The Lilac Envelope

The lilac envelope on the doormat had the personal touch of being homemade. It was addressed in practised calligraphy with a formal RSVP in the corner. The wedding invitation it contained was not exactly a surprise, we had heard about the engagement and sent our congratulations. But the wedding date was problematic, it was a busy time at work and a great distance to travel. Next morning we picked up a 'with sincere regret' card.

In the stationers an old friend beamed. He too had received an invitation and his excitement was evident. He had not expected to be asked to the wedding but was informed that arrangements were already in place. His dress-suit was ready and awaiting collection compliments of the groom. All was paid for and in the envelope was a receipt. His hotel room was booked, the account also settled. Even his travel tickets were enclosed.

Our invitation brought no tickets and no receipt. No wedding outfits were ordered, no travel arrangements made. Having decided not to attend nothing was lost, but the groom did not know this. What if we had wanted to go? What arrangements had been made for us? Where was our wedding outfit and confirmation of accommodation?

Then the penny dropped. It was never expected, nor intended, that we would attend the wedding. It was an empty invitation sent out for show. Nothing necessary for us to make the journey was arranged or supplied. The lilac envelope was for appearance only. It sounded good, it looked good, it made us feel valued and wanted, it was ingenious, but it was not sincere. What appeared as a grand invitation to attend a grand wedding was really a grand deceit. Despite the invitation, nothing was prepared, nothing was provided, nothing was supplied.

What kind of person sends such an invitation? Who would mock their friends by appearing to invite them while failing to provide what was necessary for them to attend? Certainly not a man of integrity, not an honest man. Yet today, preachers in pulpits are making just such offers and sending out such invitations, on behalf, they say, of God Himself. It is a genuine invitation, they tell us. “Come to the wedding of God’s Son”. It is a sincere offer, they say, lovingly given in the gospel to all who hear. A free offer, without condition, without restriction.

But is there with the offer an enabling to accept? Is there cleansing blood applied? Is a robe of righteousness supplied for the guilty, naked sinner? Is the ransom paid? Is the soul redeemed from the curse of the law? Has Christ carried their sin and died in their place? Is He now preparing a mansion for them? Is all that is needful most certainly supplied? No? Then it is an empty offer, a grand deceit and an insult to our sovereign God. Shame on the free-offer preacher who mocks a sinner thus.

When God invites a sinner to the wedding of His Son He provides everything required for him to come. With God’s invitation comes the gift of faith and power to accept, with His offer of mercy comes the gift of grace. He cleanses with precious blood, anoints with perfect righteousness, and by Jesus Christ opens the way of reconciliation into His holy presence. God never mocks the sinner with an insincere offer. Nor will He deceive those condemned already by offering them what can never be theirs.

God’s invitations are full and gracious, never deceitful, never empty.
NEW FOCUS

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I beseech you, Sir, let nothing be so dear to you as Christ’s truth, for salvation is worth all the world, and, therefore, be not afraid of men that shall die. The Lord will do for you in your suffering for Him, and will bless your house and seed; and ye have God’s promise, that ye shall have His presence in fire, water, and in seven tribulations. Your day shall wear to an end, and your sun go down. In death it will be your joy that ye have ventured all ye have for Christ; and there is not a promise of heaven made but to such as are willing to suffer for it. It is a castle taken by force. This earth is but the clay portion of bastards; and, therefore, no wonder that the world smile on its own; but better things are laid up for His lawfully-begotten bairns, whom the world hateth.

Samuel Rutherford

To William Fullerton, Provost of Kirkcudbright
From Aberdeen, March 13, 1637
Why So Particular?

To be described as being particular about things is not always a compliment. In fact it is sometimes used as a polite put down as much as to say, ‘He’s very fussy’, or ‘She’s hard to please’.

This is often the impression given when some Christians, usually Baptists, describe themselves as ‘Strict and Particular’. One can imagine someone new to the phrase wincing slightly at the expression. The picture of an austere old aunt or a disciplinarian teacher might spring to mind. Hair combed, laces tied and sitting quietly. Overly strict and very particular.

Strict

Of course the real meaning of the term is quite different and has more to do with the historical development of theology in certain churches. Congregations who practise strict communion place some kind of restriction upon who is allowed to join in church fellowship and participate at the Lord’s Table. Criteria differ from church to church but in essence all true churches ought to be sensitive about who receives the Lord’s supper and thoughtful about who may share in what is, in essence, a remembrance meal for believers in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Particular

Similarly, ‘particular’ has a meaning not immediately obvious in current usage. While those who are Particular might often appear ‘hard to please’ when it comes to church matters or theology (and other things too) the real meaning of the word has to do with the death of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross at Calvary. ‘Particular’ has reference to the nature and extent of the atoning work of Jesus Christ, rather than the fastidiousness of an individual believer.

Redemption redefined

Recently some professing Christians have sought to redefine the meaning and purpose of the death of Jesus Christ. They have claimed that Jesus’ death on the cross was nothing to do with redemption or atonement, themes which have historically been central to the church’s understanding of the crucifixion. They prefer to talk of Jesus’ death as a sacrificial example or a divine gesture to demonstrate how much God loves us and the lengths to which He is prepared to go to secure our affection in return. Some even say the death of Jesus was an unforeseen mistake, that Jesus did not intend to die and the resurrection allowed God to take a different course and try another approach. It has been disappointing to observe how supposedly evangelical organisations, who ought to have answered these attacks on the atonement promptly and accurately, in the event struggled to produce a coherent response.

Atoning blood

The Bible will not permit these interpretations to stand without a proper emphasis upon the redemptive nature of Christ’s death and the atoning power of His shed blood. Passages such
as Isaiah 53 speak of Christ’s death being an offering for sin and God’s righteous servant justifying many by bearing their iniquities. This chimes beautifully with New Testament passages such as John 10 where Jesus is described as laying down His life for the sheep, and Acts 20:28 where it is clear that Christ has purchased His church with His own blood. Furthermore, Paul shows the unity of purpose within the Godhead for this great transaction when he states in Romans 8:32 that the Father delivered Christ up for sinners and in Ephesians 5:25 that Christ willingly gave Himself for His people.

The death of the Lord Jesus redeemed or ‘bought back’ His people sold, as they were, into slavery to sin. He paid the price of redemption to God’s justice, and atoned for those whom He redeemed thereby restoring them to peace with the offended God, justifying them by His own perfect righteousness.

**Substitutionary atonement**

And this is where ‘particular’ comes in. The death of the Lord Jesus must be seen as substitutionary if we are to do justice to Biblical language. Christ died for sinners. The Crucifixion was not simply the death of one man, justly or unjustly, at the hands of Roman soldiers 2000 years ago. Christ died as a representative for others, He suffered in their place and instead of them. As both the offeror and the sacrifice offered our Lord gave His life for the sins of others. And God the Father accepted the blood of His Son in payment for the sins of others. Their sins were placed on Christ’s shoulders and God the Father punished God the Son, their Substitute, instead of them. In this way Christ fulfilled all the Old Testament priestly typology of the sacrificial lamb and the offering for sin.

**Naming particular people**

Who are these ‘others’ for whom Christ died? Did He represent all mankind or was He a substitute only for some? Was His death for all men in general or only for some men in particular? The Bible is not silent on this, as we have seen above. Jesus said, ‘I lay down my life for the sheep’ John 10:15 and later in the same passage distinguishes between those who are His sheep and those who are not. He identifies the sheep, describing them as those who are known of Him, hear His voice, and follow Him (vv. 26-28).

We therefore hold that Christ’s atonement was a definite, substitutionary atonement for specific individuals and was limited in its extent to a certain number of men and women for whom the redemption price of blood was paid. This limited number, variously called God’s sheep, His little ones, the church of God, the chosen, and the elect of God are the ‘particular’ individuals for whom Christ died.

**Its not particular if it isn’t definite**

Sadly, today there are evangelicals who claim in their confessional standards to believe in particular redemption but who prefer from their pulpits and in their preaching to open up the scope of Christ’s work to include everyone. Some teach that the particularity of grace is not in Christ’s atoning work at all, but in God’s electing purpose. Thus they can say, Christ’s death is sufficient for all, covers all and avails for all while being efficient (or actually saving) only for the elect whom the Father has chosen to save. By this logic, but without scriptural warrant, they can offer Christ to all as a potential Saviour. They can say, ‘Christ died for you in order to save you, if you will only believe.’

Others say that Christ’s redemption was for all but the blessings and benefits of it are only applied to certain individuals by the Holy Spirit. These false teachers try to push a wedge between the united purpose of the Godhead by claiming that the extent of Christ’s atoning work differs from the elective purpose of the Father and the quickening work of the Holy Spirit. Put another way, indefinite atonement is posited as a means of circumventing the implications of particular redemption even though it is inconsistent with the divine purpose of grace, and the particular application of atoning blood. With this we cannot agree.

Cont’d on page 25
In Ezekiel 34 the Lord God denounces all self-serving false prophets, those men who feed themselves upon his sheep rather than feeding his sheep, and declares the certainty of his wrath against them saying, "Woe be to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flock?" (v. 3) — "Behold, I am against the shepherds; and I will require my flock at their hand" (v. 10). But that chapter is also a tremendous declaration of God’s saving grace in and by Christ, our Good Shepherd, and gives assurance of the absolute safety and security of God’s elect, the sheep of his pasture (Ezekiel 34:11-17, 22-31). In verses 29-31 the Lord God promised that he would raise up for his sheep “A Plant of Renown”, that would shelter and protect us from all danger and all shame.

And I will raise up for them a plant of renown, and they shall be no more consumed with hunger in the land, neither bear the shame of the heathen any more. Thus shall they know that I the LORD their God am with them, and that they, even the house of Israel, are my people, saith the Lord GOD. And ye my flock, the flock of my pasture, are men, and I am your God, saith the Lord GOD.
This Plant of Renown is our blessed Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. He grew up before the Lord God “as a tender plant and as a root out of a dry ground” (Isaiah 53:2), and grew into a stately tree of renown in the mountain of the Lord, “a goodly cedar,” under the shadow of which we take refuge and dwell in safety (Ezekiel 17:23-24). This Plant of Renown, our glorious, famous, renowned Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, is set before us as the Branch of the Lord seven times in the Old Testament Scriptures (Psalm 80:15; Isaiah 4:2; 11:1; Jeremiah 23:5-6; 33:15-16; Zechariah 3:8; 6:12). I want to show you the beauty and glory, the blessedness and the fame of Christ the Branch, as he is set before us in the Old Testament. We will begin with Zechariah 6:12 and work our way back to Psalm 80:15.

Zechariah 6:12

Zechariah 6:12 is the last of seven distinct prophecies in the Old Testament identifying our Lord Jesus Christ as the Branch of the Lord. — “And speak unto him, saying, Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, Behold the man whose name is The BRANCH; and he shall grow up out of his place, and he shall build the temple of the LORD.”

Here the Lord God calls for us to “Behold the man whose name is The BRANCH.” This word “Behold” is a call to faith. The Lord God here says to all who read and hear the words of this prophecy to look to, believe in, and trust this Man whose name is the Branch, the Lord Jesus Christ, his dear Son. Mark the wonderful features of his person; and behold him. He is “the Branch.” This is one of the prophetic names of him, in whom all the Old Testament saints lived and died in hope, the One they trusted as the Redeemer of Israel, and in whom they were accepted of God. — “The man whose name is The BRANCH.”

May God the Holy Spirit give us grace to hear and heed the call, and enable us to behold this wonderful Man, whose name is the Branch. You will notice that Zechariah was inspired to write his name in all capital letters, as if to call our attention to the importance of this name for our Saviour. The Lord God calls for us to trust his Son, “the Branch”. Then he gives us seven assuring descriptions of this Branch to encourage us to trust him. This is the Branch that God’s right hand planted. The descriptions of this Branch, his person, his glory, and his character are all things that identify the Branch as our Lord Jesus Christ. They have their accomplishment in him alone. Look at them with me, one by one, and behold the Lord Jesus as we do.

1. “Behold the Man.” — That Man of whom the Scriptures speak, “whose name is the Branch,” is the Man God promised to send as our Redeemer and Saviour, the Man promised to our fallen parents in Genesis 3:15, the Seed of woman, the Seed of Abraham, the Seed of David, the Son of God and the Son of Man.

How blessed! Yes, he is “the man,” truly and properly man, as well as truly and properly God, all man and all God. Otherwise, he could never have saved us. As Hawker put it, “God and man, forming one Christ, alone could be suited for a Mediator to accomplish redemption by his blood.” This man is “the Branch”, the “Plant of Renown”, who God planted and raised up for us, under whose shadow our souls are made to dwell in safety.

2. “And he shall grow up out of his place.” — That certainly has reference to our Saviour’s incarnation and virgin birth. This Man, the Branch, did not grow up by the sowing and planting of man. No man had a hand in his being. This “holy thing” was conceived in the womb of a virgin by the Holy Spirit.

When the Lord God said, “He shall grow up out of his place,” he described our Saviour’s birth; but there is more here than just his virgin birth. When the Lord God declares, “He shall grow up out of his place,” there is clearly a reference to eternity. His “goings forth have been from of old from everlasting” (Micah 5:2). What is his place? The place from which he comes is heaven itself (2 Corinthians 8:9). His place, the place from which he grew is the eternal counsels of the triune God (Proverbs 8:23, 30-31).

The Psalmist asked, “Who shall declare his generation?” Yes, he is a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a branch out of his roots. Yet, he is, himself, the root of David, planted in the eternal purpose of God’s own sovereign decree, and budding forth as a Branch in his incarnation, death, resurrection, ascension, and glory. What a Branch he is! Our blessed Redeemer is the Branch of never-failing loveliness, eternally luscious and fruitful in all the proclamations of his gospel, converting sinners, and comforting saints. Our Saviour is the eternally perennial Branch to all his redeemed in grace and glory.

3. “And he shall build the temple of the Lord: Even he shall build the temple of the Lord.” — This is stated twice, as if to show us what an important and sure promise this is. The Lord Jesus Christ is the Builder of his house, the church of God (Matthew 16:18), which is here (and throughout the Word of God) said to be his temple, his dwelling place.
The Church is compared to the temple of the Old Testament, because the temple was placed on a mountain, lifted above the earth, highly exalted and safe. The materials used to build the temple were choice stones and excellent timber, symbolizing God’s elect, who are as lively stones built up into a spiritual house, fitly compacted together. The temple was a magnificent, glorious place (Psalm 87:3).

Glorious things of thee are spoken, Zion, city of our God.
He whose word cannot be broken,
Formed thee for his own abode.

Truly, our God has spoken glorious things concerning his church! She is a people chosen in love, redeemed by blood, called and kept by grace, and there is no spot in her. The Old Testament temple was called “the temple of the Lord,” because he built it, he dwelt in it, there he was worshipped, there he revealed himself, and there he met with his people (Exodus 25:22). So it is with the church of God, his true temple (1 Corinthians 3:16-17). Christ is the Foundation and Chief Cornerstone of it; and he is the wise master Builder who builds it. He builds it on himself and for himself. He builds his holy temple by his Spirit, by his grace, and by his Word; and he alone is the Builder.

4. “And he shall bear the glory.”—Who else? He bought it with his blood. He builds it out of nothing. He makes it glorious in himself, with his own glory. Therefore, the glory of his house shall be hung on him alone (Isaiah 22:24). Truly, “his glory is great in thy salvation: honour and majesty hast thou laid upon him” (Psalm 21:5). “His work is honourable and glorious” (Psalm 111:3). “And blessed be his glorious name for ever: and let the whole earth be filled with his glory; Amen, and Amen” (Psalm 72:19).

5. “And (he) shall sit and rule upon his throne.”—Lift your eyes to heaven. There, in heaven, having finished all his work on earth, our Saviour is at ease and rests, and his rest is glorious. He rules over all flesh to give eternal life to his elect, ransomed ones, to save, protect, and perfect the purchase of his blood.

6. “And he shall be a priest upon his throne.”—“The man whose name is the Branch,” the One we are called to trust, our all-glorious Christ, is both Priest and King. By his one great sacrifice of himself, he has put away our sins forever. By his precious blood, he has perfected us forever. He is now seated upon his throne as our King, the King of Glory, crowned with glory and honour. He ever lives as our High Priest. He is both our Priest and our King. That means that all he seeks in his intercession for us, as he appears in the presence of God for us, presenting his blood, his sacrifice, and his righteousness to the Father, he shall have. This Priest is the King! He has power and authority as the King of Glory to effectually apply the benefits of his work and to effectually bestow the blessings of his grace, and to effectually accomplish the desires of his heart upon his people.

7. “And the counsel of peace shall be between them both.”—That simply means, “the man whose name is the Branch,” our almighty Christ shall, by his sovereign dominion and eternal, effectual priesthood, fulfill all the covenant of peace toward us, for us, and in us by his omnipotent grace. To put it another way, “He shall save his people from their sins!”

Zechariah 3:8

Now, look at the preceding prophecies of our Lord Jesus Christ as the Branch. —“Hear now, O Joshua the high priest, thou, and thy fellows that sit before thee: for they are men wondered at: for, behold, I will bring forth my servant the BRANCH” (Zechariah 3:8). Here, the Lord God promised that he would send our Saviour to perform his great purpose of grace in saving his people, making all his elect to be men wondered at, saying, “I will bring forth my servant the BRANCH.” He is the fruitful Branch, by whom Satan is spoiled, by whose omnipotent grace God’s elect are plucked as brands out of the fire, and his chosen ones are washed. By his will, his work, and his word our filthy garments are taken away and our iniquities are made to pass from us. God’s Servant, the Branch, Christ Jesus, clothes poor sinners with a change of raiment, even the garments of salvation, and sits the fair mitre of “holiness to the Lord” upon us, making us kings and priests unto our God forever. It is he who removed the iniquity of Zion in one day, by his one great sacrifice for us.

Jeremiah 33:15

In Jeremiah 33 our Saviour is called “the Branch of Righteousness.”—“In those days, and at that time, will I cause the Branch of righteousness to grow up unto David: and he shall execute judgment and righteousness in the land. In those days shall Judah be saved, and Jerusalem shall dwell safely: and this is the name wherewith she
shall be called, The LORD our righteousness” (Jeremiah 33:15-16).

He is the Branch who brought in everlasting righteousness for us by his obedience to God as our Substitute, living and dying as our Representative. By his life and death in our place, our blessed Saviour fully satisfied all the requirements of God’s holy law and inflexible justice on our behalf, executing “judgment and righteousness” (the just verdict of righteousness) in the earth, by whom we are made the very righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21). So complete and perfect is our righteousness in him that all his redeemed, the whole Israel of God, are named after him, “the Lord our Righteousness.” That is because we are one with him, truly one with him.

Jeremiah 23:5
In Jeremiah 23:5-6 we read, “Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.”

In Jeremiah 33:15-16 the language is almost exactly the same as the language used here; but the slight differences are very significant. Both passages are talking about this gospel day of grace and salvation. Both are assurances that all God’s elect, all the Israel of God shall be saved. In chapter 33 the Lord God speaks of his Son as “the Branch of Righteousness.” Here he calls him “the Righteous Branch.” Our Lord Jesus Christ is both the Branch who is Righteous and the Branch through whom righteousness flows. In chapter 33 he tells us that, “he shall grow up unto David.” Here he says, “I shall raise unto David.” In chapter 33 it was promised that our Lord Jesus would “grow up unto David,” speaking of his own accomplishments as our Mediator. Here it was promised that the Lord God would “raise unto David a righteous Branch,” speaking of him as the Mediator raised up by God the Father. In chapter 33 he says, “He shall execute judgment and righteousness.” Here he says, “He shall execute judgment and justice.” But the words are the same in both places in the original. — “He shall execute judgment and righteousness in the earth,” both speaking of the satisfaction of God’s law and justice.

The matter of truly great significance I want you to see is this. In Jeremiah 23:6 we are told that as the result of Christ’s finished work of righteousness, by all who “Behold the man whose name is the Branch,” by every sinner who trusts Christ alone as Saviour, he is called Jehovah-tsidkenu — “The Lord our Righteousness.” In chapter 33 (v. 16) we are told that, as the result of his finished work, all who trust him are called by the Triune God Jehovah-tsidkenu, — “The Lord our Righteousness!” Every believing sinner truly is one with Christ, and, drawing all righteousness from him, we are the very righteousness of God in him! His obedience is our obedience. His death is our death. His satisfaction is our satisfaction. And his righteousness, being made our righteousness by God himself, is our righteousness. As it is written, “As he is so are we in this world!”

Isaiah 11:1
In Isaiah 11:1 our Saviour is called “a Branch”; but the word “Branch” here (and only here) is a different word. It is the word from which we get the word “Nazarite.” In fact, this word is commonly translated “Nazarite,” or “Nazareth.” Yet, the word is, without question, properly translated “Branch” in Isaiah 11:1. — “And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots.”
The Lord Jesus Christ, the only true Nazarite, is that Man who had his family roots of royalty in Jesse, David’s father. And he is the Branch from whom all the blessings of grace, righteousness, and peace, described in the rest of Isaiah 11, flow down to us, because the Spirit of the Lord rests upon him and he judges his people with righteousness, and not according to the sight of the eye or the hearing of the ear.

When we compare this with the law of the Nazarite in Numbers 6, we see this clearly. All the blessings of grace, righteousness, and peace are given to us according to righteousness and truth because of the faithful obedience of Christ the Nazarite, required and described in Numbers 6:1-21. Upon the basis of the Nazarite’s obedience, because he is the Branch of grace, from whom we receive all blessings and blessedness, the Lord God commands Moses (the law) to bless us, and promises that he shall perform the blessing (Numbers 6:22-26).

Isaiah 4:2
Isaiah 4 gives us another view of Christ the Branch. — “In that day shall the branch of the LORD be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the earth shall be excellent and comely for them that are escaped of Israel. And it shall come to pass, that he that is left in Zion, and he that remaineth in Jerusalem, shall be called holy, even every one that is written among the living in Jerusalem,” Isaiah 4:2-3. Take a brief look at these two verses line by line. They are bursting with the good news of the gospel.

“In that day” — That day is not a literal day, or a specified time. It is the day of salvation (2 Corinthians 6:2; Isaiah 49:8). It is the day when God visits his elect in the mighty operations of grace, revealing Christ and giving us faith in him. “In that day shall the Branch of the Lord be beautiful and glorious.” — When the Lord Jesus is revealed and the sinner is made to know him and trust him as the Branch of the Lord, the Branch into whom we are grafted and from whom flows to our souls life, and grace, and salvation, he is truly beautiful and glorious in our eyes!

“And,” when Christ is revealed, once the sinner looks to him in faith, “the fruit of the earth shall be excellent and comely for them.” — Our Lord Jesus, the Branch, who was brought forth from the earth as the Fruit of the earth, “the first begotten from the dead,” now appears excellent and comely for us. Our blessed Saviour sprang forth as righteousness from the earth when he “was delivered for our offences and raised again for our justification” (Romans 4:25; Psalm 85:10-11).

That cannot be said of everyone, but it can be said and is most assuredly true “for them that are escaped of Israel.” — “Unto you, therefore, which believe he is precious! Who are these? They are described in verse 3 as “he that is left in Zion and he that remaineth in Jerusalem.” — Believing sinners, having escaped the wrath of God, remain among God’s people, worshipping him.

Who are they? They are those who, being grafted into the Branch of Righteousness, are “called holy.” — Yes, God himself calls us “holy”, because he has made us holy in his Son.

Who are these who have escaped? Who are those who shall escape? They are those, everyone of them, whose names are “written among the living in Jerusalem.” — If you will refer to the marginal translation, you will see that those words might be more accurately translated, “written to life”. In other words, those who have escaped and shall escape the wrath of God are those whose names were written in the Lamb’s book of life before the world began (Revelation 13:8; 17:8; 20:12, 15; 21:27).

No wonder, then, that our Saviour said, “Rejoice because your names are written in heaven.” Unless our names were written to life in heaven, in the book of life, we shall be cast into the lake of fire. Truly, the Lamb of God, who is the Branch, is beautiful and glorious, excellent and comely, when he gives us faith and causes us to see that our names were written to life before the world began!

Psalm 80:15
Psalm 80 is a prayer to God our Saviour, the Shepherd of Israel, desiring him to make his face shine, visit us in grace, and visit his church, the vine he has planted. Look at the language of the prayer in verses 14 and 15, and you will see that we have every reason to confidently expect him to do so.

Return, we beseech thee, O God of hosts: look down from heaven, and behold, and visit this vine; And the vineyard which thy right hand hath planted, and the branch that thou madest strong for thyself.

The vine God planted is his church; and the Branch he made strong for himself is Christ our Saviour. In this passage, again, the two are spoken of as one. When the psalmist prayed for God to visit his vine, he was praying for him to visit his Son. If he will do that (and he most assuredly will), all is well, and we shall be saved (Psalm 80:17-19).
The Sinner

When some fellow yields to temptation,
And breaks a conventional law,
We look for no good in his makeup
But Lord, how we look for the flaw.
No-one asks who did the tempting,
Nor allows for the battles he fought.
His name becomes food for the Jackal.
The saints who have never been caught.
I am a sinner, O Lord, and I know it.
I am weak, tired and frail.
I am tossed on life’s stormy oceans,
Like a ship that is caught in a gale.
I am willing to trust in thy mercy,
To keep the Commandments thus taught.
But deliver me Lord from the judgment,
Of the saints who have never been caught.
The familiar story of David's encounter with Goliath the giant Philistine has been used for untold numbers of lessons for the Lord's people. Rightly so, it is a stirring example of the power of God using a weak young man to accomplish an historic victory.

We can focus upon many aspects of the narrative to highlight this or that spiritual lesson, but for the moment let us ignore the great human figures and look at David's choice of weapon; a slingshot and five smooth stones.

The sling
Now it is clear that David used his favoured sling because he was used to it at that time. As a shepherd boy he had many occasions to defend the sheep against wolves, lions and bears by slingling stones. A young lad would have been no use in close combat with large predators, but from a distance a sling could be used to great effect, he could then club the animal to death. Many ancient armies had ranks of slingshot soldiers to 'soften up' the approaching enemy before the infantry attacked. Archers attacked at a greater distance, slingers at a nearer distance, then swords, clubs and axes were used at close quarters.

Slingers could become extremely accurate in their chosen method of fighting. It was not unusual for a slinger to be able to cut down a bird in flight and a slingshot was nearly as effective as an arrow or a bullet. David was clearly accomplished in this discipline.

The stones
But the skill of the slinger is of no use unless the items he throws are the right shape, weight and size. The pebbles used by David were crucial in this fight. With the wrong shaped stones he would have no control over the accuracy of his throw; with a light stone the effect when it hit would be diminished.

The stones that David cast were utterly crucial in the fight against the enemy of the Lord, this uncircumcised Philistine. He went to a small stream and carefully chose five smooth stones to fight the most terrifying soldier Israel had ever seen, a veteran of war since his youth.

Now five is the number of grace in the Bible, strength out of weakness, the action of God in empowering weak humanity. David's victory is a work of grace. The choice of the five stones is about God's purposes using his instruments of grace.

And he took his staff in his hand, and chose him five smooth stones out of the brook, and put them in a shepherd's bag which he had, even in a scrip; and his sling was in his hand: and he drew near to the Philistine.

(1 Samuel 17:40)

Smooth Pebbles in God’s Hand

The familiar story of David’s encounter with Goliath the giant Philistine has been used for untold numbers of lessons for the Lord’s people. Rightly so, it is a stirring example of the power of God using a weak young man to accomplish an historic victory.

We can focus upon many aspects of the narrative to highlight this or that spiritual lesson, but for the moment let us ignore the great human figures and look at David’s choice of weapon; a slingshot and five smooth stones.

The sling
Now it is clear that David used his favoured sling because he was used to it at that time. As a shepherd boy he had many occasions to defend the sheep against wolves, lions and bears by slingling stones. A young lad would have been no use in close combat with large predators, but from a distance a sling could be used to great effect, he could then club the animal to death. Many ancient armies had ranks of slingshot soldiers to ‘soften up’ the approaching enemy before the infantry attacked. Archers attacked at a greater distance, slingers at a nearer distance, then swords, clubs and axes were used at close quarters.

Slingers could become extremely accurate in their chosen method of fighting. It was not unusual for a slinger to be able to cut down a bird in flight and a slingshot was nearly as effective as an arrow or a bullet. David was clearly accomplished in this discipline.

The stones
But the skill of the slinger is of no use unless the items he throws are the right shape, weight and size. The pebbles used by David were crucial in this fight. With the wrong shaped stones he would have no control over the accuracy of his throw; with a light stone the effect when it hit would be diminished.

The stones that David cast were utterly crucial in the fight against the enemy of the Lord, this uncircumcised Philistine. He went to a small stream and carefully chose five smooth stones to fight the most terrifying soldier Israel had ever seen, a veteran of war since his youth.

Now five is the number of grace in the Bible, strength out of weakness, the action of God in empowering weak humanity. David’s victory is a work of grace. The choice of the five stones is about God’s purposes using his instruments of grace.
Prepared instruments
The combat between David and Goliath can be seen symbolically as the warfare between Almighty God and Satan. David was a man after God's own heart, while Goliath represented the champion of Israel's chief enemy. Typologically, this battle is a picture of God's battle.

In this battle, the Lord uses prepared instruments, symbolised here by the five stones. The prepared instruments are the work of grace, the work of God. Now pebbles do not become smooth overnight. It takes many years, perhaps hundreds or thousands of years to make lumps of rock into a rounded, smooth surfaced stone. It is the process of attrition and erosion that does this. The stone is smashed against other rocks and grit by the action of flowing water, time after time. Gradually all the rough edges are worn down and the stone becomes rounded or elliptical. As anyone knows who has polished stones, it requires continuous rough action and the presence of extremely hard grit to wear down pebbles.

From the point of view of the pebble, it is a tough and difficult process. Features that made the stone stand out from others are smashed off. Distinctive characteristics are worn away. That which makes the stone special in itself are rubbed out. Empty cavities get smoothed away, jutting out protuberances are destroyed.

We are the pebbles
Now the instruments God uses in his warfare on earth are His people, sinners saved by grace. We are the stones that God slings at the face of the enemy. We are the prepared ones whom God will use for His testimony of victory.

This means that we must also be prepared by the slow attrition of the sanctifying graces of the Holy Spirit in our lives in order to become effective against the enemy. Our rough edges need to be knocked off, our fleshy desires to be broken down. We must become smooth stones in the hand of God to do with as He will.

The victory
Notice that the stone David slung sunk deep into the forehead of Goliath. This is important. God uses us to smash the mind of the enemy. The chief method used by Satan is deception; he centres on anti-truth. All the wiles of the devil involve deceit and attacking truth in some form or another.

Paul speaks of the Wicked one ‘whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish’. (2 Thessalonians 2:9-10)

The chief weapon of the saint is truth, it is the truth that sets people free (John 8:32). The first element of spiritual armour is being girded with truth (Ephesians 6:14).

The key matter today, with so much around that is erroneous and deceitful, is for saints to focus upon God’s word, the truth, and attack the enemy head on - to smash into the lies, heresies, slanders and deceits with the truth of God’s word. At the end of the age, the Lord Jesus Christ will destroy the enemy and all his works with truth, the breath of His mouth ...

And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming. (2 Thessalonians 2:8)

Jesus breathes truth, speaks truth, and reveals the brightness of his glory, which is itself truth, since the Lord is truth (John 14:6), and the enemy is consumed completely.

In a small way in our battles for God’s testimony on earth, we also must focus on the truth. The two key things that destroy the works of the devil are, blood bought people who have been tried and tested by God and shaped into willing instruments, who focus upon the truth and allow themselves to be thrown at the enemy’s lies.

Some examples
The Bible is full of beautiful examples of men trained and moulded by God in difficult circumstances, who were then used by the Lord to defeat the enemy.
My dear Friend, — I like to receive letters, but I do not like writing the answers. However, we shall find through life one thing must be set over against another; there is no separating the bitters and sweets, the joys and the sorrows, and the sweetest pleasures and severest pains. All things are to work together for good for those called by grace, and surely trials, afflictions and chastisements will be experienced by the child of God, as well as the Love, Mercy and Goodness of God, and all proceeding from the Loving-kindness of a merciful God. In our right minds what could we wish to be altered in outward things? All things are right, well-ordered, and the language is, “God knows best.” But “Thy will be done” is a hard lesson to learn, and far beyond what flesh and blood can attain unto. Tribulation must work patience, and when God blesses us with that, we can hear the rod, and know who hath appointed it. What have we to fear but sin, and in that we have very much to fear; although we may be blest to have the sting taken away through a blessed deliverance, nevertheless that enemy never dies, and it has made all true Christians groan, and surely it will us. But what a mercy it is to groan on account of it, instead of committing it with delight and greediness!

Moses was chosen by God, but had to wait until most men his age were as good as dead before he was able to fulfil his ministry; he was eighty when he spoke to Pharaoh (Exodus 7:7). Moses thought he was ready for God’s work when he was forty (Acts 7:23), but he needed to be put in a wilderness for forty years of attrition before God could use him as a great deliverer. The wilderness years rounded the rough edges off Moses, taught him restraint and meekness and gave him the fiery revelation of God.

David was chosen king of Israel but suffered year after year under the jealous hand of Saul. It was living in Adullam’s cave that David learned the path of hard knocks as his early Psalms show us. Once prepared, David was supremely useful as deliverer of God’s people against various enemies.

Paul the apostle was called to the ministry by a direct revelation from the Lord Jesus himself, but his path was always hard and difficult. He suffered more than most other apostles, but also understood the gospel more than most (2 Peter 3:16). He experienced anxiety and worry (2 Corinthians 1:8), could be at a complete loss (2 Corinthians 4:8, the meaning of ‘perplexed’), and knew ‘trouble on every side’ (2 Corinthians 7:5). He was also persecuted continuously: five whippings, three beatings with rods, one stoning. Then there were natural afflictions, three shipwrecks, danger from drowning, dangers from bandits, persecution from his own people and others, problems in wildernesses, weariness, toil, sleeplessness, hunger, thirst, cold, nakedness and anxiety for the churches every day (2 Corinthians 11:24-29). Paul certainly was a polished stone. Yet Paul was primarily responsible for the early spread of the Gospel throughout the whole Mediterranean area and beyond.

Encouragement in trials
God only uses pebbles that have been worn smooth by the trials and tribulations of his predetermined providence. The best weapons in God’s hand are the stones that have been most worn down. This gives us a genuine reason for our trials; we do well if we can remember this in them.

William Tiptaft
(1803—1864)

My dear Friend, — I like to receive letters, but I do not like writing the answers. However, we shall find through life one thing must be set over against another; there is no separating the bitters and sweets, the joys and the sorrows, and the sweetest pleasures and severest pains. All things are to work together for good for those called by grace, and surely trials, afflictions and chastisements will be experienced by the child of God, as well as the Love, Mercy and Goodness of God, and all proceeding from the Loving-kindness of a merciful God. In our right minds what could we wish to be altered in outward things? All things are right, well-ordered, and the language is, “God knows best.” But “Thy will be done” is a hard lesson to learn, and far beyond what flesh and blood can attain unto. Tribulation must work patience, and when God blesses us with that, we can hear the rod, and know who hath appointed it. What have we to fear but sin, and in that we have very much to fear; although we may be blest to have the sting taken away through a blessed deliverance, nevertheless that enemy never dies, and it has made all true Christians groan, and surely it will us. But what a mercy it is to groan on account of it, instead of committing it with delight and greediness!
I feel the power of it, and feel grateful to God it does not reign with that power it sometimes threatens to do, and it is a great mercy that we are not left to contend with so powerful an enemy in our own strength. I desire to bless God for restraining grace as well as saving grace, and I am sure that none are well kept, except those whom the Lord keeps. How much sin we are conscious of, and how much we are ignorant of! Who is a God like unto our God, that pardoneth iniquity and delighteth in mercy?

At times Christ is precious to my soul, and I can bless God for His great mercies to such a worm as I am; and at times I feel as if grace could not possibly be in my heart, and all comfort, joy and peace are gone, and I seem to have no heart to read the Bible, no heart to pray, much less to preach. Nevertheless, through mercy I continue to this day, and to the Lord be all the praise! Necessity compels us to contend for the renewings and revivings of God’s Spirit, and makes us to know that all our springs are in God, and from Him all fruit comes.

William Tiptaft as an undergraduate

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels.  
2 Corinthians 4:7

Treasure in earthen vessels

Do not be surprised if you feel that in yourself you are but an earthen vessel—if you are made deeply and daily sensible of your frail body.

Do not be surprised . . .
if your clay house is often tottering;
if sickness sometimes assails your mortal tabernacle;
if in your flesh there dwells no good thing;
if your soul often cleaves to the dust; and
if you are unable to retain a sweet sense of God’s goodness and love.

Do not be surprised nor startled . . .
at the corruptions of your depraved nature;
at the depth of sin in your carnal mind;
at the vile abominations which lurk and work in your deceitful and desperately wicked heart.

Bear in mind that it is the will of God that this heavenly treasure which makes you rich for eternity, should be lodged in an earthen vessel.

We have ever to feel our native weakness—and that without Christ we can do nothing—that we may be clothed with humility, and feel ourselves the chief of sinners, and less than the least of all saints.

We thus learn to prize the heights, breadths, lengths, and depths of the love of Christ, who stooped so low to raise us up so high!

J C Philpot
Henry Bullinger and the Covenant of Grace

Bullinger's lasting contribution to the Reformation

Covenant Theology is widely accepted today as an essential ingredient of Reformed doctrine. The earliest, most developed, comprehensive and meticulously perfected exposition of this doctrine was presented to the public during the middle 1520s by Heinrich Bullinger (1504-1575) of Zürich. His exposition of the Covenant remains the classical and most widely accepted view of God's Testament for His people. Indeed, this teaching is most likely the greatest and lasting contribution Bullinger ever made to the Reformed churches so that he can truly be called the Father of Reformed Covenant teaching. He above all our Reformers pointed out to an all-embracing degree how the same essential message of salvation is seen throughout the entire Bible from Genesis to Revelation. The Covenant thus provides a focusing point in Bullinger's teaching for all the doctrines of grace. For Bullinger, baptism, the Lord’s Supper, predestination, election, reprobation, law and gospel, the forgiveness of sins, justification, sanctification and the perseverance of the saints, are all to be understood in the covenant context of God choosing a people for Himself in Christ and binding them to Him for eternity. This covenant thus centres alone in the work and offices of the Lord Jesus Christ through whom as Head of the Covenant all believers have access to every covenant blessing.
Trying to prove who was first in reviving the Scriptural teaching that God’s one covenant was revealed in both Testaments is, however, fraught with difficulties. Bullinger’s major rival as a re-discoverer of covenant theology during Reformation times was thought for some time to be Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531) of Zürich. Bullinger was Zwingli’s colleague from 1523-31 at nearby Kappel and Brengarten and became his successor at Zürich in 1531 after Zwingli’s death in the Second Kappel War. Zwingli also appears to have developed a covenant theology in the fifteen-twenties though it is not easy to date each writers’ separate works during this period. We know, for instance, that several very early works of Bullinger are lost or preserved merely in fragments, and this is also probably the case with some of Zwingli’s seminal Reformed works, so one cannot be too dogmatic. Furthermore, Bullinger’s Von dem Touff (On Baptism) which refers to one covenant of grace throughout the Scriptures has recently been dated immediately after Zwingli’s arguments referring to a covenant in his Reply to Hubmaier of November 5, 1525 and not in late 1524 as formerly supposed. Hans-Georg vom Berg in his 1991 edition of Von dem Touff gives between 5 November and 10 December, 1525 as the possible date of writing. Similarly Bullinger’s Answer to Burchard, which also deals with the covenant to a high degree, previously dated 1525, is now believed to have been written a year later. Zwingli is thus thought, by a very slim margin of mere days, to be the first to use the word ‘covenant’ to describe God’s one saving plan outlined in both Testaments.

Who influenced whom on the doctrine of the covenant of grace?
This modern view, however, is not above criticism. The methods used appear to be like dating what came first, the hen or the egg and, in reality, are merely based on the assumption that Zwingli, being twenty years older than Bullinger, had had a longer time to ripen in his Reformation ideas. Thus, the criterion used for placing Bullinger’s works on the covenant after Zwingli’s Reply to Hubmaier is merely one of assumed dependence. In fact, it appears difficult for some scholars to see any similarities between the two men’s works without claiming that Bullinger must have relied on Zwingli for his material merely because they suppose that Bullinger was Zwingli’s pupil. The evidence brought forward to back up this hypothesis is meagre. For instance, Hans-Georg vom Berg believes that he has discovered in Bullinger’s Von dem Touff, (notes 20, 25, 38, 54, 78, 79, 92, 108 etc.), evidence that Bullinger followed Zwingli. Bullinger refers to baptism as a ‘Pflichtzeichen’ or sign of commitment, a term Zwingli also uses, so the deduction is made that Bullinger copied Zwingli. So, too, Bullinger likens Anabaptist practice to the baptizing of geese and thus must have taken over the idea from Zwingli as the older man likens Anabaptist re-baptism to bathing geese. But all this proves is that the two Swiss-Germans, who both spoke the same kind of idiomatic German, used much the same terminology and imagery. Such arguments prove that Bullinger must have taken his theology from Zwingli as little as they prove that Bullinger took his language from his older friend whom Bullinger did not meet until he himself was already an author of several books.

Bullinger often led the way along the Reformed path
In the case of Zwingli’s Reply to Hubmeier, we are asked to believe that as soon as that letter was sent off to Hubmeier, Bullinger was given a copy which he immediately used to compose a far more detailed, extensive, and in important parts quite different work, which he finished on the very next day or very shortly afterwards. The truth is that Bullinger was often ahead of Zwingli in his Reformed works and he was clearly often the one who influenced Zwingli, or at least beat him to writing on the subject. This had very much to do with the fact that Bullinger saw his calling at the time as being principally in writing and not preaching, whereas Zwingli saw his calling.
primarily in preaching and only took to his pen when circumstances compelled him. So, too, Bullinger’s works on the covenant were more detailed and developed than Zwingli’s ever became. On December 10, 1525, for instance, Bullinger sent off his De institutione et genuine eucharistiae to Bartholomäus Stocker emphasising the importance of the Lord’s Supper in God’s covenant for His people. Again, Bullinger was ahead of Zwingli here as the Zürich Superintendent had not involved the Eucharist in his references to a covenant anywhere near as clearly as Bullinger, nor presented any full-scale plan of how the covenant as a whole worked. So too, in the coming year, Bullinger was far more productive than Zwingli on the topic of the covenant and Zwingli only began to teach a more detailed doctrine in his Elenchus (Refutation of the Tricks of the Re-Baptisers) which appeared in July 1527. This work, however, was still less comprehensive than Bullinger’s previous works on the subject.

Oddly enough, the idea that Zwingli might have been dependent on Bullinger as the two men worked diligently together at this time appears not to have been raised by other scholars. Yet Bullinger was obviously growing in his influence on Zwingli and we have Bullinger’s own testimony in his diary that he was the one who wished to inform the public quickly on newly discovered Reformed principles, whereas Zwingli pleaded for caution. We do know for certain, however, that when Zwingli wrote his Reply to Hubmeier in November of 1525, he must have been influenced in some way by Bullinger or at least had asked him for help. Evidence for this is found in a letter from Leo Jud, dated 1 December, 1525 thanking Bullinger for drawing Zwingli’s attention to quotes from Tertullian and Lactantius supporting the covenant unity of the Scriptures which Zwingli had used in his November work. Bullinger was in Zürich from June to November, 1525 and the two men consulted each other often during this period, especially concerning the Eucharist. So it is very likely that Bullinger had discussed his views on the covenant in conjunction with the Eucharist and Jud’s remark referred to these discussions. Bullinger’s departure from Zürich coincided with Zwingli’s publication of his Reply to Hubmeier. So, too, there is scarcely any evidence that Bullinger ever stood in Zwingli’s shadow and learnt his doctrines from him. Indeed most of the available evidence points to independence of thought in Bullinger which always caused him to pursue Reformed paths either in front of or abreast of Zwingli.

**Bullinger emphasised the unity of the Testaments before Zwingli**

There is far more to a doctrine, however than the word that describes it. Bullinger’s teaching on the subject was worked out in conjunction with his studies of the two Testaments so that when looking back on his rise to faith through reading the Scriptures in his De Scripturae negotio of November 30, 1523, Bullinger could write, “In brief, I discover that the New Testament is nothing other than the interpretation of the Old, in that the latter promises, the former teaches what has been made real; the latter more concealed, the former more open; the latter in veils and figures, the former with clear evidence and the things itself.”¹ In a footnote, he adds “The New Testament is a commentary.”² In this passage, Bullinger also shows that Christ based His calling on the Old Testament Scriptures and proclaimed that the Old Testament bore witness to Him (John 5:39-47). Likewise, Acts 15:14-21 shows that the Apostles saw their work as carrying out the message of the Old Testament. So, too, Paul, when he told Timothy that all Scripture was written on inspiration of God, he was chiefly referring to the Old Testament (2 Timothy 3:16-17).³ If we, however, compare Zwingli’s teaching with Bullinger’s at this time, we find the older man, on the appearance of his Taufbüchlein in late May 1525, still emphasising the distinctions and contrast rather than the unity of the two Testaments. He must have thus moved from a belief in two separate Testaments with contrasting

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teaching to a unity of doctrine regarding God’s plan of salvation in both Testaments between late May and early November of 1525. By that time, however, Bullinger had been teaching the unity of the Testaments for at least two years, though he did not use exactly the same terms as Zwingli. Indeed, it is clear from Bullinger’s works that he rarely uses a fixed terminus technicus to describe the eternal covenant of grace but speaks sometimes of a ‘punt’, sometimes of a ‘gmecht’, sometimes of a ‘testament’. He also uses various Latin equivalents such as ‘foedus’, ‘testamentum’ and ‘pactum’, the words being used as synonyms at times and at other times with divers meanings.

Bullinger’s covenant teaching bilateral

Peter Opitz in his Habilitationschrift on Heinrich Bullinger’s theology agrees that in Von dem Touff, which Bullinger wrote for Henry Simler to help him contend with the Catabaptists, Bullinger deals with elements concerning baptism which Zwingli had also discussed earlier in the year but adds that in his doctrine of the covenant outlined in that work, he takes on a position and emphasis (Stellung und Prägung) which can be traced back to his work before meeting up with Zwingli. In Von dem Touff, Bullinger emphasises God’s covenantal requirements concerning His creatures, a point almost totally left out by Zwingli. Unlike Zwingli, Bullinger anchors baptism firmly in God’s covenantal dealings with man and relates how God by His mercy alone first made a covenant of grace with Adam, then Enoch, then Noah and then with Abraham and his seed for ever. Zwingli saw the idea of covenant simply in the form of how God obliged Himself in mercy to serve man, whereas Bullinger adds how obliged man is to walk uprightly before God. There is thus a bilateral aspect in Bullinger’s doctrine lacking in Zwingli. Furthermore, in outlining this bilateral responsibility, Bullinger sees one of Abraham’s major covenantal tasks being to institute circumcision as a covenant sign pointing to the grace God offers. In the same way, Christian parents are obliged to have their children baptised as a covenant sign. Similar comparisons provided by Wayne Baker make him also conclude that:

“This does not mean, however, that Bullinger then became Zwingli’s student any more than he had previously been bound to Luther and Melanchton. Rather, he worked on his own point of view with some intellectual and spiritual freedom. Indeed, the single time Bullinger mentioned a theological matter in connection with Zwingli in his Diarium, he emphasised his own independence.”

Be this as it may, in Bullinger’s 1527 work Studiorum ratio, Bullinger points out that all the books of the whole Bible point to the one eternal covenant which is thus the central theme of God’s Word. Furthermore, Bullinger goes down in history, as far as we know at the present time, as the Reformer who first penned a complete work solely on the topic of the covenant. This was his De testamento seu foedere dei unico et aeterno expositio or On the One and Eternal Testament or Covenant of God of 1534 which quickly went into 15 editions and in which Bullinger outlines that all God’s covenant promises in both the Old and New Testaments are centred in the eternal son of God and are thus ‘one and eternal’ in themselves. The subtitle of this work is Bullinger’s most used text, “This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him,” (Matthew 17:5).

Bullinger’s covenant doctrine developed through his dealings with the Catabaptists

Bullinger tells us in his diary for 1534 that he wrote his work on the covenant, as hinted above by Opitz concerning Bullinger’s Von dem Touff, chiefly against the Catabaptist views of the day. Many of these varied movements rejected the entire covenant idea as being merely Jewish and part of an Old Testament which had no relevance to Christians. Bullinger pointed out that in rejecting the Old Testament, Catabaptists rejected not only the covenant and the signs pointing to the work of grace in Christ but to a right use of the ordinances and the central themes...
When the Law is sweetly laid asleep to make room for Jesus, our true Joshua, it is not because its eye cannot see sin, or its arm avenge it, but because the Lord Himself, lays it in its honourable repose.

Devotional Bible
March 12th (morning)
And at the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the most High, and I praised and honoured him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation: And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?

(Daniel 4:34-35)

Our God is No Failure!

Modern day religion makes the eternal God a pathetic failure! Preachers everywhere tell us that God is trying to save multitudes who are not saved. They tell us that God wants to do many things for us and with us that we will not let Him do. We are told that Christ died for all the people of the world in an attempt to redeem and save all men; but that all are not saved. Modern religion tells us that God the Holy Spirit calls all men alike to Christ; but some men resist the power of His grace, while others allow Him to have His way. We are told that God has done all He can to save sinners, but some will not allow Him to save them. One of these modern prophets of deceit has even dared to put his blasphemous opinions about God into print. What he wrote is a widely held view.

This is what he said...

What is hell? It is an infinite negation. And it is more than that: hell is a ghastly monument to the failures of the triune God to save the multitudes who are there ... Sinners go to hell because God Almighty Himself could not save them! He did all He could, He failed!

Such a god is a pathetic, miserable failure. His will is limited by the will of man. His power is broken by the power of man. His purpose is thwarted by the purpose of man. Such a god is to be pitied, not worshipped! According to modern religious opinion man is sovereign over god, man is gracious to allow god to save him, god is obligated to man, not man to god. Is this the god I must trust for the salvation of my soul? Perish the thought! Such a god as this, while he is popular with proud men, is nothing more than the idol of modern religion, the figment of man’s imagination, an idol carved from one of the trees in the dark forest of man’s depraved heart.

The God of heaven is sovereign, majestic, glorious, almighty. He never tries to do anything. What He purposed in eternity, He will do. He says, “My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure” (Isaiah 46:10). The sovereign, eternal, omnipotent God is not limited in His own power or in the accomplishment of His purpose by the free-will of puny man. God is not at man’s disposal. Man is at God’s disposal. God is not obligated to man. Man is obligated to God. God is not subject to man’s will. Man is subject to God’s will.

The Lord Jesus Christ, God the eternal Son, did not die at Calvary in an effort to save every person in the world. His blood is powerful and efficacious. If He had intended to redeem and save the whole human race, all would be saved. It is written, “He shall not fail” (Isaiah 42:4). If one soul for whom Christ shed His blood were to perish, His redemptive work would be a miserable failure. He would never see the travail of His soul and be satisfied. Such blasphemous notions cannot be endured. — “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law” (Galatians 3:13). Every soul for whom the Son of God suffered and died at Calvary shall be with Him in heaven.

The Holy Spirit does not try to draw sinners to Christ, hoping that they will let Him save them. His power is not defeated by the power of man’s free-will. The Holy Spirit invades the hearts of those dead sinners, who were chosen in eternal love and redeemed by the blood of Christ, giving them eternal life, creating faith in their hearts toward Christ. He draws sinners to Christ by the power of His irresistible grace. — “Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power” (Psalm 110:3). — “Blessed is the man whom thou choosest and causest to approach unto thee” (Psalm 65:4). This is the God of the Bible. This is the God whom we worship. He is the eternal triune God, the God of sovereign power and irresistible grace. This is our God.

Contributed

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There is no new law

The Socinian and New Covenant idea which teaches that Christ came to add to the law and make it more perfect must be rejected on the grounds that God's Word itself denies the need for such a development. As the law is the reflection of God's perfect nature and will for mankind, it is thus God's perfect will for mankind (Psalm 19:7). It is, at the same time, His perfect standard of righteousness and shows "what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God" (Romans 12:2). In other words, the law shows man what law-duties he has in relation to God, both regarding what he should do and what he should not do. No other law is necessary for this purpose. The gospel shows man what he cannot do of himself, i.e. keep the perfect law, but also how Christ not only kept the law on man's behalf but covenanted with the Father in eternity to take on Himself the elect's punishment that they might go free and not receive the condemnation they deserve. No other gospel is necessary for this purpose.

Rejecting the covenant of grace

Reformed Christians believe that this eternal covenant of grace was the basis for the gospel of salvation for the elect which came into action as soon as Adam sinned. John Reisinger teaches in his book Abraham's Four Seeds that there was never such a covenant of grace in either Testament. He considers the term to be unbiblical and quotes Galatians 3:8 as evidence that the gospel to Abraham excludes by definition a covenant of grace with Abraham:

And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed.¹

Though the entire chapter, one would think, is a clear reference to the covenant of grace, Reisinger says:

Nowhere in all the Word of God does the Holy Spirit call the gospel the Covenant of Grace nor does any verse remotely imply that when God graciously makes known the gospel promise to an individual, or to a whole nation, that he is thereby putting the individual under a covenant of grace. If Covenant Theology is correct, then Paul should have said, 'God made a covenant of grace with Abraham.'²

The Romanists included the notorious Marcionite Prologues into their Vulgate Bibles to show their allegiance with Marcion's rejection of the Old Testament, especially its teaching on saving grace. New Covenant Theology follows in their wake. Furthermore, Reisinger has warranted his Galatians 'proof text' out of its covenant context. Paul is arguing in the Galatians text for a gospel of salvation anchored clearly in the covenant with Abraham. He is indeed stressing that "God made a covenant of grace with Abraham" saying of it, "And this I say, that the covenant that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect." Here, Paul is distinguishing clearly between the covenant of grace and the law. Grace was plentiful within the covenant but the condemning law came much later and cannot disannul that covenant. Reisinger must be familiar with Luke 1:54 ff. where the covenant with Abraham made for eternity is described as one of mercy (eleous), a term used synonymously with grace as in Jude 21 and 2 Corinthians 13:14. Reisinger, oddly enough, rejects the covenant of grace because he feels it is not in Biblical terms, yet his own gospel is clothed in theological jargon reminding us of American New-Lighters, Two-Seeders and New Divinity who developed a new religious meta-language. So New Covenanters explain their gospel in terms such as ‘protoevangelium’; ‘escatalogical transcendence’; ‘unique seed’; ‘natural seed’; ‘special natural seed’; ‘spiritual seed’; the ‘four seeds’; ‘the doctrines of grace’ and ‘covenant of redemption’. Whether valid or not, this is not Biblical terminology.

John Gill gives us the lead by telling us that the term ‘covenant of grace’, though not literally and explicitly found as a technical theological term in Scripture, is used:
... properly enough, since it entirely flows from and has its foundation in the grace of God: it is owing to the everlasting love and free favour of God the Father, that he proposed a covenant of this kind to his Son; and it is owing to the grace of the son that he so freely and voluntarily entered into engagements with the Father; the matter, sum and substance of it is grace; it consists of grants and blessings of grace to the elect in Christ; and the ultimate end and design of it is the glory of the grace of God.3

By excluding the covenant of grace from the gospel, Reisinger is merely showing his disregard for the Old Testament. He finds no traces of gospel redemption there. Thus, the gospel promised to Abraham, for Reisinger, did not take place savingly in the lives of the Old Testament saints but was merely an eschatological promise of what was to come after Christ came but in no wise before. However, the Genesis account of the everlasting covenant of grace with Abraham from Genesis 12 on is pure gospel in its teaching that God, even then, was choosing out a people for himself. Indeed, without the OT teaching of the Covenant with Abraham, proclaiming the righteousness which is of faith as experienced by Abraham, we cannot possibly understand right what the New Testament teaches. For instance, when Paul writes in Ephesians 2:8 ff. on the work of grace in salvation, he places it in a covenantal context outside of which one is a stranger to the gospel ‘having no hope and without God in the world’. There is no limbus partum in the Christian faith.

There is no limbus partum in the Christian faith
The Roman Catholic idea of a place where Old Testament believers were detained until Christ arose from the dead and then were set free is void of Scriptural and historical backing. The similar New Covenant idea that the Old Testament saints were under their fallen obligations until Christ paid the price of their sins in future time is equally unscriptural because Christ obligated Himself to pay for those sins in eternity. John Reisinger, in keeping with Rome, teaches that the status of Old Testament saints is different to the status of New Testament saints and that they were in a grey zone between being saved and entering into a future Church, being grafted into the vine and becoming part of the Body of Christ. In his chapter, ‘Who is the Great Nation?’ in his book Abraham’s Four Seeds, Reisinger accepts that there were believing souls in Old Testament times but they nevertheless had not what he calls ‘hope realised’ until Christ came in time. He appears thus to suggest that there was a kind of suspended salvation for OT saints which turned into real, empirical salvation at the point in time when Christ atoned for their sins and Pentecost (why Pentecost?) became a historical event.

This is not Biblical theology; whatever Zaspel and Reisinger call it. The nature of the Church has always been faith in Christ and not rational trust in Christ by sight. There is thus no difference in a saving aspect between the faith of Abraham and the faith of Paul. Indeed, Abraham is depicted in the Scriptures as being the father of the faithful. ‘Hope realised’ will be the lot of the entire Body of Christ on the Resurrection Morning. Indeed, when the author to the Hebrews describes Christian faith, he begins with the faith of the fathers in times past and, before listing their names, tells us (11:1) that, “Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” Thus, the Old Testament saints are presented to us as exemplary in their true faith and not as second class believers.

Truth to tell, Reisinger declares himself and his followers to be second-class Christians as...
they base their belief in an eschatological ‘hope realised’ rather than a hope substantiated through faith. Indeed, Reisinger, in keeping with most of the ‘American Religion’ sects influenced by freemasonry and the then budding Mormon movement, has a multi-tiered-view of believers even more complicated than that of the old papist system. He depicts coming to ‘realised hope’ as a hierarchical climb. Starting from believing Jews who are not yet Christ’s Bride, the Church, he moves up to those who have not attained hope realised and then to those who have. Then he arrives at the Non-Baptist Christians and then proceeds higher to ordinary Baptists until he has his Four Seeders sitting right at the top of the ladder of progression.

Reisinger clearly contradicts Genesis 15:6 “And he (Abraham) believed in the Lord and he accounted it to him for righteousness”. Could Abraham have been more saved than at that time? Furthermore, Jesus told the Jews, “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad” (John 8:56). This was before Christ’s vicarious death on the cross, before the resurrection and before Pentecost! We note, too, that Paul speaking to the Roman Christians of their common father in the faith in chapter 4, echoed the words of Genesis 15:6. Indeed, Paul uses Abraham as the prime example of one who believed in Jesus. There is thus no reason whatsoever to disbelieve the fact that those Old Testament saints mentioned in Hebrews 11, and the myriad more whom the author had not time and parchment enough to name, died safely in the Christian faith and entered into the eternal inheritance of the saints, God’s true elect. Hebrews 11:13-16 is worth quoting here:

These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.

(Footnotes)
1 Abraham’s Four Seeds, p. 38.
A price paid

Christ’s redemptive work must be considered particular as by it a transaction is accomplished in the divine economy of God. Christ’s blood secured the transaction when the purchase price for sin was paid. In the atonement the debt is paid; the church is bought with a price (1 Corinthians 6:20). Christ, with His own precious blood, has paid the ransom demanded by justice, and purchased the inheritance sold under sin (Matthew 20:28; 1 Peter 1:19). The church, thus redeemed, is His purchased possession (Ephesians 1:14). To teach a sufficiency for all in the death of Christ denies the efficacy of Christ’s atonement and can have no proper place in faithful evangelical preaching.

Sin removed

Redemption must also be considered particular because substitution provides for the bearing and carrying away of sin by the substitute. God’s justice demands payment for sin but His holiness also demands the removal of sin and the application of righteousness. Perhaps the most wonderful aspect of Christ’s substitutionary atonement is His bearing the sins of His people in His own body on the tree (1 Peter 2:24). Here we see the punishment for our sin. Here God’s mercy and justice find satisfaction in one glorious act. If the death of Christ was general and indefinite then the sins of all mankind must be both paid for and carried away, and there is no need for Hell, no final judgment and no accountability for sin.

Grace bestowed

Finally, if there is to be any assurance in Christ, any confidence in the efficacy of His work, redemption must be particular. If, as we are told, the death of Jesus Christ is sufficient for all and He paid the full price of sin for all mankind as completely as for one individual then we may justifiably conclude there is nothing inherent in the atonement itself to secure the sinner’s salvation. If, supposing the whole world believe, Christ’s blood is sufficient for the whole world’s sins, and if, supposing they will but trust in Him, Christ’s sin-bearing is sufficient for all mankind, then it is clear that for me, personally, any cleansing power in the blood is conditional upon my believing, and the carrying away of my sin contingent upon my faith. In short, there is no ground for hope, no enduring comfort and no intrinsic merit in our Saviour’s blood and righteousness, unless and until it is made so by some additional input on the part of the sinner.

Yet that is not how Scripture speaks. The salvation of a sinner is always traced to the vicarious death of the Lord Jesus Christ which must therefore, be particular. The particular, electing purpose of God the Father does not pay the captive’s ransom or free the sin-bound slave. Election is not salvation. Nor does the particular, regenerating power of God the Holy Spirit bear the sin of burdened souls, weary and heavy laden. Effectual calling is not salvation. It is Christ’s blood and righteousness alone that cleanses men from sin and makes them fit for glory (1 John 1:7-9). Hence our Lord could say to Zacchaeus, ‘this day is salvation come to this house’ and Isaiah declares, Surely, he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows … the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed (Isaiah 53:4, 5). Salvation is of the Lord (Jonah 2:9).

William Rushton in his little book, Particular Redemption, provides an apt conclusion:

A wealthy and philanthropic individual visits Algiers, and approaches a dungeon in which a wretched captive lies bound with chains and fetters, and strongly secured within walls, and doors, and bars. He proclaims aloud to the captive, that he has brought gold sufficient for a ransom, on condition that the captive will liberate himself from his chains, burst open his prison-doors, and come forth. Alas! exclaims the wretched man, your kindness does not reach my case. Unless your gold can effect my deliverance, it can be of no service to me. The offer of it on such terms can do me no good. Now, although there is a great difference between spiritual and physical inability, yet one serves to illustrate the other. Man by nature is spiritually as unable to believe in Christ, as the Algerine captive is physically unable to break his chains and the prison doors; so that all this boasted sufficiency of the atonement is only an empty offer of salvation on certain terms and conditions; and such an atonement is much too weak to meet the desperate case of a lost sinner.

But how different is the salvation of God! By the blood of thy covenant, I have sent forth thy prisoners out of the pit wherein is no water1 Jesus, by his death, hath paid the ransom, and made the captives his own. Therefore he has a legal right to their persons, and with his own right arm he brings them forth. It is his glory to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison-house.2

Particular? Oh, yes!

1 Zechariah 11.
2 Isaiah 42:6, 7.
CHURCHES

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FRASERBURGH. The Sovereign Grace Fellowship. The Gospel Hall, Cairnbulg. Sun. 11.00am. 6.00pm.
Rev. Dr James Millar 01358 701323 & Rev. Paul Jennings 01346 583433.

CO. DURHAM
BARNARD CASTLE. Egglesburn Baptist Church, Eggleston, off B6282. Sun. 10.30am. Fri. 7.30pm.
Preacher: Peter L. Meney, Tel: 01833 650797.
Email: pastor@egglesburn.org.uk
Website: www.egglesburn.org.uk Visitors welcome.

CUMBRIA (LAKE DISTRICT)
KENDAL. Bethel Strict Baptist Chapel, Chapel Lane, Kirkland (just off main street at south end of town).
Sun. 10.30am. Thu. 7.00pm. Pastor: Kevin M. Price
Visitors ring to confirm times. Tel: 01539 821596.
Email: bethelsbchapelkendal@hotmail.com

CHANNEL ISLES
GUERNSEY. Bethesda Strict Baptist Church, Mont Marche, Forest, Guernsey. All welcome.
Sun. 11.00am, 6.00pm. Wed. 7.30pm (please check).
Pastor: Graham Miller. Tel: 01481 248016.

DENBIGHSHIRE
LLANGOLLEN. Glanrafon Evangelical Church, Princess Street, Llangollen. Sun. 11.00am & 6.00pm. Wed. 7.30pm.
Pastor: James Cornford, Tel: 01978 860642.
www.glanrafonevangelicalchurch.org.uk

DORSET
BOURNEMOUTH. Sovereign Grace Fellowship, 31, Hill View Road, Ensbury Park, Bournemouth.
Sun. 10.30am. Thu. lunch and Bible Study 12 noon.
Rev. Paul Cartlidge, Tel: 01202 259860

DORCHESTER. Grace Baptist Church.
Boys Brigade Hall, Sawmill Lane, Weymouth Road, Dorchester. (by Sports Ground nr Tesco’s) Sun. 11.00am.
Pastor Frederick Serjeant, Tel: 01300 341670. 
pastor@gracebaptistchurch.org.uk

WEYMOUTH. Independent Evangelical Church,
W.I. Hall, Gallway Road, Wyke Regis, Weymouth. Sun. 11.00am, 6.30pm. Sec. John Mann, Tel: 01305 774523

LONDON
MERTON Evangelical Church, Nelson Grove Road, London, SW19 2LG. Sun. 11.00am & 5.45pm, Tue. 8.00pm
Pastor: John Graham, Tel: 0208 540 6104.

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NEW FOCUS APRIL / MAY 2007
The Bible in a Year

Read the whole Bible once a year, the Psalms & New Testament twice. Based on an arrangement by Robert Murray M’Cheyne. The centre column shows the day of the month. M’Cheyne suggests the columns to the left may be read by the family and those to the right in private.

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