

Insight Into

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General Information

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MEDITATION

Looking Unto the Author

“Let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith”
(Hebrews 12:1-2).

Rev. J. Mijnders (1921-2021)

The beginning of a new year preaches to us that this is not the land of rest. In recent days, we have paused for a moment at the end of a year quickly gone by, but in the New Year that command comes to us again: *“Speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward”* (Exodus 14:15). In that going forth, may the LORD grant us to practise David’s words from Psalm 37, verse 5: *“Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in Him; and He shall bring it to pass.”* The Lord grant us that we may walk the path unknown to us, looking to *“the author and finisher of our faith,”* Jesus.

Every human being by nature walks upon a path whose end is death. However, if we wish to walk the path that the apostle presents to us, then it is necessary to change course and enter through the narrow gate. For then we may set our feet upon the path of faith. No, that is not a path covered with roses. Moses had to bear the reproach of Christ on that path. David was hunted on that path as a partridge in the mountains. It is a path upon which everything must be deemed worthless for the sake of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus. Yes, it is a path that must be walked with patience.

It is not a wide path. Jesus says that the gate is narrow, and the way narrow that leads to life, and that there are few who find it. Hence the runner constantly prays, *“Teach me, O Lord, the way determined by Thee.”*

Suggested Reading: Hebrews 12:1-6

China Requires Parents to Limit Children's Smartphone Usage



Synod Modern Media Committee

These days, you might occasionally catch someone saying, “Have you heard what’s happening in China?” and then describe something the Chinese government is doing to keep a closer eye on or control its people. Of course, we strongly disagree with the Chinese government’s persecution of Christianity and how they severely limit the freedom of their citizens. Still, it’s worth paying attention to some of the things they’re doing with technology and children. Maybe we could learn something from them.

An article published by the Royal Geographical Society in 2023 reports that the “screen addiction is becoming a huge issue worldwide, with children particularly affected. For a parent today, one of the biggest problems to be faced is how to control and limit a child’s screen time.” Parents struggle with how to limit their children’s screen time, since these devices are so interwoven into daily life. The article describes how the Chinese government is alert and aware of the problems associated with children and too much screen time. They have mandated limits for children under eighteen which include:

- Limiting video game playing to three hours per week (only on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays between the hours of 8pm and 9pm).
- Children are to be blocked from accessing the internet between 10pm and 6am.
- Children under eight would get forty minutes of internet usage per day; children ages eight to sixteen would get one hour per day; and children ages sixteen to eighteen would get two hours of internet access per day.

Other Asian countries, including Japan and South Korea, have limited their children’s internet access as well. A law in Taiwan could result in a fine for parents up to \$1,500 if their children are found to be physically or mentally ill due to overuse of electronic devices.

The limitations listed above are not something we endorse entirely. Additionally, we do not endorse internet and cellphone use for young children or phone use on the Lord's Day. However, we as parents are required to set limits according to biblical principles. Video games and movies and other digital entertainment should have no place in our families (Psalm 101:3). On Sunday, we should keep the day holy and free from digital distractions and not use our cellphones (Exodus 20:8-11, Isaiah 58).

Parents, what happens after dark in our homes? Are young people using phones when they should be sleeping, assuming that no one will see their screen?

While increased governmental control and regulation of families is certainly not something we want or recommend, the fact that foreign governments see overuse of electronic devices to be a threat to their children is significant. If completely secular and, in some cases, anti-Christian governments are concerned about children and technology use, then what about us as members of Reformed congregations?

What can we learn from the rules these governments have put in place? Are we taking the time to engage our children in discussions about technology use and then setting and enforcing appropriate limits? Dear parents, at the baptism of our children we promised that we would instruct and bring up our children in "the doctrine which is contained in the Old and New Testament, and in the articles of the Christian faith" to the utmost of our power. This promise also requires that we set an example for our children in limiting our own internet use, seeking to "*walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil*" (Ephesians 5:15-16).

"Believe God's love and power more than you believe your own feelings and experiences. Your Rock is Christ, and it is not the Rock that ebbs and flows, but your sea."

~ Rev. Samuel Rutherford (1600-1661)

God's Revelation of Himself in Creation (2)

Mr. S. Timmer

In our previous article we considered two of God's attributes which are revealed in creation, His omnipotence and His orderliness. There are other attributes made evident by creation, and here we examine several.

God is wisdom

The intricate ecosystems and delicate balances within them reveal a God of profound wisdom and infinite intelligence, of which we can only fathom a trace. *"For the LORD is a great God, and a great King above all gods"* (Psalm 95:3).

The deserts, grasslands, forests, and marine biomes He created with unique living and nonliving factors. The living factors are typically broken into groups of producers, consumers, and decomposers. The non-living factors are things like soil, water, light, and air. God has created the organisms in a particular biome to carry on unique activities, and yet the sum total of all living and non-living factors demonstrates marvelous harmony and great complexity.

This wisdom and balance seen in the human body, made of 12 interconnected body systems, seems exhaustless. We are made with macro monitoring systems, positive feedback systems, negative feedback systems, and yet, at the same time, micro machinery in our trillions of cells. Between conception and death, most people in our countries live free of pain and disease. How aptly wrote the psalmist, *"In wisdom thou hast Though made them all: the earth is full of thy riches"* (Psalm 104:24).

Psalter 377:1-6

O thank the Lord, the Lord of love,
O thank the God, all gods above;
His tender mercies ever sure
To all eternity endure.

O thank the mighty King of kings,
Whose arm has done such wondrous
things;
His tender mercies ever sure
To all eternity endure.

His wisdom gave the heav'ns their birth,
And on the waters spread the earth;
His tender mercies ever sure
To all eternity endure.

He taught yon glorious lights
their way,
He made the sun to rule the day;
His tender mercies ever sure
To all eternity endure.

He seit the milder light,
And shining stars to rule the night;
His tender mercies ever sure
To all eternity endure.

He thought on us amid our woes,
And rescued us from all our foes;
His tender mercies ever sure
To all eternity endure.

God is personal

God is not only transcendent, above all, but He is also imminent, controlling every atom, heartbeat, and nerve impulse. We are not keeping ourselves alive and neither is the food we eat nor the air we breathe. It is our Creator and Sustainer that is maintaining each life. Not only does God maintain all human life, but He also creates in us a desire for fulfillment. *“Why do you labour for that which does not satisfy?”* (see Isaiah 55:2) implies that man has been given a desire for something beyond himself that God alone can satisfy as revealed in Scripture. When God enters the heart in the work of salvation, then a person begins to know God in a real, personal manner.

The creation of humans in God’s image and the relationship God accomplishes with His chosen, implies a God who is personal, relational, and cares for His creation. The condescension of God to uphold humans in a most intimate manner, *“seeing He giveth to all life, and breath, and all things,”* (verse 25) was a central theme of Paul’s sermon to the Athenians in Acts 17:24-31, Paul focussed on the creation, the first book of revelation, to the Athenians, because they had no understanding of Scripture, the second book.

God is eternal

Creation requires a creator who is outside of and transcends matter and time. Matter and time are His creation. The fact that God created all things and is not limited by time or space, implies His eternal nature. Romans 1:20 is a verse that states that God’s *“eternal power and Godhead”* can be “clearly seen” and “understood from what has been made.” Matter has a beginning and began when time began. The sun, moon, and stars are timekeepers which will be removed when time ends. There was eternity past, then came time. There will be eternity future when time ends. Psalm 90:2 states, *“From everlasting to everlasting, Thou art God.”* How keenly David expressed his dependency upon the eternal God, *“My times are in Thy hand”* (Psalm 31:15).

(To be continued, the Lord willing)

“Measure not God’s love and favour by your own feeling. The sun shines as clearly in the darkest day as it does in the brightest. The difference is not in the sun, but in some clouds which hinder the manifestation of the light thereof.”

~ Rev. Richard Sibbes (1577-1635)



The Adventures of a Bible

Rev. J. H. Townsend

On a dull January afternoon some year ago, a young widow was sitting in her drawing room looking listlessly out of the window. It was a fine house in a fashionable Dublin square; the room was handsomely furnished, everything indicated comfort, but the owner looked unhappy.

Mrs. Blake was a Roman Catholic, fervent and conscientious in the practice of her creed; but of late, her mind had been burdened with the thought of sin. Religious practices, penance, and even prayers, brought her no relief; the burden could not be removed. She had told her sorrows to her confessor, and at his bidding had taken up works of charity; but though these things were an interest and for a while occupied her mind, the sense of her own sins lay heavy upon her soul. Her confessor, a kindly young priest, gave her full absolution, but his words brought no comfort. As she sat musing, there was a knock at the hall door, and before she had time to collect her thoughts, a visitor was in the room.

“What shall I do to rouse you and get that sad look from your face?”

“Ah, Father John, you are kind, and you have done your best, but the burden of which I have told you lies heavy on my heart.”

“Listen to me,” he said. “I have made up my mind what you are to do. There’s a man coming to the Rotunda tomorrow night who will make your sides ache with laughter, and you should go to hear him.”

“Oh, Father John.”

“No, not a word! I won’t have any excuse, I demand it! Go you will and go you must.”

The young priest explained that a well-known society entertainer was to appear before a fashionable audience, and that in his opinion, this would be the best thing for her. Protest was of no use; she could not disobey her spiritual adviser, who had even brought her a ticket for the performance. So the following afternoon saw Mrs. Blake at the appointed place, where large placards announced the entertainment which she had been ordered to attend.

The Rotunda had more than one public room under its roof. There

was the great Round Room, the Pillar Room, and one or two more; there were, moreover, different entrances. Now, as it happened, Mrs. Blake had made a mistake as to the hour of the performance, and instead of the crowd which she would have seen had she come at the right time, she noticed small groups of people entering the building. Following them, she found herself in one of the smaller halls and sat down.

It seemed odd that no one had asked for her ticket, but she concluded that this would be rectified later on. There was no time for much thought, as almost immediately a gentleman came upon the platform and gave out a hymn. Then it flashed upon her that she had made some dreadful mistake, she must be in the wrong room, and worst of all, this must be some Protestant meeting into which she had mistakenly found her way. Mrs. Blake was shy and sensitive, and to leave in the sight of all assembled was an impossibility to her. What should she do? She was determined to slip out at the close of the hymn, for by so doing her action would be less likely to attract any attention.

This she tried to do, but in her anxiety to be quick, she violently knocked down her umbrella, and the noise which it made was so great that many turned around to see the cause. Poor Mrs. Blake, terrified at what she had done, sank into a chair and almost wished that she could fall through the floor.

Now there was a deep silence, and then one voice, that of the man on the platform, was heard in prayer. She could not help listening, as she had never heard anything like this before; it was so unlike the “Hail Marys” and other prayers in her books of devotion. The man was very reverent, but he seemed so happy as he prayed, which struck her as most extraordinary.

The prayer ended and the speaker announced that he would read a passage of Scripture on the “Forgiveness of Sins,” the very subject of all in the world she longed to hear. Come what may, let Father John say what he liked or do what he chose, she must listen to this.

This first eighteen verses of the tenth chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews was read, and the speaker in a simple way expounded the teaching until it became clear as daylight. The one Sacrifice once offered, the free and full forgiveness granted to those who ask for it in His name, illustrated by several other passages in the New Testament, formed the subject of the discourse.

As the thirsty ground drinks in the summer rain, so did this poor soul receive these wonderful truths. She had never heard them before, but now they flowed into her inmost being and she longed to hear more.

The speaker finished and after another prayer, the meeting broke up. Mrs. Blake felt that this was the opportunity of her life, so summoning all

her courage, she went to the edge of the platform and asked the gentleman whose words he had been reading. Surprised at such a question, he came down and was at once plied with so many inquiries that he offered to write down references for her to study at home. However, when he learned that the lady never had possessed a Bible, his interest was keenly aroused. "I will lend you mind," he said. "Read the marked passages in the pages which I have turned down, but let me have it back in a few days. It is the most precious thing I have."

Mrs. Blake thanked him warmly, and hastened home with joy in her heart and a new light in her eye. How different from the disconsolate creature who a few hours previously had found her way to the Rotunda.

For the next few days everything was forgotten but her new treasure. She read and re-read the marked passages and many others too. The light shone into her understanding, the burden, long weighing on her conscience, rolled away into the open grave, and the peace of God filled her heart and her mind.

Now the time had come for the Bible to be returned. Once more she was deep in her new study and so engrossed in thought as not to notice a ring at the hall door. Someone entered her sitting room and her confessor stood before her. He noticed two things, an embarrassment in her manner, and at the same time a restful calm in her eyes, to which he was a stranger.

"What has happened to you?" said her visitor. "I haven't heard how you liked the entertainment, and as I didn't see you at mass last Sunday, I thought you might be ill."

Taken aback by the suddenness of the whole thing, Mrs. Blake lost her self-possession. She had intended to keep the matter secret for a while, but now she was off guard, and with the simplicity of a child, she told the whole story--the mistake of the room, the attempt to leave, the words spoken, the book lent, and last of all, the joy and peace that filled her heart.

With downcast eyes she spoke, but when she glanced up, her spirit froze with terror at the look of the man before her. It was black with rage! Never before had she seen such fury depicted on a face.

"Give me that book!" he said hoarsely.

"It isn't mine!" she cried vainly, attempting to stop him.

"Give it to me," was the reply, or your soul will be damned eternally; that heretic has nearly got you into hell, and neither he nor you shall ever read the book again."

Seizing it as he spoke, he thrust it into his pocket and giving her a fearful look, strode out of the room.

The lady sat as if paralyzed. She heard that hall door close, and something in her heart seemed to close also and to leave her alone in

terror. That awful look searched her through and through; only those who have been born and brought up in the Church of Rome know the nameless horror which their idea of the power of the priesthood can inspire. Then, too, she thought of the gentleman who had lent her his Bible, and whose address was in it, but she could not remember it and knew not where to write. This was very grievous, but oh, that look. It was branded on her memory.

Days passed slowly by, but her visitor, once so welcome, now so dreaded, did not return. Courage began to creep back, and at last, after a fortnight or more had elapsed, Mrs. Blake determined to venture upon a visit to him. She must make one more effort, if not too late, to have the book restored to its rightful owner.

Father John lived some distance from Mrs. Blake's residence, and his house adjoined a convent to which he was confessor. The door was opened by a nun, who visibly started at the sight of Mrs. Blake, and upon being asked if the priest was at home, her eyes seemed to blaze for a moment. Immediately, her face became rigid and her manner cold as she said, "Yes, Father John is at home—he is in this room; will you not come in and see him?" As she spoke, she half led, half pushed the lady into a room opening off the hall; but as the visitor entered, she uttered a piercing shriek! There was an open coffin, and in it was the lifeless form of her confessor.

Before she could recover from the shock, the nun glided up to her and hissed these words: "He died cursing you; you gave him a Bible, and he told me to tell you that he cursed you with his last breath; now go!" And before she knew what had happened, Mrs. Blake was in the street, with the door shut behind her.

Several weeks elapsed. The breath of spring had passed over the earth, waking leaves and flowers to life and loveliness. One evening Mrs. Blake was sitting alone pondering the events of the last three months. The joy of pardon was in her heart; she had bought a Bible for herself and had read it daily. The old errors in which she had been brought up had one by one been renounced, but there was a sorrow which could not be overcome. How sad, the brief illness and sudden death of that young priest! His last look! His last words! That terrible message!

Why should she have been so blest, brought into the haven of peace, filled with heavenly joy, and he--why should not the same words have brought him a similar message? It was too awful and was one of those mysteries which could never be explained. "Why," she said to herself, "should a God of love do this?"

At this moment, the servant ushered into the room a lady who was closely veiled and who stood irresolutely for a moment. Before Mrs.

Blake could speak, the lady said, “You do not know me, but you will soon recognize me.” With these words, she lifted her veil and revealed the face of the nun who had delivered the message of cursing as they stood by the open coffin.

Mrs. Blake moved back, not knowing what might happen next, but her visitor calmed her fears, adding, “May I sit down and tell you something?” Having been invited to do so, she went on. “I have two things to tell you, and I must be very brief for I am in haste. First, please forgive me for that awful lie of mine. I have asked God’s forgiveness, but I beg also for yours. Father John died blessing you with all his heart. The day before his death, he charged me to tell you that he too had found forgiveness for his sins by that book and that throughout eternity, he would bless you for having brought him to the knowledge of his Saviour. Now, will you forgive me?”

“I will indeed, from the bottom of my heart,” gasped the astonished lady, “but why did you say what you did?”

“Because I hated you for having sent him to hell, as I believed. Now listen. I felt the strongest desire to read what he had read, and after his funeral, I could not resist looking into the book for myself. I was fascinated and read more and more, and I too have found pardon and peace in my Saviour. I have been studying the Bible for weeks, and now here it is,” producing it as she spoke. “I have escaped from the convent this evening and will cross to England tonight, but I felt that I must come here and return this Bible, and to tell you that all my life I, too, shall bless you for having, through it, taught me how to receive forgiveness for my sins. Goodbye! God bless you! We shall meet in heaven.”

A brief farewell, and she left the house and was gone. Was it, after all, only a dream? A little worn Bible lay on the table before her. It was not a dream, but a glorious reality. That little book, without a living voice to expound its teaching in two of these cases, had brought three precious souls out of the darkness into the light.

Imagine the feelings of its owner when it was restored to him with this wonderful record. And yet what says the One who sent it on its mission? “*My Word ... shall not return unto Me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it*” (Isaiah 55:11).

Reader, what does your Bible mean to you? Jesus said: “*Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth My Word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life*” (John 5:24). “*This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners*” (1 Timothy 1:15).

The Lord Willing and We Live

Some time ago, a man known as Father van Luyken lived in a village in the Netherlands. He was known by almost everyone in the village. He was always ready to help others and was friendly toward everyone. He was especially known as an example of godliness. At a young age, God drew him out of darkness into His marvellous light.

The Lord's people often gathered together in one of their homes in the evening. They spoke about the services that had taken place in the house of God and the ways in which the Lord had led them. As they met together, they often felt the blessing of the Lord upon them, and His name was praised.

At the end of such gatherings, they usually discussed where they would meet the next time. When they had agreed on a place, Father van Luyken would say goodbye with the words, "Well, dear friends, now we know when and where we will hope to meet the next time, the Lord willing and we live."

One evening, a man was in their midst for the first time. He had come to visit his sister, not knowing that she wanted to go to the fellowship meeting that evening. She told him that he was welcome to come along, and, out of courtesy, he agreed to do so. However, he did not care much for religion or take spiritual things seriously.

This man started to laugh at the words of Father van Luyken, who asked him why he laughed. "Well," he said, "twice tonight I heard you say 'the Lord willing and we live.' I don't see why you add those words."

"My dear friend," said van Luyken, "do you think that is so strange? According to God's Word, our life is short and uncertain; we cannot be certain that we will come to the end of any day or any hour. The Word of God says, 'Ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that' (James 4:14-15)."

The man became angry at his gentle rebuke and said, "I tell you, whether the Lord will or not, I will be in your midst the next time."

"Dear friend," Father van Luyken said calmly and seriously, "I hope that under those circumstances, you don't have to experience that man is only vanity."

Then, the friends parted, and each went to their own home.

That same night, the man who had spoken so boldly died. He was like the rich man in the parable, of whom God said, "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee" (Luke 12:20).

~ Adapted from *"For the Generations to Come"* Volume 1

Receiving a Deathbed (2)

Rev. P. J. De Raaf

It is very painful to sit around a deathbed, for the family and friends who have to miss a loved one and cannot miss them, and especially for the dying person who has to let go of everything and everyone to go into eternity. What a privilege to know that the dying person in his or her healthy days has been sought out by the Lord and has come to know a worthy Saviour as an unworthy sinner. Then a wonderful joy can mingle with the sorrow.

Speaking

What should you say when you're sitting at a deathbed? Maybe not that much. When Job's friends were silently present in his grief, they were a support, but when they began to speak, they were the wrong words at the wrong time. Remember that a dying person can have so much to do with his body and be so tired that a conversation can be too much. The sound of voices can already be a burden. We have to explore what the dying person can handle, also in our official visits to the sick! And let's first observe with our eyes and ears to what the sick person has to say, before we come up with our well-intentioned, but far too quick words. "Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man" (Colossians 4:6).

Questions

With a deathbed, many questions disappear. Those about food, clothing, holidays, politics, and business no longer matter at all. In fact, only one question remains: "Is it well with thee?" (2 Kings 4:26). This question must be asked, not only by ministers, but also by family and friends. Hopefully, we won't only raise this question when someone is dying. Let's ask this question to each other when we are still healthy. This question must be asked honestly, because the dying person will soon stand before God's judgment seat. But also because it is good that the loved ones know how these things were in the heart of their loved one. If they have to guess after death, it is difficult to process.

Yet we have to be careful how we ask this question. Sometimes such a question is asked so urgently that the dying person is almost forced to say something good. Answers are half or completely on the lips. When someone cannot or does not want to share what is in the heart, it behooves us to take a step back. And let's realize we don't have to reveal God's work. He Himself will take care of that, if necessary, on the deathbed.

Encourage

Hardly anyone is unmoved in the religious field when he is about to die. And how strongly we can realize in those moments that only one thing is needed for the dying person. If someone asks to sing a certain psalm, or tells us that he experiences such a wonderful peace in his heart, we can take courage from that. The tendency can be very strong to encourage the dying person with comforting Bible verses or by saying that we believe that someone will soon go to the Lord. Yet we must always, and especially at a deathbed, remain honest. Were the fruits of grace to be found in life, "such as a true faith in Christ, filial fear, a godly sorrow for sin, a hungering and thirsting after righteousness"? (Canons of Dordt, First Head of Doctrine, Article 12).

Certainly, a child of God may be comforted by pointing to the Substitute, who is waiting in the Father's house (John 14). But if these things are not clear, it is very misleading to reassure someone, when there is no good reason for it. Then it is better to point to the Saviour, who was very willing to receive the sick (see Matthew 8:16).

~ Translated from *De Saambinder*
(*To be continued, the Lord willing*)

When men can live and plod on in their profession, and not be able to say when they last experienced any living sense of the love of God or of the privileges they have in the blood of Christ, I do not know how they can keep themselves from being ensnared.

~ John Owen

A Conversation with Sam and Tom About Believing

Rev. P. van Ruitenburg

Part 1

Sam: “Good evening, Tom. How are you?”

Tom: “I’m fine, Sam, but I am concerned.”

Sam: “What are you concerned about, Tom?”

Tom: “I am concerned about some of our members and fear that they may not understand the gospel.”

Sam: “Not understanding the gospel? You make me curious. What is the matter?”

Tom: “Briefly, some people think they are saved, because they believe that they are saved.”

Sam: “Well, is that so bad? Are we not called to believe that we are saved? And is that believing, not saving?”

Tom: “Yes, believing that you are saved can be totally wrong.”

Sam: “Are you serious? Are we not commanded to believe? Whosoever believes shall be saved, the Bible says, correct? And is doubting not a sin?”

Tom: “I see that you’re confused, Sam. I don’t see anywhere in the Bible that it says we must believe that we are saved.”

Sam: “Come on, Tom. How can believing that you are saved be wrong?”

Tom: “Let me explain. It is totally wrong to believe that you are saved when you aren’t, but you may believe that you are saved if indeed you are saved. Does that make sense?”

Sam: “But are we not all commanded to believe? And, not believing is a great sin, isn’t it?”

Tom: “You are right that unbelief is a great sin. But the Lord does not call sinners to believe that they are saved, but we are called to believe in Christ, and that is very different from believing that you are forgiven. Believing that something is true differs greatly from believing in someone personally. Believing in someone includes a relationship. You cannot

believe in a person you do not know.”

Sam: “Okay, so you say that someone first needs to believe in Christ before they can believe that they are saved?”

Tom: “Yes, exactly. There is much more to say, so please stay with me.”

Sam: “I also hear people say we need to grow in grace and that our faith needs to become stronger, not weaker.”

Tom: “Well, yes, of course. Don’t encourage unbelief, but let faith become stronger.”

Sam: “I am sorry, but I would not tell everyone that they need to grow in their faith.”

Tom: “Why not? Everyone needs to grow in grace and become a firm believer.”

Sam: “So, do you think you should tell unconverted people without grace to become stronger in their faith? That is dangerous.”

Tom: “Why is that dangerous?”

Sam: “It is dangerous, because you assume that they are beginners in grace. But are they? They may not have a true saving faith, but you tell them that they are fine and only need to become stronger. That is deceiving! What would you say about becoming stronger in faith?”

Tom: “That is a good question Sam, and I hope to answer that the next time we meet.”

Yes, blessed Jesus, I would cast all upon Thee; sins, sorrows, trials, temptations. Thou art the Almighty Burden-bearer of Thy people; for the Lord Jehovah hath laid on Thee the iniquity of us all. And as Thou bearest all our sins, so Thou bearest all our sorrows. And dost Thou not bear all the persons of Thy redeemed? Dost Thou not bear all our troubles, all our exercises, all our temptations, trials, difficulties? The government is upon Thy shoulder; the care of the churches is all with Thee. And shall I not cast all my care upon Thee? Shall I be careful for many things, while Jesus saith, “Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee”? O for grace to sit loose to all things, and to leave all things with Thee. Lord, do Thou bear me up when I am falling, support me when weak, uphold me against all mine enemies, carry me safe through a life of grace here – and finally, bring me home to Thy glory, to behold Thee, and dwell with Thee for ever.

~ Extract from Dr. Hawker

The White Devil of Unbelief

John Bunyan

This doctrine of coming to Jesus Christ for life informs us of the evil of unbelief, that wicked thing that is the only or chief hindrance to the coming sinner. Does the text say, “Come?” Does it say, “And him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out?” Then what an evil that is that keeps sinners from coming to Jesus Christ! And that evil is unbelief: for by faith we come; by unbelief we keep away. Therefore, it is said to be that by which a soul departs from God, because it was that which at first caused the world to go away from Him, and that also that keeps them from Him to this day. And it does it the more easily because it does it with deceit.

This sin may be called the white devil, for it often, in its mischievous doings in the soul, shows as if it were an angel of light. Yes, it acts like a counsellor of heaven. Therefore, a little discourse on this evil disease.

1. It is that sin, above all others, that has some show of reason in its attempts. For it keeps the soul from Christ by pretending its present unfitness and unpreparedness; such as a need of more sense of sin, a need of more repentance, a need of more humility, a need of a more broken heart.

2. It is the sin that most fits the conscience. The conscience of the coming sinner tells him that he has nothing good; that he stands indictable for ten thousand talents; that he is a very ignorant, blind, and hard-hearted sinner, unworthy to be once taken notice of by Jesus Christ. “And will you,” says unbelief, “in such a case as you now are, presume to come to Jesus Christ?”

3. It is the sin that most fits with our sense of feeling. The coming sinner feels the workings of sin, of all kinds of sin and wretchedness in his flesh; he also feels the wrath and judgment of God due to sin, and often staggers under it. “Now,” says unbelief, “you may see you have no grace, for that which works in you is corruption. You may also perceive that God does not love you, because the sense of His wrath abides upon you. Therefore, how can you have the face to come to Jesus Christ?”

4. It is that sin, above all others, that most fits the wisdom of our flesh. The wisdom of our flesh thinks it prudent to question awhile, to stand

back awhile, to listen to both sides awhile; and not to be rash, sudden, or unadvised in too bold a presuming upon Jesus Christ. And this wisdom unbelief agrees with.

5. It is that sin, above all others, that continually whispers in the ear of the soul with mistrust of the faithfulness of God, in keeping promise to them that come to Jesus Christ for life. It also suggests mistrust about Christ's willingness to receive it and save it. And no sin can do this so cleverly as unbelief.

6. It is also that sin which is always at hand to enter an objection against this or that promise that by the Spirit of God is brought to our heart to comfort us. And if the poor, coming sinner is not aware of it, it will, by some evasion, slight, trick, or cavil, quickly wrest from him the promise again, and he shall have but little benefit of it.

7. It is that, above all other sins, that weakens our prayers, our faith, our love, our diligence, our hope, and expectations; it even takes the heart away from God in duty.

8. Lastly, this sin appears in the soul with so many sweet pretenses to safety and security that it is, as it were, counsel sent from heaven, telling the soul to be wise, wary, considerate, well-advised, and to take heed of too rash a venture upon believing. Be sure, first, that God loves you; take hold of no promise until you are forced by God to it; neither be sure of your salvation; doubt it still, though the testimony of the Lord has been often confirmed in you. Live not by faith, but by sense; and when you can neither see nor feel, then fear and mistrust, then doubt and question all.

This is the devilish counsel of unbelief, which is so covered over with specious pretenses that the wisest Christian can hardly shake off these reasonings.

