What rapture it will be to open our eyes in the first moment of death beholding the face of our dear Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. How wonderful He will appear. How beautiful and brilliant and blessed! What ecstasy will break upon our senses, what sights and sounds and scents will fill that instant, that first eternal moment in the immediate presence of our Beloved.

Somewhere in time tears are beginning to well up in the eyes of our loved ones, a nurse is fussing, an onlooker frets. But there are no more tears in this place. No fussing, fretting or fear will be found. A new day has dawned, we succumb to death, we waken to glory. Never such peace, never such joy, beyond all we ever thought or imagined.

Those who suffer great loss speak of the moment of wakening from sleep and the calm peace of the instant before their mind recalls its pain and the memory of emptiness returns. No more. The travail of the Lord’s people is ended. We have sown in tears, but we shall reap in joy. Joy for victory won, joy for labour’s end, joy for hopes realised, but most of all joy for seeing Jesus!

I will behold His face in righteousness and I will be like Him. What a prospect! What a vision! Well might the Apostle declare, ‘Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.’ And if these blessings are begun in time, what sublime fulfilment they will render in eternity.

Do not speak of rewards. I shall be satisfied with Jesus. Do not speak of merit or just deserts. In righteousness I shall see my Saviour’s face. Do not speak of crowns earned, services fulfilled, works performed. The likeness of Christ will suffice.

As for me, one day soon I shall close my eyes in natural death and open them in eternal life. I will see my Saviour, my God, as I have longed to see Him for many years. I will know Him above all others for I will be like Him.

What promises these are to the child of God to strengthen and comfort him on the way to heaven. What consolation for those who remain when the beloved of the Lord precede them home. What glorious gifts await us all who seek His face, who trust Him now, who presently enjoy the sweet blessings of His grace, cherish His mercy and feel His love. Soon we shall sleep, then we shall awake, then we shall rise in complete and everlasting enjoyment of Him and His salvation throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.

Psalm 17:15 As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness.
Every believer values Christ. Let others think of Him as they may all who are taught of God, think highly of Him. They can never honour Him as they wish, or enjoy Him to their full satisfaction. Every believer feels their need of Him. No weary traveller ever felt his need of rest, no hungry labourer ever felt his need of food, no drowning mariner ever felt his need of a life-boat as the believer has felt his need of Christ!

They need to be saved and only Christ can save them. They need to be happy and only Jesus can make them happy. They need His blood to cleanse them from sin, and procure their pardon. They need His righteousness to clothe their souls, and justify them before God. They need His Spirit to sanctify their nature, and make them fit for Heaven. They need His intercession to secure them from evil, and procure for them good things. They need His fulness of grace to supply all their needs, from earth to heaven.

Every believer discovers the exact suitability of Christ to them. He is just what they need, He has all they need! They are foolish and He has wisdom. They are unrighteous and He has righteousness. They are unholy and He has holiness. They are weak and He has strength. They are in bondage and He has redemption. They are lost and He has salvation. In a word, they are led to see that God has stored up everything in Jesus and that possessing Him, they have all things!

Every Christian believes on Him to the saving of the soul. They trust Him to procure their pardon, peace with God, and everlasting life. Their heart goes out to Him, they repose confidence in Him, they commit their souls to Him, they build on Him as God’s foundation; they hide in Him as the sinner’s refuge; and they trust themselves with Him as the almighty Saviour.

Beloved, do you have this saving faith which renders Christ so precious? If so, admire the sovereign and distinguishing grace of God, which has conferred so great a blessing upon you for not all are given saving faith. If so, realize the importance of this faith which renders Christ so precious. It is the eye which sees the beauty of Christ. It is the foot which travels to Christ. It is the hand which lays hold of Christ. It is the mouth which tastes the sweetness of Christ. It is the inward principle which clings and cleaves to Christ.

James Smith, “Christ Precious!” 1861
When God created the first man, Adam, he placed him in the Garden of Eden. Eden was a place of innocence, abundance, life, and joy. It was paradise on earth; but paradise was not complete for Adam until the Lord God gave him a woman to be his bride. So the Lord caused Adam to sleep in the earth and took a rib from his side. From Adam’s wounded side, Eve was made. She came from Adam. She was a part of Adam. Without Adam, Eve could never have lived. Yet, without Eve, Adam could never have been complete.

Adam and Eve had for their home the paradise of God. There they lived in perfect harmony, holiness, and happiness until the serpent beguiled Eve and persuaded her to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. When Adam saw what Eve had done, he took the fruit of the tree in rebellion against God. Sin had entered the world. Paradise was lost. Fallen man was driven away from the presence of the Lord.

In the fulness of time, the second Adam, the last Adam, was born. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came into the world to seek his beloved bride, his elect church. He came to recover for us what we lost in Adam. By his obedience unto death, he has regained for us all that we lost in Adam: righteousness, peace, life, fellowship with God, and paradise. He has already entered the paradise of God as our Representative, claiming it in the name of His people (Hebrews 6:20). Yet, as Adam without Eve was incomplete, so Christ without His beloved bride is incomplete. The Head must

And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him: And they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads. And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever.

Revelation 22:1-5
have the body. The Bridegroom must have His bride. Christ must have His church, "which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all" (Ephesians 1:23). When Christ and His church are united in heaven, in the perfection of heavenly glory, paradise shall be fully recovered.

In Revelation 22:1-5, John describes the holy city, New Jerusalem, using symbols drawn from the Garden of Eden. The eternal, heavenly state of God's saints with Christ is paradise regained. Our Lord said to the thief on the cross, "Today shalt thou be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43). The apostle Paul was "caught up into paradise" (2 Corinthians 12:4). That blessed place and condition is described as "The paradise of God" (Revelation 2:7). When God's saints leave this world, they enter into paradise, not purgatory, not limbo, but paradise. What is it like? In these five verses John shows us six things about paradise:

1. The River of Paradise
The earthly paradise was watered by a mighty river; but it was only a river of water for the earth. The heavenly paradise is watered by the river of the water of life (v. 1). This river of the water of life is the everlasting love of God (Psalm 46:4). Like a river, the love of God is ever flowing towards His elect, abundant and free (Ephesians 3:18, 19). The streams of this river make glad the hearts of God's people. The streams of this river, like the river in Eden, run in four directions across the earth. The streams of the river are: eternal election, blood atonement, effectual calling, peace, pardon, justification, and eternal life. Flowing to sinners from the river of God's everlasting love, through the mediation of Christ, these blessings of grace bring us eternal life. This river is called the "river of the water of life" (Zechariah 14:8, 9; John 7:38, 39), because the love of God is the source and cause of life, revives the saints with life, and sustains them in life.

God's love for us is a mighty, flowing river that is pure and clear as crystal. His love for us is pure, sincere, true, without hypocrisy. It is as clear as crystal. It is free, without motive or condition. It promotes purity. The gospel, which reveals it, is a gospel of purity and holiness. The grace which is the fruit of it is righteousness. Every discovery of this love compels and constrains us to consecrate ourselves to Christ in obedience, love, and faith. The love of God is free of licentiousness and can never promote licentiousness.

The source of this great river of love is the throne of God and of the Lamb. God's love for us is not caused by or conditioned upon our obedience or love to him. His love for us precedes our love for him and is the cause of our love for him (1 John 4:19). God's love for us is not caused or conditioned even upon the obedience and death of Christ as our Substitute. It was God's love for us that sent Christ to die for us and redeem us (John 3:16; Romans 5:8; 1 John 3:16; 4:9, 10). God's love for His elect is free. He said, from eternity, "I will love them freely" (Hosea 14:4). God's love for us is like God Himself; eternal, immutable, and indestructible. The source and cause of His love is His own sovereign will and pleasure (Romans 9:11-18). It cannot be attributed to anything else.

2. The Tree of Paradise
In the Garden of Eden there was a tree of life. Adam, by sin, lost his right to eat of that tree. In the paradise of God there is another Tree of Life. That Tree of Life is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. He is that One in heaven who heals chosen sinners scattered through the nations of the earth by virtue of His finished work of redemption and by the power of His Holy Spirit. Christ, the Tree of Life, fills heaven. He is seen in the midst of the street and on both sides of the river. The City of God is full of Christ. That is the blessedness of heaven. Christ is there! Luther's doctrine concerning the ubiquity of Christ's physical body after His glorification may not be correct, but his heavenly body is such that he is immediately known and accessible everywhere and to everyone at all times. What mortal can imagine such a body? Our Saviour's immortal body and the immortal bodies we shall have after the resurrection will be free of all limitations and hindrances necessary to this earthly existence. Christ, the Tree of Life, bears twelve manner of fruits. He bears fruit for the twelve tribes of the Israel of God. He has fruit sufficient for the whole Israel of God, the whole body of His elect. All fulness is in Him. And we have our perfection and completion in Him (John 1:16; Ephesians 1:6; Colossians 2:9). The fruit of this Tree of Life is abundant at all times. From it we obtain abundant, perfect righteousness, both for justification and for sanctification; plenteous redemption, from the curse of the law by Christ's atonement, from the dominion of sin by the power of his grace, and from the very being and consequences of sin by the resurrection of our bodies; and
eternal life, with all its blessedness in time and eternity. The leaves of this Tree are for the healing of the nations. The leaves of this tree are the blessed doctrines of the gospel: substitutionary redemption and imputed righteousness. Through the preaching of the gospel today, God sends His grace into the nations of the world for the healing of men’s souls (Romans 1:15, 16; 10:17; 1 Corinthians 1:21). And in heaven’s glory, the leaves of this tree, the blessed gospel of Christ, will yet preserve all God’s elect in life as the tree of life in Eden would have preserved Adam in life (Genesis 3:22-24). Even in that blessed, eternal state God’s saints will be “kept by the power of his grace.” In a word, everything in Christ will unceasingly contribute to and secure the everlasting life and joy of God’s saints in heaven.

3. The Freedom of Paradise
“And there shall be no more curse.” Having been redeemed from the curse of the law by Christ’s precious blood (Galatians 3:13), the curse of the law cannot fall upon the redeemed. Where there is no sin, there is no cause for the curse. And Christ has put away our sins forever. We shall not even suffer loss or be treated any the less graciously because of our sin. Imagine that! God will not impute sin to those for whom Christ has died (Romans 4:8), neither in this world, nor in the world to come. In that blessed state awaiting us, there shall be no possibility of a curse, because there shall be no possibility of sin. Not only has the Son of God saved us from the fall, He has saved us from the possibility of another fall (John 10:28). Consequently, in the holy city, New Jerusalem, there will never even be the fear of the curse of God’s holy law!

4. The Throne of Paradise
“But the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it.” It is the presence and stability of this throne that guarantees the security of God’s saints and removes all possibility of curse from us. It is called “the throne of God and of the Lamb” because God and the Lamb are One and God is seen, known, and revealed only in the Lamb (John 1:14,18). This throne is the source of all things, the rule of all things, and the end of all things (Romans 11:36). This throne, a throne of free grace (Hebrews 4:16) and sovereign dominion (Daniel 4:35-37), is the joy of all believers, and the dread of all rebels.

5. The Joy of Paradise
“His servants shall serve him.” In eternity we will serve God our Saviour perfectly and perpetually.

“And they shall see his face.” Then, when we see Him face to face who loved us and gave Himself for us, we shall enjoy perfect communion with Him, complete acceptance with God in Him and with Him, and full satisfaction in Him. In heaven’s glory He will make a full disclosure of Himself, His works, and His ways to us. And when we see His face, seeing all things as He sees them, we will be filled with intense, indescribable delight!

“And his name shall be in their foreheads.” That simply means that we will own and be owned, accept and be accepted of our God forever. We will confess Him to be our God; and He will confess us to be His people forever.

“And there shall be no night there.” There will be no darkness of any kind in heaven: no darkness of sin, sorrow, ignorance, or bigotry. In the New Jerusalem there will be no need for secondary lights, no need for the symbolic ordinances that now contribute so much to our worship, neither believer’s baptism (the confession of Christ) nor the Lord’s Supper (the remembrance of Christ). There will not even be a need of pastors and teachers to instruct, guide, and correct us. The reason is this: “For the Lord God giveth them light.”

6. The Duration of Paradise
“And they shall reign for ever and ever.” When the Lord Jesus Christ has presented His bride, His body, the church and kingdom of God in its entirety to the Father, holy, blameless, unreproveable, and glorious, we shall reign with Him for ever and ever (1 Corinthians 15:24-28) in “the glorious liberty of the children of God” (Romans 8:21). Let these thoughts sustain, comfort, and rejoice your heart, child of God, as you live in the hope of that city whose Builder and Maker is your God.

Our Adam, the last Adam, the Lord Jesus Christ is in paradise now. From His wounded side, God is forming a bride for Him. Paradise will not be complete for Christ until He has His beloved bride with Him. And Christ shall have His bride. Not one of God’s elect, given to Christ in eternity, redeemed by Christ at Calvary, and called by the Spirit of Christ in time shall be missing in the heavenly paradise.

Don Fortner’s new book Discovering Christ In The Acts Of The Apostles - See page 16
Your pierced Lord had no dying bed; He gave up the ghost on the accursed tree. Look at the dying circumstances of the Saviour. Who nursed Him? No one. Who moistened His burning tongue when He said—I thirst! No mother was permitted to dip a feather into wine and water to mitigate the sufferings of the dying God-man.

A wretch filled a sponge with vinegar, and raised it to His parched lips. When fever burns us up, my friends, we have nurses, and are succoured; and when otherwise afflicted, we have alleviating circumstances and services; but your Lord had none, nothing to mitigate His woes. When tempted to repine and murmur in suffering, think of and look on the pierced One. They shall look on Him whom they pierced when in suffering.

And then again in learning—whilst inquiring into the mysteries of the kingdom, they shall look on Him. When they would know the whole about sin, they shall look upon Him for the whole appears there. When they want to know what is love divine, they shall look on Him. When they would know as much as possible of justice and its inflexibility and sternness, they shall look upon Him; and when they would know what is hell, they shall look upon Him that was pierced, and around whom the flames of divine wrath raged; and when they would know what is death, and the sting thereof, they shall look on Him; for a pierced Christ is the fullest and grandest exposition of the vital mysteries which constitute our grand and holy religion.

Have we conflict with the world, the flesh, and the devil? The let us look upon the pierced Christ. I know of no influence that can enable one to stand against the powers of darkness, but that which comes from the crucified One. The Papists, deluded mortals, have many methods of mortifying the flesh and sin. Let me say, Do you want to mortify sin? It must be done by a look, a daily look at Him. Is the world to be crucified to you, and you to the world? It must be done in this way.

They may kneel on pebbles, count beads, and pray for whole days together, put peas between the soles of their feet and their shoes, wear horsehair or sackcloth next to their skin, immure themselves in nunneries and convents, assume a voluntary poverty, and much more, yet the “old man” will remain strong, and sin will prevail. When all these things are placed in competition with the pierced Christ of God, we say, with Paul: “God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of my Lord Jesus Christ, by whom I am crucified to the world, and the world is crucified to me.” I would sit before this pierced One as a sinner, and loathe sin, mortify it, be crucified to the world myself, and become pure; for purity emanates from the pierced One, and flows from Him through faith into the spectator’s heart.

They shall look on Him in worship; in prayer; in the ordinances of God’s house, baptism and the Lord’s Supper. I could not baptize any person that said he saw nothing of Jesus Christ in the ordinance, nor could I baptize one that rested therein. Be baptized for His sake; but whilst doing this look on Him whom you have pierced. Let us take our seats at the Lord’s table, see the elements, and look through them on Him whom we pierced.

In worship look; but on Him only. “This, sir, is the identical cross that Christ hung upon.” I do not care for that. “Here is the identical spear with which He was pierced. Here are the three nails with which He was nailed to the tree, one for each hand and one for His feet, the identical nails I do not care for them. Could I have them, and were I convinced that they were the same, I would pass them by, and come to the fact that as a guilty sinner, I want, not the spear, not the nails, but Him that was pierced. And then, lastly, death will come, and we will die looking on Him. Then, by-and-bye, the graves shall be opened and the dead shall be raised, and He that was pierced shall come again, and every eye shall see Him, and we shall put our blood-bought, pardoned heads out of our dusty beds, and our ransomed eyes will be fixed upon Him whom we pierced, and we shall say—"Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and He will save us: this is the Lord; we have waited for Him, we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation.”

Then shall our eyes be set upon Him forever; and “so shall we ever be with the Lord.”
For whom did Christ die?
Nowadays many Christians speak of a redemption which Christ accomplished theoretically for all but which worked out practically only for a few. This would seem like a great waste of divine energy – if it were true. Fancy preaching on a redemption accomplished but not applied. What a false gospel that would be! We rarely meet up with Absolute Universalism amongst Evangelicals; that is the idea that Christ has died for all and thus all will be ultimately saved. We do, however, meet up with the teaching that Christ has died for all men everywhere, should they wish to accept it. This belief, once found only amongst Pelagians and Arminians, is an even more questionable dogma than Universalism. The latter still looks to God to provide the salvation of all, whereas those who preach a universal salvation for all those who wish to accept it, leave salvation ultimately to the will of man. This view is surprisingly claimed nowadays as being true Reformed evangelicalism and those who hold on solid grounds that this view is a scandalous departure from orthodox, full-gospel preaching are denounced by these Revisionists as ‘Hardshells’, ‘Antinomians’, ‘Hyper-Calvinists’ and ‘Extremists’. However, to support this new idea of orthodoxy, these Neo-Liberals preach a man-made gospel based on a low view of our Triune God in whom they see nothing but a clash of different wills; a low view of the Scriptures which they argue are self-contradictory and a very high view of man whom they believe is not fallen in all respects but there is enough of God’s image and natural abilities in him to see his sense of duty to believe savingly and thus become an agent in his own salvation.1

An overview of this downgrade
Reformed Orthodoxy suffered a major blow in the late 18th century when the Grotian and New Divinity teaching of a theoretical redemption for all made harmful inroads into evangelical preaching. Andrew Fuller, through his revolutionary, rationalist and radical book The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation sought to make this error palatable by speaking of an atonement sufficient for all but only applicable to some. His argument was that Christ died sufficiently for all men, should they be willing to accept it, but as man is basically unwilling, though not unable, the Father applied Christ’s universal atonement merely to some. In this way, Fuller sought to merge all the difficulties he found in Calvinism and Arminianism. This theory is usually known as

1 See my booklets: The Free Offer and the Call of the Gospel; Common Grace and the Call of the Gospel and The Atonement and the Call of the Gospel in which I examine the false vintage of these adulterators.
‘Theoretical Universalism’ but John Gill called it rank ‘Universalism’. As James P. Boyce argued in his *Abstract of Systematic Theology*, Fuller’s theory is clearly a Universalism which effects no actual reconciliation at all. Fuller, himself, called this ‘Strict Calvinism’, though his followers nowadays tend to call this error ‘Moderate Calvinism’. Fuller argued that his theory was consistent with reason, nature and grace, three elements which he summed up as ‘the nature and fitness of things’ or Natural Law. As recently argued by Hong-Gyu Park in his University of Aberdeen doctoral thesis *Grace and Nature in the Theology of John Gill* (2001), this makes Fullerism a philosophy and not a theology as has been previously pointed out in a number of New Focus essays and books.

Obviously, this view of Redemption is most ill thought out. If only a choice number are saved, it must be asked, why did Christ die for all men everywhere? If He knew that only some would be saved, why did He provide a provisional atonement for all? What went wrong? Fuller’s answer is that if man rejects this universal salvation, it is his own fault. But this will not do. All men, in that they are sinners, stand without excuse before God. It is not that they become sinners and therefore without excuse after God. It is not that they reject the gospel because they are sinners. Thus the question remains, if Christ died for all sinners, why are they not all saved? What Fuller and his followers are actually preaching is that man has frustrated Christ’s universal atonement and caused Him to die in vain for many whom He wished to save.

Errol Hulse, in his booklets *The Free Offer* and *The Great Invitation*, in which he aims, he says, to be clearer than Fuller on the subject, maintains that we are dealing here with a paradox which is, nevertheless, true because Christ’s salvation goes out to all men but all men are not saved. To overcome this difficulty he postulates two kinds of grace, *common grace* which displays God’s love and saving desire to all but does not save all, and *saving grace* which procures salvation for some only. This is no help at all as we are still left with a redemptive provision for all which fails to redeem all. Christ is displayed as creating an atonement for all which He does not give all.

Hulse gives no Scriptural backing to his idea that common grace demonstrates God’s will to save all, though not all are saved. Indeed, Hulse confuses his so-called common grace so completely with saving grace that the reader is bound to understand Hulse as preaching that the very fact that the sun shines on the just and unjust is an indicator that God wishes to save all. This reminds us of the old adage:

The rain it raineth on the just
And also on the unjust fella;
But chiefly on the just because
The unjust hath the just's umbrella.

Hulse is admittedly simpler to follow than Fuller and far less prone to launch out into philosophical speculation, but he is in no way ‘clearer’, as he professes to be, and he does not convince us that his ‘appearances of contradiction’ is, in fact, ‘no contradiction’ and merely ‘two sides of a vice.’ What Hulse destroys is the Biblical teaching of God’s Providence to all men and his calling in of Christ’s Bride.

Hulse leans heavily on John Murray’s essay, *The Free Offer of the Gospel* which he seeks to simplify as he has done Fuller. Hulse presents Murray’s ‘special study’ less complicately but does not make it more persuasive. Murray takes up the supposed antonym of ‘a redemption for all’ versus ‘a redemption for some’ and claims that he has

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4 *The Great Invitation*, p. 5.
6 *The Free Offer*, p. 4 and passim.
found the solution to this enigma. Murray deduces that God has two different wills. He has both a benevolent will and also a decretal will. God does not always do what he likes and cannot do what He wants. God’s benevolent will loves all men and would have all men saved but His decretal will compels Him to save some only. Here is the old picture commonly used of man with a devil sitting on one shoulder and an angel sitting on the other, one saying “spare him”, the other saying “damn him”. Thus Murray uses his gospel of contradictions to divide the one will of the Trinity in salvation.

The task of the evangelist and preacher, says Murray, is to preach God’s benevolent will to all men and keep his decretal will, i.e. to save only some, secret. He can thus conclude:

We have found that God himself expresses an ardent desire for the fulfilment of certain things which he has not decreed in his inscrutable counsel to come to pass. This means that there is a will to the realization of what he has not decretively willed, a pleasure towards that which he has not been pleased to decree. This is indeed mysterious, and why he has not brought to pass, in the exercise of his omnipotent power and grace, what is his ardent pleasure lies hid in the sovereign counsel of his will. We should not entertain, however, any prejudice against the notion that God desires or has pleasure in the accomplishment of what he does not decretively will.7

7 Murray’s The Free Offer of the Gospel, p. 29.

John Murray wrote a book entitled Redemption Accomplished and Applied. That title is misleading as he sees a paradox between what Christ accomplished and what He applied. Biblical Christianity, and there can be no other Christianity, is Redemption Secured and Applied because all for whom Christ died are secure in their redemption which is applied to them. Murray preaches that the gospel which is to be freely offered is the gospel that God wills to do what He does not will but if it is preached in a ‘well-meant’ manner, it will be affective! One must drive this scandalous opinion ad absurdum in their own words so that these modern scoffers may realise what they are doing! This is truly a religion dishonouring to God which preaches a gospel of deceit and it is a most worrying thing to realise that such writers are claimed to be present day authorities and leaders in our Reformed churches. This down-grading of religion in the English-speaking world is, in many ways, a more severe down-grading than that against which Spurgeon fought so bravely.

A special and distinct people
Gill will have nothing to do with the religion of Mr Facing-Both-Ways. The object of redemption, he argues, is that God might secure a people out of the world for Himself and make them special and distinct from other peoples. Redemption is God’s own divine choice and not the prerogative of all men to choose God.8 Gill gives seven reasons for this:

1. The objects of redemption are the objects of God’s love

God has a special saving love which must be distinguished from His general, providential goodness to all men. God does not love all men savingly. For instance, He says, “Jacob have I loved and Esau have I hated.” There is thus no common grace pointing to the possibility of salvation for all men, but only a selective saving grace through which Christ secures a people whom He calls variously His Bride, His Church, or His sheep. These people are in a special relationship to God as His right and property.

2. The objects of redemption are the same as the objects of election

Christ died for His elect ones. Romans 8:30-33 and Ephesians 1:4-7 show that the election, predestination, calling, justification and glorification of God's loved ones were sealed in eternity. Those who are elected are those whom God loves and who are redeemed. These are not restricted to any nation but are freely chosen by God from all peoples as vessels of mercy. What Christ has purchased with His blood belongs to Him and there is no danger of His losing His possessions. God has not left salvation to the whims of man as thus none would be saved.

3. The objects of redemption are the same as those for whom Christ is a Surety

Christ is the Surety of a better covenant, commonly called the covenant of grace. This suretyship is the grounds and foundation of redemption and in His engagement of it, Christ bore the sin and punishment of His people to redeem them from the hands of justice. He, however, was not obliged to redeem those for whom He was not a Surety. Christ is not the Surety of every man but only those who were put under that suretyship from the foundation of the world. Thus, Christ's suretyship and redemption are of equal extent and the same people are placed under both.

4. The objects of redemption are a chosen people

Both the Old and New Testaments proclaim that Christ is to die for and thus redeem His own people (Isaiah 53:8; Matthew 1:21 etc.). Though all men are created by God, they are not accounted on that ground as belonging to His redeemed children. Christ does not redeem all universally but He universally chooses people from out of “every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation” worldwide (Revelation 5:9). These are God's covenant people of whom He said “They shall be my people, and I will be their God” (Jeremiah 11:4 etc.).

5. The objects of redemption are those for whom Christ paid a ransom

Christ gave His life for His sheep who are a definite people discernible by Him from others, also called goats in Scripture. Only Christ's sheep know Him, are led by Him and follow Him (John 10:15-29). To others, He says, “Depart from me; I know you not.” Indeed, the gospel is revealed to the sheep but hid from the goats. It is Christ's sheep alone who shall never perish and enjoy their Saviour for ever.

6. The objects of redemption are the sons of God

These children of God are predestined and adopted to be fellow-heirs with Christ and as such are distinguishable from the children of flesh. They are a fixed number which cannot be altered and thus partakers of a special grace which is given to none but them (John 11:52; Romans 9:8; Galatians 3:26; John 1:12; John 3:1).

7. The object of redemption is Christ's Bride, the Church

The Old Testament tells believers that their maker is their Husband and their Redeemer the Holy One of Israel (Isaiah 54:5). In the New Testament Christ is depicted as the Husband who so loved His Bride, that He gave Himself for her (Ephesians 5:25). This Bride is also called God's ‘general assembly and church of the first-born which are written in heaven’, i.e. in the Lamb’s book of life, who are members of the New Covenant and sealed through the shedding of Christ’s blood (Hebrews 12:23 ff.).

Theoretical Universalists deny God's perfections

The idea that God loves savingly those whom He will not save is a total denial of God's love. The idea that God in His wisdom planned a scheme whereby redemption is made for all but God does not succeed in redeeming all, is a total denial of God's planning wisdom. The idea that God, in His justice, contrived a means by which Christ was punished for all men and bore all men's sins and yet God did not allow all men to go free is to deny God’s justice. If Christ has paid the debts of all men, all men must, for the sake of justice, be declared free. If God designed to save all and all are not saved, this denies the power of God to do that which He desires and wills. This dogma would even make man more powerful than God as God proposes but man overrules God's proposal. The Bible, however, reveals a God for whom nothing is too hard or impossible and whose will is almighty. The Universalist error also denies the immutability of God as it represents Him as being of two minds in salvation and both willing and not willing the salvation of all men at the same time. His love for all is changed into His hatred of some. The Bible teaches that in God there is no variableness, nor shadow of turning. This universal scheme robs God of His chief end and glory. If His ultimate aim is the redemption of all men to His own glory, and
some for whom Christ became a ransom are not saved, He has failed in both His aim and glory. The Universalist has thus a god void of all his perfections and who is in the end, less powerful than man.

**Theoretical Universalism denies Christ’s love and grace**
If Christ loved all men so that He died for all and all men do not partake of that love and vicarious death, then Christ’s love and grace were not sufficient for their task. Christ says that “greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends”. If ‘friends’ are interpreted, in Christ’s case, as all, Christ loved and died in vain. If ‘friends’ are the sum total of those for whom Christ intended to die and for whom He died successfully, then Christ’s love and grace for His own is established as complete. This universal scheme also reflects negatively on the work of Christ. If He has made satisfaction for everyman, everyman must go free. If Christ has paid a price for all, but many remain unpaid for, then either the price was not valid or the payment was not enough. In dying for His people, Christ purchased not only their redemption but also their reconciliation with God. The Universalists, however, only teach a one-sided reconciliation, i.e. that of God being reconciled to man, which is no reconciliation at all because a reconciliation is always of at least two parties. Where man is not reconciled to God, Christ’s work of reconciliation was in vain. That is if Christ had died to reconcile all men everywhere. The Bible, however, teaches clearly that Christ was a ransom for the many but not for all.

**Theoretical Universalism denies any redemption at all**
If Christ died for the redemption of all and all are not redeemed, that redemption never took place. Furthermore, Christ’s failed redemption is thus no security against condemnation either. Scriptures tell us, however, that there is no condemnation for those whose sins are condemned in Christ. If some sinners are condemned and some not, either something has gone wrong with Christ’s universal engagement or the Universalists have quite misunderstood the gospel.

**Universal redemption separates the work of Christ from its accomplishment**
Christ did not die, rise again and now intercedes for all men. If He did, all would be the objects of Christ’s intercession. But Christ says that He does not pray for the world (i.e. all men) but for those whom God has given Him only (John 17:9). It is absurd and incredible to think that Christ separates His work from what resulted from that work. Those for whom He died are those for whom He prays. It is absurd and incredible to think that Christ died for those for whom He would not pray. Boyce takes up this dichotomy in Fuller’s doctrine of an atonement which does not reconcile, arguing conclusively that Fullerism entails two separate works of Christ: the work of Redemption which is for all and the work of atonement which is for some. Redemption merely means that a mode of reconciliation and a medium of acceptance has been provided – even for those who shall not be saved and for those who are already damned. This is a theory of no practical saving value and is incompatible with scriptures concerning the choosing of the elect before the foundation of the world and Christ’s dying for them before the foundation of the world. These passages show that Christ died solely for those whom He redeemed and reconciled to God (See John 10:11, 15, 26-28; John 17:9, 19; Romans 5:8, 9; Ephesians 5:25; Titus 2:14; 1 Peter 1:20). As Boyce points out, Fuller never explains how it comes about that a redeemed all become reconciled and how they lose their theoretical redemption and possible reconciliation and become either practically an atoned-for few or a lost many.

**A Christ who cannot see the travail of His soul and be satisfied**
If Christ died for all men but all men are not saved, Christ will never see the travail of His soul and be satisfied (Isaiah 53). The joy that was set before Him in enduring the cross must now be turned into disappointment because the plan of salvation failed. Now the millions whom He loved are howling in hell because His atonement failed to atone.

**Outcome of the Theoretical Universalist’s scepticism**
Such Universalists believe that Christ died for sins that are irremissible (Matthew 12:31, 32; 1 John 5:16). His redemption for all is useless for most or, at least, many. Christ affords no grounds for faith and hope if those who are redeemed can fall and perish. The Bible exhorts, however, sinners to trust in Christ.
“for with him is plenteous redemption” (Psalm 130:7). Nor, if Universalism were true, have would-be believers any grounds to love Christ or to be thankful for Him as they would have been destroyed had they not appropriated salvation for themselves. This would cause self-love but hardly love for a god who merely provides a means of reconciliation but leaves all the struggle to accomplish it to the sinner himself. The efficacy of salvation is then not Christ’s death so much as the sinner’s will and work in grasping the benefits for himself.

Summary and conclusion
Redemption is not universal in that all men are redeemed but is limited to those for whom the redemption price is paid. Redemption is bought for God’s people at the highest possible price and given to the elect freely for no other reason than God’s love for them. This gift is all of grace and sinners have no agency whatsoever in it. Any claim from believers that their agency helped procure their salvation, is a testimony of ungratefulness and unbelief and not the fruit by which true believers are known. Christ saves all those whom He redeems and Christ’s redemption is for those alone.

This redemption is agreeable to all the perfections of God, springing from His love, grace and kindness. It is planned and carried out in and by the infinite wisdom of God and reflects His peace-bringing justice, honour, mercy, truth, and righteousness which are pledged for ever to a people who are the apple of His eye and whom He will never forsake. No sinner could redeem himself like this or perform any works of salvation on his own. Man’s infinite sin demands an infinite ransom leading to an infinite satisfaction. Only God in Christ has the power to do this and only He has truly done this.

The redemption which Christ obtained as its Author and Finisher is freely given to those and those only for whom Christ worked it out (Ephesians 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:30). This redemption is particular, choosing out a special people from the nations, the Church, and the redemption these chosen ones are given is definite, full and complete. The Lord Jesus Christ’s atonement did not merely make salvation possible but it accomplished salvation in every aspect and for all for whom it was meant and to whom it is given. This full salvation is eternal (Hebrews 9:12) and none who are saved shall perish but all of them are given everlasting life.

GEORGE M. ELLA

Joy and Peace in Believing

1. Sometimes a light surprises
The Christian while he sings;
It is the Lord who rises
With healing in His wings:
When comforts are declining,
He grants the soul again
A season of clear shining
To cheer it after rain.

2. In holy contemplation,
We sweetly then pursue
The theme of God’s salvation,
And find it ever new:
Set free from present sorrow,
We cheerfully can say,
E’en let th’ unknown tomorrow,
Bring with it what it may.

3. It can bring with it nothing
But He will bear us through;
Who gives the lilies clothing
Will clothe His people, too:
Beneath the spreading heavens,
No creature but is fed;
And He who feeds the ravens,
Will give His children bread.

4. The vine, nor fig-tree neither,
Their wonted fruit should bear,
Though all the fields should wither,
Nor flocks, nor herds, be there:
Yet God the same abiding,
His praise shall tune my voice;
For while in Him confiding,
I cannot but rejoice.

William Cowper
For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them (Ephesians 2:8-10).

But he is in one mind, and who can turn him? and what his soul desireth, even that he doeth. For he performeth the thing that is appointed for me: and many such things are with him (Job 23:13, 14).

Few of the multitudes who speak of salvation by grace, hold the doctrine in such a view as to exclude law and merit. The scheme of salvation which commands the admiration of the greatest part of what is called the Christian world, is that which represents an interest in the atonement to be procured by the condition of works. In opposition to all these, the Apostles declare salvation to be purely of grace, the free gift of God through Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul not only asserts salvation by grace, and not by human merit, but declares that salvation by grace and works, is a contradiction in terms. “And if by grace, then it is no more of works: otherwise, grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then it is no more of grace: otherwise, work is no more work” (Romans 11:6). “For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise” (Galatians 3:18).

This is so obvious a dictate of common sense, that it is strange to find any professing to believe the Scriptures, and mixing these incompatible elements. Yet, these things thought so inconsistent by the Apostle, have been found perfectly reconcilable by others; and what Paul looks upon as a contradiction, they have considered as a scheme, beautifully harmonising the attributes of God, and the moral agency of mankind. God is just and gracious in the atonement, while man is entitled to the benefit of this and the reward of eternal life, by his repentance and new obedience. This is the darling scheme of the wise and the unwise.
Grace And Merit Are Opposites
But let us see how the admirers of this popular scheme reconcile what Paul looked upon as a contradiction. If it is obvious to common sense, that grace and merit are irreconcilable, how can those who have not only common sense, but many that have such good sense and learning, be blind to the contradiction? It seems to me, that they hide the inconsistency from themselves, by viewing the grace of God and the merit of man, as not respecting the same things. Were it not for something of this nature, it would be impossible to attempt to reconcile things noticeably irreconcilable. The same thing that is given purely of favour, cannot also be given as wages for work. But they contrive to appropriate the grace of God to one thing, and the merit of man to another. The former respects the giving of Christ as a ransom for sinners; the latter respects the terms of obtaining an interest in this ransom. The atonement is all of grace, but human efforts must obtain an interest in that work.

God And Man Working Together
This surely is the spirit of their doctrine, who speak of the grace of God in salvation, yet of man’s being pardoned through the atonement for his repentance, and rewarded for his sincere obedience. The grace of God consists not in giving all freely through Christ, but in making salvation possible through Him, which was otherwise impossible, in giving a new and easier covenant, which requires not perfect but sincere obedience. This they call a milder law, the gospel covenant, etc. In this view, also, some speak of faith itself, as if God, on account of the excellent disposition which it is supposed to manifest, accepts it in lieu of sinless obedience to His law. They seem to have the same view of God’s grace, as they would of that of a rich man, who, to encourage industry among the poor, would engage to give them wages, in value much above their work. While others give but a shilling a day, he gives five. He is gracious, then, in giving the poor so good a bargain; they merit their wages, because they have performed a work. But it is obvious that when the Scriptures speak of God’s grace, and the opposition of grace and works, they refer to the whole scheme of salvation, and oppose grace to work with respect to the same points. In Galatians 3:18, where Paul asserts the inconsistency of law and promise, he is speaking against the doctrine of those who made the observance of law necessary to

Alexander Carson was a Baptist minister best known today for his writings, including *Baptism, its Mode and Subjects*. However, he began his ministry as a Presbyterian in Tobermore, Northern Ireland. After a time Carson resigned his pastorate, shook off what he saw as the shackles of presbyterianism, and published his ‘Reasons for Separating’ in 1804. Part of his congregation followed him. For some years he preached in barns and in the open air. In 1814 a small meeting-house was built in which he laboured for thirty years. He published books on biblical interpretation, Transubstantiation, the Trinity, &c.

In attempting to refute Robert Haldane’s ‘New Views of Baptism’ he became convinced of the Baptist position. He also became well known by travelling through most of the English counties, preaching on behalf of Baptist missions. Returning from his last tour in 1844, while waiting at Liverpool for the steamer to Belfast, he fell over the edge of the quay, dislocated his shoulder, and was nearly drowned. He was rescued and taken to the steamer; but on his arrival at Belfast he was unable to proceed further, and after eight days he died, aged sixty-eight. He was buried near the chapel where he had preached, and where six months before he had buried his wife. A collection of Carson’s works has been printed in six volumes.
salvation, as well as faith in the death of Christ. In Romans 11:6, it is not only the salvation of sinners that is represented as of grace, but the election of them as of grace.

**The Gospel Is All Of Grace**

The heirs of life are represented as chosen, not on account of works that they should do, but altogether out of grace. If so, works of no kind can ever be represented consistently with Scripture as conditions of salvation. But all the ingenuity of all the learned advocates of this heterogeneous scheme, has never been able either to harmonise it with the scriptures, or even with itself. If God requires any conditions on the part of sinners, it is impossible that salvation is of grace. However inconsiderable and easy such conditions may be, however short of the value of what is gained, still, when they are performed, they are work, and therefore contrary to grace. When they have been performed, they give ground to glory. If in themselves they are of no value, then they who have them not, are not inferior in moral worth to those who possess them; consequently they are of no value. If, though of no value in themselves, they are valuable, as commanded by God, then they who possess them, offer some value to God for their salvation. But if these conditions are valuable in themselves, as is generally supposed by the advocates of this scheme, then, according to their value, do they afford God a price for what He gives. If faith, repentance, sincere obedience, are the work of man, or the productions of man's own efforts, then his salvation is the fruit of his own labour. If one perishes, because he does not comply with these terms, and another is saved on account of them, then salvation is not of grace, but by human merit! The man who is saved may glory in the success of his efforts. He cannot be said to be saved by grace. He has given value for what he has received; and although it is not full value, it is all that is thought reasonable in his bankrupt circumstances to require of him. God then still demands of him all the debt which he is able to pay. Is this a salvation by grace? If faith, repentance, sincere obedience, are spoken of as the gift of God, then it is absurd in that view of them, to consider them as conditions on the part of man. In this view, the man who receives them has no more merit than the man who receives them not. If through faith, repentance, and sincere obedience, are the gift of God, but are given to one rather than another, on account of complying with some previous conditions, it is only removing merit a little farther back, and salvation is the reward of these previous conditions.

**Free Unconditional Grace**

On the other hand, if it can be said that salvation is of grace, that eternal life is the gift of God, then it is absurd and contradictory to suppose that the performance of anything is required on the part of man. It cannot be grace that requires—that will not give without something in return. It cannot be a gift that requires a purchase before it is communicated. No conditions on the part of the sinner can exist in a free salvation. It is of faith that it might be by grace. The pride of man is humbled in the doctrine of the cross. The virtuous sage is able to offer to God, for his salvation, nothing more than the abandoned profligate. If they believe the gospel; they both alike are changed by its power; they repent, are born again, and perform good works.

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The changing attitude of Academia to Bunyan

Happily more and more university researchers are pioneering studies of Bunyan’s language, style and message. An interest in Bunyan has moved from the elementary school, through secondary schools and has become a topic for serious students of literature and theology at the highest level. Bunyan is now being seen for the great genius he is on a far wider scale than merely amongst evangelicals. Modern Bunyan studies are proving to be most objective and informative and unlike much denominational writing are mostly based on original research. Such studies in vocabulary and style and their spiritual and theological contextualization coupled with a minute examination of Bunyan’s high motives and outreach are now happily seen in scholarly dissertations such as those by Richard Greaves (2002), Anne Dunan-Page (2006), Robert McKelvey (2011), Karin Böe (2012) and John Coffey (2013). These all echo in some way the positive academic stand of writers such as Michael Davies’ *Graceful Reading: Theology and Narrative in the works of John Bunyan*, (2002). These studies are not built on denominational reasoning and reveal the sublime nature of Bunyan’s language, knowledge-management and thought-world. This is because in recent years there has been a widening of academic interest in the synergizing of all forms of knowledge, including the literary and the spiritual. Formerly, *Academia* appeared to follow Dr. Johnson’s narrow-minded idea that religion was not a fit topic for literature and especially poetic literature. Nowadays, *Academia* accepts that religion can reach its full bloom in literature and poetry as the works of Bunyan, Milton, Cowper and Hervey show. *Academia* now sees how the spiritual and metaphysical are necessary elements in judging the so-called scientific elements of knowledge.
as the two are inseparable in defining what true practical knowledge and wisdom is. These modern doctoral theses are almost unanimous in revealing Bunyan’s great skill in putting over the gospel in the highest literary content where every word has a special and irreplaceable function. Thus this author would warn his readers against the re-interpretations of Bunyan’s works now sold for material profit in supposed ‘Simple English’ by so-called ‘Reformed’ establishments who, in altering Bunyan’s language and arguments make him speak as an Arminian and a Fullerite.

A catalogue of Bunyan’s written works covers over 50 normal book pages. However, though Bunyan rarely wrote anything which was not instructive and spiritually profitable to all, most Bunyan biographers merely quote from some five volumes from Bunyan’s pen including Pilgrims Progress; Grace Abounding; The Holy War and Come and Welcome to Jesus Christ. These are all works of great prestige and evangelical fervor but for those who wish to look deeper into the pastoral heart of Bunyan, there are scores of works in a lively, instructive language which are sadly seldom brought to the public gaze. This is a great pity as Bunyan’s works are more modern in style than many other contemporary works and still make for good reading for those of a less sophisticated education.

Bunyan and children
There are many works of Bunyan’s most suitable for children, though these need to be placed in a skilled teacher’s hands as they have suffered the most from language development and regression over the centuries. Children were addressed differently in Bunyan’s age and the whole gospel was given them in simple language which was, however, not babyish. Nowadays educators tend to think that the gospel should be given children in a form as diluted as their own childish language. The Christian parent or teacher might take a look here at ‘A book for boys and girls, or, Country rhimes for children which Bunyan published in 1686. Bunyan draws wonderful pictures from the lives of spiders, flies, snails and frogs, showing how nature, innocent of the fall, fell with man but preserved far more of its original integrity so that even a rose-bush can be an emblem of grace. Of the wee fish in a pool, Bunyan can thus say:

The water is the fish’s element
Her sportings there to her are excellent.
So is God’s service unto holy men,
They are not in their element till then.

Healing barren hearts
Bunyan made great effort in his teaching to show how professing to be a Christian was not enough and one must ever be a practising Christian in thought, word and deed. He thus wrote intensively against empty professors of religion or ‘barren fig trees’ as he called them, teaching them their need of a broken heart regarding their own sins as a forerunner to accepting the gospel. He wrote of the need of the realisation imbued by the Spirit that Jesus is the sole heart-minder who is ever able to instil them with true spiritual life so that they might give a true Christian testimony. For such people who have turned their backs on their former life of empty professions, Bunyan wrote a bevy of books on guarding against sin and advice to backsliders who had lost their ‘First Love’.

Keeping the Church together
Always practical, Bunyan wrote about keeping up fellowship within the family and the Church and gave advice as to how one should be able to give a reason for one’s faith to anyone who sought for an answer. Above all, he wrote to those labouring under their sins who needed to hear the good news of how Christ welcomes sinners. Realising the social revolutions taking place amongst employers and employees at the time, Bunyan gave advice on the Christian duties of both. He also wrote on the sins and solutions regarding squabbling and quarrelling, amongst the various denominations which were springing up all over the country as brother warred with brother.

1 See my NF review of the Banner Of Truth’s dumbed-down version of Come and Welcome to Jesus Christ.

2 See The barren fig-tree, or, The doom & downfal of the fruitless professor shewing that the day of grace may be past with him long before his life is ended : the signs also by which such miserable mortals may be known, and The acceptable sacrifice, or, The excellency of a broken heart shewing the nature, signs, and proper effects of a contrite spirit.

3 See Christian behaviour, or, The fruits of true Christianity shewing the ground from whence they flow, in their godlike order in the duty of relations, as husbands, wives, parents, children, masters, servants, &c.
Bunyan the Nonconformist

Bunyan was a Dissenter in the sense that no institution could enforce on a Christian what he should do or not do as a Christian. He did not live by a constitution, contract, book of rules or institutional list to do or not do but by the Bible. He believed that Christianity was not a book of contracted regulations whether it came from the Church of England, the Baptists, the Presbyterians, the Quakers or the Fifth Monarchy men or from wherever. He thus did not fight shy of condemning the anti-Christian regulation policies of both churches and governments. This is what moved him to condemn in writing the illegal and arbitrary proceedings by certain justices of the peace against nonconformists in 1670. Such works would be exemplary today where we hear of both State and Church laying down the Law concerning what gospel news may not be preached by Christians today.

Pastor-evangelist Olaf Lazel who is busy winning Muslims for Christ is now suffering under politicians pretending to be popes. Evangelicals are now finding in Germany that the government and even churches are forbidding the evangelization of the Jews and followers of Islam by Christians. Soon they will be telling us that we must not evangelise children and political efforts are being made in that unholy direction, too. Happily, many Jews in Germany have long turned to Christ and there are now very many conversions amongst Muslims in spite of governmental and ecclesiastical interference. My over fifty years of teaching has shown me that children still love to hear the gospel. So we see that in their insistence on laws and regulations curbing the gospel, both our modern States and churches have not reckoned with God's sovereign grace and purpose.

The rights of wrong women

In Bunyan's day, churches were being split up on the question of women's rights and ambitions and a number of nonconformist churches were appointing women ministers. Benjamin Keach was one of the first to encourage women to take part in admonishing the members in word and leading in prayer but without arguing for their ordination. Cromwell went even further and was open to women entering the ministry and accepted petitions sympathetically from groups of women ministers who demanded more governmental support. Bunyan saw the birthplace of women striving to take over positions hitherto occupied by men in the Women's Meeting which was also a novelty arising during Cromwell's revolutionary years.

Women demanded the privilege of organizing meetings in the church solely for women without fathers, brothers, husbands and children and male members. This 'freedom' gave these women the notion that they could handle church worship at least as well as men if not better. Their idea of dividing church fellowship according to gender and age groups grew so rapidly and continually that great pastors and preachers such as William Huntington had to preach against this dividing of the robe of Christ into tattered segments within the most Bible-believing congregations. It has become a permanent fashion. This protest movement spread to Bedford and another minister was persuaded by some women to hand in a petition to Bunyan outlining their arguments for gender separation in the Church and asked for Bunyan’s advice on this new church issue. Bunyan decided that the separating of women from their fellow male Christians was a step back in Christian fellowship to Judaism where the sexes were strictly separated in different parts of buildings and was not typical of Christian worship. The women demanded a written reply so Bunyan answered with his A case of conscience resolved viz. whether, where a church of Christ is situate, it is the duty of the women of that congregation, ordinarily, and by appointment, to separate themselves from their brethren, and so to assemble together to perform some parts of divine worship, as prayer, &c. without their men?

The dissatisfied women argued that women in the Bible obviously prayed individually and in groups together. Bunyan answered that the duty to pray is incumbent on all and not merely on individual women or groups of women. Therefore, to limit this duty and privilege to women was un-Biblical. He also argued that the Jewish examples given of women praying in groups could not be exemplary for the Church where there was no difference made between men, women and children in the joint duty to pray. Bunyan pressed home the fact that the idea of calling a woman’s meeting for prayer or any other form of worship was not to be found anywhere in Scripture which is our sole rule of faith and worship. Furthermore, Bunyan argued, the organizing of church meetings is placed in the hands of pastors and elders who represent the whole church. Nowhere in Scripture do we read that women as a separated group may
organize the Church so that different bodies worship and pray separately. Bunyan even challenges the idea that meetings should be held in church for prayer only. Prayer goes hand in hand with teaching and instruction and is ministerial in that it must be explained what is being prayed for and why there is this need. There is no such thing as a meeting in the church for random prayer, especially when this is limited to one sex only. So too, when a meeting is called in a church it must be for all church members, not merely for some of them who wish to separate from their brethren for the purpose of worship. He concludes that as a pastor, he seeks the edification of the whole flock and not contention caused by church-splitting.

This insight into Bunyan’s view of prayer may seem off-putting to some but one must hear Bunyan out. In his book I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also, Bunyan expounds 1 Corinthians 14:15 explaining what prayer is; what it is to pray with the spirit and what it means to pray with the understanding. Those who merely rattle off prayers, thinking there is merit in that, or worse still dominate prayer meetings with their long-winded private mantras soon learn better from Bunyan.

Quarrelling over inessentials

Just as Bunyan is against gender-separation in worship, so he is against members of his church quarrelling over inessentials which they present as articles of faith. The ‘dipped and sprinkled’, as Cowper calls them, lived in peace in the same congregations until well into the eighteenth century when again the churches were shattered by separatists policies regarding rituals. Against such trends, Bunyan argued that these outward figurative signs professed by the various denominations to mark them off from one another, providing they were outward and did not destroy a person’s inner walk with God, were no bar to communion and full fellowship together within the local community of saints. He thus wrote his A Confession of my Faith, and a Reason of my Practice and his Difference in Judgment no Bar to Communion, supported by many of the earlier Reformed Baptists such as Henry Jessey. Here the reader will find a most practical and easily understandable explanation of Justification, Election, the Call to Christ, Faith, Repentance, Love, the Scriptures and Government (both secular and ecclesiastical).

In his section on With whom I dare not hold communion and With whom I dare. Bunyan explains that he is not thinking so much of the Lord’s Supper in particular but Christian fellowship in general. He says that he cannot refuse fellowship with those who he might think are hypocrites but is prepared to fellowship with all those who are visible professors of faith in Christ. The line is drawn however, when the professing Christian is shown to be a fraud and a man living in open profanity. To those who claimed their baptism gave them a right to Church membership and thus to full fellowship and joint participation at the Communion Table, Bunyan said:

Baptism makes thee no member of the church, neither particular nor universal: neither doth it make you a visible saint: It therefore gives thee neither right to nor being off membership at all. 4

This was a statement made by one who believed in what we call ‘Believers’ Baptism’ but he has said enough here to bring the church edifices of many Anglicans, Presbyterians, Independents and Baptists down to the ground. I have rarely found anyone who agreed with Bunyan, so tied up are we with our denominationalism. But Bunyan was right. Our fellowship is with the saints and promoted by them and not with baptism of whatever kind. It is to those who repent and believe who find the doors of Heaven open for them. This is why we find true lovers of Christian fellowship walking arm in arm with one another as Newton an Anglican and Sutcliffe a Baptist did in Olney and William Carey and his Anglican and Lutheran friends who helped greatly to finance his work in India. Perhaps the best example is church historian and humorist Anglican Thomas Fuller and Baptist and friend of the Jews Henry Jessey who shared the same pulpit and pastored the same church with each other. These men put Christ first, and their congregations second and saw denominational affiliation as merely the organization which appealed to people’s secondary love of order and discipline. Indeed, Bunyan after explaining that one does not become a saint through baptism but through Christ’s electing love, goes on to say:

Now that which by Christ is made the door of entrance into the church, by that we may doubtless enter; and seeing

baptism is not that ordinance, we ought not to seek to enter thereby, but may with good conscience enter without it.\footnote{Also vol. ii, p. 606.}

In these works Bunyan explains that baptism and communion are not initiation rites and do not open doors to either the Church nor privileges of grace and differences of opinions concerning how these symbols are interpreted and defined do not un-christianise us or make us unable to be edified together by Christ and be an edification to one another and those still lost. His motto was that rites and rituals do not regenerate and a trust in symbols does not edify.

**Bunyan the theologian**

Despite his lack of formal education, Bunyan was a brilliant theologian. His confessions of faith and accounts of his own conversion experiences are practical, scriptural and comprehensive. They are void of speculation and theorizing and couched in words that the simplest can understand. As he tells us in *Scriptural Poems*, he ‘affected plainness more than fame’. Here in Germany the government now realises that their information concerning taxation, pensions and insurance is way beyond the understanding and patience of the ‘man in the street’ so they have set up local translation centres where qualified people put governmental instructions and information into the language of the people.

This was what John Bunyan did in the seventeenth century in England regarding the doctrines of Law and Grace which had become isolated from common speech because of the new generation of preachers who had their feet on common ground but their heads still in the cloistered corridors of the universities. At the time, Oxford was teaching Britain dubious theories of textual criticism which meant a cutting and pasting of well-established texts and with it a cutting and pasting of long accepted theology. German, Dutch and Swiss scholars happily denounced this lax and speculative way of ‘searching the Scriptures’. This author, on reading the Westminster Assembly minutes by various scribes was dismayed at the attempt made by even the humblest members to ‘talk up’ to their brethren in a pseudo-learned language and make theology appear far more complicated than it was. This was because the academics who kept to Aristotelian analysis and ‘pie in the sky’ Enlightenment linguistics were being slavishly imitated. I have collected enough Latin phrases from the Westminster records to fill a thick volume which seemed to have been merely dropped to impress, often quite unnecessarily or out of context. There was none of this pseudo-academic cant in Bunyan. His hearers were mostly from a farming and craftsman community, and through his teaching they became useful communicators of the gospel in plain, simple but highly effective English.

Luther at the beginning of the Reformation was tired with the constant sermons on an angry God and the infernos that were supposed to accompany both the elect and the damned in the alleged thousands of years after death before the Last Judgement. Luther longed for a God of Grace and Mercy. Nowadays we have gone to the other extreme. We preachers of the Word are told by our modern ‘Reformed Establishment’ to ban emphasis on the lamentable state of the damned and give sinners a ‘well-meant’ gospel warranting salvation for every man and appeal to his fallen duties without him going through the fears of hell. The sinner, these ‘well-meaners’ say, must be made aware of his inner abilities to know God when he hears the indiscriminate warrant given him that ‘Christ died for him’ in the duty-faith gospel. Bunyan was quite different. He wrote a gem called *Christ a Complete Saviour* to show that Christ had taken on Himself all man’s duties and conditions within His own provisions and agency and that there was nothing left for man to do but repent and rejoice in his God-given belief. Bunyan knew that the grace of the Law was there to lead souls to Christ and he missed nothing out in its application.

The embarrassment that moderns have with Justification, Predestination, Election, Reprobation, Reconciliation and even Atonement, caused him no blushing but he expounded these comforting doctrines within the framework of God’s love for His Church, showing no salvation without previous condemnation, no cleansing without the sinner’s awareness of his sin. It was in this context of the whole gospel that Bunyan could say to all men everywhere ‘Come and Welcome to Jesus Christ’. Indeed, he emphasized passionately that God held out an especially loving hand for the biggest sinners and wrote a book about that, too.

So come and be welcomed by Jesus Christ through reading Bunyan’s precious literary gems!
Three times in Romans 15 the Apostle Paul draws our attention to the character and attributes of our glorious Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ with descriptive titles to comfort and encourage the church. Our Great Redeemer is called ‘the God of patience and consolation’, ‘the God of hope’ and ‘the God of peace’ (vv. 5, 13, 33). How blessed we are that God the Holy Spirit should leave us these wonderful descriptions of the Godhead as reminders and tokens of God’s love and grace for His people.

Our blessed Saviour is both the source of these graces and the dispenser. Our Great Provider is Himself patient and teaches patience to His people. He is trustworthy and faithful and teaches His people to hope and trust in Him. He is eternally at peace with Himself; self-contained, self-sufficient, self-contented and secures peace for His people by reconciling us to Himself and speaking peace to all His seed.

The God of Patience
How patiently our Saviour endured the contradiction of sinners. How we tested and taunted Almighty God with our wickedness in the days of our opposition; shaking our fists in His face. How adamantly we withstood His whispers of love, despised His gentle pleadings, mocking His forbearance as weakness. “Despising the riches of His goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God was all the time leading us to repentance.”

Each one of us deserves to be punished as rebels, and damned to eternal separation. Yet, thank God, our Beloved is the God of patience, waiting to be merciful in conversion and ever longsuffering towards us His people despite our failings, weaknesses and faults. What an example He provides for us to follow. As we wait patiently upon Him whom we recognise now as our Great God and Saviour, He becomes to us the source of all good, the fountainhead of every perfect gift. As He suffered patiently and endured for us the full weight of God’s wrath against our sin, might we not follow our Master when called to endure the opposition of men against us? Is the servant greater than his master? The church learns patience by looking to the God of patience.

The God of Consolation
Yet here, too, is a blessed promise, for our God is also the God of consolation. Our Saviour comforts His people in their trials, consoling our troubled hearts. He draws near to us in our loneliness, uplifts us when we are downcast, nourishes our soul when we hunger after righteousness, and refreshes us when weary. He bears our griefs and carries our sorrows. He is our Jacob’s Ladder by whom ministering angels supply all our needs, granting gracious promises, bestowing gospel blessings.

Like their Saviour, the Lord’s people in this world sow in tears. Jesus wept in sympathy, by which He taught us to love one another, and in bitterest anguish and pain indicating that no trial in this world is unknown to His people. I am convinced there will be no one in the day of judgment who will be able to say with any legitimacy that the elect people of God had an easier passage in this life. But through the tribulation comes endurance, from trial comes patience, from suffering a dependence and reliance upon our God.

The God of Hope
The Lord Jesus Christ is the God of hope to the
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church, in whom our trust is placed and upon whom our faith is fixed. On the cross we see our redemption won. In the empty tomb victory is declared, and the ascended Christ is the pledge of eternal life. In the gospel we hear His plan of salvation expounded and the good hope of the believer is assured in trusting a good and loving Saviour.

Upon who else can we trust, upon what else place our hope? Recently, I buried a close relative. It is many years since she last had any thought for the so-called riches or pleasures of this world. In life there is no lasting hope, in death no other hope. The Lord Jesus Christ is the God of hope, and a more suitable Saviour, a more able Deliverer, we could not wish or find.

The God of Peace
The King of Peace has won the peace that passes understanding. That peace with God is possible is wonderful for sinners to know, but oh, what manner of peace it is in its nature, depth and endurance. Its blessedness is beyond our ability to describe and transcends our finite minds. It shall be known only by experience. How troubled this world appears to the child of God, but what eternal contentment, joy and union stretches out before us in glory.

The peace is beyond the understanding of natural man in his spiritual ignorance. It is beyond the understanding of angels who stand in awe as the plan of redemption unfolds and reconciliation in time and eternity between God and man is revealed in every convert of sovereign irresistible grace. It is beyond the understanding of devils for whom no peace ever will be found. And though it is beyond the understanding of the guilty sinner with his felt need of pardon and grace, it is embraced, believed and rested upon to his soul’s everlasting relief.

The Lord Jesus Christ has made peace through the blood of His cross. How wonderful the plan of redemption appears to those whose sins are washed away, who are made ready by grace for the presence of God. What a story of love and mercy is salvation by grace. God Himself has stooped to die and pay the price of His bride’s deliverance from sin.

Patience, consolation, hope and peace are blessed gifts of heavenly love from the God of all patience, consolation, hope and peace. May God grant us to know these truths in our hearts and to experience their power in our soul as He comes and ministers these attributes of His character and nature to us.

New Focus Conference 2017

This year’s New Focus conference was held over the weekend of 26-28 May in the London Borough of Merton and was hosted by friends at Merton Evangelical (Baptist) Church, supported by Allan Jellett and the members of Knebworth Grace Church, and Pastor John Graham. Preachers Don Fortner, Harry Qazi and Peter Meney brought the gospel to friends who attended from throughout the UK and beyond. Thank you to all involved.

The services were blessed with a great sense of the Lord’s presence and we rejoiced to hear the gospel declared powerfully and to share in the ordinances of communion and baptism as we met together on Sunday morning. ‘Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!’

Pastor Fortner preached three times over three days and his ministry challenged us all as our eyes were turned once again to the Lord Jesus Christ and His sacrifice. We are grateful to this esteemed servant of the Lord for his faithfulness in bringing us the word of God over many years.

It was a delight to see again many of the brothers and sisters that make these annual gatherings so encouraging for the fellowship they afford and once again it was pleasing to see many children and young people among the congregation.

The weekend’s sermons are available online at Sermonaudio and can be found under the respective preacher’s names. The titles are: Lessons Learned Too Late, By The Grace Of God I Am What I Am, Three Church Ordinances by Don Fortner; All Things Working For Your Good by Harry Qazi and Sowing In Tears by Peter Meney.

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1. Though the morn may be serene,
Not a threatening cloud be seen;
Who can undertake to say
'Twill be pleasant all the day?
Tempests suddenly may rise,
Darkness overspread the skies;
Lightnings flash, and thunders roar,
Ere a short-lived day be o’er.

2. Often thus, the child of grace,
Enters on his Christian race;
Guilt and fear are overborne,
'Tis with him a summer’s morn:
While his new-felt joys abound,
All things seem to smile around;
And he hopes it will be fair,
All the day and all the year.

3. Should we warn him of a change,
He would think the caution strange;
He no change or trouble fears,
Till the gathering storm appears;
Till dark clouds his sun conceal,
All his hopes and courage fail.

4. But the wonder-working Lord
Soothes the tempest by His Word;
Stills the thunder, stops the rain,
And His sun breaks forth again:
Soon the cloud again returns,
Now he joys, and now he mourns;
Oft his sky is overcast,
Ere the day of life be past.

5. Tried believers too can say,
In the course of one short day,
Though the morning has been fair,
Proved a golden hour of prayer:
Sin, and Satan, long ere night,
Have their comforts put to flight;
Ah! What heart-felt peace and joy,
Unexpected storms destroy.

6. Dearest Saviour, call us soon
To Thine high eternal noon;
Never there shall tempest rise,
To conceal Thee from our eyes:
Satan shall no more deceive,
We no more Thy Spirit grieve;
But through cloudless, endless days,
Sound, to golden harps, Thy praise.