Some lesser known names of The Lord Jesus Christ

1. Amen: These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God (Revelation 3:14). This name of our Lord Jesus speaks of the Saviour's trustworthiness and faithfulness. All He speaks is true, all He reveals is certain and dependable, all He promises will most surely come to pass.

2. Bishop: For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls (1 Peter 2:25). That Christ is the Bishop of our never-dying souls points to His role as overseer, protector and guide of the elect of God committed into His charge in covenant purpose by God the Father, before the foundation of the world.

3. Only Potentate: Which in his times he shall shew, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords (1 Timothy 6:15). Our Lord is the mighty One with whom there is no equal. How weak our trust is when we worry and fret as though Our Great King's power was somehow diminished.

4. Dayspring: Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us (Luke 1:78). Dawn brings light, warmth and hope. The fears of the night have passed away. The promise of a new day lays before us. Light shines on our path to enable our progress. In mercy God sent His dearly beloved Son to shine into our lives and guide us into the warmth of His love.

5. Messenger of the Covenant: Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts (Malachi 3:1). Christ, the delight of His Church and Bride has come to His temple. He is both the sum of the everlasting covenant of peace and its bearer to God's people, who dwell in Him and He in them.

6. Rabboni: Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master (John 20:16). There is meaning here beyond mere respect in the astonished exclamation of Mary. She honours her Lord as highly as words will express as the significance of His wise and successful mission of redemption dawns upon her mind.

7. Refiner: And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver ... (Malachi 3:2, 3). The Lord Jesus separates men from men, good from evil and cleanses His people by taking every impurity, every imperfection, every sin from them and carrying them all Himself. And though His people be brought through fires of trial, He walks with them in the furnace.

8. Sceptre: ... a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth (Numbers 24:17). A sceptre is a rod or crook carried by a king and symbolic of his shepherding care of his people. It may also suggest a pen by which a judgment is written. So the Lord Jesus Christ shepherds His little flock and records every offence against them by their enemies in this world.

9. Tried Stone: Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation (Isaiah 28:16). Our Saviour is the solid rock upon which His people are fitly built together in the church. He is tried and found sufficient for every trouble, trial and threat. When floods rise to shake the building the tried and tested stone stands firm.

Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; Psalm 46:2

Augustine Volcanic Island from the Lower-Cook Inlet, Alaska Courtesy: Edward Luteran
Commenting upon this verse J.C. Philpot said,

Those who have every reason to fear as to their eternal state before God, have for the most part, no fear at all. They are secure, and free from doubt and fear. The depths of human hypocrisy, the dreadful lengths to which profession may go, the deceit of the carnal heart, the snares spread for the unwary feet, the fearful danger of being deceived at the last; these traps and pitfalls are not objects of anxiety to those dead in sin.

As long as they can pacify natural conscience, and do something to soothe any transient conviction—they are glad to be deceived!

God does not see fit to disturb their quiet. He has no purpose of mercy towards them; they are not subjects of His kingdom; they are not objects of His love. He therefore leaves them carnally secure, as in a dream—from which they will not awake until the day of judgment.

Friend, is not this a terrible condition; to be left alone by God with no thought of eternal destiny, no concern for your never-dying soul? How many slip into eternity with no substantial hope in this world and none for the world to come? Such is the spiritual ignorance of natural man, the blindness of the flesh.

How blessed we are if the Lord is merciful to stir up our spirit, shake our ignorant peace, arouse lethargic carelessness, pierce our heart with well-aimed arrows and convict us of our sin. Blessed, I say, even if we fail at first to recognise His grace, even when the flesh resists and recoils against it, as it surely will.

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom says the Psalmist. Holy Father, send thy convicting Spirit. Rouse the sleeper! Show me my need for Christ! Then show me my Saviour, and the glorious accomplishments of His perfect love.
Will there be degrees of reward in heaven? That is a question about which there has been much controversy throughout the history of the church. Many men, whose doctrine has been thoroughly biblical in other areas, have been in grave error concerning rewards. I know that I will not settle the controversy surrounding this question in this study. However, it is my responsibility to teach those things which become sound doctrine and build up the saints of God in the faith of Christ, so that those taught by me will not be “tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness.” My purpose in this study is threefold.

I want to glorify and honour our great God, establish you who read these lines in the faith of Christ, and show sinners the way of salvation by grace alone.

Salvation involves all that is required to bring a sinner from the ruins of the fall into the glory of heaven. This salvation, in its entirety, is the work of God’s free grace. That is the foundation upon which we build all our doctrine. Salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. No part of salvation can be, in any measure, attributed to the will, worth, or works of man (2 Timothy 1:9; Ephesians 2:8, 9; Romans 11:6). If it is possible to separate heavenly rewards from salvation, then you might talk about degrees of reward; but if heaven and the glorious inheritance of the saints in heaven is only the consummation of salvation, then to talk of degrees of reward in heaven is to teach salvation by works.

The Doctrine
What is the doctrine of those who teach degrees of reward in heaven? I realize that some men who teach this doctrine may have some slightly different opinions than others; but basically this is their doctrine. Lest I be accused of putting
words in their mouths, let me quote directly from one of the leading proponents of this doctrine. The following are the words of Merrill F. Unger.

Rewards are offered by God to a believer on the basis of faithful service rendered after salvation. It is clear from Scripture that God offers to the lost salvation and for the faithful service of the saved rewards. Often in theological thinking salvation and rewards are confused. However, these two terms must be carefully distinguished. Salvation is a free gift (John 4:10; Romans 6:23; Ephesians 2:8, 9), while rewards are earned by works (Matthew 10:42; Luke 19:17; 1 Corinthians 9:24, 25; 2 Timothy 4:7, 8). Rewards will be dispensed at the Judgment Seat of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:10; Romans 14:10). The doctrine of rewards is inseparably connected with God’s grace. A soul being saved on the basis of divine grace, there is no room for the building up of merit on the part of the believer. Yet, God recognizes an obligation on his part to reward his saved ones for their service to him. Nothing can be done to merit salvation, but what the believer has achieved for God’s glory God recognizes in his great faithfulness with rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

Mr. Unger gives a fair representation of what those men teach who teach degrees of reward in heaven. They teach that:

1. Salvation is limited to the initial experience of conversion. — That is not the doctrine of the New Testament (2 Corinthians 2:10; 2 Timothy 1:9; Romans 13:11; 1 Peter 2:4; Matthew 10:22). We cannot separate one part of salvation from another. It is one package. Those who have election have redemption. Those who have justification have sanctification. Those who have been given grace shall be given glory, too (Romans 8:28-30). All spiritual blessings belong to all God’s elect (Ephesians 1:3, 4).

2. It is possible for a person to be saved and not be a faithful servant of Christ. — Popular as the doctrine is among religionists, it is directly contrary to the Word of God. All believers are voluntary subjects and servants to Christ their Lord and King (Luke 14:25-33).

3. Men, by their service to God, put God under obligation to reward them! — That is utter nonsense. Is it possible for a sinful man or woman to do anything to merit God’s favour and earn God’s blessing? Can a mere man oblige the Almighty?

4. There will be two judgment days, one for believers and another for unbelievers. — Those people must make the Bible fit their doctrine. So they teach that there are two second comings of Christ, one secret and one open and public, two second resurrections, one secret and one open and public, and two judgments, one for believers, The Judgment Seat of Christ, and one for unbelievers, The Great White Throne.

5. Believers will yet have to suffer for their sins! This is one of the most horrendous aspects of the doctrine of degrees of reward in heaven. It puts some of God’s saints through an everlasting state of purgatory in heaven, declaring that some must forever suffer punishment for their sins after conversion! The Word of God, however, emphatically declares that God will never charge His people with sin (Romans 4:8; 8:32-34).

**Inevitable Implications**

The doctrine that there will be degrees of reward in heaven has some undeniable and inevitable consequences. If the doctrine of degrees of reward in heaven is accepted, then it must be acknowledged that:

1. Heaven’s glory is not the reward of grace, but the payment of a debt.

2. Heaven is not a place of unmingled joy, but of mingled joy and grief.

3. God does withhold some good things from them that walk uprightly, and some evil shall fall upon the just (Psalm 84:11; Proverbs 12:21).

4. The blood of Christ and the righteousness of Christ is not alone sufficient for our acceptance with God.

5. Some part of God’s favour, some of the blessings of God must be earned by us!

**A Doctrine Opposed**

Why must we be so dogmatically opposed to this doctrine? We oppose it because it is without foundation in the Word of God. Not one passage referred to in support of this doctrine even hints that some saints will have more and some have less in heaven. Not one of the crowns mentioned in the Bible are said to be given only to certain believers. They are all given to all believers (See Revelation 4:10).

The doctrine that there will be degrees of reward in heaven is totally contrary to the...
plainest statements of Holy Scripture (Matthew 20:1-16, John 17:5, 22; Romans 8:17, 29; Ephesians 1:3; 5:25-27; Jude 24; 1 John 3:2). Can there be degrees of holiness, degrees of perfection, degrees of faultlessness, degrees of glorification? Of course not!

The doctrine that there will be degrees of reward in heaven makes service to Christ a legal, mercenary thing. It promotes pride and threatens punishment. It is merit-based, reward-inspired, legal service. God’s people are not hired, but willing servants. The soldiers in Christ’s army are not mercenaries, but volunteers.

The doctrine of rewards robs Christ of the glory of His grace and makes room for human flesh to boast before God. If we have done something that puts God Almighty in obligation to reward us, then we have a right to boast in His presence. If we do something by which we merit a higher standing than others in glory, we have every right to boast. Yet, anyone who reads the Word of God knows better. Indeed, anyone who has experienced the grace of God shudders at the thought of boasting in His presence (1 Corinthians 4:7).

The doctrine of degrees of reward in glory has the obnoxious odour of works about it; and there is no room for works in the kingdom of grace. It is not possible to worship God on an altar of hewn stone (Exodus 20:25). There is no room for the baggage of works in the strait and narrow way.

**One Text**
There is one text of Holy Scripture which both destroys the doctrine of degrees of reward and assures every believer of an everlasting fulness of joy in glory. Read Revelation 21:4, “And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.”

This text implies that there is much weeping in the way to heaven, and there is. Faith in Christ brings deliverance from all curse and condemnation, but not from pain and sorrow. There are many things that believers suffer in this world along with other men, physical pain and sickness; domestic troubles; financial losses; bereavements and more; because this world is a world of sin, it is a world of sorrow. Indeed, there are many things that bring tears to our eyes which the world knows nothing about such as inward sin, unbelief, anger, rash
speech, injured pride, coldness of heart, lack of resignation to the will of God, depression, and unbelief.

There are even some precious tears which we shed here that will be dried on the other side of Jordan. Tears of repentance will be no more. Tears of sympathy will not be required. Tears of concern over lost souls will be ended when we see all things as our Lord sees them. Tears of longing for Christ’s presence will all be dried when we are “forever with the Lord”!

Even now, while we live in this world, our heavenly Father does much to dry our tears. The believer’s life is not a morbid, sorrow-filled existence. Not at all! We do have our sorrows. Yet, even in the midst of sorrow our Lord gives us great comfort (Isaiah 43:1-6). He gives us a measure of resignation to His will. He teaches us to trust His providence. He reminds us of his gracious purpose. He causes us to remember His promise. He blesses us with the sense of His presence. He floods our hearts with the knowledge of His love (Ephesians 3:19). He reminds us of the cause of our pain (Hebrews 12:5-12). He causes our hearts to be fixed upon better things (Colossians 3:1-3; 2 Corinthians 4:15-18).

Then, in heaven’s glory our God will wipe all tears from our eyes. Impossible as it is for us to imagine, there is a time coming when we shall weep no more, when we shall have no cause to weep! Heaven is a place of sure, eternal, ever-increasing bliss; and the cause of that bliss is our God. Heaven is a place of joy without sorrow, laughter without weeping, and pleasantness without pain! In heaven there are no regrets, no remorseful tears, no second thoughts, no lost causes, no sorrows of any kind!

Read this paragraph very carefully. The thoughts expressed here are simply astounding. Though not quoted directly, they are essentially the thoughts expressed by C.H. Spurgeon on this subject. If God did not wipe away all tears from our eyes there would be much weeping in heaven. Our past sins, our unconverted family members forever lost, wasted opportunities, our unkindnesses and lack of love to our brethren here, and the terrible price of our redemption would all cause our hearts to break and our eyes to flow with rivers of tears forever; but it is written “God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.” Our great God shall, in heaven’s glory, remove us from all sin, remove all sin from us, and remove from us all the consequences of sin. He will remove us from every cause of grief. He will bring us at last into the perfection of complete salvation; and every desire of our hearts will be completely gratified. Then, we will be like Christ. We will be with Christ. We will see Christ. We will love Christ perfectly, serve Him unceasingly, worship Him without sin, rest in Him completely, enjoy Him fully, and have Him entirely.

Will you be among the blessed company of the redeemed? Will you be with Christ in glory? You will only enter into glory if you are worthy of heaven. You can only be made worthy by the merits of Christ. If you are worthy of everlasting glory you shall have all, without degrees, perfectly. Trust Christ and all the glory of Christ in heaven is yours. God help you to trust Him.
Jesus Christ
Crucified

When we consider how much the church of God owes to the cross of Christ, and that the everlasting joy of heaven springs from the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus, it well merits a place in our thoughts to dwell a few minutes on the astonishing subject.

The cross, as far as we can learn from history, on which criminals were executed, was a kind of gibbet, with timber across, on which the person condemned to suffer was nailed. The body was suspended from those nails, which were driven through the hands, and the arms stretched out to each extremity. In this manner the criminal remained until life, from the extremity of suffering, expired. Some have said, that the wretched sufferers were first nailed to the cross, and then the whole body lifted on high, and the bottom of the cross fixed in a socket prepared for that purpose. And as this was done by a jerk, some of the bones were generally broken by this act of violence. But this is not probable. Indeed, in respect to the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, it is very unlikely to have been done, for a bone of Him was not to be broken.

As crucifixion was not only the most painful but the most disgraceful of all deaths, the Roman law never allowed a Roman, be his crime whatever it might, to be thus degraded. It was only inflicted on slaves and criminals, for some more atrocious transgressions. And in order to heighten the shame and pain, the poor victims, so condemned to death, were first scourged, and their backs lacerated with whips or leathern lashes; and not unfrequently led through the city naked with their blood streaming from their wounds, and carrying their cross to the proposed place of execution. The reader will not need to be told, that thus they treated the Lord of life and glory, whom none of the princes of this world knew, until that the holy Sufferer fainted from beneath the load and severity of His pain, when they compelled one that was passing by to bear the cross for the Lord Jesus.

It was an additional aggravation to the ignominy of crucifixion, that the sufferer was perfectly naked, and without the smallest covering. Thus all criminals suffered. And when we consider the personal cruelties all along shewn to the Lord Jesus, we cannot suppose, that the smallest respect was manifested in this particular to His sacred person. Such then was the death the Son of God in our nature endured, for the redemption of His church and people! But who shall describe the soul agonies of Jesus? Here I stop short. It is the crucifixion of the body that I am now limited to, when speaking of the cross of Jesus. Over this view only, let the reader and writer for a moment pause, while listening to the call of the Holy Ghost by His servant the Baptist, "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29).

Was there ever such an object proposed to the mind of contemplation as the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross? It should seem as if the Lord Jesus, thus stretched forth and thus lifted up, was inviting, with His arms extended and His heart bleeding, all His redeemed to come to Him. Indeed, every part of His sacred body joined in giving the welcome. His arms spread to receive, His feet fixed to wait, and His head bowed down as if to kiss His people. Oh, for grace, with Paul, "to know nothing among men, save Jesus Christ and him crucified!" And with the same holy indignation as he felt, against every thing that would check the ardour of his love, to cry out, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me and I unto the world!" (Galatians 6:14).
Salvation By Grace

Consideration of the distinct parts of our salvation, will prove it is by grace, and only by grace that sinners are saved.

Eternal life is one gift, but it comes to us in several degrees, and not all at once in its utmost perfection. The degrees of our salvation are four, 1. Election. 2. Vocation. 3. Justification. 4. Glorification. We have them all mentioned in one place of Scripture, Romans 8:30, ‘Whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified’.

If we consider these degrees separately and apart, we shall find that the whole fabric of our salvation from top to bottom, and from the beginning to the end of it, is only from the grace of God.

Election Is Of Grace

The Election of persons to glory is of grace: They who are elected to glory are not chosen because of their foreseen faith or good works; but they are chosen by a sovereign act of God’s grace. God could foresee no good in the creature, but only what He Himself resolved freely to give: He made choice of no man, because He foresaw he would be good; but He made choice of them whom He has chosen, because it was His will to choose them, and when He made choice of them, He then purposed to make them righteous and holy, ‘According as he hath chosen us in him, before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy, and without blame before him in love: having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will’ (Ephesians 1:4, 5).

We may here observe four things:

1. We are not chosen for holiness but unto holiness. Holiness is one end of our election, and it is a consequent fruit of it; but it is no moving or meritorious cause of it: We are elected that we may be holy, but we were not elected because God foresaw that we would be holy.

2. All that are chosen of God are chosen in Christ. Christ was the first-fruit of election; He was chosen to be the Head of the elect, or to be a common person, to represent them before time, and to assume their nature, to act for them as their Mediator in time: By one act of electing grace, Christ was chosen as the Head of the elect, and they were chosen in Him: Christ was chosen, to be the Head of all them whom God saves; and they were chosen to be members of His mystical body, and to be saved by Him: Christ was set up as their Head from eternity, ‘I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was; rejoicing in the habitable part of his earth, and my delights were with the sons of men’ (Proverbs 8:23, 31). How was Christ set up from everlasting? I answer, He was set up to be the Head of the Elect, and to do the work of a Mediator. It was from the nature of God that Christ was a Son, but it was from the will of God that He was chosen to be the Head of the Elect, and appointed to be their Mediator: He was the Son of God from eternity by generation, but He was the Head of the Elect, and ordained to be their Redeemer by God’s choice. As He was set up to be the Head of the Elect, a covenant was made with Him for all the Elect: He did not purchase the covenant, because the covenant came from the grace which is in God; but the covenant was made with Him as the Head of the Elect, and He purchased all the grace which is given in the covenant.

3. They whom God chooses are chosen in Christ, but they are not chosen for Him. God gave Christ to merit all the grace which He gave to the elect; but Christ was not the cause that moved God to choose them: He could not be the cause of their election, because He was elected Himself as God-man, to be their Mediator: He Himself was chosen as well as they: He was pre-ordained to the office of a Mediator before the foundation of the world (1 Peter 1:20).

4. The election of persons to glory is attributed to the Sovereign act of God’s grace: They are chosen ‘according to the good pleasure of his will’. Excellent words,
which speak forth admirable, stupendous, and matchless love! It is in Christ that we are chosen; but what made God choose us in Him? And what was the cause of His predestinating us to the adoption of children? I answer, it was His own grace, or the good pleasure of His will. The good pleasure of God’s will is the primary, original, and only cause of our election in Christ. God did not seek in us the cause of our election; but the cause of it was only in Himself, and did flow from the free motion of His grace.

Our election in Christ is God’s first act to save us, and it is all of grace. As it is the act of God’s unchangeable will, it is not conditional, but absolute; and because it is not conditional, but absolute, it is a sure foundation, ‘The foundation of God standeth sure’ (2 Timothy 2:19). When all other foundations must sink and will fail, the foundation of election will stand sure.

**Vocation Is All Of Grace**

Under vocation may be comprehended the whole work of God in us, from the first moment of our entrance into a state of grace till we come to glory. If God convince us of sin, and reclaim us from our folly; if He illuminate our minds, and turn us to Himself; if He awaken our consciences, and purge us from dead works; if He soften our hearts, and purify our affections; if He implant faith in our souls, and kindle in our breasts a fervent flaming charity; if He create in us a permanent hatred of all sin, and a vehement desire after holiness; if He call us to the fellowship of His Son, and make us members of His mystical body; if He confirm us in the believing expectation of eternal life, and every way fit us for the enjoyment of it; in doing all this for us, He magnifies His grace towards us.

When we are called of God, it is according to His purpose and grace that we are called, ‘Who hath saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his purpose and grace which was given us in Christ Jesus, before the world began’ (1 Timothy 1:9). It is not said, we are saved and called according to our works, but it is said we are called and saved according to His own purpose and grace. The purpose of God according to which we are called is not taken up in time, but runs as high as eternity itself: As we are called according to God’s eternal purpose, so we are called according to His grace, which is said to be given us in Christ Jesus, before the world began. It was promised to Christ and given to Him for us, by a covenant agreement before the world began. It was of grace that God purposed to call us, and it is of grace when He doth call us: If we have been called by the grace of God, we must then say in the words of the Church, Thou hast wrought all our works in us, or for us (Isaiah 26:12).

Where were we when God called us to Himself, and secretly inclined our souls to seek Him? I answer; we were not only standing with our faces towards Hell; but with a precipitate motion running towards it: What were we doing, when God touched and warmed our hearts with a coal fetched from His altar? I answer; we were sleeping in sin without any sense of our danger: What manner of persons were we, when God quickened us? I answer; we were fighters against heaven, and destroyers of our own souls.

All the several influences of God’s grace upon us, and all the operations of it in us, are equally free. God is always beforehand with us: not only in all the good which we receive, but in all the good which we do.

**Justification Is All Of Grace**

The justification of sinners is, when they are accepted and declared righteous by God as a
Judge, and are not only delivered from Hell, but have a title and right given them to the glory of heaven.

This is justification, and it is not by our works, but only by grace that we can be justified. It is only by grace that we are justified. Our justification as it was by a perfect righteousness, is according to the strictness of infinite justice, and yet it is all of grace to us: When God glorifies His justice, He also exalts His grace and mercy in our justification. The righteousness of Christ by which we are justified, is all of grace to us: It is of grace that it was provided for us, and promised to us; it is of grace that it is given and applied to us. It was infinite grace in God to lay our sins on Christ. We are not justified without a full vindication of God's justice, in the punishment of our sins as they were discharged upon Christ, and yet grace rides in triumph in our justification, 'Being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ' (Romans 3:24). Here are words dropping sweetness to convinced sinners.

First, it is by free grace that we are justified, because grace gives a justifying righteous freely to us.

Second, it is through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ that we are justified, because Christ has purchased the grace of justification for us: Our justification is from the purchase of Christ, and yet it is of free grace to us.

Glorification Is All Of Grace

Glorification which is the last degree of our salvation is all of grace. As the first draught, so the last line of our salvation is all of grace. Not only the foundation but the top stone of our salvation is of grace. As it was in the building of the Second Temple, so it will be when our salvation is perfected in glory, 'He shall bring forth the head stone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace, unto it' (Zechariah 4:7). When the Second Temple was built, the Jews by crying Grace, grace, when the head stone was laid on, did declare, that what was then finished was not from their own strength, but from God's goodness towards them. It was God that thawed and mollified the hard hearts of heathen princes towards the Jews in their captivity, that they might let them return to their own land: It was He that restrained their enemies, raised them up instruments for their assistance, and gave them opportunity to rebuild the temple. When the top-stone was laid on, the Jews celebrated the praises of God's grace with loud and joyful acclamations, and did publicly and solemnly acknowledge the favour of God towards them in the building of the Second Temple. As the top-stone as well as the foundation of the Second Temple was of grace, so not only the beginning and progress of our salvation is of grace, but when the top-stone of it comes to be laid on in glory, it will be of grace. When our salvation is compared to a building, Christ is said to be not only the corner-stone, but the chief corner-stone of the building, 'And are built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ being himself the chief corner-stone' (Ephesians 2:20).

It is in heaven that the grace of God will be seen, in all its bright rays and sparkling beams: It is there that all the designs of God from eternity, and all His works in time, to make His people happy, will appear in their beauty, and will, as so many distinct lines drawn from the circumference, point to grace as their only centre. Everything in our salvation, from the foundation of it in election to the top-stone of it in glory, is of grace: Grace not only formed the whole contrivance of our salvation without us, but grace begins every good work in us: Grace maintains what it begins, and grace perfects what it maintains. There is nothing in us but misery, when God begins His work in us, and there is nothing in us but inability when He brings the work which He hath begun in us to perfection. It is grace that put us into the way of life, keeps us in it, and sets the crown of glory on our heads.

In the account which has been given of our salvation, it may be observed how the grace of God shines in the several and distinct degrees of it.

Election is the root; vocation and justification are branches from this root that bear fruit; and glorification is the harvest, when the ripe fruit will be gathered into the barn. Election is the spring of our happiness; vocation and justification are streams which come from this spring; and glorification is the ocean into which the streams run and discharge themselves. Election is the foundation of our blessedness; vocation and justification are not only the structure which is raised upon this foundation, but the porch or entrance into the most holy place; and glorification is the excellent and admirable sanctuary, where God will forever shine forth in the transcendent brightness of His glory.

London 1719
Recently, I attended the musical presentation of our local school in order to watch one of my grand-daughters, Elena, perform. Another one of my grand-daughters, Annika, was visiting from out-of-town, so she went with me. These two cousins do not get to see one another often, so we planned to go to a snack shop afterward.

Once the concert was over, I began looking for Elena so we could leave. As Annika and I moved into the aisle of the auditorium my focus was on finding Elena and I simply assumed Annika was following me. After a few seconds, I felt what is likely one of the more gratifying feelings a grandfather can have: a small hand grabbed my hand.

It has been a long time since I had a child that age and I had simply forgotten that young children need special supervision and that they have a natural inclination to reach out for physical contact with a trusted person when they are in an unfamiliar situation. In that sea of unfamiliar people she sensed the danger of the unknown so she reached out to the one person she did know and trust: me.

I doubt Annika analyzed the situation and made a conscious decision to grasp my hand. She quite naturally reached out to one whom she trusted. And until she is older, she will not realize what such an act did in me. First, it brought a smile to my face. It feels good to be needed. Second, it ignited all those paternal affections that make fathers and grandfathers the anxious protectors of their loved ones. I knew that she was not in any real danger, but she did not know that, so I returned her grasp with mine so that she would know that I would not let her come to harm. And third, her reaching out to take my hand did not create my love for her, but it did engage it. She could have asked for about anything right then and I would have done what I could to get it for her.

Our heavenly Father does not suffer from any lack of self-esteem nor does He need the affirmation of His creatures in order to confirm in Him a sense of relevance and importance. But He does delight in the simple trust of His children. It is not for nothing that He sets Himself forward as a loving Father to us and urges us to pray to Him with the words, “Our Father ...”

Since He calls Himself my Father, then let me act like His child — dependent on Him and confident of His watchful care. Let me, with the simplicity of a child, reach out and grasp His hand without embarrassment as though such an act diminishes me and without fear that He shall not respond with the watchful grasp of Divine Providence.

I am just a sinful man, yet the gentle grasp of my grand-daughter’s hand stirred up nearly every good thing in me. What great things must be stirred up then, when the child of God reaches out to grasp the hand of the Holy Father! (John 17:11).
No language can be more plain than that which the Holy Ghost directed Paul to use in the 11th verse, of Romans chapter 9 to set forth the absolute sovereignty of God in the constitution and salvation of His Church. Divine purpose and personal election are declared to be the immutable principles of Christianity, quite irrespective of birth and of good or evil works; yea, especially opposed to fleshly claims of seniority and antiquity (v. 19); and it is difficult to account for the infatuation which sits upon the minds of multitudes about free-will, free-agency, and such like Popish dogmas, except upon the ground of gross wilful ignorance and determined rebellion against God.

So expressly does the Holy Ghost declare “it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy” (v. 16); and to illustrate this doctrine the history of Pharaoh is introduced, that thoroughpaced Arminian, whose vaunting language was, “I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil”; but God had said “I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, I will be honoured upon Pharaoh and upon all his host”; and we know whose “I will” stood fast! This historic fact is introduced to confirm the old Roman Catholic Faith, that salvation is an act of grace from first to last, putting a difference between the Egyptians and Israel according to the predestinating purpose of God. For this same purpose God raised up Pharaoh (v. 17), that the power and glory of the divine name might be declared throughout all the earth in this grand epitome of Gospel doctrine, “I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion” (v. 15); nor could there be a hope of salvation for any man on any other principle.

But Popery and its deformed offspring Arminianism, reject all this as heresy, cruelly attempting to rob mankind of the only possible way of salvation; for nothing can reach the case of the ruined sinner but God’s “I will have mercy!” Priestly interference is imposture — conditions and contingencies are libels — free-will assumptions are high treason against the King of Zion; and the advocates for these things must be reckoned among the worst enemies of mankind, because they conceal, pervert, and deny God’s only method of saving sinners, foisting upon millions of their devotees to priesthood, conditions which no man can perform — delusions which no man can fathom, and terms by which God declares no man can be saved (Romans 3:20).

Free-will has led thousands to hell, but free-grace alone can people heaven; hence the Apostle contends (v. 14) that God is not unrighteous in the exercise of His own divine prerogative, shewing mercy on whom He will, since no child of Adam can be saved in any other way; and borrowing Jeremiah’s simile (v. 21), he asserts the power and sovereignty of God over fallen man, as the potter over the clay, to make, of the same degraded lump or mass, one vessel to honour and another to dishonour, without consulting the clay about it, much less waiting until the clay asks Him, or animates and partly forms itself anew, as a free-will act.

(For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth) Romans 9:11.
The Saddest Chapter
Three Curses, Three Blessings And Three Promises From Genesis 3

Genesis 3 has a strong claim to being the saddest chapter in the Bible. With the fall of man begins every sorrow and pain. Here is the source, the genesis and origin of the hurt of every injury, the tears of every hungry child, the suffering of sickness, disease and death in every generation. Man is born to trouble, and nature is red in tooth and claw, because of the events recorded here.

More, the souls of countless men and women have been consigned to eternal separation and everlasting punishment because of Adam's act of disobedience against God. Surely, the depth, breadth and degree of human suffering in both this life and the next that flow from the events recorded here is beyond reckoning.

But, conversely, Genesis 3 also has a claim to be the happiest chapter in the Bible for it is here that the first suggestion of God's grace is glimpsed and the first promise of salvation is given. Robert Hawker writes, "Here we read the sad origin of sin, and its unavoidable consequences, misery and death. And here, we no less, behold the first discoveries of grace, in the promised redemption, by our Lord Jesus Christ."

Three Curses
Satan took the form of a serpent to deceive the woman and by doing so obtained a name employed by the Apostles John and Paul. John says, "... that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world (Revelation 12:9). Do you see the scale of this act? In deceiving the first parents of all mankind the whole world was deceived. The Fall is universal. Sin and its wages death came upon all men. Says Paul, "by the offence of one (or by one offence, one act of disobedience) judgment came upon all men to condemnation."

Note the progress of temptation. A question is set, doubt introduced, and soon men are judging God. It is a small step from disbelief to disobedience. By the woman's act and Adam's complicity the whole world is condemned; every race, nation and individual. We carry the seed of death, the evil nature and distorted perceptions of our fallen progenitors.

God cursed the snake for its part in the plot. Perhaps snake walked upright, or even flew. Now both serpent and Satan are cursed to slither in the dust and eat dirt. The tempter is cast down, his onetime beauty spoiled and lost forever.

And God cursed the ground. There are many beautiful sights and places upon earth yet as wonderful as they may presently appear this world is decaying, declining and descending down to death. Men seek to possess the earth's wealth but its structures and systems are dying. Jesus asked, "What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Mark 8:36).

Yet God did not curse the man. Have you ever noticed that? The serpent and the earth for man's sake, but not the man himself. God did not curse what He would also bless. There were some in Adam seen and known by God though yet unborn, some upon whom the divine blessing rested and remained. No divine curse would ever be their portion until One could bear it for them.

Even in the midst of judgment our loving Father remembered mercy. God had a people and a plan to save them from their sin and condemnation. The man Jesus Christ, God's own Son (and not the man Adam) would carry this final curse. So He sent His Son in human flesh, the God-man to bear their sin, carry their guilt and redeem them from judgment. "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us ..." (Galatians 3:13).

Three Blessings
God's curses did not come without hope for Adam. The first blessing might easily be overlooked. It is simply this: The Lord spoke to Adam. He called in Genesis 3:9 "Where art thou?" That God does so call is an undeserved blessing. Unbelieving, deceived, sinful, guilty, condemned, helpless wretches are sought and addressed by the holy, eternal God! Let us never forget the initial approach came from God. God spoke to Adam when Adam did not wish to speak to God. The Lord Jesus still speaks in the gospel, calling sinners to...
examine themselves and repent. Seeking them in their hideouts whatever they may be.

Then, God made coats of skins, and clothed them (v. 21). Makeshift fig-leaves were inadequate. But durable garments of leather required that animals be slain and blood spilled. Here God prefigured both the sacrificial system and its greater meaning, the atoning death of His blessed Son the Lord Jesus Christ. It was not the animals who sinned, nor did the spotless Lamb of God. But He died to cover our nakedness and fit us for the presence of God. The Apostle Peter says, we are redeemed “with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Peter 1:19). God’s people are clothed in righteousness not our own but the very holiness of God “… for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness” (Isaiah 61:10).

Then God gave a blessed gift; the gift of faith. Where do we see this? We see it in Adam’s reaction to God’s provision. Adam named his wife Eve for she was the mother of all living. Previously she was called simply “Woman” (2:23). Now, by God’s word she would be bearer of new life. Adam believed God and gave his wife a new name. Faith is God’s gift. Adam and Eve possessed it and by faith both Adam and Eve are in heaven today. Life for them now, though they deserved to die in the garden, and life for future generations. Adam and Eve’s faith was focused on a child yet to be born, One upon whom faith’s hope is fixed. A man born to crush Satan’s head but not without grief to Himself. “And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel” (3:15).

This verse is sometimes called the proto-evangel, the first revelation of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. It anticipates the coming, many years hence, of the Great Saviour and Deliverer, which Mark confirms, “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (Mark 1:1).

Three Promises

God’s prophecies are promises and the Lord Jesus Christ fulfills all prophecy. Jesus said, “All things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me” (Luke 24:44).

God promised a bruised foot and a bruised head. Satan bruised the Saviour’s foot when Christ suffered upon earth and died on the cross. The Lord Jesus bruised, or crushed, Satan’s head when He destroyed Satan’s power, pillaged his kingdom, ruined his authority, and defeated death by His resurrection.

By His sacrifice and triumph our Redeemer saved His people from their sins, a promise received and understood by all God’s people of faith. Thus Job, a very early believer, could testify, “For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold …” (Job 19:25-27).

What a promise! We who have also faith in the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus shall also behold our Redeemer and we shall love Him. Whom having not (yet) seen, ye love” (1 Peter 1:8).

Here is our next promise, carried in this important chapter. The Lord promises, “Thy desire shall be to thy husband” (3:16). Eve to Adam? Yes. But does not the Bride of Christ, the Lamb’s wife seek after her beloved? The Church’s desire is for her Lord and Husband.

Solomon’s Song testifies to the mutual desire of Bride and Husband: “As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste”, “I am my beloved’s, and my beloved is mine”, “I am my beloved’s, and his desire is toward me” (Song of Solomon 2:3; 6:3; 7:10).

Finally, our Saviour promises: “Thy husband shall rule over thee” (3:16). What a blessed promise this is for the church! What comfort! Men try to twist, warp and corrupt marriage to destroy its meaning. Why? Because it is a picture of Christ’s blessed union with His dear people. He has worked for, wooed, and won His Bride. He will give her all things, provide every need. He protects, comforts, consoles. He directs, sustains, nourishes. He will instruct, correct, nurture. He will love, embrace, kiss with the kisses of His mouth. “Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth: for thy love is better than wine” (Song 1:2).

Sin brought death, despair, destruction but Christ brings love, grace and salvation. He is Head and Husband of His people. How blessed we are in Him. How rich in the promises of God. Amid the shame and sadness of the fall, God’s people discover the joy of the Lord.
John Bunyan

Part 1. A Life In Context

John Bunyan began his earthly pilgrimage on November 28, 1628 and this was ended on 31 August 1688. These sixty years were ones of great unrest and turmoil in the British nations as they brought with them the breaking up of the old church system and the traditional political structure of England, Scotland and Ireland. There are mysteries surrounding Bunyan’s name but this author is convinced that the confusion today concerning Bunyan’s life, arrests, imprisonments and testimony and denominational quarrels over his theology are caused by not paying due attention to the historical background into which Bunyan was born. The truth of what really happened in Bunyan’s days has scarcely been told due to lack of research on the writers’ side. Myths and speculations have ensued in lieu of facts. The story-teller has replaced the historian.

As a result, Bunyan has invariably been misused, say, to discredit the Church of England whose alleged suppression of Dissent has been emphasized again and again whereas enormous Dissenting persecution and opposition to the Reformed Church of England has been almost fully ignored. Even today, Bunyan is honoured by the Church of England who perhaps is not so interested in his theology but his literary merit alone, but Bunyan’s reputation amongst Dissenters, when it comes to theological analysis and not literary appreciation, is very mixed. This is because of his teaching regarding baptism, predestination, justification, salvation and the nature of a true Church. Though we friends of New Focus find Bunyan theologically much to our taste, we are sadly in a minority and the bulk of our alleged ‘Reformed’ brethren would reject Bunyan on the doctrines mentioned above which we call ‘the doctrines of grace’.

The world into which Bunyan was born
Perhaps the real 17th century bother started in 1596 with a negative thrust from the English established Church. It was a painful year for Dissenters due to a conventicle act preventing the splitting off of Nonconformist bodies from the Church of England. There was great opposition to this act from the Reformed body within the church who sought to go the way of prelates such as Grindal and later Abbot and urge for tolerance and inter-communion between Anglicans and Noncomformists. However extremists from both the Anglican and Nonconformist side had made this mutual tolerance impossible. Learning quickly from their own mistakes, however, this act was dropped by Parliament within a year because of inner-Church protests. Such extremist sentiments were, however, taken up by the intolerant Presbyterians when they came to power. The Presbyterians refused to be called Dissenters but there is no doubt that they pioneered the Dissenting movement though they deemed even the Reformed Church of England to be a church dissenting from the true, legal gospel as they mistakenly saw it. They thought this of Congregationalists, Independents and Baptists, too. Dissenters were always those who did not agree with the powers that be.
By the time Bunyan was discovering God’s love and grace in 1655, Cromwell was calling and dismissing Parliaments apparently at his own whim and organizing an England divided into ten districts ruled by Major-Generals. England’s religion was rapidly becoming mere politics under the tyranny of Cromwell’s ‘model army’. Many senior military officers were now made church leaders. Indeed, Cromwell confessed his army was his ‘Church’. Cromwell’s original letters which I found in the Royal Archives of Sweden, reflect a man so taken up with his role as an apocalyptic, heavenly military rider who was to side with King Charles of Sweden and drive the Roman Catholic Church out of Europe, that they reveal a mind that had departed substantially from earthly sanity. In a fiery speech delivered at the start of his new parliament on September 17, 1656, after having ousted the Church of England and the Presbyterians, Cromwell now denounced the Anabaptists and Baptists strongly as traitors to the country and apostates to the Christian faith, indeed destitute of all religion, setting up special magistrates to deal with them. These magistrates became a law unto themselves as we see from the example they set of Anabaptist James Naylor who was whipped, branded, bored through the tongue, and condemned to pick oakum and live on bread and water. The major historian Barnet Smith, to save Cromwell’s reputation, says that the Protector must have been against this action but adds that he was powerless to do anything about it. This is an odd remark indeed as Cromwell held total power at the time and his word was law.

It was harsh Commonwealth laws against private assemblies and field-preaching which first caught up with Bunyan in 1658 when he was indicted at Eaton Socon for allegedly expounding Scripture without a license. The true reason was quite different as we shall see. It appears that this time Bunyan was let off with a warning but two years later in 1660, he was arrested again and imprisoned for three months. A brief look at the acts against those dissenting from the Commonwealth State Religion, which, we must remember, also included the Church of England, would show how baseless is the idea propounded by such as George W. Latham that ‘1660 was the year of the Restoration, and in spite of the promises of toleration made by Charles, the old alleged Church of England acts against the Nonconformists were revived.’ Actually, it was the Church of England, now outlawed, who had campaigned for the annulling of these Commonwealth instituted anti-Dissenting acts. John Durie, the only Anglican and Scotsman to be given high responsibility at the Westminster Assembly and full voting rights and the compiler of the Assembly’s papers, had pleaded for years for Acts of Accommodation, granting religious toleration in Cromwell’s Parliament. He was supported by John Owen. These were acts accepting the fellowship of Nonconformists i.e. those deemed as such by the Commonwealth government. Such Acts were blocked owing to Presbyterian and Independent opposition. Shaw, in his two volume classic The Church under the Commonwealth, says:

To the ordinary clerical mind of the opening period of the Civil War, the clerical mind, i.e., which had been Episcopal, and had become, under force of circumstance, strenuously Presbyterian, the demand for toleration was at once unholy and subversive. Behind that demand, there lurked, as it seemed, all the sects and extravagances which had defaced the early Reformation, and at every turn the reproach served, with a potency which we can hardly comprehend even whilst we smile at it. In addition, the Presbyterian system was political in all its comprehensiveness. From the parochial presbytery to the national synod it was in intention a complete and national system, and the existence of a single separatist congregation was at once a blot on its beauty and a blow at its very basis.

Independents take over from Presbyterians
In 1644, the Independents began to contest Presbyterian dominance in the Assembly, backed by the secular members of Parliament, and gained a majority of one in the elections of October that year. It looked as though the Presbyterian rule was at an end and tolerance would ensue. However, Presbyterian Parliament merely put a stop to the debates, wishing to keep the status quo. Not that the Independents would have given other Nonconformists, which after 1648 included Presbyterians as well as Church of England people, a hearing had they won, as they also showed rigid intolerance against all other
church organisations and secular thinking. In October, 1647, a further bill of tolerance was put forward by the Commons but the Presbyterians, goaded by Presbyterian Scotch Commissioners, declined their assent as they wished for an enforcement of their Solemn League and Covenant on all the English people as they were enforcing it on the Scots. This would have again put the entire nation under the despotism and tyranny of totalitarianism. Had the ‘Solemn Covenant’, which was actually enforced for some time, depicted an ideal state in union with God under which all were in agreement, then signing it would have been a great blessing. However, though most severe punishments for rejecting the man-made Covenant were threatened, they were not specified but left to local judges to be defined and enforced. These magistrates and judges often became a law unto themselves and were one of the major sources of religious persecution. When secular judges are left free to determine what true faith is, seen merely as a legal entity, it is not surprising that religious and political chaos follow as it did in the seventeenth century.

Sadly, most politically-minded so-called Reformed churches today put various bowdlerised versions of this Covenant onto their web-sites to show how ideal it was without discussing the terrible penalties meted out to those who refused to give up their former Reformed faith for a political manifesto.

Charles pleads for tolerance
On 11th of November, 1647, King Charles was forced to flee to the Isle of Wight because of parliamentary opposition and the efforts of the Presbyterians to legalise their politico-clerical law and suffer none to object. The King, who had constantly pleaded with Parliament to show tolerance and mercy to their fellow Christians of other opinions, wrote to the two Houses seeking some form of compromise, saying:

Yet His Majesty, considering the great present distempers concerning Church discipline, and that the Presbyterian government is now in practice, his Majesty, to eschew confusion as much as may be, and for the satisfaction of his two Houses, is content that the same government be legally permitted to stand in the same condition it now is for three years; provided that His Majesty and those of his judgment, or any other who cannot in conscience submit thereunto, be not obliged to comply with the Presbyterian government, but have free practice of their own profession, without receiving any prejudice thereby; and that a free consultation and debate be had with the divines of Westminster (twenty of His Majesty’s nomination been added unto them); whereby it may be determined by His Majesty and the two Houses, how the church government after the said time shall be settled (or sooner, if differences may be agreed), as is most agreeable to the Word of God with full liberty to all those who shall differ upon conscientious grounds from that settlement; always provided, that nothing aforesaid be understood to tolerate those of the Popish profession, nor exempting any Popish represent from the penalties of the laws; or to tolerate the public profession of Atheism or blasphemy, contrary to the doctrines of the Apostles’, Nicene and Athanasian Creeds, they having been received by, and had in reference of all the Christian churches, and more particularly by this of England, ever since the Reformation.\textsuperscript{4}

The result of this plea was that Parliament drew up four bills on toleration for the King to sign. In these bills, the King’s suggestions were taken up but the tolerance provided by
them was taken away immediately by further paragraphs which quite contradicted the King’s requests. The bills declared that the tolerance proposed did not extend to those who taught contrarily to the:

first, second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh, ninth, tenth, eleventh, twelfth, thirteenth, fourteenth, and sixteenth Articles of the Church of England according to their true sense and meaning of them, and as they have been cleared and vindicated by the Assembly of Divines, now sitting at Westminster; nor of anything contrary to those points of faith, for the ignorance whereof men are to be kept from the sacraments of the Lord’s supper, as they are contained in the rules and directions for that purpose passed both Houses 20 October, 1645.

Now, needless to say, these Articles, interpreted in terms of Presbyterian policies, were imagined to be very different to what the English Reformers had intended them to mean. Furthermore, the bills further proposed that ‘this indulgence shall not extend to tolerate the use of the Book of Common Prayer in any place whatsoever.’ In other words, there was no true indulgence forthcoming. All were now commanded to worship on the Lord’s Day according to the Presbyterian ruling, which they put down to a natural law binding all men which could be clearly seen by the light of reason. Of course, Charles refused to sign these four bills and Parliament reacted violently on 17 January 1647/48. Accordingly, the two houses passed their vote of not only no toleration but refused to bargain further with the King and forbade all others either to address the King or receive messages from him. This state led to the second Civil War within a few years which was a war concerning religious tolerance on the King’s side and religious tyranny on the parliamentary side, whatever the reasons were behind the first Civil War which had now been settled. In a further treatise, Charles tried to pacify the Scots by signing the Solemn League and Covenant as ratified by State and Church in Scotland before enmities occurred. He refused, however to do so in respect of England who had a different Church system of which he was a member.

Cromwell turns from the Presbyterians

1648 found Cromwell at enmity with the Presbyterians, who numbered now two thirds of the MPs, and he dismissed them from Parliament through Colonel Pride’s soldiers. Now Cromwell called a Parliament only when it suited him and ended it when it bored him. Such Parliaments were often merely a selected few of some ten yes-men. Law-making became a make-shift affair and Cromwell became a law unto himself. In 1649 he had Charles I beheaded at his own command.

This was the time when the Independents were up-and-coming and had Cromwell’s sympathy. However, the bulk of Independents proved almost as intolerant as the Presbyterians in their views of who was in the Church and who stood outside. However, a number of them, centred around John Durie and Samuel Hartlib, were far closer to the Church of England Reformers than the bulk of the Presbyterians and thus differed from them in ecclesiology, covenant teaching, discipline and order. Such men, with a few Presbyterians included, were William Twisse, Adoniram Byfield, Richard Sibbes, John Davenport, Richard Holdsworth, Henry and Philip Nye, John White, Stephen Marshall, Henry Burton, Cornelius Burgess, Thomas Taylor, Thomas Edwards, Thomas Goodwin, William Gouge, Richard Baxter, John and William Forbes, Sidrach Simpson, John Owen, John Stoughton, Henry Oldenburg, John Cotton, Henry Burton, Jeremy Burroughs, Steven Marshall, Richard Hodsworth and John White. Richard Baxter joined them for a time but usually used such movements to help him go his own way. These men supported John Durie’s efforts as outlined in his *Instrumentum Theologorum Anglorum* and *Problemata de Pacis Ecclesiasticae Consiliis Capescendis*, sponsored by Church of England leaders such as George Abbott, William Laud, James Usher, William Bedell, Daniel Featley, Samuel Ward, John Davenant, Edward Stillingfleet, Joseph Hall and Thomas Morton.

The surprise here for some nonconformist hardliners is that this list is graced by the name of William Laud who generations of Nonconformists have placed in the anti-alliance corner. Laud, however, is mostly known by today’s Christians through Presbyterian forgeries penned by William Prynne, their leading lawyer. Laud, too, has become a myth. Prynne stole Laud’s diaries and letters and forged them to make people believe that he was leading the Protestant churches back to Rome. Laud was far more tolerant in his view
of church order and discipline than most of the Presbyterians, Independents and Baptists but very strict against Roman Catholic apologists and activists. However, all his efforts in promoting inter-Protestant alliances were condemned by Prynne on the Presbyterian propaganda grounds that if one as a Church of England Christian accepted Presbyterians, Lutherans and Independents as brethren in Christ, it would be only to win them over to Rome. Later, under Cromwell, Durie was sent to Sweden, Switzerland, Germany and the Netherlands to complete the same mission Laud had initially backed. So, too, Laud’s attitude to foreign churches in England was far more tolerant than that of most of the Continental, Protestant Churches, especially the Dutch.\(^6\)

New light on Charles I as a man of peace

Graham Goodlad, writing in the *Historical Review*, 2009, explains how since the 1970s there has been a greater understanding shown amongst scholars regarding the problems facing Charles I on his ascending the throne in 1625. Referring to Conrad Russel’s views concerning the ‘multiple kingdoms’ under Charles’ rule, Goodlad writes:

Crucially, each component part of the realm was internally divided on religious grounds and contained a powerful group who preferred the religion of one of the other kingdoms to their own.

One King, one Nation, one Church

Much has been made of Charles’ attempts to introduce a common order and discipline to the one Christian, Protestant, Reformed Church in Britain and the use of a common form of worship but we rarely hear of the militant attempts by the Neo-Presbyterians in Scotland to enforce their humanistic, political understandings of a church onto England. We forget, too, that Charles was a Scotsman who spoke English with a Scottish accent. So, too, the criticism that Charles wished to use the *Book of Common Prayer* in the Scottish Church loses strength when one realises that Scotland had been party to its authorship and that certain other Scottish Presbyterians, the Neo-Presbyterians, wished to enforce their Book of Disciple, as they called it, in England. The fact is that the old Presbyterian Church of Scotland’s period of Reformation had ceased to exist and even Knox’s Church had been radically changed after Melville took over. One must thus ask which party, the Presbyterian or the Episcopalian, represented the needs of the British the best, rather than particular factions within the two. Furthermore, we remember...
that when Cranmer called an international and pan-British group of ministers to work on the Book of Common Prayer, it was designed as being an inter-church, pan-Reformed work acceptable to all Protestant churches including those on the Continent. Many brave Scotchmen died in defending it during Mary’s persecutions. One of these was John Rough who had urged Knox to become a minister of the old gospel. On this recommendation Knox based his calling and ordination to the ministry but left Rough’s Reformed teaching far behind. Also, a good number of the co-authors of the Church of England Articles and Prayer Book represented those Reformed churches abroad which were theoretically favoured by the followers of such as Cartwright and Travers who had struggled through Parliament to have the Prayer Book replaced with a barren Church Directory. As I have shown in my articles on Hooker, Cartwright and Travers, the latter two went much further than the Continental Reformers in their bid for externals as a signs of discipline and order. Neither England’s nor Scotland’s rebel Presbyterians could boast pan-European and pan-Reformed cooperation in any way comparable with the Church of England’s Continental backing.

A Puritan Revolution that can hardly be called ‘Puritan’

Cromwell’s rebellion is often described as a Puritan Revolution⁴ as if all Puritans were revolutionaries and Cromwell’s rebels were all Puritans. This is far from being the case. The revolution was accomplished by Cromwell’s armies who subdued Parliament for most un-Puritan motives. Indeed, if we define ‘Puritans’ as those men who wished to continue the Reformation of England along the paths that Bullinger, Lever, Foxe, Jewel, Grindal, Whitgift, Abbott and Hooker had laid out, then we find that the so-called ‘Puritan Revolution’ threw out the bulk of such Puritans who were still living such as Bishop Hall. Also, Usher, Bedell, Hall, Morton, Meade, and Featley were certainly Puritans in that they continued the teaching of the English Reformers, and were Church of England or Church of Ireland ministers. When the second school of Puritans developed in the middle and late sixteen-fifties after Cromwell’s rebellion had lost much of its former brutality and Cromwell deteriorated in health, the former Puritans ousted by the Usurpation had either died out, were still outlawed or were still left in prison without a trial.

A New Church of England formed by former Dissenters

The new Church of England after 1662 recruited most of its clergy from those Dissenters who had usurped livings after the fiery times of 1643-45. It has been estimated that now 9,000 former Dissenters were working for or with the Church of England. This was the majority. This New Anglicanism was very different from the old Reformed Church of England. The old Church never came back because the Counter Reformation, whether Jesuit or Presbyterian, kept the upper hand until long after the return of the monarchy. Prominent amongst these ‘Neo-Anglicans’ was the liberal John Tillotson who left the Presbyterian fold to become eventually Archbishop of Canterbury. However, a number of Anglican Puritans outlived the Rebellion and continued to preserve the Puritan stand in the Anglican Church alongside a good number of their Dissenting brethren now turned Anglicans. The theology of these men was to again come to fruition in the 18th century Great Awakening.

This brief overview of Britain in the 17th century will suffice to show that Trevor-Roper’s statement that it was the Century of Crisis is very apt but it may equally be called the Century of Intolerance. Sadly, since then it can hardly be said that the denominations have become more tolerant to each other though, by means of good laws and social discipline, in the Providence of God, brother does not become more tolerant to each other though, by means of good laws and social discipline, in the Providence of God, brother does not actually war with brother as in Bunyan’s days. Happily, amidst those turbulent, chaotic and, indeed, evil times, John Bunyan preached a gospel more needy than ever and wrote his great work proclaiming ‘Come and Welcome to Jesus Christ’.

It is now time to look at Bunyan’s reception amongst a twenty-first century public which will be done in Part Two.

2 Vol. II, p. 34.
5 Presented to Archbishop Laud at the beginning of 1631.
6 See my doctoral thesis The Practical Divinity of Universal Learning: John Durie’s Educational Panosophism for a full discussion of 17th century efforts to unite Protestants worldwide.
7 Reprinted in History Today, (www.historytoday.com), 16 Nov. 2014 under the title Charles I: Author of his own Downfall?
8 See, for instance, S.R. Gardiner’s The Constitutional Documents of the Puritan Revolution and The First Two Stuarts and the Puritan Revolution.
Offering The Gospel: A Contradiction

Preachers talk of offering Christ and offering salvation to sinners but an offered gospel contradicts itself. What is the meaning of gospel? Glad tidings. What are these tidings? Pardon, justification, sanctification, redemption, and glory. For whom are these blessings? For all who believe (Acts 16:31). Who are ‘they that will believe’. As many as are ordained to eternal life (Acts 13:48). Why are these tidings denominated glad tidings? Because they are bestowed upon, secured for, and wrought in all the objects of electing love by Jehovah, in His Trinity of Persons; Father, Son and Holy Ghost, independent of creature merit, creature wisdom, creature seeking, creature asking, or creature diligence.

God The Father
God the Father in sovereignty declares, I will put my fear in their hearts, and they shall not depart from me. I will set up one shepherd over them, into whose hands I will give my people, and He shall feed them with my pardoning love through His redeeming blood; even my servant David, David’s Lord and David’s son; He shall feed them, with the counsels of my heart as seen in His person, with the purposes of my mind as known in His life, with the honours of my law as discovered in His death, and with the glory of my designs as exhibited in His exaltation. I will make with them a covenant of peace, in their covenant head, the Shepherd who shall feed them, and will cause the evil beasts to cease out of the land, will cause the reigning power of in-dwelling corruption to cease, so that it may annoy but shall not destroy my true-born children; they shall dwell safely in the wilderness, notwithstanding their enemies, conflicts, and dangers; and sleep in the woods. I will occasionally indulge them with my smile upon earth, and as the effect thereof, they shall repose upon my bosom while travelling a waste howling wilderness. Thus we see the blessings of the gospel given in sovereignty, and not one word can be found about the gift of these unspeakable blessings depending upon any act, skill or worth of the creature.

God The Son
God the Son, in securing to His people an interest in ‘the blessings given, does it in sovereignty. Thus he says, My Father worketh hitherto and I work. When He healed the man who had a withered hand, He did not ask him to raise it first, but said to him, stretch forth thy hand, and it was restored whole like the other; and when He raised up the widow’s son that was dead, He did not tell him to move first, but, said He, ‘young man, I say unto thee, arise, and he that was dead sat up and began to speak.’ So Christ bowed the heavens, and came down without creature aid; He travelled in the greatness of His strength, without creature asking; He laid down His life of Himself, so that none took it from Him, He therefore did it without creature wisdom. And declares, mine own arm brought salvation, and of the people there was none with me therefore none contributed to it. And as to His people’s meriting this great work, the following is His description of them. My sheep wandered through all the mountains, and upon every high hill. No sin but what they indulged in, and no guilt but what they contracted.

God The Holy Spirit
God the Holy Ghost works this salvation in the souls of the elect in sovereignty, by His quickening, illuminating, enlarging, and reviving power.

Does the Holy Ghost quicken? This does not depend upon creature merit, for, says the
apostle, ‘you hast he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins’. Nor upon creature diligence, for, says Christ, ‘it is the Spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing’. Does the Holy Ghost illuminate? This does not depend upon creature wisdom, for; says the psalmist, ‘the entrance of thy word giveth light’, proving that all is darkness antecedently, and consequently, that there is no wisdom. And the apostle, writing to the spiritual Hebrews, says ‘after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions’; which shows that the illuminating power of the Holy Ghost does not depend upon creature seeking, for neither the spiritual Hebrews, nor God’s people generally, are so in earnest after God, as to endure a great fight of affliction till they are illuminated. After ye were illuminated ye endured, are the apostle’s words.

Does the Holy Ghost grant enlargement of soul to such as are in bondage? This does not depend upon creature wisdom, nor creature merit, for if so David could not have said after his awful fall, I will sing of thy righteousness (Psalm 51:14). Nor would he have cried, I am shut up, and cannot come forth, bring my soul out of prison that I may praise thy name, if he knew it depended upon himself. Does the Holy Ghost revive His people after a season of darkness, barrenness, and weakness? All rests upon His own sovereignty. Thus He says, ‘I form the light and create darkness’; and the psalmist says, ‘he maketh the barren woman to keep house’. He maketh the barren Gentiles to form a vital portion of His family, and His barren people to rejoice in their portion. To them that have no might He increaseth strength, by raising them upon the wings of inward evidences and heavenly earnests, so that they can mount up into the atmosphere of gospel liberty, and sing, in the ways of the Lord, that great is the glory of the Lord.

If then the gospel is good tidings because it proclaims blessings that are given to, secured for, and wrought in the souls of all interested in them, independent of creature merit, creature wisdom, creature seeking, creature asking, or creature diligence; then that gospel which gives an opposite view of these things is not good tidings. An offered gospel does do so; therefore an offered gospel is a contradiction to itself, and cannot be the gospel of the ever blessed God, for He is not the author of confusion (1 Corinthians 14:23). Therefore an offered gospel is contrary to God’s Word and will.

How Can I Be Antinomian?

From this day forward I emphatically declare to my accusers that it is absolutely impossible for me to be an antinomian! Through God-given faith I have perfectly established the law of God in righteousness the same as Abraham did 430 years before the law was given at Mount Sinai, and that, by the successful finished work of Christ, who established the law in perfection on my behalf.

A man is not anti-law who refuses to tell sinners the lie that they can keep the law of God or who refuses to reduce the law to a level to make them imagine they can. I can jump over a barn if you let me build the barn! But God so refuses to lower the requirements of His righteous law that when sin was found on His Son, He spared not His own Son but delivered Him up to justice, fulfilling the righteousness of the law for all His elect!

Therefore, every preacher who has heard this truth yet takes professing believers from Mount Calvary back to Mount Sinai insisting they must keep the law for justification or sanctification in order to be saved is not only an antinomian but anti-Christ! Not only do they make void the law, they make faith void, they make God’s promise of no effect, and they make the blood of Christ to have been shed in vain! (Romans 4:14; Galatians 2:21). Clay Curtis
Knebworth Grace Church once again proved to be generous hosts and Datchworth Green Village Hall a suitable venue for the 2016 new Focus Conference on the last Saturday and Sunday in May. We were delighted to welcome friends from around the country to worship with us and enjoy a full day of preaching and fellowship as five different ministers of the gospel brought God’s word to those who gathered.

Peter Meney preached on Saturday morning from Galatians and the Apostle Paul’s emphasis on the rest and freedom of the Lord’s people from the heavy yoke of Moses’ law as a rule of life and the corresponding blessing’s they enjoy in bearing Christ’s easy yoke.

Pastor Jared Smith ministered in the first session after lunch and brought a helpful and delightful word from Psalm 56 pointing out from verse 12 the privileges of that people upon whom the Lord God is pleased to bestow His vows: the blessings of grace, mercy and deliverance entered into by our Triune God in eternal covenant. He showed how the receiving of covenant blessings in time in the experience of the church is the source and origin of the praises which follow and flow from believers’ hearts.

Following a break at which books were available from Ossett Christian Bookshop Pastor Harry Qazi brought an earnest and challenging message on the need for unity and clarity in the essentials of God’s gospel amongst those who understand and profess sovereign mercy.

Pastor Allan Jellett ministered upon ‘Those Things Which Are Above’ from Colossian 3:1-4 and expertly brought our thoughts once again to our proper priorities as those loved of the Lord and set apart to His glory and purpose.

Following a fine hog-roast dinner and another opportunity for conversation amongst the gathered friends, Pastor Clay Curtis from Sovereign Grace Baptist Church, Princeton, New Jersey, completed a full day of Bible teaching with a message from 1 Corinthians 10:13 entitled ‘Escaping Temptation’.

While a number of people returned home to their own congregations a good proportion were able to remain until Sunday morning for the second sermon from Clay Curtis and Communion around the Lord’s table. The message, ‘It is Finished’ was an appropriate conclusion to the conference, reminding us all of the accomplishments of the Lord Jesus Christ by His death, and the satisfaction of every requirement of justice and the fulfilment of every word of prophecy.

We are grateful for the help and kindness show to us by Knebworth Grace Church in facilitating the conference and those who served tirelessly on the days.

Sermons may be listened to from the Listen tab at: http://www.knebworthgracechurch.org or Free Grace Radio.

Peter Meney, Clay Curtis, Allan Jellett, Harry Qazi, Jared Smith