and one of the saddest subjects we can contemplate is, how many sacred acts and formal observances must be always taking place in the Church, which, like the multitude of sacrifices, the Sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, the solemn meetings, the multiplication of prayers, in the first chapter of Isaiah, are of no purpose to God, at best are vain oblations, and it may be, rise to the enormity of an abomination, a trouble, and a weariness to him! If the services of a false minister are followed by good effects, they are the result, not of the Divine sanction, either of the personal or official character of the preacher, but of the Divine sanction of the truth and of its symbols. The result gives no seal to his credentials. A Jew or infidel may print the New Testament for the profit of the publication, and such copies of the word may be as much blessed to the kingdom of heaven, as those issued by the Church itself. So the words, the arguments, the eloquence, the talents, of a preacher may be the means of benefit to souls, and a means of reputation to himself both living and dead, yet it may be, that as an official messenger he could never describe himself, with the writer to the Galatians, “an apostle, not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father.”

If the nature and the causes of this sad condemnation have been fairly stated, it is unnecessary to look further for the remedy. The Apostle gives as well the direction as the warning, in his words: “I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection, lest . . . myself should be a castaway.” We have his own exposition of, and commentary on what is meant by the body and its subjection, when he says, “all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any”; “let not sin reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof, . . . but yield

yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead”; they that “are in Christ Jesus walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit”; “they that are after the Spirit, mind the things of the Spirit”; “now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.” I need not prove to this assembly that the terms body and flesh comprise the lusts of the mind and of the heart, in all their vanities, self-conceits, ambitions, enmities, bigotries, uncharitableness, covetousness, as well as the more corporeal that tempt to ease, indolence, luxury, intemperance, or immoderation.

The self-denial which one preaches, he should not only exemplify in his own private life, as visible to observers, but should practise upon his own soul in regard to his individual characteristics and circumstances. He must not spare his own eye, or foot, or right hand, when they tempt him to offend. If the preacher is in special peril of becoming a castaway, from neglecting to bring his body into subjection to his own doctrines, if, with all his knowledge, his theoretical soundness, his efficiency in serving others, his own soul is in jeopardy, then he is called to exercise a watchfulness and self-denial peculiar to himself, to his own position, a branch of the common duty which it is the more incumbent on him to perform than to preach, inasmuch as he is the one to whom, in his distinctive character, the precepts are addressed. The presumptuous sins of a preacher must be the most aggravated of all that come under that inspired designation; and it must be the highest grade of presumption for an expounder and teacher of religion to trust either in his office or his theology, to shield him from the application of such a test as this. The creed will never exculpate, will never screen any transgressor. Election, predestination, perseverance, as mere doctrines, though held with Antinomian confidence, will not avert the reprobation of the preacher who, trusting in them, neglects to keep under his body and bring it into subjection. Subjection is the word; the same figure applied to the power of grace, as is applied to the power of sin. His servants ye are whom ye obey, whether of sin or of obedience. Sin reigns in the mortal body. Those who are made free from sin become the servants of righteousness. The bondage of Satan becomes the yoke of Christ. The preacher is not to bind burdens on others, which he discards from himself. No subjection of the flesh is to be his text; it is to be his practice. Alas! alas! how many that were thought, and thought themselves, to be standing, have fallen, just because they would not take heed to the reflex application of this

principle! “Then spake Jesus to the multitude and to his disciples, saying, The Scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat; all, therefore, whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works; for they say and do not.”

There is, then, no preventive, no remedy, but the spiritual mind. The revival we need is the revival of the piety of ministers. And as the main cause of its depression is the superincumbency of the world and of the flesh, as the cares of other things entering in choke the word, even in the heart of the sower, so life must begin with the putting away of that which is smothering it. “Take away the dross from the silver, and there shall come forth a vessel for the refiner.” If, through the charming of a serpent as subtle as the beguiler in Eden, our minds have been corrupted, in any form, to any extent, from the simplicity that is in Christ, there must be a conversion in that particular before we are strengthened. Is it not one of the great perils in which we stand this day, that the outward strength of our Church is becoming the arm of flesh, in which we misplace our confidence? May we not hear too much of names, money, schemes, policy? May we not speak too much of power, of numbers, of denominational triumphs, as though the dominion were ours, and we the masters, rather than the ministers? If personal considerations then fail to awaken us to the necessity of cultivating the spiritual mind, let us reflect that a church may be castaway, and recollect that history records that those were not vain alarms that have been sounded in times past, and are still echoed from the seven trumpets of the Apocalypse: “I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place except thou repent. I will spew thee out of my mouth.”

Spare thy people, O Lord, and give not thine heritage to reproach!

“Sermon preached at the opening of the Synod of New Jersey, October, 1858,” *Home, the School, and the Church, or the Presbyterian Education Repository*, edited by C. Van Rensselaer, Philadelphia 1859.

Recovering Experimental Religion

Sherman Isbell

EXPERIMENTAL RELIGION, which once was a vital part of the Reformed tradition of preaching and spirituality, has in a large measure been lost sight of in our day. Even use of the term *experimental* in connection with religion is no longer customary, it being more commonly associated with the natural sciences, where a method of probing and investigation leads to an understanding of reality. The older Reformed writers used the word to indicate that we not only read and confess what Scripture teaches, but also are enabled by the Holy Spirit in our own experience to prove and enter into those truths. The propositions of Scripture are true regardless of our experience of them. But in those who belong to Christ, there is a work of the Holy Spirit to persuade them of those truths, so that they taste and feel the power of them in their own souls. To tremble when we discern our guilt before God, and to be driven to seek covering in the blood of Christ, is to gain an experimental knowledge of realities revealed in Scripture. Such experiences are not like the groping of the heathen, who reflect on the mystery of their own hearts, trying to understand themselves, and pondering what God might be like and how he might relate to the world. Experimental religion in the Reformed tradition entails an experience which arises from being confronted with the testimony of Scripture, and in which the prime mover is God the Holy Spirit, driving home to heart and conscience the truths of the Word of God.

John Elias, preaching in Wales in the early nineteenth century, describes such experiences of biblical truth: “To have an experimental knowledge of something means to try it, to possess it, and to enjoy it ourselves. You must not merely read or hear about it. . . . You may read many a sweet chapter about Christ, and no doubt you have heard many a faithful sermon about Him, and yet, you may be without a saving knowledge of Christ. But an experimental knowledge of Him is to prove, see, and feel what you have read and heard about Him.”¹

Anthony Burgess, a member of the Westminster Assembly, speaks of the knowledge that a man may acquire about foreign countries by looking

at a map. But map knowledge cannot compare with actually going to the country, climbing its mountains, swimming in its rivers, and walking the streets of its towns. “Or as the Queen of Sheba, who had heard rumors of Solomon’s wisdom, when she came to have an experimental knowledge of it, then she was astonished, and said, All that she had heard was nothing to that which she saw. . . . But how is it to be feared, that many have seen godliness but in the map only, they never had experience of the thing itself. How many are there that talk of conversion or repentance, as men do of bringing forth a child, who never had the experience of the throbs and pains that then are endured. Paul, what a long time did he live in a road of religious duties, but when he came to have an experimental work upon him, he died, whereas he was alive before, that is, he became sensible of the damnable and dangerous estate he was in, whereas he had great confidence of his good life and salvation before. And thus it is with every man that hath gotten experimental knowledge; alas (saith he) I was alive once, I thought myself somebody, when I could pray, write sermons, dispute so understandingly, but now I see I did not know what that faith was, or godliness was, that I did argue so much about, I never knew anything of God, or of his gracious works till now, will that soul say.”²

There is a memorable passage in which J.C. Ryle presses on his readers the distance between belief that there is forgiveness and the believing reception of that forgiveness. “You believe perhaps, there is forgiveness of sins. You believe that Christ died for sinners, and that he offers a pardon to the most ungodly. But are you forgiven *yourself*? . . . What does it avail the sick man that the doctor offers him a medicine, if he only looks at it, and does not swallow it down? Except you lay hold for your own soul, you will be as surely lost as if there was no forgiveness at all. . . . There must be actual business between you and Christ.”³

Therefore we preach not only what Christ once did in his death and resurrection to accomplish our redemption, namely what he did outside of us, but also how Christ now works within our hearts by his Holy Spirit to apply that redemption. The Spirit brings us to appreciate Christ as the pearl of great price. He puts down the opposition of our hearts and carries us forward in repentance. In the resulting conflict, struggle and upheaval in our experience, the Spirit progressively conforms us to Christ. All of this touches the realm of our conscience, our desires and choices, our affections, joys and sorrows, and things felt and experientially known.

Thus I take a close look at myself, observing whether the truths revealed in Scripture concerning God's holiness and his just displeasure against sin have elicited a response from me. I consider the overwhelming generosity and mercy of God in the gospel provision for the ungodly, and I ask myself, What constraint do I feel from such kindness, by which God is wooing me in the gospel? Is there discernible in my life and thought that spirituality, repentance and love which Scripture indicates will be found in a true child of God?

A prominent aspect of Christ's ministry was that he aroused his hearers to go beyond a shallow consideration of his kingdom, challenging would-be disciples as to their readiness to accept what was entailed in following him, and probing whether their hearts were truly alienated from the world (Matthew 7:21-23, Mark 10:17-22, Luke 9:57-62 and 14:25-33). To examine ourselves as to whether we actually belong to Christ may be painful, and it may lead us to the discovery that we do not manifest the characteristics present in one who is savingly united to Christ, but ultimately it can also produce the deep comfort of a well-grounded assurance of our salvation. Under the thrust and shove of the probing questions and confrontational rebukes found in Scripture, we are brought to a place where we feel compelled to resolve the question, Are my faith and life true to what Scripture says will be found in a child of God? Scripture pointedly calls us to practice such self-examination, and provides us with the criteria for carrying it out. The people of God should welcome preaching that sets forth the biblical marks of grace in the life of a believer, indicating traits of character which are found only in the regenerate and which therefore are sound evidence of conversion, and distinguishing these from traits which may appear in the regenerate and unregenerate alike, and therefore provide no basis for assessing whether one has come to Christ. One objective in such preaching is to undeceive persons who are indulging a misguided hope.

Such preaching and self-examination were prominent aspects of the pastoral ministries for which the commissioners to the Westminster Assembly were renown. But appreciation for experimental religion has become increasingly rare in Presbyterian churches that honor the theological statements and the directories of worship and preaching produced by the Assembly. There are undoubtedly a number of influences that have brought this about, but one notable cause has been a

movement candidly known among its advocates as Neo-Calvinism, that is, Calvinism in a somewhat altered form, with new answers to some significant questions. One point at issue touches upon the definition of conversion. To understand accurately what it is to be converted is a very consequential matter. Indeed, the modification introduced in this area has altered the kind of preaching heard in the churches, the spiritual meditation practiced by church members, and how Christian parents conceive of the religious guidance they are to give to their children.

Neo-Calvinism has presented a more externalized definition of conversion, viewing it more in terms of what we confess, our adherence to Christian doctrine and world view, and our having a place in the church and in a Christian family. The older Calvinism warned that many, despite maintaining a public attachment to doctrinal affirmations of the faith, may never have been delivered from spiritual death, that youth growing up in a Christian setting are often still alienated in heart from God, and that a saving faith will be accompanied by experience of one's need for Christ and of the power of the gospel.

The Neo-Calvinistic movement was a response to the increasing secularization of modern society, which has dismissed the concept of an authoritative and inerrant revelation from God given in human language. Secular man has set out to identify a new mission for human society, without reference to traditional Christian doctrine. The power of this secularizing flood is intimidating. We may well appreciate the sense of crisis which prompted the retort given by Neo-Calvinism when secularization was making rapid progress in Europe a century and a half ago.

The mentor of Neo-Calvinism was a Dutch historian and politician, Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, who was born in 1801. He authored an influential book analyzing the political revolutions spreading across Europe, and sought to demonstrate that this agitation was grounded in a spiritually infidel philosophy. His assessment gave rise in the Netherlands to a new political party, which offered resistance to many of the fruits of secularization. The best-known of his disciples was the theologian and politician, Abraham Kuyper, who led this political party, and was prime minister of the Netherlands from 1901 to 1905.

From a classical Reformed perspective, it is certainly appropriate to oppose secularism. But the strategy adopted by Neo-Calvinism in this conflict entailed a major shift in thinking about conversion, which came

to be confused with taking the side of Christian doctrine in the culture wars, as if this were a sufficient indication of whether one has a new heart. In failing to maintain the distinction drawn by Calvin and the Puritans between the mere espousal of biblical doctrine and an experimental knowledge of those realities, Neo-Calvinism diluted the spirituality of the churches. Endeavoring to confront external foes, Neo-Calvinists employed a method which led to the inward weakening of the Lord's house.

We would begin by noting a point of agreement between Neo-Calvinism and the older Calvinism. The two concur in observing that no one is without a spiritual allegiance. One either has a heart renewed by grace, or one is still dead in trespasses and sins. Moreover, between these two kinds of people, regenerate and unregenerate, there exists a spiritual opposition, antipathy or antithesis in reference to the things of God. Thus far we have sound Reformed doctrine.

Where the Neo-Calvinist model became problematic is in its assumption that this antipathy or antithesis between the regenerate and the unregenerate will be visible in whether or not one adheres to a Christian world view. In the older Calvinism, it was a commonplace that there are multitudes who profess the doctrines of the Bible and traditional Christian values, but who still have not been brought from death to life, and that large numbers in the churches do not have a heart antithesis to the world.⁴ It is one thing to profess that we are on the Lord's side with respect to the world view we espouse, but it is something else altogether to experience a crucifixion to the world and to its lusts when God renews the heart.

The older perspective held that a nation should be organized on the basis of a collective acknowledgement of the truth of the Christian religion. The entire population would espouse the world view taught in Scripture. Civil laws would be framed in conformity to biblical standards of morality. Society would be unified and homogeneous, and the political constitution would embrace a Christian foundation for the social order. Thus the Reformers spoke of both the first and second uses of the law of God. The first use of the law is in the preaching of the law from the pulpit, which serves to expose our sin and show us our need of Christ as the Savior. The second use of the law is in the civil order embodying biblical standards of morality in public codes of conduct, so that the citizenry are directed into at least an outward conformity

to the moral law, thus restraining the worst displays of depravity, and reminding the population that they will answer both to human and divine authority for their conduct.

But though the older Calvinism understood that the moral law is to have a formative role for society, there was no illusion about the spiritually-mixed character of the population in an avowedly Christian society. It was recognized that despite the virtually universal acceptance of a biblical world view in such settings, there would still be at work a radical antithesis between the regenerate and the unregenerate. This was the social order within which the Reformers and Puritans carried out their ministries. They knew full well that masses of people in these outwardly homogeneous societies had not experienced the new birth, or come to personal contrition for sin or fled to the Savior for deliverance. The Reformers neither identified the kingdom of God with the social structures of this present age, nor did they regard a man's adherence to the Christian world view as implying that he has a regenerate heart.

Neo-Calvinism's approach to resisting the fruits of secularization was coupled with a large adjustment in thinking about how a Christian relates to the social order. It arose in the environment of modern pluralism, which looks for a strenuous competition of ideologies in the public marketplace of ideas. Neo-Calvinism adapted to this new playing field by advocating that Christians form their own social institutions in order to counter those which promote a secularist outlook. Christians were to develop political parties, labor unions, and schools, each of these being self-consciously based on the principles of a biblical world view. At a moment in history when western societies are professedly framed to tolerate a multiplicity of world views, one might conclude that Neo-Calvinism had little alternative regarding how a biblical world view might be asserted in such a setting. However, the response of Neo-Calvinism was not altogether innocent, in part because Neo-Calvinism introduced the assumption that participation in these distinctively Christian institutions was a manifestation of the antithesis between the regenerate and the unregenerate. This is to confuse a participant's adherence to the Christian world view with his having a regenerate heart.

This error has even more serious implications when it is brought to bear on the life and practice of the church. Kuyper regarded those in the congregation, including the children, as being in a state of grace

from their birth. The church, therefore, is not a place where people are being brought to salvation. The congregation need not be warned to flee from the wrath to come. This removes a primary reason for preaching the gospel of justification in the congregation. The call of the gospel is to be directed rather to those who are not in the church. According to this model, what the church should seek among those in its care is not their conversion to new life in Christ, but their nurture in the eternal life which they are presumed to possess already. Unless and until children of the church give clear indication of repudiating the covenant, their parents and the church were to proceed on the supposition that the children are regenerate.

However, the biblical method of bringing sinners to Christ is to confront them with the law and the gospel, and with the call to faith and repentance. In this respect, children are no different from adults. Evidence of a work of saving grace will be given in a child's response to law and gospel. Inasmuch as the sign of the covenant in baptism functions as an offer of mercy extended with particular reference to each child of a believer, and without regard to the status of the child as either elect or reprobate, the basis for concluding that such a child has passed from death to life is found in his answer to this call. Though the child might manifest doctrinal orthodoxy and a moral demeanor, he is to be taught the discipline of self-examination, so that he may discern in himself the marks indicative of a heart renewed by grace.

Archibald Alexander cautions that, "Although the grace of God may be communicated to a human soul at any period of its existence in this world, yet the fact manifestly is, that very few are renewed before the exercise of reason commences; and not many in early childhood. Most persons with whom we have been acquainted grew up without giving any decisive evidence of a change of heart. Though religiously educated, yet they have evinced a want of love to God, and an aversion to spiritual things."⁵ The call to faith and repentance should be addressed to children in the church, in recognition that, though we do not know whether a young child is regenerate, we dare not withhold from him those means which God ordinarily employs for bringing sinners to himself. "The education of children should proceed on the principle that they are in an unregenerate state, until evidences of piety clearly appear, in which case they should be sedulously cherished and nurtured. These are Christ's

lambs—‘little ones, who believe in him’—whom none should offend or mislead upon the peril of a terrible punishment. But though the religious education of children should proceed on the ground that they are destitute of grace, it ought ever to be used as a means of grace. Every lesson, therefore, should be accompanied with the lifting up of the heart of the instructor to God for a blessing on the means.”⁶

At whatever age an individual is regenerated, his experience of conscious trust in Christ will not be without conviction of his guilt and wickedness, which drives him to forsake self-reliance and to rest in Christ alone for salvation. His faith will be a faith which appreciates the need for justification.

A century ago, the Dutch theologian Herman Bavinck had opportunity to observe the effect of Neo-Calvinism on the religious life of his country. Bavinck came from churches in which experimental religion had been cherished, but which had come under a new influence when they merged with churches guided by the perspective of Kuyper. Bavinck commented on what followed, in his introduction to a reprint of the highly experimental sermons by the Scottish Presbyterians Ralph and Ebenezer Erskine: “Here we have an important element which is largely lacking among us. We miss this spiritual soul-knowledge. It seems we no longer know what sin and grace, guilt and forgiveness, regeneration and conversion are. We know these things in theory, but we no longer know them in the awful reality of life.”⁷ What Bavinck had witnessed was the widespread absence in his generation of anything like the experience which led Luther to cry out to God for mercy, in concern about sin and guilt. One still found justification, faith and repentance confessed as valid doctrine, but it was no longer expected that they would be reflected in the experiences of the soul in seeking God. The theoretical knowledge of Reformed doctrine had come to be separated from a sense of personal need for salvation.

There was a second error of similar magnitude. The aggressive pursuit of a social and cultural agenda in the service of God came to be seen as a basic objective of man’s life, with the Christian called to redeem society and culture from the influence of unbelieving principles. Neo-Calvinists were intent upon advancing a cultural program which would stand in contrast to that of opposing world views, and which would increasingly bring to light the underlying antipathy or antithesis

between the regenerate and the unregenerate. It came to be suggested that the foundational character of man's involvement with culture may be seen in a mandate given to him at creation.

This development has a background in the personal history of Kuyper, the principal figure in the emergence of Neo-Calvinism. A mark had been left on him by the university training he received at the hands of a sophisticated exponent of modern philosophy. Kuyper then entered the ministry, and it was only after he was settled as a pastor that he came to saving faith, in part through the influence of parishioners who had discerned that their minister was not converted. These humble folk avoided many of the interests of the culturally sophisticated, but Kuyper was of the view that there was no need for believers to hold aloof from cultural pursuits. He was convinced that their perspective would be enhanced if they came to appreciate how a Christian could make application of biblical principles in the realm of culture.

But such was the impetus which Neo-Calvinism gave to cultural activity, that there has been a striking alteration in the message heard from the pulpit. Preaching about the necessity of the new birth, about the call to faith and repentance, about the justification of the ungodly, and about the pursuit of personal sanctification, was in a measure displaced by preaching which assumes that the congregation is already regenerate, and that the need of the congregation is to be nurtured in the Christian's mission to transform society and culture.

What criticism should be made of the Neo-Calvinist claim that the development of culture is a primary task in the service of God? There is something appealing in Kuyper's proclamation that there is not a thumb's breath in all of life but Christ will have it as his. There should be no disagreement that in every aspect of life we should think and act from the perspective of God's revealed truth. Our intellectual, social and cultural life must be in conformity with and obedient to Scripture. Moreover, our faithfulness to the Word of God in these matters will have a powerful effect on others. A society shaped by a biblical perspective on social and cultural issues is a mighty instrument for restraining sin, for guiding the young into wise patterns of conduct, and for commending biblical faith to those who are blessed to live under such outward influences.

The first point of criticism of the cultural mandate regards the displacement of religion's primacy in man's life. Here is a significant

departure from the classical Reformed tradition, which regarded all matters of this present life as subservient to the interests of religion, so that all institutions are to join together in furthering religion as that which is of ultimate significance for man's life. For this reason, promotion of the true religion was the goal not only of the church, but also of the civil order. The Reformers understood man's highest service, greatest access to God, and chief means of furthering the glory of God, to be through religion and worship. The direction of Kuyper's thought is indicated by his rejection of the concept of an established religion.

It should be evident that to view the goal of man's life largely in terms of a social and cultural agenda is not in accord with the Bible. Culture and society do not hold any such preeminence in the narrative and doctrine of Scripture. Of course much is said in Scripture about family life, public justice, and other forms of social involvement, but they are in no way primary in the message of Scripture. This disproportion between social concern and religious concern has contributed significantly to the decline of experimental religion, and directed the thoughts of Christians away from what the original Reformed tradition considered to be most vital for the life of the church, for spiritual stability, and for living to the glory of God.

What then is the origin of Neo-Calvinism's dominant interest in cultural progress? The answer, we believe, is that it took over this interest from an aggressive secularism. Though Neo-Calvinism sets out zealously to resist secularism, there is a foundational matter regarding which it has retreated in the face of Enlightenment philosophy, because Neo-Calvinism has effectively abandoned the primacy of religion as the goal of man's life. In doing this, Neo-Calvinism has capitulated to secularism's choice of the field on which the contest between Christianity and secularism will be fought. As the parties contended over which world view should guide the development of culture, they concurred that the goal of man's life should not be viewed in terms of religion. This removal of religion as primary in man's life and in society is an abandonment of what is theologically indispensable to Christianity's strategic position.

Inasmuch as man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever, his proper orientation to God is not so indirect that man may give himself fundamentally to the affairs of this life, albeit with the plea that it is done in the name of God. The goal of his life is found in God,

and not in this creation. Only religious worship and the communion of the soul with God can give the access and intimacy of relationship to God which answers to what is ultimate for man.

A second point of criticism against Neo-Calvinism's concept of a cultural mandate respects its exegesis of Genesis 1:28. It is claimed that language about man's dominion implies a mandate for developing the hidden potential of creation. Though the reference to multiplying may be taken as indicating the increase of families, the reference to filling the earth and subduing it as the extension of human habitation across the earth and the tilling of the soil, and the reference to exercising dominion over the animals as implying herding and shepherding, Kuyper appealed to the text as inclusive of every dimension of man's social and cultural life. The verse has been made one of the most important in the Bible, a foundation for identifying man's calling throughout history, and perhaps beyond. One suspects that some texts are asked to support more weight than they were ever intended to carry, and when that happens one feels that presuppositions are being brought from elsewhere and forced onto a text rather than arising from it. Indeed, Calvin seems to be quite unaware that the passage would be viewed as a key to man's mission in life. Instead, the Reformer reads the text as a simple blessing from God, in which attention is drawn to the riches of God's provision for mankind, to whom he gives abundance of food, and allows geographical space into which the race could expand as its numbers increased.

A third criticism of the cultural mandate is that Neo-Calvinism's strong orientation to this present world misses the pilgrim character of the believer. Calvin and the Puritans were deeply interested in what the Bible teaches about family life, civil government, and godly relationships throughout society. But their understanding of what these relationships implied for the Christian's relationship to this world was quite different from that of Neo-Calvinism. The older view was given classic expression in Augustine's *The City of God*, which is an extended reflection on the decline of the Roman world, and the place of the kingdom of God in this present age.

Augustine discerned two societies to which men belong, which he called *cities*. The city of God, composed of the holy angels and God's redeemed, is in heaven. Some, who by grace have become its citizens, are pilgrims on this earth while still on their way to the heavenly city.

These pilgrims are like the Jews exiled in Babylon, longing to be united with their home elsewhere. This is the outlook adopted by Calvin: “For, if heaven is our homeland, what else is the earth but our place of exile?”⁸ Augustine understood that the city of God was not the same as the Christian church, because only some members of the church are pilgrims traveling to the heavenly city. The other city, which Augustine calls the earthly city, is composed of those men and angels who in heart are the enemies of God. The men of this city are dominated by the angels who turned away from God and became devils. Whereas the citizens of the city of God are characterized by love to God, the earthly city is driven by selfish love. The earthly city is the city into which we all are born, though by grace we can become citizens of the heavenly.

And yet, though the pilgrim is sighing for a distant country, he does not flee from the life around him, being aware that his present life is inextricably bound up with the lives of others around him in this place away from his home. He currently has business in this world. He can value virtues such as patriotism, friendship, marital fidelity, responsible parenthood, and a degree of justice administered by civil rulers, all of which are common to citizens of the two cities. But the pilgrim recognizes that these virtues are not good in an absolute sense, because they are defiled by an unbelief and human pride which turn away from the Creator and use created things without gratitude to God as our benefactor. And so the division between the two cities remains, despite the necessity and advantage of sharing the present life.

Here is a model which expresses the ambivalence found in Scripture about the believer’s place in the world. There are those within the church who are not citizens of the heavenly city, so that espousing a set of doctrines does not indicate where the ultimate division is to be found. Further, citizens of both cities are involved in the discharge of responsibilities which pertain to this present life. Social institutions are useful for restraining evil and giving outward enforcement of biblical morality, but their administration of justice will often miscarry, and they fall far short of the righteousness of God’s heavenly kingdom. The social structures of the present life, though they are under obligation to promote the true religion, never represent the coming of the kingdom of God. Accordingly, Augustine does not have a high expectation for them, and finds their value relativized in the perspective of eternity.

Neo-Calvinists have a number of names for this point of view. They call it dualism, Manichaeism, pietism, and world flight. Rarely do they call it Augustinian or Calvinistic, though it is certainly the view with the longest pedigree in the Reformed tradition. The larger question remains, Is it biblical? In such passages of Scripture as Hebrews 11:8–16 and 13:10–14, and 1 Corinthians 7:29–31, the believer's situation is certainly regarded as that of a detached pilgrim journeying to his true home, though having responsibilities here for the present. The goal of his life is found in what transcends this creation.

Neo-Calvinism and the classical Reformed tradition represent two discrete concepts of the Christian's relationship to this world, and historically one of them has not been congenial to experimental religion. Though there sometimes have been and will be attempts to form a hybrid of the two traditions, the leaven of the new perspective will eventually militate against experimental spirituality.

Notes

¹ John Elias, *The Experimental Knowledge of Christ and additional sermons of John Elias (1774–1841)* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 27.

² Anthony Burgess, *Spiritual Refining: or a Treatise of Grace and Assurance* (London: A. Miller for Thomas Underhill, 1652), 5.

³ John Charles Ryle, *Old Paths, being plain statements on some of the weightier matters of Christianity* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 1977), 204–205.

⁴ Joel R. Beeke, *Living for God's Glory: An Introduction to Calvinism* (Orlando: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2008), 279.

⁵ Archibald Alexander, *Thoughts on Religious Experience* (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1967), 13–14.

⁶ Alexander, *Thoughts on Religious Experience*, 13.

⁷ C. Pronk, *Neo-Calvinism* (Millgrove: Free Reformed Student Society, 1994), 15.

⁸ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), III.viii.4, 716.

The Death of a Son

Ashbel Green

Ashbel Green, *The Life of Ashbel Green, V.D.M.*, ed. Joseph H. Jones, New York 1849.

MY ELDEST SON, ROBERT STOCKTON GREEN, died the very close of this year 1813. He died at Boston, on Tuesday the 28th of September, and the next day his corpse was deposited in Mr. Dexter's cemetery;—the very day of our annual commencement, eight years after taking his degree in this College. He was born July 30th, 1787; and was, of course, twenty-six years and two months of age when he died, wanting two days. He had been exhausted by the heat of the city of Philadelphia, and by his business as a lawyer; and came out of the city to recover his health. He was with me on the 31st of July and the 1st of August. He was emaciated and pallid, but not sick. He left me on the morning of the 2nd of August, on a visit to his brother Jacob at Albany, and intending to spend a short time at the Ballston Springs. He wrote to me from Albany, which he reached in a few days, and was as well as usual. He went to the Springs, and there met with a particular friend, Mr. William Appleton.

The two agreed to visit the military stations on Lake Ontario, and to go to the falls of Niagara. This they accomplished; and were in an attack made on Fort George by the British troops. From Buffalo, after visiting the falls of Niagara, my son wrote me a particular account of his journey and adventures—the last letter that he wrote me with his own hand. He returned to Albany apparently in health, and spent a day or two with his brother. He and Mr. Appleton then set out for Boston. Between Pittsfield and Northampton he was wet by rain in traveling. The next day he was taken ill of what appeared to be a rheumatic complaint to which he was subject, accompanied with some fever. By stopping one day he was somewhat recruited, and traveled the day following. Again he lay by for a day, and then was able to reach Boston, where he went to bed and sent for a physician. E. Rockwood, Esq., a lawyer of eminence, who married Miss Hayward (a former parishioner of mine, and intimate friend of my

son) took Robert to his house. Here he received every possible attention which friendship and medical skill could supply.

For about ten days he was not thought to be dangerously ill, either by friends or physician, although I rather suspect that he considered himself in danger, for during this period (using the hand of his friend Appleton) he dictated a letter to me of such a kind as he never wrote before. It was tender and affectionate in a high degree, recognising his dependence on God, and expressing a strong desire to see me. He was apparently recovering till the night but one before his death, when he was taken with a profuse discharge of blood from the bowels, under which he sunk rapidly, and died on Friday morning. He died without a struggle, groan, or the motion of a muscle, and declared repeatedly the day before his death that he had not experienced a single pain from the time he entered Mr. Rockwood's family. He had his senses fully till within a few hours of his dissolution; and I was glad to learn that his nurse observed him frequently engaged, as she supposed, in earnest devotion—his hands clasped, and his lips moving.

Doubtless I have the partiality of a parent; and affection awakened by the death of a favourite child is apt to magnify his amiable qualities. This notwithstanding, I believe I may say with truth that few parents could lose as much in a child as I have lost in mine. He was tall and well made, had a most impressive and pleasing countenance, with an eye intelligent and benignant in a very high degree. He had also an amenity of temper and a gracefulness and elegance of manners very rarely seen. He was frank, candid, facetious, hospitable and kind. He had more knowledge, and of more various kinds, than any one of his age that I ever personally knew, though not so much as some I have read of. His eminence as a lawyer, of his own standing, both as to distinction and prospects, was without a rival. He was also a handsome and eloquent speaker.

He had a full belief in divine revelation; not the effect merely of education (for he had at one time been on the brink of infidelity), but the result of close and profound examination, terminating in a thorough and unwavering conviction. He had examined and was a complete master of the deistical controversy in all its parts and bearings, and could sooner and more fully put an infidel to silence than any other man I have ever known. He was orthodox in the great outlines of his religious creed. Talking to a friend a short time before his death, about the Unitarian

system, he said, "Take from the gospel the divinity and atonement of Christ, and you have little of importance behind." He was free from vice, and a constant and reverential attendant on public worship. His seriousness was growing, and had manifestly increased in the last year of his life. Whether it had reached to vital practical piety is known to God, in whose hands I leave him. It certainly would now give me more comfort if he had been unequivocally and eminently pious, than that he should have possessed all the brilliant talents and attainments by which he was undoubtedly distinguished.

In this dispensation I recognize my unspeakable indebtedness to God in the following particulars: 1. That during all the illness of my son, I felt more engagedness in praying that it might be sanctified to him, than that he might survive it. 2. That my will was in a degree very remarkably and unusually for me, swallowed up in the divine will, as to what should be the issue, when I knew that his life was in danger. 3. That for the forty-eight hours during which I had to wait for letters which would probably inform me of my son's death, I was not greatly agitated nor anxious, and that I was so prepared for the mournful news of his death, that when I received it, I was not disappointed. 4. For remarkable composure, submission and resignation, for me, under the severe bereavement, so that I lost little or no sleep, was able to attend to all ordinary concerns as usual, and had in general great quietness of spirit. One day, indeed, I was permitted to see that but for the preventing and supporting grace of God, I should be ready to murmur, repine, and be overwhelmed with dejection and distress. But here was the mercy, *I did but see it*, and I trust was preserved from it, and was made to partake of these consolations, and to follow the advice which on similar occasions I have endeavoured so often to suggest to others—to God be all the praise.

The improvement I would strive to make of this dispensation, is—1. To impress on my mind more deeply and sensibly than has ever yet been done, that both I and all my family are absolutely in the hand of God, to take any of us, or all of us, out of life, when, how, or where he pleases, and that in so doing, he will not do us wrong, or deal hardly with us. Yea, that I ought to rejoice in this, and be satisfied that in every privation I meet with, my covenant God chooses better for me than I could choose for myself. 2. To trust in God to sustain, support and comfort me, under all his dispensations. He has done so under this, which is one of the most

grievous. But let me remember that in order to this, I must really depend on and trust in *Him* and not on *myself*. Left to myself, I shall be crushed before the moth.

3. To think less than I have done of the attainments of science and of intellectual distinction, when not connected with religion. Avaricious men are apt to desire unduly that their children may be rich. If I know myself, this has not been my prevailing transgression. But a degree of the same kind of sin, I do believe I have been very prone to, that is, in having my heart unduly set on my children being what my eldest was in intellectual wealth, without considering in the degree that I ought, that this also is vanity unless sanctified by divine grace. I hope and trust that I have supremely desired for them all, that they should be truly the Lord's: and I think that for two or three years past, I had more of this than before. Yet I have certainly been in a degree an idolater of science. God has taken my idol. Let me renounce for ever my sin in this respect.

4. To be more earnest than I have ever yet been for the saving conversion of my children. As already stated, I hope I have increased in this earnestness within a few years past, and on this partly is founded the hope which I have, that my deceased son had received sanctifying grace before his death; especially, as he showed for more than a year a growing seriousness and attachment to religious duties: but yet I have never been as earnest on this subject as I ought to be. Let me then hear and regard the solemn call which I have had to more fervency of prayer for the salvation of my offspring; and let me not suffer to pass without improvement any opportunity I may have to say or do something, and every thing, that may tend to engage them to attend to the one thing needful. I have hoped that God may sanctify to them the death of their brother. O, most merciful God! grant this most desirable event for the sake of Christ my Saviour. I trust that he did sanctify it to my son Jacob. For, about two years after his brother's decease he made a public profession of religion at Princeton; and in conversing with him on that occasion, if I rightly remember, he told me that his first serious attention to the state of his soul was produced by Robert's death. He afterwards commenced the study of theology.

5. To be more engaged for the conversion of young people in general, especially of my dear pupils. I have long felt peculiarly interested for the young, but not enough so. I have not been as deeply sensible as I

ought to be, how soon all these opportunities and privileges might be terminated by death. I am now at the head of an institution devoted to the instruction of ingenuous youth, who are destined to teach others, and to have a great influence on society. Their religious instruction is especially committed to me. O, may I feel the importance and responsibility of my situation; and may this event in providence stir me up to the greatest engagedness, watchfulness, diligence and tenderness in endeavouring to promote by every means I can devise, and by every exertion I can make, the eternal salvation of the precious youth of whom I have the charge—Lord, direct, assist, and bless me in this.

6. Finally my son's death is to be improved to impress my mind more deeply with the emptiness of the world, and the importance of being constantly prepared for death and eternity. How very uncertain, unsatisfying, and delusive are our dearest earthly enjoyments; how deceitful and sorely disappointing are often our fondest hopes and most flattering prospects. Let my heart be less set than it has been on any thing so unworthy of its best affections. Let these affections be more set on things above, where Christ Jesus sitteth at the right hand of God. My son died suddenly—so may I also. Let me live constantly with my lamp trimmed and burning. O God! enable me so to live that I may at last be found of thee in peace.

A Request Denied

Marcus Dods (of Belford)

On the Incarnation of the Eternal Word, London 1849.

WE MAY OFTEN PRAY FOR THINGS, the possession of which would prove really hurtful to us, and the denial of which things, therefore, is the most gracious answer to our prayer. God alone can tell what is really good for us, and graciously reserves to himself the prerogative of determining whether the petitions which we offer be fit to be granted. "Ye have ye bereaved of my children," said the mourning patriarch; "Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away. All these things are against me." Nay, Jacob! but these are the steps whereby God is providing a place, where thou and thine may be satisfied in the days of famine. How often does the wayward child struggle and cry, while the tenderest hand is performing offices essentially necessary for its health and comfort! And how often are we, in the hands of God, very wayward children, fretting and murmuring at that which is necessary for our spiritual health and comfort! God may therefore often deny our petitions, because he sees that to grant them would be detrimental to us. But in this case there is no reason to doubt, that he will always give us a blessing more appropriate to our situation, and of greater value than that which he has refused. In this case, then, though our petition be denied, yet the prayer of faith is not in vain. A beloved child may ask an indulgent father for something which the father sees would be hurtful. This therefore he refuses; and the child, who knows both that his father is wiser than he, and knows much better what is good for him, and also that he is so good that he will refuse him nothing that is really good for him, will rest perfectly satisfied with the decision.

Reasons for Accepting a Ministerial Call

John Macdonald (of Calcutta)

“Statement of Reasons For Accepting a Call to Go to India as a Missionary, submitted to the Scotch Presbytery in London, on the 24th January 1837,” *A Pastor’s Memorial to His Former Flock*, London 1842.

THE CIRCUMSTANCES WHICH LED TO THIS STATEMENT were briefly as follows. For some time past the writer’s mind was much drawn towards foreign missionary work. The knowledge of this circumstance led the Committee of the General Assembly on Missions to inquire into his willingness to enter upon their missionary service in India. This communication from the representative body of the Church, as a Presbyterian he laid before his brethren for counsel: and after full procedure, in the course of which his Congregation presented a Memorial expressive of their interests and feelings, and the Presbytery delivered their mind both on the Call and the Memorial, he was led to the decision recorded in the following document. In a day when, on the one hand a carnal fanaticism would counterfeit, and on the other an earthly intellectualism would supplant, the self-evidencing and personal operations of the Holy Spirit, Christian men, however timid, ought not to shrink from avowing their grounds of spiritual judgment.

MODERATOR, I feel thankful that I am now addressing those who agree with me in the following scriptural and practical principles:

That the Lord Jesus Christ is the only, living, true, personal and sovereign Head of the church, having all power both in heaven and earth, and a right to do whatever seems good to him in his church:

That in the Christian ministry there is a *real transaction of personal dedication* unto him as Lord of all; in virtue of which he has a moral and spiritual *property* in us, which he may ever exercise, at any time, or for any end, and which it is our ministerial principle ever to obey in its fullest extent:

That over our ministerial relations and fields of labour we have in reality *no personal control*—all is dependent on the will of him whom we as truly serve as any earthly servant his master; and that with his will alone, as intimated in the appointed way, have we to do, in all matters of ministerial service:

That as the Lord Jesus Christ hath the right, so does he exercise the right of *calling* his servants, as seems good to him, in the exercise of his wisdom, to any form of service, or to any part of his vineyard; and this is the foundation for that provision made for even calls of *transference* in the several branches of his church:

That although our Lord be removed from our sight, and do not vouchsafe those extraordinary and miraculous manifestations of his will, which he granted of old, still that he *hath the power most truly and certainly to intimate his call to his servants*, so that they shall “know his voice, and follow him”; else what foundation for faith and duty could we have in one of the weightiest matters of his church? And although there have been discoverable in his professed ministers, at times, much delusion, much hypocrisy, as to his call, yet can this never do away with a plain truth; neither can Christ be deprived of his prerogative, nor we be stripped of our privilege by any such abuse.

Further, we agree in holding that the *Holy Ghost, the Comforter, dwells in the church*, during Christ’s personal absence from it; that his office is “to guide into all truth” in doctrine, and duty in practice; that he has the power to reveal to us the mind and will of Christ, so that we shall know it to be his will, and be convinced of it in its own Divine evidence; and he does this not by any new revelation of truth, but by so applying to us that which we may already know, that we shall individually feel its authority, and perceive its design; and so, under that clear, intelligent, conscientious, and spiritual influence, be led on to the end in view, that is, our *duty*. That in such a course, we may be exposed to the danger of deception and temptation, especially from Satan the “evil spirit,” is no reason why we should distrust the Holy Spirit, but is only an additional reason for submitting more purely unto him; and we may not doubt, that if we *rightly* wait on him, he will, in his appointed way, make manifest our several calls of duty.

Now, if we are agreed in these several points, leading up from the *headship of Christ over us*, to the *Spirit’s manifestation of his will to us*

as his servants, is it not right also to inquire, *How* may we expect the Spirit to declare our call? By what elements of truth does he convey that knowledge to us?

It has seemed to me, in these different ways—yet all concurring in one result, when overruled by him:

1. By the *Holy Scriptures*, authoritatively and individually applied; so that the soul is filled with life, light, desires, motives, ends, and all converging and tending to Christ's holy will, in all matters, as their centre of attraction.

2. By the personal overruling and adaptation of the system of *Providence*, in all its parts and relations, so as to give us a certain more specific bent or tendency of soul; and making us so to feel therein, that we may not and cannot but yield ourselves up to this Divine current of events, whereby we feel sweetly and conscientiously propelled towards the end, and to be arrived at in due course. It is said in our charter of grace, that he "makes all things work together for our good," and surely a sense of duty, or a conveyance to it, is one of the highest goods that can be sought or bestowed.

3. Is not the Holy Spirit of God also found imparting to us a certain inward *experience*, in correspondence with his outward will? engaging us, by the various workings of joy, peace, love, hope, fear, delight, nearness to God, and foretaste of his glory, towards certain objects and duties; so, that all his gracious actings within us are converging towards certain ends; and so, that these ends seem incorporated with the very life of God, that is within us—and so that to reject them were to "quench the Spirit" within us?—Does not such experience lead to a knowledge of Christ's will? and yet how difficult to impart to others a knowledge of it?—and even when we can in some measure convey to them the *substance* of that experience, we are unable to transfer to them a sense of that *Divine authority* with which it is accompanied to us, and by which we ourselves recognize it.

4. The *conference* of those who love and fear the Lord, and who seek his will supremely, seems another ordinance whereby he leads to a knowledge of his will. He who "dwells in them" and "works in them," is pleased often to lead forth their minds, and to speak by them so that what they say shall approve itself as good and true. He may in such conference give authority to that which he intends for practice, even contrary to the wishes of the hearer; or he may leave

weak and powerless, that which is good and true in itself, but which is not his mind in relation to the point of duty involved and agitated. How often in such spiritual conference is a seemingly involuntary testimony given, when the Spirit of God is triumphing over personal feelings, and leading forth a man unconsciously and painfully to speak his mind? Such conference has been, and ought to be, sought in the church of Christ: to shrink from it for fear of consequences is undutiful; for a call already clear may be made still clearer by the weakness, the confusion, or by the very humility and submissiveness of the *opposition* that is made to it by the saints and servants of Christ.

5. And, *lastly*, is not *prayer* another of those ordinances whereby the Spirit does specially help us to a knowledge of Christ's will? Does he not "help our infirmities," and "teach us what things we should pray for as we ought"? Does he not often draw us out, with fulness of soul, towards things accordant to his will and the mind of Christ? Does he not often break us down, after strongly contending with our fellow-men for some object, to utter prostration of spirit, so that the utmost we can say is, "Thy will be done"? Does not an appeal to a throne of grace often dispel in an instant our former argumentative and fond confidence, and we are left to the stronger leadings of the Spirit, even the "mind of Christ"? There may be, and there is, much danger of deception in so spiritual a matter as this; but nothing on our part can deprive the Holy Spirit of his Divine prerogative of manifesting himself to his people, and that by a self-evidence, neither may any delusion of Satan, as an angel of light, induce us to yield up this our privilege of adoption.

Now, through these several channels, have I waited for a knowledge of the Divine will as to my missionary call. The word of God, his providence, spiritual experience, Christian conference, and continued prayer, have all concurred, in different degrees, in leading to this night's decision. These, however, are all so interwoven together in actual life, and it is so difficult to trace to each its particular effect, in a general result, that I shall not attempt to show in detail what I feel in whole. But as there are *certain considerations* which have been impressed upon me, with an individuality and authority which I feel it were sin in me to resist; and as these considerations have been poured in upon me as the grounds of a call, or else have confirmed such as already existed, I shall endeavour to recount these to my brethren, or so far as I can master them; for that

may often work powerfully and rightly, which is scarcely transferable to others:—and in making this attempt, I trust my brethren will not overlook the novelty of the present case; nor forget that I need greater latitude and indulgence, as I have devolved on me to plead for parties not at your bar, who have no deputation, no advocacy here, though they be deeply concerned; and that you will regard these considerations as *present in my mind*, whilst only *recited to yours*.

I. The consideration has been pressed upon me from the word of God, that the *church* of Christ is essentially and constitutionally *evangelistic* or missionary—having been called, formed, and sanctified “to shew forth the praises of the Lord,” and to “hold forth the word of life”:—that she is not intended to sit down, or rest in ease and self-enjoyment, but is to arise and shake herself from the dust, and maintain an aspect of salvation towards the world:—that her unceasing duty is evangelical aggression, and perpetual extension:—that the design of all internal edification as a church, is thus externally to multiply and replenish the earth:—that the evangelization of the world, being the will of her Head, is the law of her being:—that this law descends to every member of the body; so that the chief end for which I ought to live towards the world, under God, is the salvation of my perishing fellow-men:—and that this bears more strongly upon those of my fellow-men who *have sinned* and are *ignorant* of a Saviour, than upon those who have both *sinned* and *rejected* that Saviour. Therefore of two claims before me, I have been made to feel that the stronger which goes more to fulfil the original constitution and design of the church, in preaching the Gospel where it is not, than where it is. Yet in this I judge not others.

II. I have been impressed with the consideration also, that the *world* is the *church's trust* for the express end of being evangelized—as Canaan was given to the Jews, so is the world of “all nations” to Christians, to be by them possessed:—that, for 1800 years, we have been accepting and holding this immense and awful trust at the hands of our Lord:—that at this moment there are some hundred millions, to “every creature” of whom it is His clear and express command that the Gospel be preached, and yet to not one of whom has it been conveyed by the church:—that every individual Christian, whether he own it or not, is most certainly, by his own act and deed of communion with the church, a full partaker in this tremendous trust:—that the blood

of the world will be required at his hand, according to the nature of his calling, and the extent of his ability to do good:—that if there are places where this trust has been either wholly or comparatively unfulfilled, and where the Lord of all is at the same time opening a wide door for the fulfilment, as in India, at this time—then I am made in my own self to feel, that, of two claims or calls, I must, according to this conviction, prefer that which goes more fully to the discharge of the great and solemn trust of the whole world's evangelization.

III. This third consideration has been pressed upon me, that the gospel *ministry* is originally and primarily *evangelistic* or missionary—and that nothing can destroy or annul this its *first* element and characteristic:—so that this, the grand organ of the church, is of one constitution with the church itself. Our *commission*, as it came from the lips of our Lord, is *universal*; in his church, and by his providence, he may subdivide this universality for special ends, or he may call us to the full exercise of it: he may fix us as pastors of churches, or send us as evangelists to the world, as seems good to him:—in the former case, we must devote our whole energies to our present work; in the latter we must be ready to gird up our loins, and leave all to fulfil the original ministry which we have accepted. This evangelistic and universal element ever remains in our Divine commission; and as it may subject us to pastoral transferences, so may it also subject us to missionary calls, at home or abroad. If then such be my commission, and if the missionary call sent me be not only within its scope, but originally contemplated as the highest fulfilment of it; then surely, if the pastoral claim from the church, and an evangelistic call to the world, be both before me; if I look to the unalterable character of that commission, I cannot but yield to the conviction, that the *latter* I must prefer to the former; and rather preach to those who comparatively have not the Gospel, than to those who have it—to those who may have but, a hundred preachers to a hundred millions, than to those who have more than a preacher to every five thousand, if every pastor were as he ought to be, an evangelist too.

IV. I feel also individually laid prostrate under the conviction, that the internal and spiritual *prosperity of the church* herself, demands a more full discharge of her evangelistic work. Like a human body, the church is constructed for certain activity and functions: in the fulfilling of these, God will bless her; in the neglect of them, she is blighted. If the neglect

of half a million of souls in London be chargeable against the churches of Christ in it, how can they prosper? Will the Lord smile on the blood-guilty!—And if over the world there be six hundred millions of souls, far, far more neglected than even that half million here, can those churches ever expect a blessing that will not arise and do their Lord's will, by a total consecration of themselves to his work? Will he reward those who are standing idle all the day in the market-place, as he will those who are toiling in his vineyard? May he not say to *our* churches in this matter, as of old, "When ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you; yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: *your hands are full of blood*. Wash you, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow. *Come now*, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." Oh, surely, if our churches did but respond to that parting charge of their common Lord, to preach his Gospel of grace "to all nations and every creature," and did but devote themselves to this his supreme work on earth, we should not have such a mournful deadness in other respects amongst us! In proportion as we pour out a blessing to others, will he pour into us: the most devoted and zealous, are the most happy and joyous. And *by what* can the church give more largely, than by yielding up her own tried Gospel ministry? or By what act can the ministers more largely bless the church, than by going forth personally, as Paul and Barnabas of old? And if God hath, by many dealings and considerations, made it manifest to me that is more for the good of his church, in its spiritual relation to him, although not in its temporal aspect, that I should go forth, who am I, that anything of mine should stand in the way? And if my own congregation and presbytery do in faith render me up to this work, I am persuaded that they will eventually discover a new benefit springing up, in *another* form, and *better* far than any connected with the presence of a poor fellow-worm—they will have more of the presence of *Christ himself* in the midst of the churches.

V. The *apathy* too generally prevalent amongst us, on the subject of the world's evangelization, has been laid upon me also by the hand of God, as an argument for personal surrender in this solemn and important work. The standard of that interest which we ought to take

in the matter of *publishing* the Gospel of salvation, is surely to be found in the interest which the Son of God took in *working* out that salvation. We are called by His name; we profess, as Christians, unity of mind and aim with Him; we say in baptism, and at his table, and in the worship of the sanctuary, that we are His—that our heart is with His—else we mean nothing. But where is the semblance of the heart that was pierced with the spear? Where is the head that was crowned with thorns? Where the hands and feet that were transfixed with nails? Where his groaning spirit, where his travailing soul? Oh, where are those tears that bedewed Jerusalem's highway? Where the bloody sweat that stained Gethsemane? Where, O where, is the evidence of unity and conformity amongst the great mass of us, to the Son of God and of man, to the crucified One? True, there is a remnant, however small, that are living, feeling, acting, praying, and even suffering somewhat, that they may fulfil the mind that was in Christ; and who may be known by a brokenness and contrition of heart over their own imperfections. But, oh! as to the mass of Christian professors, they are sunk in carnal sloth, and selfish ease! they *shrink* from the very hearing of the claims of Christ and the world; or they *compound*, by the substitution of a coin of gold for a heart of love, or of a printed name for a burning soul! To me there seems something fearfully wrong in our present state; all missionary or evangelistic effort is accounted as something extra, over and above just claims; a favour conferred on man, if not on God, instead of being that for which chiefly we should live as Christians in a perishing world!

Now this state of things in our own branch of the Church of Christ, has been brought home to me with *individual* power, and I have been made to consider what will break up this apathy? The *ministry* of Christ must do it. But how? by preaching the word, and awaking man by blowing the trumpet, either of Sinai or Zion, as may be needed? True.—But will it be *enough* that they *preach*? nay, they must *act* too; and if action lead to *suffering*, then must they suffer too, which is their highest privilege and glory here. Was it preaching, without actions and suffering, that established the primitive church? Was it preaching, without actions and suffering, that established the Reformation? Shall it be preaching, without actions and sufferings in some sort, that will establish the missionary cause, the *universal* kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ? Nay, the apathy of the people must be broken up by the readiness

of the ministers. Let the priests that might plead exemption, go into the river *first*, and the people will follow, and, the river will dry up, and Canaan be possessed.—But is it needful that *all* should do the same? No—but let all be willing and ready: and, if God so please, let one go for many or few. Now, then, if the Lord hath said in my hearing, even in my heart, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” was I, or am I, wrong in saying, “Here am I, send me”? If death were to seize me tomorrow, or the ocean to close over me, ere I reached a heathen shore, still would I die in the conviction that I had done my Lord’s will in accepting this call; and that he could cause that which was dead to bring to nought that which was living: by the death of one man he could break up the apathy of ten; and by the last crash of life, accomplish more than by a warfare of years threescore and ten!

VI. Or shall I farther be ashamed to own, that in this matter of acceptance, I feel “*constrained by the love*” of the Lord Jesus Christ—which, as my brethren know, is the *mainspring* of the ministry, even as of Christian life? We well know that there is an *actual* fellowship between the Lord of glory and his servants still; that *still* there is a reciprocation of love between the Son of God and us, the poor children of men; so that when we are rendering up our poor selves to him, he is pleased to shed abroad in us his marvellous and constraining love by his Holy Spirit; and so that when we are engaged in those duties, or pursuing those objects that are nearest to his heart, he does especially manifest himself to us. Is it not this “love to the Lord Jesus Christ,” which we declared at ordination led us to the gospel ministry? Is it not this love which has sustained us in our many difficulties? Is it not the leadings of this love that prompts us in our evangelistic exertions at home, when we cross our pastoral limit it may be, in the judgment of some? And if he who said, “*other sheep* I have who are not of this fold,” and who said also to Peter, “Simon, son of Jonas, *lovest thou me?*—feed *my sheep*, feed *my lambs*”; if he, by his providence and inward dealings, do point now, not to those dear sheep and dear lambs around me, whom I have endeavoured joyfully to tend, whilst he would have it so, (as you have their own affectionate testimony in that Memorial now on your table); but if he point to “*others*, not of this fold,” who, in a land to which few, save for the love of gold, will go, are dying for want of shepherds to lead them to the pastures of salvation, shall I, can I, demur under the pressure of that love “which

passeth knowledge," to do what I feel to be his will? Nay, perish my right hand, and let my tongue cleave to my mouth, if I yield not to *His* love, who died for me! I cannot indeed expect my brethren or others to see that the love of Christ requires this *special* thing of me? but I give them the workings and convictions of my soul, as they desired that I would. I feel and admit, that were I placed amidst a gainsaying and disobedient people, (as I have not been), that to persevere unto death in declaring the truth to them, would be, if such were the will of Christ, the highest fruit of love to him that perhaps could be given: but he leads as seems good to him; and if a sense of his love shut me up to accept this invitation, as His call, I cannot but go on to obey it.

VII. But I am led by this further to advert to the personal dealings of God with my own self, in regard to the matter now before us, in that he hath given me a *heart* to this missionary work. My brethren are aware that the call now on their table, has, in course of Providence, arisen out of information received by the Committee in Edinburgh, that my mind was disposed towards personal engagement in the foreign missionary cause; and the existence of such a bias I have both publicly and privately been ready to avow, when required. Its history is briefly as follows; and I now give that, which, but for this special providence of God, would have remained buried where it ought, in the secrecy of mine own heart; if so be, that the recital may lead to more satisfaction in the minds of my brethren, as to the course which I feel led to adopt.

Soon after it pleased God, of his great grace, to "reveal his Son in me," as in most, if not in all such cases, I was filled with a vehement desire to make known the salvation of Christ to *all* men; and having a door thrown open to me just then in my immediate neighbourhood for the doing of good, I was enabled to embrace the opening. In pursuing one department, the formation of a Sabbath School Library, I was most unexpectedly led to the perusal of certain missionary biographies, and, among the rest, of Martyn and Brainerd. I was immediately smitten like Saul to the ground; and under the oppression of what was mightier than any human hand, I was led for many weeks to cry day and night, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" At length, unwilling even then, to do what might be rash or undutiful, I took counsel of a venerated and devoted servant of our Master. His wise counsel was, in substance, "Keep this matter before the throne of grace; and go on with present duty until light

be given.” This I followed, though not without a struggle, and went on in the different spheres opened from that day to this. It may be said, could *such* a bias, that seemed so to pass away, have been from God? I believe it was; “the time was not yet come”: *discipline*, very sore and needful discipline, must first be undergone. Moses, when a youth, had the bias of his future work, and “slew the Egyptian”; but he was not then called of God, and therefore he must flee, and forty years in Midian must pass over his head as a shepherd, ere the year of his ultimate calling arrived. May not a right bias then exist, and be *trained* in its very *suspension*?

My people well know, that from the time I came amongst them, in November 1830, until the month of April 1835, I took no active interest in foreign missionary matters. I seemed almost estranged beyond others from them. I had, indeed, occasional thoughts and stirrings within me us to personal call; but I must say, that I was so distrustful of their origin, and fearful of their tendency, that I was induced to check them. I have since been led to see and mourn over that, as a period of special guilt, wherein, on account of my apathy, I am chargeable with my brother’s blood.

The spring of 1835, as it was thus the most insensible portion of my spiritual life as to all missionary exertion, was, at the same time, *externally*, the most bright and promising of my ministry in London. After a long struggle, my flock and myself had entered this new and desirable place of worship. A larger number of hearers were added to us within a few weeks, than in any one year of my ministry, either before or after; and I will frankly own, that I felt as if settling down to my rest, and saying, “*Here* will I dwell, for I do like it.” At this very time it was proposed that the Rev. Dr. Duff should visit our Presbytery, and that we should enter into closer missionary co-operation in our several churches. I now confess, to my shame, and perhaps my brethren will remember it, that I was the only member of the Presbytery that was at first inclined to oppose the proposition, or to hinder the good work; although afterwards I concurred in making a trial. There existed in my mind a degree of prejudice against that very scheme with which I am now called to co-operate. Thus was there no excitement, no prepossession in my mind. It was at this most unlikely time, that it pleased the Lord a second time to transfix me with that shaft of his authority, which no hand as yet has been able to extract; and although, as to man, it was as from “a bow drawn at a venture,” yet not so as to Him who presides in heaven. In the public ministrations of

certain of his honoured servants to whom I was personally unknown, was I thus smitten, and driven out of my selfish apathy and my settled formality, to the fresh inquiry, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” From that time till now, I have had no continued rest of soul in this matter, save in yielding to it; and from one stage to another has this renewed bias advanced, until it has, by a providential necessity which I dared not arrest, reached that solemn crisis which places me here this night.

But, have I done *right*, it has been asked, in *entertaining* or cherishing such a bias? Was it not undutiful in my present sphere? was it not yielding to *temptation*? in reply to this, I might simply refer to principles formerly laid down, that the Lord undoubtedly has the power of manifesting his own mind to his own servants: to think otherwise were to suppose him inferior to an earthly master, who can declare his mind to his servants—or it were to insinuate that the Lord of light is at the mercy of the Prince of darkness, so that we can have *no certainty* in regard to any impulse or bias, whether it be from the former or the latter? But the question may be one of *evidence* in some degree, even to others—and if I can satisfy on this point, I would rejoice to do so. Take first the *negative* view. Was there anything *undutiful* in *these* steps, which include substantially all that I have done?

Was it undutiful, or does it savour of temptation, to have carried this matter, in the very first conscious working of it, to the throne of grace; and there to pour it forth—there to plead for direction, and against all delusion—for many months?

Was it wrong to renew my personal dedication, with this enlargement of it, “send me *whither* thou wilt”—and with this accompaniment, even an endeavour to have my “loins girt, and lamp burning,” if I should be called away?

Was it wrong to withhold from my flock and brethren *here*, for a time, the disclosure of that which was still vague and unformed within my own breast, and the publicity of which might have the effect, at that stage, of weakening my hands, or of prejudicing my future judgment?

Was it *contrary to my duty* as a Christian brother, when in such circumstances I most unexpectedly met with two or three missionary brethren, to *confer* with them about this state of mind, and seek the benefit of their prayers and experience; more especially as they were no personal friends of mine, and used no personal influence with me?

And, finally, when I received the first communication from the Committee in Edinburgh, inquiring confidentially into my reported willingness to enter into the foreign missionary work, was it *undutiful* simply to *relate* my feelings in their *conditional* form to a representative body of the church, and to say, in substance, that I was *ready to receive and consider* a call from them, although I still must hold myself free and unpledged as to any result, until I had, as a presbyter and a pastor, laid the matter before my brethren and my flock?

But I may go further than that which is merely negative, and declare *positively* my conviction, that this *bias* of soul to which I am now ultimately yielding, was, and is “of God,” on such grounds as these; although there be others also, which my own heart alone can know:—

There is nothing in my own *natural* constitution or temperament, that I am aware of, which would lead to such a bias as this—nay, rather, with mere nature I have had throughout to contend.

No *personal* influence has been at all brought to bear on me, in promoting this state of mind. I have had no missionary friend or correspondent; although such might have been a most legitimate and a Divine channel of influence, had it existed.

I have felt uniformly *satisfied*, and glad to labour in my present sphere: and so far from feeling that this has led to any discontent, I have felt constrained by it to devote myself more to my immediate calling, and to increase, during the last year or more, my public exertions in the field around me.

There has been present to my mind a *sense of self-distrust* and jealousy, lest I should err. I have, I trust, sought only the evidence of duty; and this has led to the use of those means formerly described, wherein I might expect guidance. I hope I can say, that I have loved and sought the light of God, and that only; and I can have no doubt that the *bias* which distrusts the flesh, and demands for its sustenance a *clear conscience*, and requires for its element the light of God in his word and at his throne, must be of him “who is light, and in whom is no darkness at all.”

That *increase of blessing* too, which my people have referred to, as connected with my *latter* ministrations amongst them, has, in my experience, after close examination, been found uniformly connected with this missionary bias. At first, I was doubtful what this fact, of which I am conscious, might indicate—whether it was not an arrest laid on

me to retain me—or whether it was a messenger to encourage me in dedication of heart to the missionary cause; but I found, as by a process of continued and experimental induction, that this special blessing of which I was so conscious, was sent for the latter purpose. I was made in the end clearly to see that this bias was like the “Nazarite’s lock” of separation—when it was cut I became weak, but when it was suffered to grow I became strong. David says, “If I regard iniquity in my heart, my God will not hear me: but verily the Lord hath heard me; he hath attended to the voice of my prayer. Blessed be God which hath not turned away my prayer, nor his mercy from me.” If such, of old, was a test of duty, or of “sin in the heart,” may I not hope, that if God has blessed this bias of my soul, that it is itself from him; and that if he so bountifully answered the prayers offered up under its dominion, it was surely because he found it not to be “iniquity”?

Nor may I deny or withhold that this calling forth of my heart towards the arduous work of foreign mission, has been accompanied with more full discoveries of my own meanness, and nothingness, and unworthiness before God than I am aware of having ever before attained to; neither know I how I could have endured such discoveries, so as to go on with present duty, far less to have contemplated the work to which I now seem called, were it not for such increased manifestations on the other side of our “completeness in Christ the Head,” and the omnipotence of the “indwelling Spirit” of Grace, as more than counterbalanced the former. Such self-emptying and Divine replenishing, I have been led to consider as evidences of the work of God, according to the Scriptures; whereas a mere natural bias is generally accompanied with a personal confidence and selfish preference which have no affinity to that experience which led Paul to say, “Unto me, who am *less than the least of all saints*, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ!” God alone knoweth the depths or the heights into which he has led me in this solemn matter.

I might also endeavour to show, how, for a long time past, the *external Providence* of God towards me has, in most striking manner, corresponded with this the inward work of my heart. But on this I deem it inexpedient here to enter, for various reasons; but especially because the multitude of consecutive incidents referred to, could not be realized in their legitimate power by others, unless seen linked together in their

mutual relations, and in their joint bearing on the individual concerned, and for whom they were intended. Often have Christians to encounter this ground of initiation—that those *special* providences in their lot, with which there is connected to them inwardly a special Divine authority, are to others unmeaning; and that the practice resulting from them is arraigned as baseless. This, however, will lead us only to a closer investigation, and to a deeper persuasion, that our Ruler is our Teacher, and that he counsels in governing. Such has been my own experience up to the present stage of this matter; and I have the more satisfaction in saying this, because I can safely assert, that all the more striking acts of Divine Providence occurred when unsought and unexpected—when there was no activity of bias in pursuit of them, and when, therefore, there would be least danger of prejudice in their reception.

If, then, I have a *heart* towards this missionary work, and if I have evidence that this heart is “of God,” then truly am I responsible for such a gift. I am not better than other men because of it: but I am more accountable than they in this one point, and must take heed how I hinder or arrest. True, indeed, such a heart is needed by me *here*; but then it gets no rest here. True also, God may, as of old, accept the “purpose of the heart” for the deed of the hand: but with me he has not so interposed; and how then can I stop? So far from an arrest, I have to contemplate,

VIII. Lastly, a *door opened*, in the course of his Providence, whereby I may, in a clear, orderly, and satisfactory manner, go out from my present much-loved charge, and enter dutifully on that other work to which I have been so long drawn in mind.

With the *immediate* origin of the application or call now on your table, I have nothing to do, for I have had no share in it. If asked again that ordination question, “Have you used any undue methods, either by yourself or others, in procuring this call?” my reply is now, as heretofore, “No—*none*.” If *ultimately*, however, this call *may* be traced up to that *general* disclosure of my mind made to certain brethren, under a pressure of heart which none but they who have felt it can comprehend, does it therefore follow that this is no call of God? Do we find, on surveying his word, that his methods of calling his servants are so limited, as to restrict (especially in works not generally desired), all knowledge or disclosure of their own minds as elements in the matter? We read in the case of the godly Nehemiah, that even whilst he held what in those days

was a most important trust in the court of Persia, whereby he might have much benefited his people in the way of direct personal influence, that he entered into correspondence with certain brethren about the far distant and ruined Jerusalem—that when he heard the tidings they brought, he sat down and wept and mourned certain days, yea, and fasted and prayed to the God of heaven for favour in this matter. Still he remained at his post. Months after this, the door was *thus* opened: “Now the wine was before the king Artaxerxes, and I took up the wine and gave it unto the king. Now I had not before been sad in his presence. Wherefore the king said unto me, Why is thy countenance sad, seeing thou art not sick? this is nothing else but sorrow of heart. Then was I very sore afraid, and said unto the king, Let the king live for ever: why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers’ sepulchres, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are burnt with fire. Then the king said unto me, For what dost thou make request? So I prayed unto the God of heaven. And I said unto the king, If it please the king, and if thy servant have found favour in thy sight, that thou wouldest send me unto Judah, unto the city of my fathers’ sepulchres, that I may build it. And the king said, For how long shall thy journey be? when wilt thou return? So it pleased the king to send me, and I set him a time.”

Thus did the burden of Nehemiah’s heart, a burden which was of the Lord, *reveal* itself; and that disclosure, long suppressed and prayed over, at length led to his commission to go forward to the work to which the Lord called him, and in which, amidst many trials, he finally was prospered. May not this call now before my brethren be also of God; although, if traced up in its human relations, it may have arisen from the disclosure of a mind long burdened, but at length constrained, from a regard to truth and duty, to speak?

I feel that I cannot but regard this invitation from the representative body of the church, as a *call*, simple, clear, and direct in *my* circumstances, and as the consummating link in that long chain of personal providence with which I have been tried. I will not say, that had this visitation come to me unprepared in heart for any such work, or unexercised previously about it, that I could have regarded it as of the special weight that I now do; although even then I dared not have put it lightly aside. But when I look back on the whole train from the beginning until now, and consider how I have been impelled, contrary to my own nature and to

creature relations; now, after waiting on him, although most imperfectly, in the reading of his word, in the watching of his providence, in the examination of experience, in the exercise of conference, and above all in continued prayer for guidance and against delusion, I have still been uniformly impelled in the same course; how, when I would again and again, through impatience it may be, have ventured to seek a door of outlet for myself, before any door of inlet to another sphere was opened to me, I was most mercifully hindered, and kept joyfully engaged in my present work; and how, when I had long left the matter entirely with the Lord, he was pleased, by conveying the knowledge of my mind to those in his church who were at that time engaged in looking out for one of that mind, to stir them up to propose to me that which is as the very opening of the door of the church to me, in a scriptural and orderly manner; when I retrace all this, I feel that there is in it, as manifested to my conscience, a complete and finished call of the Lord Jesus—of him “who hath the keys of David; who openeth and no man shutteth, and who shutteth and no man openeth.” I see much sin *in* what I have done, for which I come to my Redeemer’s blood, for the same one is our Lord and our *Saviour* too; but I do not see that *what* I have done is *sin*, therefore can I commit the result to him who is our *Judge*, as well as our Master.

Throughout this statement I have waived anything like discussion or debate, as to the considerations which have been urged against my removal; but I believe that virtually and substantially the results of my mind regarding them, will be found embodied and inter-woven in what I have this evening declared. My object is, to show simply the conviction to which I am led, as to the will of our Head; and let it speak for itself in the minds of my brethren.

Yet I feel that I cannot conclude without regarding one question, “*How can you part with your present flock?*” If the question be asked of my *heart*, I can only reply by repeating the question, “*How can I?* Lord God, thou only knowest how I am to do this thing! From thee alone can come my strength for such a separation.” This I can say, that nothing but a love to my Saviour, greater I trust than my love to my flock, could lead to such a step as that to which I am now brought; and they will not blame me for yielding to *that love* which I ever sought to lead them to as best.

But if the question be asked of my *conscience*, then *must* I reply, “He that called me hither six years ago, now calls me hence again, and I

must go, for He wills it"; and my people have prayed with me that "his will may be done." That which they have deemed and felt to be as the *beginning* of a blessing on my ministry, I have been made to feel as the winding up of it, by the hand of Mercy, until the judgment day. And that *memorial*, in which I see most clearly the Spirit of God restraining and subduing the hearts of praying men who composed it, so that they should not, even unconsciously, go beyond the limits of his holy but then unknown will, I found to be as a testimony of acceptance, sweeter to my taste than the last but richly mellowed fruits of autumn. It declares, that *with me* there is *no discontent, and with them no disaffection*; that I have endeavoured to labour to *the last*, and that to *the last* they have rejoiced in my poor borrowed labours. If any chain forged on earth could bind me, that memorial might: but I feel that, contrary to my own weak nature, all ties are made as flax to me. I feel bound in spirit, and I cannot but go. I feel that I have this night come to the brink of waters deep, dark, and strong; and never has my flesh trembled as now. But there is a voice from the Unseen, which says, "It is I; be not afraid." That voice I know; it is "the Beloved" who speaks. I must not shrink—I may not fear—but will follow whithersoever he call. I am not yours, my beloved brethren and flock; neither am I my own. If I follow not him, the sentence is already pronounced that I am not his. But his I am and must be; therefore I go—Lord lead me! what I have done evil, forgive; what is thine own, accept; and "Thine be the kingdom, the power and the glory, forever. Amen."

Moderator, once more, in conclusion, must I declare my clear acceptance of this call, to go forth to labour as a minister in foreign parts; and in due time, although not now (for the sake of my flock), shall be tendered to you my resignation of the present charge, if the Lord further permit: and I trust that the statement made this night will satisfy the minds of my brethren, that I am now acting according to truth and conscience.

WORSHIP SERVICES

Free Church Atlanta, Tucker, Georgia

Sabbath services 11 AM and 2 PM, 2256 Northlake Parkway, Suite 301-302.

Minister: Rev. Warren Gardner, 1115 Jefferson Highway, Winder, GA 30680, tel. 770.867.5765, wegardner@masterstrumpet.org.

Westminster Presbyterian Church, Bethesda, Maryland

Sabbath services 2 PM and 6 PM, 7801 Persimmon Tree Lane.

Minister: Rev. Sherman Isbell, 3155 Lindenwood Lane, Fairfax, VA 22031, tel. 703.359.0192, rsisbell@masterstrumpet.org.

Pilgrims' Hope Presbyterian Church, Cumberland, Maryland

Sabbath service 2 PM.

Information: Elder David Biser, 18105 Vernon Estates Drive, Oldtown, MD 21555, tel. 301.478.5764, dbiser@masterstrumpet.org.

Detroit Preaching Station, Plymouth, Michigan

Sabbath service 3:30 PM, Trinity Presbyterian Church, 10101 West Ann Arbor.

Church Planter: Rev. Sean Humby, 46645 Ford Road, Canton, MI 48187, tel. 734.855.6221, shumby@masterstrumpet.org.

St. Louis Preaching Station, St. Louis, Missouri

Sabbath service 6:15 PM, 10126 East Watson Road.

Supply: Mr. Jonathan Mattull, 4814 Werner Road, High Ridge, MO 63049, tel. 314.520.1629, jmattull@masterstrumpet.org.

Greenville Presbyterian Church, Greenville, South Carolina

Sabbath services 10 AM and 1 PM, One Cleveland Street.

Minister: Rev. Robert McCurley, 982 Bates Crossing Road, Travelers Rest, SC 29690, tel. 864.610.0227, rdmccurley@masterstrumpet.org.