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Professor Tom Nettles teaching

Front cover picture. Conrad Mbewe, one of the directors of APC. He writes, 'The African Pastors' Conferences have been used by God over the last few years to bring biblical messages to pastors and church leaders across southern and eastern Africa about the Christian faith that need to be heard today. We also supply each conference with a good array of books at greatly discounted prices, with some being given out free. Currently, we are running about 40 conferences per year reaching about 2,000 pastors. We are looking for partners to "adopt" individual conferences and will gladly supply the details to any interested churches.'

Editorial

THE CHURCH SHOULD LIVE IN PRAYERFUL, LOVING obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ, longing for much needed revival

The need of prayer

As we contemplate our current position as God's people and Church in the world at the beginning of another year, we would do well to read the book of the prophet Habakkuk and to use his prayer as an example and inspiration for our own prayers. I am thinking especially of Habakkuk 3:2 where we read: 'O LORD, I have heard the report of you, and your work, O LORD, do I fear. In the midst of the years revive it; in the midst of the years make it known; in wrath remember mercy' (ESV). In recent issues of *RT* we have paid attention to God's mighty acts in past periods of revival and to the need of prayer. This crucial topic occupies a good part of this first issue of *RT* in 2015. The story of John Sutcliff and the call to prayer of 1784 as told by Michael Haykin is a wonderful stimulus to pray along similar lines as Habakkuk.

..... *and obedience*

When we pray, we speak to

our great God and Lord, to our Saviour Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church. This should remind us immediately of who he is and what his will is for us and for the Church and the need for obedience to our Lord. We are therefore profoundly grateful to be able to include an article on the Ten Commandments by our founding editor Erroll Hulse in this issue of *Reformation Today*. Our brother Erroll spoke about this topic in Edinburgh in late 2013 in what proved to be his last public address before he went to South Africa where he suffered a stroke. His main ministry now is fulltime prayer and intercession as he has told us. This article by Erroll Hulse on the Ten Commandments is of importance with regard to the current debate about so-called New Covenant Theology. In one sense we as NT believers do all belong to the New Covenant and are therefore likely to have a new covenant theology. But what the discussion refers to specifically is the question about the abrogation of the Mosaic law for NT believers which is what New Covenant Theology claims. This is combined with a rejection of the classical reformed view of the threefold division of the Mosaic law (moral, ceremonial and civil).

This raises many questions, one of which is whether the ten commandments are still valid for Christians today? Well, nobody would suggest that it is now OK to steal, to lie etc. but New Covenant Theology still makes a plea for its position. As Erroll Hulse makes clear, however, it is certainly significant that the moral law of our eternal God was verbally expressed by God speaking AND writing the Ten Commandments. As John Palmer mentions in his article, we have to give due weight to the teaching of Jesus in a passage like John 14:15-23 in which Jesus makes a direct connection to loving him and obeying his commandments. Love, truth and obedience are not mutually contradictory but go hand in hand as 2 John 4-6 makes clear. This is why Jesus said that his yoke is easy and his burden light!

Focused on the Lord Jesus Christ

It is most appropriate that the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ is the great subject in this issue's instalment in our doctrinal series, this time written by Stephen Clark. The topics of obeying and following our Lord are extended to the life of the Church in the article by John Palmer. The various articles in this issue combine well to make up the following theme: The Church should live in prayerful, loving

obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ, longing for much needed revival. We hope and pray that this theme will be a consistent feature of our lives and ministries in the year ahead.

Reformation Today in 2015

The board of the *Reformation Today* Trust has asked me to continue the task of editing *Reformation Today*. This is both a huge responsibility and a tremendous privilege especially when considering this means stepping in the footsteps of Erroll Hulse who founded and edited *RT* for 45 years! I therefore greatly value your prayer and invite you to send me any comments you may have.

Plans for the contents of *RT* in 2015 include the following. We are aiming to continue our doctrinal series written by our assistant editor Mostyn Roberts and some other authors. Bob Davey has prepared a further series of expositions, now focusing on our Lord's prayer in John 17. Our other assistant editor Tom Nettles has already sent biographical articles (see also News). We are also seeking to expand the number of authors e.g. more authors from Africa.

As many of our readers will know, we heavily subsidise subscriptions to readers in less affluent parts of the world.

We are very grateful for a rapidly expanding readership in the growing churches in regions like Africa. All of this means, however, that there is an increasing financial burden to keep making *RT* available and affordable for readers in other parts of the world. These subsidies are paid for by the subscriptions of our readers in Europe and North America. We would therefore kindly ask you to promote *RT* wherever you can: among relatives, friends, church etc. in order to increase the number of fully paid subscriptions. We also welcome donations for this purpose (which in the UK qualify for the Gift Aid scheme; please contact Frederick Hodgson for further information). Your support will be much appreciated.

African Pastors' Conferences

This brings me to the ministry of the APCs which will be well known to our readers. We are profoundly grateful for the substantial growth of this work in recent years reaching many hundreds of pastors with teaching and literature to support their ministries in local churches. But this growth presents its own challenges and this has led the committee to seek to expand the support base for this work. At the same time this offers individuals and churches the

opportunity to get involved in this ministry in a meaningful and relatively direct way. You will find all the information in the brochure enclosed with this issue of *RT*. We invite you to read this carefully and ask you to support this work first of all through prayer (see above!) and also through financial support.

International Federation of Reformed Baptists (IFRB)

IFRB was set up in 1990 with the overall purpose of strengthening the ministry and fellowship of Reformed Baptists and, more specifically, to promote Reformed truth, to encourage unity and networking, and to facilitate exchange of news and information. One of the activities was therefore to produce a bimonthly paper newsletter sent together with *RT* to members of IFRB. We do not think this is still the best way to serve the purposes of the IFRB at the moment. As the IFRB approaches its 25th anniversary, we are thinking of new ways to achieve the above purposes. Any comments will be most welcome; please e-mail me or Frederick Hodgson.

And finally.....

May the Lord bless you all in this new year, AD (= Anno Domini; the year of the Lord) 2015.

Kees van Kralingen

The Uniqueness of the Ten Commandments

by Erroll Hulse

Martin Luther: 'Whoever knows well this art of distinguishing between Law and Gospel, him place at the head and call him a doctor of Holy Scripture' [Concordia, vol 9, col 802]

WE REFER TO THE TEN COMMANDMENTS (EX 20:1-17, DEUT 5:6-21) AS 'GOD'S MORAL LAW'. THE WESTMINSTER CONFESSION and the second London Baptist Confession ('The 1689') distinguish clearly between the moral, ceremonial and civil laws. This threefold division of the law was discussed by Jonathan Bayes (*Reformation Today*, 177). Bayes explored patristic and rabbinic literature on this subject to show that the threefold division of the law was not only the belief of the Reformers but has a long history.

The Bible uses the word 'law' in a number of different ways. It sometimes refers to the whole of Scripture (Psalm 19:7). The word 'law' (*Torah*) is found about 180 times in the Old Testament, and the word 'law' (*nomos*) about 280 times in the New Testament. In a few instances these words are translated as 'commandments'. The word 'law' is sometimes taken for the Old Testament (John 15:25). In Acts 15:5 it is used to refer to the law of Moses. The law, referring to the moral law, is used many times as we shall see.

In Exodus these laws are clearly distinguished into three categories: moral law, chapter 20; civil law, chapters 21 to 23; and ceremonial law, chapters 24 to 40.

My purpose is to show that the Ten Commandments as an entity are unique.

They are unique in the way they were revealed at Mount Sinai. There is nothing in the history of mankind to compare with the exodus of the people of Israel out of Egypt and into the wilderness of Sinai, and there is nothing to compare with that nation's early major experience which was the enactment of the moral law at Mount Sinai. When the people assembled before that mountain:

'On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning, with a thick cloud over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast. Everyone in the camp trembled. Then Moses led the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the LORD descended on it in fire. The smoke billowed up from it like smoke from a furnace, the whole mountain

trembled violently and the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder. Then Moses spoke and the voice of God answered him' (Ex 19:16-19).

Note the unique features of thunder and lightning, the thick cloud, the loud trumpet blast and the descent of the LORD in fire. Never had there been anything to equal the fire, the thunder, the voice of God and the trumpets. These features combine to make the event unique. The purpose of this display of God's holiness is to stress the importance of the moral law as a unique entity.

The throne of God at Sinai is unique. Nowhere else do we find a mountain on fire, redolent with divine justice, holiness and purity, as the place from which law is promulgated. King Solomon sat on a magnificent throne to give judgements. Queen Elizabeth II sits on her throne each time she reads out her government's legislative programme. But nothing compares to the glory of Mount Sinai for a throne from which the King delivered his law.

1. The moral law is unique in its vocal presentation

There are some important examples in the Gospels where the Father declares his love for his Son (e.g. Matt 3:17; 17:5). But we should note that the Ten Commandments were spoken out by the Lord in the hearing of the full assembly of Israelites. All other laws were mediated either by the Lord personally instructing Moses or by the mediation of angels delegated by him (Gal 3:19; Acts 7:53). None of the laws, ceremonial or civil, were presented to the people by the living voice of God. 'Has any other people heard the voice of God speaking out of fire, as you have, and lived?' (Deut 4:33).

2. The moral law is unique in being written by the finger of God

Ceremonial and civil law make up much of the first five books of the Bible. They were written down by Moses and the scribes who assisted him. But God himself, with his own finger, inscribed the Ten Commandments into stone tablets as is clear from Exodus 31:18 and 32:16. This is also true for the second set which was provided after Moses had smashed the first set after the incident with the golden calf. In this case Moses had to carve out the stones himself, but God wrote the Ten Commandments on them (Ex 34:1-28; see below under 4).

The twin tablets represented the duty and promise of each of the covenant partners to keep that law. Only Jesus in his incarnation from the time of his birth to the time of his death kept the moral law perfectly.

3. The moral law is unique in its being engraven into stone

This may seem incidental and insignificant. However there is a message in this action.

All laws are written on paper and all the Hebrew laws, ceremonial and civil, were written on papyri or scrolls. To engrave laws into stone conveys the message of perpetuity. This is law that can never be changed, neither in time or eternity. That is because it reflects the very character of God.

The ceremonial law once fulfilled by Christ was abrogated. Civil laws are changeable according to conditions that vary from nation to nation. The civil laws given to Israel as a theocracy have their own application which are peculiar to that ancient nation. We can learn lessons from Israel's theocracy, but there is no country today that is subject to the civil laws of ancient Israel. Civil laws in Israel today are certainly not the same as they were under Old Testament Israel.

The moral law graven into stone does apply to everyone in every generation.

4. The moral law is unique in its being written into stone twice

Jeremiah dictated his messages to his scribe Baruch. When King Jehoiakim burned Jeremiah's work, section by section, Baruch was required to write it all over again under the dictation of Jeremiah (Jer 36:32). Deuteronomy chapters nine and ten describe the dramatic breaking of the first set of tablets on Mount Sinai. Then followed the Lord's command for Moses to chisel out two more tablets and take them up the mountain where the Lord himself engraved the Ten Commandments into them. We must surely learn from this episode that the moral law is permanent. No matter how many times the law is transgressed, the requirements of that law remain.

In our secular society the idea prevails that popular opinion can outvote God and change his law. We have seen that recently in the outrageous denial of the seventh commandment by same-sex marriage legislation. That law was passed on the basis of popular opinion although a plebiscite was never allowed. The lesson is that God's moral law does not change. Neither time nor events can change or take away the Ten Commandments. They are permanent, written twice.

5. The moral law is unique in its composition

There were two engraven identical tablets, one for the people and one for the Lord. This was the protocol for the covenant with Israel. On one side of each tablet were written four commandments concerning the law

of faithfulness to God. On the other side of each tablet were written six commandments which comprehensively describe our responsibility to each other and to our neighbours. No other legislation is divided neatly into two categories. The two categories summarise what it is to love God and what it is to love each other.

6. The moral law is unique in its reflection of the divine character

There is no other composition that can equal the Ten Commandments in reflecting the divine attributes of God. As supreme sovereign creator the majesty of God as law-maker shines. The holiness of God is displayed. The justice of God is expressed. Fiery wrath is the message to transgressors. God's love is displayed because when kept peace and prosperity prevail. When kept in love the Ten Commandments provide complete protection from harm. If everyone lived in glad obedience to the moral law there would be no need for a police force or an army. The Lord loves righteousness and hates iniquity.

7. The moral law is unique in its relationship to the ceremonial law

The Ten Commandments are unique in their relationship to the ceremonial law. In making the golden calf the second commandment was broken. Moses pleaded in prayer for God to forgive the people and spare his brother Aaron for his part in gross idolatry. But this saga raises the issue of the basis of forgiveness. In postmodern society the idea prevails that everyone is forgiven and everyone goes to heaven. But there is no basis whatever for that. Propitiation is essential. There must be an atoning sacrifice. The moral law exposes and condemns sin. The ceremonial law describes the basis of forgiveness and cleansing from sin. The ceremonial laws in Exodus chapters 25 to 40 and Leviticus chapters 1 to 10 describe sacrifices, the priesthood and the tabernacle which were administered by the priests. This elaborate ceremonial law is provided for law-breakers. Law-breakers are defined by the moral law. 'Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness' (1 John 3:4).

Christ has fulfilled the ceremonial law, having as great high priest offered up himself as the sacrifice for sin which brings to an end all animal sacrifices (Heb 10:12-14). The ceremonial law which prefigured Christ is now fulfilled. That is the message conveyed in the letter to the Hebrews.

8. The moral law is unique in relationship to civil laws

The moral law is unique in relationship to all civil laws because it is the only God-given basis for guidance for all law-making (1 Tim 1:8-10;

Rom 13:3-4). The moral law shines light on all legislation. Rulers are to make laws which promote good and restrain evil. They cannot force or compel citizens to be spiritual and to keep the first four commandments. But they can pass laws which encourage rest on the Sabbath day. They are obliged to pass laws which encourage family life (fifth commandment), protect life (sixth commandment), protect purity and chastity (seventh commandment), protect property and ownership (eighth commandment) maintain honesty, truth and reputation (ninth commandment).

9. The moral law is unique in its relationship to Christ who alone kept it

The mercy seat covering the ark containing the stone tablets in the tabernacle was symbolic also of the faithfulness of the Lord Jesus Christ as law-keeper. It is a marvel that there could be such a thing as a sinless man. We can only appreciate this when we understand how pervasive and terrible sin is. Yet Jesus was entirely free from sin in his nature. In his life he was confronted with sin in all its vulgarity. By nature he was perfect in holiness. He hated sin and always rejected it. There are several passages that express clearly the sinless nature of Jesus.

- a. Hebrews 4:15 (cf. Heb 7:26) tells us that Jesus was exposed to sin of every kind. He was tempted in every way, just as we are, yet was without sin. Temptation was a reality to him.
- b. 1 John 3:5 affirms that there is no sin in the Son of God. 'But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin.' This explains why he did not sin and could not sin. There was no handle of sin in him for the devil to get a hold of.
- c. 1 Peter 2:22-23 (quoting Isa 53:9) tells of the extreme pressures under which he was brought in his death yet even then he did not sin: 'He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth. When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate: when he suffered he made no threats.'
- d. The Lord Jesus himself could therefore confidently ask (John 8:46): 'Can any of you prove me guilty of sin?'
- e. Paul refers to the same truth in 2 Corinthians 5:21 'God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.'

10. The moral law is unique in relationship to the human conscience

'Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the requirements of the law are written

on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other times even defending them' (Rom 2:14-15).

Every person, throughout time, in every place has been given a conscience, which relates to the moral law and is convicted by that law. The law of God resonates in the conscience of unbelievers – even the fourth commandment.

This is not the case with the ceremonial law. My conscience is not moved at all by the requirement to sacrifice animals or to find priests qualified to sacrifice animals or to find a tabernacle containing articles of furniture. My conscience does respond to civil laws but only as they reflect the demands of the Ten Commandments. Hence if there is a speed limit on the road my conscience responds to drive carefully so as not to harm others.

Having described the uniqueness of the Ten Commandments I proceed now to four important implications.

Implications

1. The New Testament everywhere affirms the continued obligation of the Ten Commandments

This is made clear in Romans 13:8-10: 'Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellow-man has fulfilled the law. The commandments, "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not covet," and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbour as yourself." Love does no harm to its neighbour. Therefore love is the fulfilment of the law.'

The established duty for Christians is love. This is required by the law. Which law? The Ten Commandments as stated in the text.

Paul in his letter to the Galatians affirms the obligation of the moral law. 'You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbour as yourself" (Gal 5:13-14). Here we are urged to fulfil God's law by love. This is exactly in accord with the words of Jesus when he said: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: "Love your neighbour as yourself." All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments' (Matt 22:37-40).

The apostle Paul uses the fifth commandment in exhorting children (Eph 6:1-2): 'Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.

“Honour your father and mother”—which is the first commandment with a promise— “that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.” Note that he cites the fifth commandment in full with the promise attached.

James describes the Ten Commandments as ‘the royal law’ which emphasises the kingship of Christ who engraved this law into tablets of stone. ‘If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, “Love your neighbour as yourself;” you are doing right. But if you show favouritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as law-breakers. For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. For he who said, “Do not commit adultery,” also said, “Do not murder.” If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a law-breaker’ (James 2:8-11). This statement proves the unity of the Ten Commandments. If you break one you break them all. Adam and Eve in rebellion toward God broke all the commandments at a stroke. When the children of Israel worshipped the golden calf they broke the second commandment and by departing from the Lord to serve an idol at one stroke abandoned all the other commandments.

2. The Scriptures consistently reject legalism, not law-keeping

Galatians 2:15-16 ‘We who are Jews by birth and not “Gentile sinners” know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no-one will be justified.’

Legalism in Scripture can be defined as any form of teaching or presentation of the gospel which implies that Christ’s work needs to be supplemented by our own work if we are to be justified.

The basis or ground of my salvation is the perfect righteousness of Christ put to my account. It is never the perfect righteousness of Christ with the addition of my merit or my law-keeping, the merit of my obedience or the merit of my faith. I am justified by faith alone without any addition and my faith is the instrument of my salvation. If I am given a ten thousand pound cheque I do not add to its value by stretching out my hand to receive it.

Paul in Galatians uses extreme language because the Galatian believers were adding to the gospel. False teachers were deceiving them by saying that they could not be saved by faith alone but had to be circumcised. Others were saying that salvation depended on keeping Jewish rituals.

The universal error throughout the world is the belief that law-keeping will save. Muslims rely on their good works out-weighting their sins. In the UK the increasingly prevalent idea is that everyone will be forgiven.

The Established Church of England pronounces over every buried or cremated soul the words 'in sure and certain hope of the resurrection to life immortal'. Yet the Scripture is crystal clear: 'No-one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin' (Rom 3:20). Paul declares: 'Clearly no-one is justified before God by the law, because "the righteous will live by faith".' The keeping of the moral law has no place whatsoever in a sinner's justification before God (Gal 3:11).

Paul declares that the law is 'spiritual' (Rom 7:14). He is never negative about the moral law but describes it as 'holy, righteous and good' (Rom 7:12). He fiercely opposed misuse of the moral law.

Paul is consistently vehement against self-righteous use of the law whether it be the moral law or vestiges of the ceremonial law as we see in Romans 10:1-4: 'My heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.' In fulfilling every need of righteousness in his active and passive obedience for us Christ has fulfilled the demands of the law. That is the end of it. Nothing more is required.

3. The moral law is the chief instrument used by the Holy Spirit when he convicts the world of sin

Romans 4:15 'Where there is no law, there is no transgression'

The promise is that the Holy Spirit will convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgement (John 16:8). It is the law that defines sin. The Holy Spirit prior to conversion can cause sinners to be filled with dread because of their guilt (Rom 8:15).

We see this principle at work when the apostle Paul describes his experience. 'What shall we say, then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, "Do not covet." But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of covetous desire. For apart from law, sin is dead' (Rom 7:7-8).

Foremost among references to the Ten Commandments is Jesus' exposition of the moral law in the Sermon on the Mount. He confirms that he has not come to abolish the law but to fulfil the law. He illustrates the spirituality of the law and the depth of its demands by affirming that hatred in the heart is tantamount to murder. He makes it plain that lusting

after women is the same as adultery (Matt 5:27-30).

When approached by a rich young ruler Jesus applied the Ten Commandments. The young man thought that if he kept the letter of the law that would be adequate. He was shown that he loved his possessions more than God which is idolatry.

4. The fourth commandment cannot be severed from the other nine

The fourth commandment was required to be kept strictly by the Israelites. In keeping the fourth commandment we are not under the rules of the theocracy of Israel.

As those adopted into God's family we are required to organise the Christian Sabbath as a day of spiritual renewal and delight. Exhortation to do this for the whole of the Lord's Day is found in Isaiah 58:13-14:

'If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath and from doing as you please on my holy day, if you call the Sabbath a delight and the LORD's holy day honourable, and if you honour it by not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking idle words, then you will find your joy in the LORD, and I will cause you to ride on the heights of the land and to feast on the inheritance of your father Jacob. The mouth of the LORD has spoken.'

Rest from secular work is required but it is important to allow for works of necessity such as nursing and dairy farming. The Sabbath is a creation ordinance created for the benefit of mankind. Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath. It is a day set apart from other days and for believers is the day over which the Lord has oversight as we read in Revelation 1:10. The Greek text *tê Kuriakê hemera* literally means 'on the Lordly day'.

Conclusion

The essence of law is clarity. For law to work it has to be specific. It is very easy to see the categories of law in Scripture. There is a beautiful simplicity in the three-fold division: moral, ceremonial and civil law.¹

In conclusion, it is by the moral law that sinners are convicted. We have the promise that the Holy Spirit will convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgement (John 16:8). It is the moral law that defines sin. But for the believer the moral law is to be loved and upheld as it is the permanent expression of our God's just and righteous character. With the Psalmist let us affirm, 'Oh how I love your law; it is my meditation day and night' (Ps 119:97).

¹ "New Covenant advocates reject the threefold division of the law. I would commend Greg Welty's 46 page article on Mathew 5:17-48: *Eschatological Fulfilment and the Confirmation of Mosaic Law*. This important piece is available online: www.the-highway.com/mosaic-law_Welty.html. "

The Person of Jesus Christ

by *Stephen Clark*

Introduction

There are three essential elements to the Bible's teaching concerning the true nature and identity of the Lord Jesus Christ. They are:

1. Jesus Christ is God, in the fullest sense of that word.
2. Jesus Christ is a real man - albeit a sinless man - in the fullest sense of that word.
3. Jesus Christ is one person: the God-man.

Jesus is God

The Godhood, or deity of Jesus, is taught in many, many passages of Scripture. The Bible unfolds its message in a progressive way: we may say that God's revealing of himself and the truth about himself kept in step or in tandem with his redemptive acts. This being so, the further one progresses through the Bible the greater is the measure of light. To begin with - as we shall see in the next section on the humanity of Jesus - in the early stages of God's revealing of the plan of salvation, little or nothing is said as to the divine identity of the great Saviour and Deliverer. But as the light of divine revelation increases in its intensity - much as the sun, when rising, sheds greater light upon the earth - so we learn that the great Saviour who would come would be none other than God himself. Hints of a 'plurality of persons' in the Godhead are to be found in the somewhat mysterious figure of the Angel of the Lord who appears on numerous occasions in the Old Testament: He appears to be both distinct from the Lord and yet also to be the Lord. There is mystery indeed in the Being of God!

The mystery becomes clearer in the writings of that great 'eagle of the prophets', the prophet Isaiah. The sign, announced to Ahaz and given by the LORD to the household of David, was that the virgin would conceive and bring forth a child who would be called Immanuel, which means God with us (Isa 7:13-14) [1]. The land of Israel is called 'your land, O Immanuel' (Isa 8:8), while the triumph of God's people is attributed to the fact 'for God is with us' (Isa 8:10) - a clear reference to Immanuel. In the next chapter more is spelled out concerning this wonderful child: the child who is to be born, the son who is to be given - a reference back to the Immanuel referred to in Isaiah 7, chapters 7-12 really forming one block of material - will be called 'Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace' (Isa 9:6). The divine identity of the great Deliverer is clearly stated here. Groups such as the Jehovah's Witnesses claim that this cannot be an ascription of deity to the child to be born because he is only called 'Mighty God', not

‘Almighty God’. But in 10:21 exactly the same words, ‘Mighty God’, are used to denote Jehovah: cf. 10:21, 23. Other Old Testament prophets clearly allude to the divine identity of the coming Deliverer. Thus, Jeremiah 33:15,16 calls the righteous Branch to sprout from David’s line - echoes of Isaiah 11:1 here - ‘The LORD Our Righteousness’. Thus divine names are attributed to him in the Old Testament.

The New Testament teaches, by a variety of means, the full deity of the Lord Jesus Christ. First, on numerous occasions he is specifically called God. Thus, referring to the pre-incarnate Christ as ‘the Word’, John tells us that the Word was with God and was God (1:1). Various attempts have been made to weaken the teaching in this verse, from arguments by some New Testament scholars who claim that John means no more than that Jesus was, in some sense, divine, to the literature published by the Jehovah’s Witnesses which says that the verse should be translated ‘was a god’. But both of these groups fail to take account of v. 2, where John tells us that through him all things were made and that without him nothing was made that has been made. If the Word were the first being to have been created, then it would not be true that without him nothing was made that had been made. The immediate context helps us to understand that John 1:1 really means that the Word was God, in the full sense of that term. As for the Jehovah’s Witnesses’ claim, it needs to be pointed out that there really is no other way in Greek in which John could have written, ‘The Word was God.’ If their understanding were correct, then it would contradict the fierce monotheism which the Bible so clearly teaches. Indeed, it could be argued that John frames his Gospel within the ontological statement of John 1:1 (that is, what the Word was in and of himself) and the functional confession of Thomas in 20:28 (that is, what Jesus was to Thomas), a confession which would have been blasphemous if Jesus were not fully God. (Chapter 21 is something of a P.S. to this Gospel, which corrects a misunderstanding which had been circulating and which needed to be corrected.) Hebrews 1:8 is another classic statement of Jesus’ deity.

Furthermore, titles, descriptions, and activities which are used elsewhere with respect to God are routinely attributed to Jesus. Thus, in Ezekiel chapter 34 the Sovereign Lord, grieved at the unfaithfulness of Israel’s shepherds, promises that one day he himself will come to shepherd his people (vv. 11-16). Jesus’ claim, in John 10, to be the Good Shepherd, is to be understood against this background. His claim is, therefore, an implicit claim to deity. Again, in Philippians 2:10-11 language is applied to Jesus which is applied in Isaiah 45:23 to Jehovah. In Titus 3:6 Jesus Christ is called ‘our Saviour’, while in 1:3 and 3:4 we read of ‘God our Saviour’, while 2 Peter 1:1 speaks of ‘our God and Saviour Jesus Christ’. In Isaiah 42:8 we read: ‘I am the LORD; that is my name! I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols.’ Yet in John 17:5 Jesus prays, ‘Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.’ The praise which will not be given to idols is given to Jesus (Rev 5:9-14). Indeed, Jesus is standing in the midst of the throne upon which God sits (Rev 5:1, 6). The praise and worship

which was given to Jesus is something which is not to be given to angels (Col 2:18), and is something which they will not accept (Rev 19:10). If the Lord God calls himself the Alpha and the Omega – that is, the A and the Z – the one who is, and who was, and who is to come (Rev 1:8), it is no less the case that Scripture calls Jesus the First and the Last (Rev 1:17), which is the same thing.

Jesus Christ is God in the full sense of the word: he is eternal, infinite, and almighty or omnipotent; omniscient (knowing everything) and omnipresent (being everywhere).

We have only scratched the surface of the Bible's teaching on the deity of Christ; so much more could be and should be said, especially with respect to the different ways in which the phrase 'Son of God' is used in Scripture [2]. But constraints of space require us to move on to the humanity of Jesus.

Jesus is man

It may seem strange that this needs to be established and affirmed, but the fact is that in the early centuries of the Christian Church there was a false teaching called Docetism. This was the teaching that Jesus only seemed to be human. (The term Docetism comes from the Greek word for 'to seem'.) Scripture is emphatic, however, that Jesus really is a man. The promise in Genesis 3:15 is that the seed of the woman would strike Satan's head. The many references to a descendant of David clearly refer to someone who is fully human: for example, Isaiah 9 tells us that the one who will be called 'the mighty God' will reign on David's throne (v. 7). Although the Lord says in Ezekiel 34 that he will shepherd his people, verse 23 advises us that he will place his servant David over them as one shepherd, and verse 24 says that David will be prince among them.

Jesus is, therefore, miraculously conceived by the Virgin Mary of the Holy Spirit (Matt 1:18,20; Luke 1:35). Although Jesus was thus miraculously conceived, he developed in the womb as any other child and was born in the same way as any other child (Luke 2:6; cf. 1:57). He was born into a Jewish family and, as any other human being, had the ethnic identity (Rom 9:5) and the sexual identity of a male (Isa 9:6; Matt 1:23, 25; Luke 2:21). Jesus grew physically, mentally, and spiritually (Luke 2:40, 52). Numerous passages of Scripture specifically assert that he was – and, therefore, still is – a man: Jn 8:40; Acts 2:22; Rom 5:15, 17, 19; 1 Cor 15:21, 45, 47-49; 1 Tim 2:5. We read that Jesus was tired (Jn 4:6) and that he slept (Matt 8:24); that he knew hunger (Matt 21:18) and thirst (Jn 19:28); that he knew joy (Luke 10:21) and sorrow (Isa 53:3); that he wept (Jn 11:35) and died (1 Cor 15:3).

The Bible teaches that every human being has a body and a soul. It teaches that we have what might be called a cognitive faculty – we think; an affective or emotional faculty – we feel; and a volitional faculty – we make decisions and choices. Since Jesus is a real human being, it means that he has a real human body and a real human soul, with human cognitive, emotional, and

volitional capacities and capabilities. Although a sinless man (Heb 4:15) and possessed of the Holy Spirit without measure (Jn 1:32; 3:34), and therefore having far greater capacities and capabilities than the rest of us, the fact remains that he was and is a real man. His human nature, therefore, is something which is created, finite, and limited: his human nature is not almighty; his human mind had to develop and did not and does not know everything; his human body is not omnipresent. Just as we saw that Jesus is God in the fullest sense of the word, we must now assert that he is also human in the fullest sense of the word.

One Person

Although Jesus is both God and man – that is to say, although he has both a divine nature and a human nature – he is one person. Isaiah 9:6 and Matthew 1:23 teach this profound and sublime truth with a wonderful simplicity. It is the child who is born, the son who is given who will be called the mighty God. It is the child and the son who is to be called Immanuel – God with us. Everywhere the Scriptures emphasise that Jesus is one person. It is Jesus – the one person – who is tired, who sleeps, who is hungry, who is thirsty and who dies. All these are characteristics of a human being, not of God: yet nowhere does the Bible say that it was his human nature which experienced these things; rather it says that he did. Similarly, although he is praying in John 17 (something which a human being does), he refers to the glory he had with his Father before the world began (v. 5). It is the one ‘I’ who said, ‘I am thirsty’ (Jn 19:28); it is the same ‘I’ who said, ‘Before Abraham was born, I am’ (Jn 8:58). Now we know that God is self-sufficient and has need of nothing (Ps 50:9-11; Acts 17:25), never slumbers nor sleeps (Ps 121:3-4), and, since he is Spirit (Jn 4:24), therefore does not get thirsty. Moreover, he is not and cannot be tempted by evil (Jas 1:13). But all these things were true of the one person of Jesus. But they were true of him and experienced by him – that is, by the one person – in, or as to, his human nature. Likewise, we know that no man is eternal, no man can share the divine glory, no man can rightfully receive worship. Yet the one person of Jesus is eternal, had divine glory, and rightly received and receives worship: it is the person of Jesus of whom these things are true but not of, or as to, his human nature. It is important to remember that his deity did not undergo any transformation at the incarnation so that he is somehow less than God, nor was his humanity in any way transformed so as to be ‘superhuman’; nor did the divine and the human ‘mix’ so as to form a being who is neither divine nor human, or whose humanity is deified and whose deity is humanised. No: he is one person and unites in that one person his deity, which he has always had, and humanity which he took into a personal union with himself, so that there is for ever one person who is both fully God and fully human.

This means that as to his Godhood he is omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent; but as to his manhood, he is none of these things. Some may think that to say of the same person at the same time that he knows all things

but does not know all things; that he is almighty but is not almighty; that he is omnipresent but is also spatially confined: this is not sublime mystery but incoherent nonsense. But an illustration from the world of physics may help at this point. For many years physicists were divided in their views of the nature of light: some believed it was a wave motion through a medium ('the ether') while others held to a 'corpuscular theory', maintaining that light consisted of a stream of particles. According to classical physics it had to be one or the other: it could not be both. But eventually enough data had been gathered and studied to lead to the view that although there was not such a thing as the ether, light consisted of packets of energy - photons - which had the characteristics of particles and waves. Both are true: the categories of classical physics were inadequate to deal with this phenomenon, and physicists learned to revise their understanding in the light of the data found in God's world. Similarly, we must not try to squeeze the data of Scripture into our categories but learn to live with the mysteries we find in God's Word.

It is important to bear in mind that although the Scriptures refer to the man Christ Jesus, there never was a human Jesus, even for a nanosecond, who was not in union with the divine person of the Son of God. At the incarnation, the eternal Word took into union with himself true, real human nature, which thereby acquired its personal status as a result of this union. If this were not so, one would effectively be left with two personal agents or one would be saying that God came to dwell in a human person. But this is not what the Scriptures teach; rather, they assert that there is one person, who always was the eternal Word, but who, as a result of taking human nature into union with himself, is now and forever God-man, one person with two natures. Some things are attributed to Jesus by virtue of his being God-man, a theanthropic person: thus, his headship of the Church is on account of this. Sometimes, he is referred to with respect to his divine nature: 'Before Abraham was born, I am.' Sometimes, he is referred to with respect to his human nature: 'I am thirsty.' Sometimes he is referred to with respect to one nature, when something which can only be true of the other nature is predicated of him. For example, we read, of 'the church of God, which he bought with his own blood' (Acts 20:28). Again, we read of people having 'crucified the Lord of glory' (1 Cor 2:8).

Lessons

1. Jesus is always worthy of our worship, for who he is and for what he has done. He is the Lord of glory, who has bought us with his blood.
2. Since he is truly human and is mystically united to his people, he feels for us and with us (Acts 9:4; Heb 4:15). He has been tried and tempted, and can sympathise with us. This should encourage us to go boldly to him in prayer, to obtain mercy and to find grace to help in time of need (Heb 4:16).
3. Jesus lived a holy life as a real man, with a real body and with real human emotions. Therefore, authentic holiness does not consist in becoming less

than human, and having a negative attitude to the body and to the physical realm (as some groups, at different points in history, have maintained); nor does it consist in the suppression of one's emotional nature (as other groups, from time to time, have done). No: true holiness is to become more like Jesus Christ and, therefore, to become more authentically human.

4. Since Jesus is God and is the only God-man, he is the only way to God. As such, this is a wonderfully inclusive message: it is for all people (1 Tim 2:3-7). Equally, it is an exclusive message: there is no other name under heaven given to men and women whereby we must be saved. It is because Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life, that no-one can come to the Father except through him.

5. Love for Christ is paramount. A curse is expressed on those who do not love him (1 Cor 16:22). Christian growth is tied to growth in experiential knowledge of, and love to, Jesus Christ. Without this, we are nothing.

6. If he who is God made himself of no reputation to save us, nothing should ever be too great for us to sacrifice or to do for him.

Notes

[1] Most present day evangelical commentators do not regard this passage as referring primarily to the Messiah. Edward Hindson, however, in a one hundred page monograph study of Isaiah 7:14 - one of the most thorough and exhaustive studies of this verse ever written - ably defends the Messianic interpretation of this passage. He also demonstrates that the 'double fulfilment' view only really became widespread after the rise of theological liberalism, which would admit of no Messianic reference. (Edward E Hindson *Isaiah's Immanuel: A Sign of His Times Or the Sign of the Ages?* Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., International Library Series, 1978.) See also JA Motyer *The Prophecy of Isaiah* Inter-Varsity Press, Leicester, 1993, who, though differing in some respects from Hindson, also presents a Messianic reading of the verse.

[2] As applied to humans, the phrase is used of Adam, of the nation of Israel, and of the line of Davidic kings. Applied to Christ, it denotes him as last Adam, as the true Israel, and as the Davidic king par excellence, that is the Messiah. But there is also a pre-existing sonship, an eternal sonship. For a helpful treatment of this phrase, see D A Carson *Jesus The Son of God* Crossway, 2012.

For Further Reading

Stephen Clark (Ed.) *The Forgotten Christ, Apollos, Nottingham, 2007*

Stuart Olyott *Jesus Is Both God And Man, Evangelical Press, Darlington, 2000*

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‘I wish I had prayed more’: John Sutcliff and the Concert of Prayer for Revival¹

by Michael Haykin

HOW DOES RENEWAL OR REVIVAL COME TO A CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY OR CONGREGATION? A VARIETY OF ANSWERS can be given to this important question, but, from the vantage-point of Church history, prayer will head the list. When God’s people are driven to realise their desperate need for spiritual advance and revival, they also realise they must pray for this to happen. Only God can do the work of God, and true revival is his work. As such, they cry out to God, both corporately and singly, for God to stretch forth his arm and revive his people. A great example of this important truth can be found in the English Baptist community of the eighteenth century.

Now, among the Calvinistic Baptist figures of this period one of the most important is also one of the least known—John Sutcliff, the pastor of the Baptist Church in Olney, Buckinghamshire, for thirty-nine years. An extremely close friend of both Andrew Fuller and William Carey and one of the founders of the Baptist Missionary Society, Sutcliff played a central part in bringing revival to the English Calvinistic Baptists through the medium of prayer.²

Early years in West Yorkshire

Sutcliff’s early nurture in the Christian faith came through his parents, Daniel and Hannah Sutcliff, both of whom attended Rodhill End Baptist Church, not far from Hebden Bridge, Yorkshire. But it was not until

¹ This article has appeared before as chapter 4 in: Michael AG Haykin, *Ardent Love for Jesus. Learning from the eighteenth-century Baptist revival* (Bridgend: Bryntirion Press, 2013) and is reproduced here by kind permission of both the author and the publisher.

² Comparatively little research has been done on the life or theology of John Sutcliff. There is a biographical sketch by Andrew Fuller attached to his funeral sermon for Sutcliff: *The Principles and Prospects of a Servant of Christ [The Complete Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller, revised Joseph Belcher (1845 ed.; repr. Harrisonburg, Virginia: Sprinkle Publications, 1988), I, 342–56]*. Kenneth WH Howard, who was pastor of Sutcliff Baptist Church in Olney from 1949–54, has written a fine biographical piece: ‘John Sutcliff of Olney’, *The Baptist*

1767 or 1768, when Sutcliff was either sixteen or seventeen, that he was converted during a local revival in Wainsgate Baptist Church, where his parents worshipped on alternate weeks, since there was a service at Rodhill End only every other week. The pastor of the church, John Fawcett (1740–1817), had himself been converted through the preaching of George Whitefield (1714–70), and was shaped as a young Christian by the eccentric Anglican evangelical William Grimshaw (1708–63). According to his son Fawcett kept a portrait of Whitefield in his study and ‘the very mention of his name inspired the warmest emotions of grateful remembrance’. Fawcett was thus personally convinced of many of the emphases of the Evangelical Revival, and would in time become a powerful force for revival in the north of England.



The reverse of the 1842 Jubilee Medal struck in commemoration of the 50th Anniversary of the Baptist Missionary Society. The portraits feature John Sutcliff, John Ryland, William Carey, Andrew Fuller and Samuel Pearce. The text is from Zechariah 4:6

After a couple of years under Fawcett’s watchful care Sutcliff devoted two and a half years, from 1772 to May of 1774, to theological study at Bristol Baptist College. He then briefly served in two Baptist churches, one in Shrewsbury and one in Birmingham, before he entered upon what would be his life’s ministry at Olney, Buckinghamshire in July 1775.³

Reading Jonathan Edwards

John Sutcliff began to study in earnest the writings of Jonathan Edwards (1703–58), rightly known as the theologian of revival, not long after he came to Olney. First introduced to the writings of Edwards by John Fawcett, the works of this New England divine exercised a great influence in shaping Sutcliff’s theology. Edwards’ writings first gave Calvinists like Sutcliff an answer to the Enlightenment critique that divine sovereignty and human freedom are incompatible. Human beings, Edwards argued, refused to obey

Quarterly, 14 (1951–1952), 304–9. See also my *One heart and one soul: John Sutcliff of Olney, his friends, and his times* (Darlington, Co. Durham: Evangelical Press, 1994).

³ John Fawcett, Jr., *An Account of the Life, Ministry, and Writings of the Late Rev. John Fawcett D.D.* (London: Baldwin, Cradock, and Joy/Halifax: PK Holden, 1818), 15.

God not because of any natural inability. Rather, it was their affections that were enslaved and needed to be re-oriented in godly directions. Then, Edwards also maintained that the duty incumbent upon all who heard the gospel was immediate repentance. As a Calvinist Edwards upheld the utter necessity of grace in conversion. But he moved away from the passive understanding of conversion that had prevailed in some seventeenth-century Calvinist quarters, and that was still very much a part of Hyper-Calvinism in the eighteenth century, and argued sinners must respond to the gospel summons without delay. The upshot of Edwardsean Calvinism was a dual commitment to revival at home and strenuous missionary endeavours abroad.⁴

It was this evangelical Calvinism of Jonathan Edwards that led Sutcliff to the conviction that certain aspects of the Hyper-Calvinism that was then regnant in many Calvinistic Baptist churches were unscriptural. For instance, a number of Sutcliff's fellow pastors denied that it was the *duty* of sinners to believe in the Lord Jesus. They reasoned that since the Scriptures ascribe repentance and faith to the working of the Holy Spirit, neither of these can be regarded as duties required of sinners. In practical terms this meant that the preaching of these pastors omitted 'the free invitations of the gospel' and thus 'chilled many churches to their very soul'.⁵ Edwards' writings particularly helped Sutcliff to be convinced of 'the harmony...between the duty of ministers to call on sinners to repent and believe in Christ for salvation, and the necessity of omnipotent grace to render the call effectual'.⁶

Sutcliff soon began to incorporate into his preaching these fresh insights regarding the relationship between human responsibility and divine grace. Some of his congregation, however, were deeply disturbed by what they considered to be a departure from the canons of 'orthodoxy,' and they began to absent themselves from the church's celebration of the Lord's Supper. But Sutcliff was not to be deterred from preaching biblical truth, and 'by patience, calmness, and prudent perseverance' he eventually won over all those in this congregation who stood opposed to his theological position.

Sutcliff's commitment to Edwardsean Calvinism was shared by a number of other pastors in the geographical vicinity of Olney. In particular this

⁴ Extremely helpful in summarising Edwards' thought in this paragraph has been David W Kling, *The New Divinity and the Origins of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, Church History*, 72 (2003), 799–807.

⁵ Susannah Spurgeon and JW Harrauld, *CH Spurgeon's Autobiography* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1899), I, 310.

⁶ Fuller, *Principles and Prospects (Complete Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller, I, 350)*.

included John Ryland, Jr. at College Street Baptist Church in Northampton, whom Sutcliff had met in the early 1770s, and Andrew Fuller at Kettering Baptist Church, whom Sutcliff first met in 1776 at the annual meeting of the Northamptonshire Association, to which the churches of all three pastors belonged.

In the spring of 1784 Ryland shared with Sutcliff and Fuller a treatise of Edwards which had been sent to him by the Scottish Presbyterian minister John Erskine (1721–1803). When Erskine was in his mid-twenties he had entered into correspondence with Edwards, and long after Edwards' death in 1758 he had continued to uphold Edwards' theological perspectives and to heartily recommend his books. Erskine regularly corresponded with Ryland from 1780 until his death in 1803, sending him not only letters, but also, on occasion, bundles of interesting books and tracts which he sought to promote. Thus it was in April 1784 that Erskine mailed to Ryland a copy of Edwards' *An Humble Attempt to Promote Explicit Agreement and Visible Union of God's People in Extraordinary Prayer for the Revival of Religion and the Advancement of Christ's Kingdom on Earth, Pursuant to Scripture-Promises and Prophecies Concerning the Last Time* (henceforth referred to as the *Humble Attempt*). The *Humble Attempt* was not widely heeded during the lifetime of its author. Its greatest impact would come after Edwards' death. As Iain H Murray has noted, it is arguable that no such tract on the hidden source of all true evangelistic success, namely, prayer for the Spirit of God, has ever been so widely used as this one.⁷

The Prayer Call of 1784

Reading Edwards' *Humble Attempt* in the spring of 1784 had a profound impact on Ryland, Fuller, and Sutcliff. Fuller was to preach that June at the annual meeting of the Northamptonshire Association. On his way to the meeting at Nottingham, Fuller found that heavy rains had flooded a number of spots of the roads over which he had to travel. At one particular point the flooded area appeared so deep that Fuller was reluctant to continue. A resident of the area, who knew how deep the water actually was, encouraged him to urge his horse through the water. 'Go on, sir,' he said, 'you are quite safe.' As the water came up to Fuller's saddle, Fuller began to have second thoughts about continuing. 'Go on, sir,' the man said again, 'All is

⁷ Jonathan Edwards. *A New Biography* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987), 299.

right.’ Taking the man at his word, Fuller continued and safely traversed the flooded area of the road. This experience prompted Fuller to abandon the sermon he had planned to preach. Instead he spoke on 2 Corinthians 5:7 at the Association meeting: ‘We walk by faith, not by sight.’⁸

During the course of this sermon, which Fuller entitled ‘The Nature and Importance of Walking by Faith’, Fuller clearly revealed the impression Edwards’ *Humble Attempt* had made upon his thinking when he appealed thus to his hearers:

Let us take encouragement, in the present day of small things, by looking forward, and hoping for better days. Let this be attended with earnest and united prayer to him by whom Jacob must arise. A life of faith will ever be a life of prayer. O brethren, let us pray much for an outpouring of God’s Spirit upon our ministers and churches, and not upon those only of our own connection and denomination, but upon ‘all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours’ (1 Cor 1:2).⁹

At the same meeting Sutcliff proposed that the churches of the Association establish monthly prayer meetings for the outpouring of God’s Holy Spirit and the consequent revival of the churches of Great Britain. This proposal was adopted by the representatives of the 16 churches at the meeting, and on the last page of the circular letter sent out that year to the churches of the Association there was what has come to be known as ‘The Prayer Call of 1784’, which was most likely drawn up by Sutcliff.¹⁰ The entire document runs as follows:

Upon a motion being made to the ministers and messengers of the associate Baptist churches assembled at Nottingham, respecting meetings for prayer, to bewail the low estate of religion, and earnestly implore a revival of our churches, and of the general cause of our Redeemer, and for that end to wrestle with God for the effusion of his Holy Spirit, which alone can produce the blessed effect, it was unanimously RESOLVED, to recommend to all

⁸ *The Nature and Importance of Walking by Faith* (Complete Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller, I, 117, note *).

⁹ *Nature and Importance of Walking by Faith* (Complete Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller, I, 131).

¹⁰ ‘The Prayer Call of 1784’, attached to John Ryland, Jr., *The Nature, Evidences, and Advantages, of Humility* (Circular Letter of the Northamptonshire Association, 1784), 12. For a detailed study of this influential call to prayer, see especially Ernest A Payne, *The Prayer Call of 1784* (London: Baptist Laymen’s Missionary Movement, 1941).

our churches and congregations, the spending of one hour in this important exercise, on the first Monday in every calendar month.

We hereby solemnly exhort all the churches in our connection, to engage heartily and perseveringly in the prosecution of this plan. And as it may be well to endeavour to keep the same hour, as a token of our unity herein, it is supposed the following scheme may suit many congregations, viz. to meet on the first Monday evening in May, June, and July, from 8 to 9. In Aug. from 7 to 8. Sept. and Oct. from 6 to 7. Nov. Dec. Jan. and Feb. from 5 to 6. March, from 6 to 7; and April, from 7 to 8. Nevertheless if this hour, or even the particular evening, should not suit in particular places, we wish our brethren to fix on one more convenient to themselves.

We hope also, that as many of our brethren who live at a distance from our places of worship and may not be able to attend there, that as many as are conveniently situated in a village or neighbourhood, will unite in small societies at the same time. And if any single individual should be so situated as not to be able to attend to this duty in society with others, let him retire at the appointed hour, to unite the breath of prayer in private with those who are thus engaged in a more public manner.

The grand object of prayer is to be that the Holy Spirit may be poured down on our ministers and churches, that sinners may be converted, the saints edified, the interest of religion revived, and the name of God glorified. At the same time, remember, we trust you will not confine your requests to your own societies [i.e. churches]; or to your own immediate connection [i.e. denomination]; let the whole interest of the Redeemer be affectionately remembered, and the spread of the gospel to the most distant parts of the habitable globe be the object of your most fervent requests. We shall rejoice if any other Christian societies of our own or other denominations will unite with us, and do now invite them most cordially to join heart and hand in the attempt.

Who can tell what the consequences of such an united effort in prayer may be! Let us plead with God the many gracious promises of his Word, which relate to the future success of his gospel. He has

said, 'I will yet for this be enquired of by the House of Israel to do it for them, I will increase them with men like a flock' (Ezek 36:37). Surely we have love enough for Zion to set apart one hour at a time, twelve times in a year, to seek her welfare. ¹¹

There are at least four noteworthy points about this Prayer Call. First, very much in evidence in this statement, as well as in the extract from Fuller's sermon, is the conviction that any reversal of the decline of the Calvinistic Baptists could not be accomplished by mere human zeal, but must be effected by the Spirit of God. As Sutcliff noted in another context in strongly Edwardsean language:

The outpouring of the divine Spirit...is the grand promise of the New Testament. ...His influences are the soul, the great animating soul of all religion. These withheld, divine ordinances are empty cisterns, and spiritual graces are withering flowers. These suspended, the greatest human abilities labour in vain, and noblest efforts fail of success. ¹²

Then there is the catholicity that is recommended with regard to the subjects of prayer. As the Calvinistic Baptists of the Northamptonshire Association gathered together to pray, they were encouraged not to think simply of their own churches and their own denomination, but they were to embrace in prayer believers of other denominational bodies. The kingdom of God consists of more than Calvinistic Baptists! In fact, churches of other associations were encouraged to join with them in praying for revival. This was a quite a break from earlier Baptist attitudes towards those of the established Church, for example. Only thirty-five years earlier Gill had argued for a position that refused to countenance open communion with Anglicans. And here this prayer call is urging prayer with them for revival. If, as is likely, Sutcliff wrote this document, the catholicity recommended is understandable from his own context in Olney, where he and the Anglican minister, who was none other than John Newton of later fame, were often in each other's company and even exchanged pulpits at the new year.

¹¹ Ryland, Jr., *Nature, Evidences, and Advantages of Humility*, 12.

¹² *Jealousy for the Lord of Hosts Illustrated* (London: W Button, 1791), 12.

Third, there is the distinct missionary emphasis of the Prayer Call. The members of the Association churches were urged to pray that the gospel be spread 'to the most distant parts of the habitable globe'. Little did these Baptists realise how God would begin to fulfill these very prayers within the space of less than a decade.

Finally, the sole foundation for praying for revival is located in the Scriptures. Only one text, Ezekiel 36:37, is actually cited though, but those issuing this call to prayer are aware of 'many gracious promises' in God's Word which speak of the successful advance of his kingdom. At first glance this passage from Ezekiel hardly seems the best text to support the Prayer Call. But the overall context of this verse needs to be considered. It is one in which God is telling Israel that he will bring them back from exile in Babylon to the promised land. Before he does this, however, he tells his people that he will stir them up to pray for this very return from exile. Sutcliff and his fellow Baptists have rightly discerned the principle that preceding times of revival and striking extensions of Christ's kingdom there invariably occur the concerted and constant prayers of Christians.

The return of prayers

The Association meetings at which this Prayer Call was issued were held on June 2–3, 1784. At the end of that month, on June 29, the church that Sutcliff pastored in Olney resolved to establish a 'monthly meeting for prayer...to seek for a revival of religion'.¹³ Two years later Sutcliff gave the following progress report and exhortation regarding the prayer meetings that had been established in his own church and others in the Association.

The monthly meetings of prayer, for the general spread of the gospel, appear to be kept up with some degree of spirit. This, we hope, will yet be the case. Brethren, be not weary in well-doing,

¹³ Olney Church Book III, Sutcliff Baptist Church, Olney, Buckinghamshire, entry for June 29, 1784.

for in due time ye shall reap, if ye faint not. We learn that many other churches, in different, and some in distant parts of the land, and some of different denominations, have voluntarily acceded to the plan. We communicate the above information for your encouragement. Once more we would invite all who love truth and holiness, into whose hands our letter may fall, to unite their help. Let societies, let families, let individuals, who are friends to the cause of Christ unite with us, not only daily, but in a particular manner, at the appointed season. With pleasure we were informed of an open door in many places, for the preaching of the gospel. We request it of our friends that they would encourage the occasional ministry of the Word in their respective villages and neighbourhoods, where they may be situated, to the utmost of their power. Be not backward to appear on God's side.¹⁴

As this text shows, Sutcliff, like his mentor Edwards, was convinced that not simply the individual prayers of God's people presaged revival, but the prayers of God's people when they gathered together to pray in unison. And, as Sutcliff went on to indicate, God was already answering their prayers by providing 'an open door in many places, for the preaching of the gospel'.¹⁵

The passing years did not diminish Sutcliff's zeal in praying for revival and stirring up such prayer. For instance Ryland wrote in his diary for January 21, 1788:

Brethren Fuller, Sutcliff, Carey, and I kept this day as a private fast, in my study...and each prayed twice¹⁶ —Carey with singular enlargement and pungency. Our chief design was to implore a revival of godliness in our own souls, in our churches, and in the church at large.¹⁷

And in 1789, the number of prayer meetings for revival having grown considerably, Sutcliff decided to bring out an edition of Edwards' *Humble Attempt* to further encourage those meeting for prayer. Measuring only six and one quarter inches long, and three and three-quarter inches wide, and

¹⁴ *Authority and Sanctification of the Lord's Day, Explained and Enforced* (Circular Letter of the Northamptonshire Association, 1786), 1–2.

¹⁵ *Authority and Sanctification of the Lord's Day*, 2.

¹⁶ These would probably have been lengthy prayers.

¹⁷ Cited Jonathan Edwards Ryland, 'Memoir of Dr. Ryland' in *Pastoral Memorials: Selected from the Manuscripts of the Late Revd. John Ryland, D.D. of Bristol* (London: BJ Holdsworth, 1826), I, 17.

containing 168 pages, this edition was clearly designed to be a handy pocket-size edition. In his 'Preface' to this edition, Sutcliff re-emphasised that the Prayer Call issued by the Northamptonshire Association five years earlier was not intended for simply Calvinistic Baptists. Rather, they ardently wished it might become general among the real friends of truth and holiness.

The advocates of error are indefatigable in their endeavours to overthrow the distinguishing and interesting doctrines of Christianity; those doctrines which are the grounds of our hope, and sources of our joy. Surely it becomes the followers of Christ, to use every effort, in order to strengthen the things, which remain. ... In the present imperfect state, we may reasonably expect a diversity of sentiments upon religious matters. Each ought to think for himself; and every one has a right, on proper occasions, to shew [sic] his opinion. Yet all should remember, that there are but two parties in the world, each engaged in opposite causes; the cause of God and Satan; of holiness and sin; of heaven and hell. The advancement of the one, and the downfall of the other, must appear exceedingly desirable to every real friend of God and man. If such in some respects entertain different sentiments, and practise distinguishing modes of worship, surely they may unite in the above business. O for thousands upon thousands, divided into small bands in their respective cities, towns, villages, and neighbourhood, all met at the same time, and in pursuit of one end, offering up their united prayers, like so many ascending clouds of incense before the Most High!—May he shower down blessings on all the scattered tribes of Zion! Grace, great grace be with all them that love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity! ¹⁸

In this text Sutcliff positions the Prayer Call of 1784 on the broad canvas of history, in which God and Satan are waging war for the souls of men and women. Prayer, because it is a weapon common to all who are 'friends of truth and holiness', is one sphere in which Christians can present a fully united front against Satan. Sutcliff is well aware that evangelicals in his day held differing theological positions and worshipped in different ways. He himself was a convinced Baptist—convinced, for instance, that the

¹⁸ 'Preface' to Jonathan Edwards, *An Humble Attempt to Promote Explicit Agreement and Visible Union of God's People in Extraordinary Prayer, For the Revival of Religion and the Advancement of Christ's Kingdom on Earth, pursuant to Scripture-Promises and Prophecies concerning the Last Time* (1748 ed.; repr. Northampton: T Dicey and Co., 1789), iv–vi.

Scriptures fully supported congregational polity and believer's baptism—yet, as he rightly emphasises in the above 'Preface', such convictions should not prevent believers, committed to the foundational truths of Christianity, uniting together to pray for revival.

Hard on the heels of the republication of Edwards' treatise came the events leading to the formation of the Particular Baptist Society for the Propagation of the Gospel among the Heathen in 1792, later known as the Baptist Missionary Society. Included among the items recommended for prayer in the Prayer Call of 1784 had been 'the spread of the gospel to the most distant parts of the habitable globe'. God began to answer that specific prayer in the early 1790s. First, God provided a man with the desire to go and evangelise peoples to whom the name of Christ was completely unknown, namely, William Carey. And then, the Lord gave other believers the strength and courage to support him as he went and laboured. Over the next four decades Carey's example would spur numerous others to offer themselves for missionary service. Of these missionary candidates a good number would be sent to Sutcliff to be tutored by him in a parsonage seminary that he opened at the close of the 1790s.

In 1794, two years after the formation of the Baptist Missionary Society, John Rippon (1750–1836), pastor of Carter Lane Baptist Church in Southwark, London, published a list of Calvinistic Baptist congregations and ministers in his *Baptist Annual Register*. Rippon estimated that there were at that time 326 churches in England and 56 in Wales, more than double the number which had existed in 1750.¹⁹ He printed another list of churches four years later, according to which the numbers had grown to 361 churches in England and 84 in Wales.²⁰ Reflecting on these numbers, Rippon wrote, 'It is said, that more of our meeting houses have been enlarged, within the last five years, and built within the last fifteen, than had been built and enlarged for thirty years before.'²¹

Rippon was not exaggerating. There was indeed steady growth among the Calvinistic Baptists during the last four decades of the eighteenth century, but it was not until the final decade of the century that there was a truly rapid influx of converts. It is surely no coincidence that preceding and accompanying this growth were the concerts of prayer that many churches had established in response to the Prayer Call of 1784.

¹⁹ *The Baptist Annual Register* (London, 1797), 2:16, 23.

²⁰ *The Baptist Annual Register* (London, 1801), 3:40, 42.

²¹ *The Baptist Annual Register*, 3:40.

'I wish I had prayed more'

On the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the Baptist Missionary Society, FA Cox (1783–1853), reflecting on the origins of the Society, stated that:

The primary cause of the missionary excitement in Carey's mind, and its diffusion among the Northamptonshire ministers [was]... the meeting of the Association in 1784, at Nottingham, [when] it was resolved to set apart an hour on the first Monday evening of every month, 'for extraordinary prayer for revival of religion, and for the extending of Christ's kingdom in the world'. This suggestion proceeded from the venerable Sutcliff. Its simplicity and appropriateness have since recommended it to universal adoption; and copious showers of blessing from on high have been poured forth upon the churches.²²

From the vantage point of the early 1840s Cox saw the Prayer Call of 1784 as pivotal in that it focused the prayers of Calvinistic Baptist churches in the Northamptonshire Association on the nations of the world, and thus prepared the way for the emergence of the Baptist Missionary Society and the sending of Carey to India. Yet he also notes that the 'universal adoption' of the concert of prayer by churches beyond the ranks of the Calvinistic Baptist denomination had led to rich times of revival, when God poured forth upon these churches 'copious showers of blessing'. Later historians would describe this period of blessing as the Second Evangelical Awakening (1790s–1830s). Some of them, like J Edwin Orr and Paul EG Cook, would concur with Cox and rightly trace the human origins of this time of revival and spiritual awakening to the adoption of the concert of prayer by the Calvinistic Baptists in 1784.²³

²² *History of the Baptist Missionary Society, From 1792 to 1842* (London: T Ward & Co./G & J Dyer, 1842), 1:10–11.

²³ J Edwin Orr, *The Eager Feet: Evangelical Awakenings 1790-1830* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1975), 95, 191–2, 199; Paul E G Cook, 'The Forgotten Revival' in *Preaching and Revival* (London: The Westminster Conference, 1984), 92.

However, in one area Cox's statement is somewhat misleading. In describing Sutcliff as 'the venerable Sutcliff' he leaves the reader with an idyllic impression of the Baptist pastor. How sobering to find that this man, who was at the heart of a prayer movement that God used to bring so much spiritual blessing to his church, also struggled when it came to prayer. When Sutcliff lay dying in 1814 he said to Fuller: 'I wish I had prayed more.'²⁴ For some time Fuller ruminated on this statement by his dying friend. Eventually he came to the conviction that Sutcliff did not mean that he 'wished he had prayed more frequently, but more spiritually.' Then Fuller elaborated on this interpretation by applying Sutcliff's statement to his own life:

I wish I had prayed more for the influence of the Holy Spirit; I might have enjoyed more of the power of vital godliness. I wish I had prayed more for the assistance of the Holy Spirit, in studying and preaching my sermons; I might have seen more of the blessing of God attending my ministry. I wish I had prayed more for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit to attend the labours of our friends in India; I might have witnessed more of the effects of their efforts in the conversion of the heathen.

Whether or not Fuller correctly interpreted Sutcliff's statement, his application certainly resonates with themes dear to Sutcliff's heart: personal renewal, the revival of the church, and Spirit-empowered prayer and witness.

²⁴ Fuller, *Principles and Prospects* (*Complete Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller*, 1, 344).

²⁵ Cited JW Morris, *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of the Rev. Andrew Fuller* (London, 1816), 443.

The Church that Embodies its Lord

By John Palmer

JESUS SAID, AS RECORDED IN MATTHEW 11:28-30: 'COME TO ME, ALL YOU WHO LABOUR AND ARE HEAVY-LADEN, AND I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.'

These are wonderful words! Here we find the Lord Jesus calling sinners to enter his kingdom, become his disciples and find the soul-rest which can be found nowhere else. In this article, though, we are looking at them from a different angle.

A church should reflect its Master. It should show what Jesus is like. It should do this because it is the spiritual body of Christ. In 1 Corinthians 12:27 we learn that we are the body of Christ, and individually members of it. Seeing us, the world sees him if we are living as we should be.

He is the Light of the world (John 8:12) but so are we (Matt 5:14)! We are to shine out as such; so each church should do this.

Jesus Christ builds healthy churches, as Luke Jenner wrote in his excellent article in RT 261. He does so because he indwells them by his Spirit. So every church should have a truly-earned reputation of being Christ-like. This should be true of its worship meetings, corporate life, and the lives of its members individually. What does this mean in practice?

1. A church should say, 'Come' (Matt 11:28a)

We begin with something very basic and, hopefully, obvious. Jesus said, 'Come to me'— so the church should say, 'Come to him.' So being welcoming goes far beyond the smiling handshake and the cup of tea. The world's organisations can do this, and sincerely; they are usually pleased to see new faces too! When the church meets for worship, the whole experience should be spiritually welcoming. This means:

a) Not being unfriendly, cliquey, self-satisfied. Unbelievers should not have a first impression of a people who know and are comfortable with each other, but don't want outsiders to disturb their cosy club, that the church is a place for the 'already in' crowd. We must not be happy with each other, while unhappy with the effort of welcoming outsiders. Small churches

who infrequently see ‘walk-ins’ must be especially careful here; so must churches who really feel that they have enough members and want a period of peace and consolidation.

b) Not being a preaching centre for the ‘religious’. Larger churches are more likely to have this attitude. The impression an outsider gains is that all sit in rows and watch/listen to the performance from the front, where one man addresses those who already agree with him, speaking about subjects which seem to interest only them in a language which only they can understand. I remember preaching a sermon on the resurrection of the dead, where there was a man who came in late and seemed to be a visitor. So I deliberately preached as basically as I could, but he was still heard to say, ‘I didn’t really understand what he was going on about!’ The point is that at least after the service someone was sitting and talking with him in some depth. There is a communication problem for the outsider; we must not make it seem as if we don’t care about it, by ignoring such people.

c) Not being divided, so having a bad atmosphere. This is worse than being cliquy. Unity is a sign of God’s blessing of eternal life (Ps 133:3) (see e.g. ESV, AV; the NIV obscures this point). We cannot expect the Lord’s blessing unless we are ‘eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace’ (Eph 4:3). If we have unresolved tensions, we give the message that we are not one body, and believe in different Spirits, Sons and Fathers! (vv4-6).

So what does being spiritually welcoming mean? It means that a church is a place where people are Christ-like, because they are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Outsiders will perceive this. They will not understand it. However, they should go away knowing that they have been in the presence of something good and enticing, and wanting to come back, not just to find out more of what is taught, but more of what these people have, which they don’t have.

We must not alter the worship of God to please the outsider, or it ceases to be the worship of God. Many have gone astray here. (This is why we need ‘Reformation, today!’) No, but true spiritual worship will be welcoming to those whom Jesus welcomed – the sin-burdened. It will be like this if it is full of Christ. Not just that his Name is often mentioned in the prayers, the hymns, and the preaching, although it should be. Rather, that this happens naturally, because the church loves its Lord. We should want the downcast to go home, if not yet converted, yet longing to return, because they have known the presence of Christ, even if they don’t yet know that’s what it is!

This leads to the second point:

2. A church should say, 'Come To Jesus' (28a)

It is Jesus to whom a church should wish to welcome people. He is the 'something' referred to above – the 'Someone'. We should not have the desire to draw people to us, or to the truths which we preach, glorious though these are; it is to Jesus that people must come.

So we must proclaim him. Paul said to the Corinthians, 'I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified' (1 Cor 2:2). Note that there were two elements of Paul's preaching – the person of Christ, and his work on the cross – and the first preceded the second. We do not preach a work of salvation, first – we proclaim a living Saviour.

This is where the preaching in Acts usually began. 'Here is Jesus – he was killed – but he is alive – so he is the Lord and Saviour – so come to him!' The preaching of how he accomplished salvation by his death on the cross is not even always mentioned; presumably it followed to those who wanted to hear more. It would be this to which Peter bore witness in Acts 2:40, for example.

A preacher was once spoken to by an unbelieving member of his congregation about Christ, 'You speak of him as if he were alive.' To which he wisely replied, 'You will never understand while you think of him as though he were dead.' If we preach only the work of the cross, we can give the impression of preaching a 'dead Christ' not a living Saviour. Jesus himself is the good news! So, a church must declare the Son of God (1Jn 4:15) who can and will save because he loves and welcomes sinners.

This must be done in the preaching. It should also be evident throughout the whole worship – the singing, the prayers. We do not only worship Jesus, we worship a Triune God. However, if an unbeliever can leave a worship service without hearing in some clear way that we base our hopes for eternal life upon the Son of God who died to redeem us, in what way was our activity Christian worship?

Nor is this all. A church is still a body when its members are scattered during the week. It is the responsibility of each Christian, according to their God-given talents, to use each God-given opportunity to present the God-given gospel. The more the members are suffused through with Christ in the preaching, the more their lives will tend to reflect his, and their words be full of him (2 Cor 3:18).

3. A church should help the labouring and burdened to find rest in Christ (28b, 29c)

a) Many people are obviously labouring their way through life. The word means doing the daily work which is just enough to keep you going until the next day. There is a great struggle in which each human being outside Christ is engaged, which saps the strength of their soul. This is the struggle to try to survive daily, as a sinner, without God's strength, in a sinful world. Many try to live lives where they fulfil their duties and do good, and find it incredibly hard. Others cannot manage this, and just try to survive like animals, abandoning any attempt to live for others, and turning maybe to crime or drugs. Many find in life no meaning, no purpose, no sense of having achieved anything useful.

We should not be surprised that people find life hard! One of the great evidences of our being made in the image of God, and recipients of his common grace, is the amazing resilience of many people. Man, made in God's image, was not designed for this life of living cut off from God in a fallen world. The Fall has condemned men to having to try to do what he was not designed to do. You can take a power screwdriver and use it without the battery; but if you try to remove screws which are so firmly fixed that you need the power function, you will end up with a ruined screwdriver. So people end up with worn-out souls, for which the only answer is the power of Christ within (Col 1:11; Eph 6:10). When he comes in to live by his Spirit, the soul has rest from its futile struggle of fighting to stay alive without God. This we must proclaim; this we must exemplify.

b) With what are people burdened? Some will believe, feel this, more than others, but all carry the burden of known sin (whatever they call it), and so guilt-feelings. They carry also, in the depths of their souls, unknown but dimly perceived, the burden of actual guilt before their holy Creator. This crushes them. Some sustain it better than others; the more sensitive their souls, the less their success. Some are given various techniques by religion or philosophy to enable them to feel that these things are forgiven, or imaginary, or that they have overcome them.

It is all futile! Soul-rest only comes as a sinner finds their sins forgiven, as they encounter Christ, as he is proclaimed and exemplified. Woe to the church that does not do this! Hence:

4. A church must consist of the gentle and humble (29b)

After the marvellous exposition of God's grace which constitutes Ephesians 1-3, Paul urges Christians to live in a manner worthy of this great calling

which we have received. What does he begin with? Great and striking works? Renouncing of all possessions? No – humility and gentleness, exactly those qualities which the Lord here singles out as his, in the depths of his heart. These are foundational qualities. If you are not gentle and humble in your heart toward sinners, of whom you are one, you need to repent! For the church must embody the Spirit of Jesus, so that in our gentleness and humility he is encountered.

A church, then, should be a place where the harsh and censorious and overbearing and proud don't feel at home. The Pharisees were like this, and they certainly didn't feel at home with Jesus! No, it was the outcasts, aware of their sinfulness, whom he went and ate with and called to repentance and the ordinary, struggling people, 'the poor'. They loved him and were drawn to him. The Pharisees condemned them (John 7:49) and him (John 9:24).

So a church's leaders and teachers must not be like the Pharisees. They must not be overbearing taskmasters. The church is not a military boot-camp; its leaders are not sergeant-majors! 2 Timothy 2:24-5 says that they must gently instruct those who oppose them. As with Jesus, it is only hardened rebels who are to be rebuked fiercely!

When Thomas refused to believe that Jesus had risen, the Lord appeared and said to them all, including Thomas, 'Peace be with you.' Then he invited him to put his hand in his side, and exhorted him to faith, only rebuking him by implication. The result? The clearest confession yet of Christ's deity! (John 20:26-28). This is a lesson for us all.

Nor must leaders and teachers be proud – 'I can do this; why can't you?' This was the fault of the Scribes (Matt 23:4). Preachers should not give the impression that they have got the Christian life all sorted. They will either soon be found out, or have to live a life of pretence of having attained a greater spiritual level than they actually have.

So, each church should be a company of people where both Christians and unbelievers, who come in gentleness and humility wanting to learn of Jesus, find that others help them out of love. This help is to a deeper soul-rest in Christ. The church should be truly a gathering of those who all want this for themselves and others. Galatians 6:1 says that a mark of spirituality is the ability to restore sinners in a spirit of gentleness.

5. A church must enable people to find Christ's yoke easy (29a, 30)

Having said all this, it is essential that in every church Christ's commands are both clearly taught, and urged as imperatives. Obedience is not an optional extra. It is disciples who are Christians (Acts 11:26), followers of his Way

(Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22). Jesus said three times in one short address that the mark of a Christian is the keeping of his commandments (John 14:15, 21, 23).

Urging and enforcing obedience to Jesus is not legalism! For he is Lord! Legalism is enforcing men's commands rather than God's; or either God's or man's in order that the one obeying gains merit with him. This is what the Scribes and Pharisees did. So, when Jesus here claimed that his yoke is easy and burden light, it is with their heavy yoke that he is making the contrast. They added many burdens and would not help to carry them at all (23:4). Jesus gives commands which those who love him are glad to keep; and moreover, by his Spirit he enables us to keep them. The gospel, compared with the law, 'bids us fly and gives us wings', for Christ himself does.

The Christian life is not easy. Jesus did not say, here or anywhere, that it is. It is a battle, a wrestling match. It is a life of denying self, taking up our cross and following him. This is his yoke. The Way is a narrow way that leads to life. Yet loving the One who has loved us, and obeying him because of that love, is so easy compared with trying to fulfil God's law without his help.

Moreover, he places Christians into churches. He does not just say to us, 'Grow,' but gives us a greenhouse! This is why the church must consist of the humble and gentle: so that we are all helping one another, in love, to follow Christ. For his first commandment is that we love one another as he has loved us (John 15:12).

To this end, we must follow Jesus so that we can be an example to one another (1 Cor 11:1). Moreover, we must encourage all, especially new believers who may have to make great changes to their lifestyle. We must also bear each others' burdens (Gal 6:2), that is, help anyone who is struggling with particular temptations and trials.

Conclusion

Above all we must always keep at the centre of our thinking that Jesus said, 'Learn of me.' The aim in all our church life must be to be a vehicle for Jesus to teach people about, and draw them to know, himself in their souls. He is the Good Shepherd. Any attitude which prevents this is sinful.

Is your church like this? A church must neither be theologically correct, but nasty; nor nice, but woolly. Christ is neither, and so is in neither! We must love, so seek, him, more and more, together, and then we will show him forth.

News

Tom Nettles

MANY READERS OF REFORMATION TODAY WILL BE FAMILIAR WITH THE NAME OF OUR ASSOCIATE EDITOR PROFESSOR Thomas J Nettles and will know him from his writings as a great expert on Church History and especially (Reformed) Baptist history. Tom Nettles has now retired as professor of Historical Theology at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (SBTS) after a full-time teaching career spanning a period of 38 years.

Before joining Southern Baptist Theological Seminary 17 years ago, Tom Nettles held teaching posts at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Mid-American Baptist Theological Seminary and Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.

The following is based on a report written for this occasion by Jeff Robinson and James A Smith Sr. and published on the website of SBTS (see: <http://news.sbts.edu/2014/05/14/tom-nettles-legendary-historian-retires-from-southern-seminary/>). This report contains some wonderful testimonies by former students. Nettles' students attested that his classroom is a place of joy and song. A gifted singer, he often breaks spontaneously into a song or hymn!

Tom Ascol, pastor of Grace Baptist Church in Cape Coral, Florida, who is also chairman of Founders' Ministries, says: 'Tom has a pastor's heart and considers his teaching ministry to be pastoral work. He has encouraged me countless times through the years by giving me biblical counsel, offering needed but at times unwanted rebuke and correction, and challenging me to think more biblically and carefully about knotty pastoral issues.'

Tom Nettles has made a major contribution to the debates on inerrancy and inspiration of Scripture. In 1980 Moody Press published the landmark study by Nettles and Bush on the historic Baptist view of Scripture, *Baptists and the Bible*. The book crystallised and strengthened the case for inerrancy as they showed how thoroughly Baptists had adhered to that fundamental doctrine in the past.

Southern Seminary President R Albert Mohler Jr. said Nettles is a 'legendary' Southern Baptist professor, citing his crucial role in the SBC's Conservative Resurgence.

Nettles has also written important books on Baptist ecclesiology, catechisms

and the place of Calvinism in Baptist history. His book *By His Grace and for His Glory* has become a classic and argues exhaustively that Baptists are theological heirs of the Protestant Reformation.

More recently Nettles has published major biographies of James P Boyce and Charles Spurgeon which have been welcomed as remarkable achievements.

Finally, the report quotes Tom Nettles himself: 'I have always wanted what I've done to be serviceable to the church,' Nettles said. 'I've wanted it to be something that can be taken by our students who are going into the pastoral ministry and be used for the glory of God and the clarity of the Gospel and the good of their churches.'

We thank our Lord for Professor Tom Nettles and the great gift he has been to the church. We wish our brother a very long and blessed retirement and look forward to continuing to benefit from his ministry also in the pages of *Reformation Today* (for which he has recently sent us again some important material).

Sola 5 Baptists' Conference in The Netherlands

This conference took place on 14-15th November 2014 in Veenendaal, The Netherlands. The theme was 'Radical God-centred Living', referring to one of the five 'sola' statements of the Reformation: Soli Deo Gloria. A large part of Paul's letter to the Ephesians provided the biblical basis for the preaching at this conference. Itinerant preacher Oscar Lohuis gave three addresses on 'The Glory of God', 'Radically God-centred Worship', and 'The Fear of the Lord'. The session on worship was especially important as there is nowadays such a strong tendency to mere man-centred worship in so many evangelical churches. Kees van Kralingen presented a biographical paper on George Whitefield as an example of a God-centred life and ministry by the grace of God. Several workshops provided an opportunity to discuss what God-centred living means for marriage, the family, our work and our life in this day and age (focusing on Ephesians 5:21-6:9). Pastor Yme Horjus preached the closing sermon from Ephesians 6:10-20 emphasising the great need today to use the whole armour of God.

The compilation of quotations from several Puritans in RT262 was mistakenly attributed to Wes Johnston and was actually copied from the following blog: <http://tidesandturning.wordpress.com/2012/12/30/the-puritans-and-their-heirs-on-the-sensible-presence-of-god-the-immediate-work-of-the-holy-spirit-and-the-spirits-work-of-assurance/>

We apologise for this mistake.

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CONTENTS

- | | | |
|------------|--|--------------------|
| 1. | Editorial | Kees van Kralingen |
| 4. | The Uniqueness of the Ten Commandments | Erroll Hulse |
| 14. | The Person of Jesus Christ | Stephen Clark |
| 20. | John Sutcliff and the Concert of Prayer for Revival | Michael Haykin |
| 33. | The Church that Embodies its Lord | John Palmer |
| 39. | News | |