

JOSEPH ALLEINE

David N. Samuel



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(1634 – 1668)

Author of

An Alarm to the Unconverted

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JOSEPH ALLEINE

Joseph Alleine was born in Devizes, in a house in the Market Place, and was baptised on 8 April 1634. The years of Alleine's childhood in Devizes were turbulent, for it was the time of the civil war between Parliament and the King. From the back of his house in the Market Place Alleine would have seen the high, bare slopes of Roundway Down. Looking up early on the morning of 10 July 1643 as a child he might have seen, through the rain, Sir William Waller's Parliamentary army of 5,500 men moving slowly over the edge of the down, for the battle of Roundway Down, where the Parliamentary army was defeated by the Royalists.

CHILDHOOD

Another scene that Alleine might have witnessed as a child was that of Sunday morning, 18 September, when he would have found that a battery of ten guns had been assembled the night before, just in front of his father's house, in the Market Square. The guns pointed towards the castle gates. Oliver Cromwell himself was present, and delivered an ultimatum to the defenders to surrender. But it took three days of bombardment before the castle fell to the Parliamentary army.

As a boy Alleine might also have witnessed the incident in St John's Church when the minister, on that occasion a Presbyterian, was ejected from the pulpit with "much admirable incivilitie" by a Captain Pretty. It was not uncommon for Cromwell's soldiers to do this and to deliver the sermon themselves.

The castle was destroyed during the civil war, and it was said that the men engaged would often go, after the work was over, to "a little house of good dame Ffreme, there to hold meetings for prayer and exhortation", which we understand formed the first stage of the history of the Old Baptist Church in Devizes.

UNIVERSITY

Alleine went up to the University at Oxford, and after taking his B.A. degree in 1653 he became tutor and chaplain to Corpus Christi College. He laboured to evangelise the surrounding villages and preached to the prisoners in the gaol every fortnight. He then went on in 1655 to be assistant to a man called George Newton, who was Rector of Taunton. The population of Taunton was around 20,000. At about this time he married Theodosia, a cousin.

Oliver Cromwell, who had become Lord Protector in place of the King after the defeat of the Royalists, died in 1658 and the Restoration of the Monarchy took place shortly afterwards. This, said Philip Henry, the father of Matthew Henry (the famous commentator on the Bible), was the era “when the face of godliness upon the nation” was over. The Act of Uniformity of 1662 was passed by Parliament, and as a consequence 2,000 Puritan ministers and their families were ejected from their livings in the established church; eighty-five of them in Somerset, where Alleine was. This was known as ‘Black Bartholomew’ since the Act was put into force on 24 August, St Bartholomew’s Day.

Alleine continued preaching, but he was eventually arrested, and after a year’s imprisonment was released, but was confronted with the ‘Five Mile Act’ and the ‘Conventicle Act’. These Acts required that all meetings be registered with the magistrate, and that no minister could preach outside a radius of five miles of his residence. Alleine continued to preach, though in declining health. He was arrested on 10 July 1666 while preaching at a private house. His text was from Psalm 147:20: “He hath not dealt so with any nation ... Praise ye the Lord.” While he was preaching the door was suddenly burst open, and a party of men appeared with drawn swords. Two magistrates accompanied them. The names of all present were taken down, and the constables charged to bring them next day before the justices. All were later convicted of holding a conventicle, and sentenced to fine or imprisonment.

IMPRISONMENT

Alleine and his wife were committed to the prison at Ilchester. Alleine preached regularly in gaol to the prisoners. While in prison they heard of the fire of London. His imprisonment prevented him attending Devizes to drink the mineral waters, and this greatly increased his disorder. But in June 1667 he went again to Devizes. He here enjoyed a much needed rest and wrote to his friends: “I bless the Lord I am in great tranquillity in this town and walk up and down the corporation without any questioning me.”

Here he made many acquaintances, amongst them Mr Benjamin Flower, the ejected vicar of Cardiff, who, as a result of his great labours, became known as “the apostle of the Wiltshire dissenters”. Flower became the first pastor of the Presbyterian Church in Devizes, which eventually became the church we now know as the New Baptist Church in Sheep Street.

Alleine died on 17 November 1668 and was buried at Taunton. He left specific instruction: “If I should die fifty miles away, let me be buried at Taunton.” A grave was therefore found for him in the chancel of St Mary’s Church. He was thirty-four years old when he died.

PURITANISM

Alleine was a Puritan and a Presbyterian, in that order: Puritan in faith and doctrine; Presbyterian in church polity. In the Commonwealth period, that is, the time when Cromwell was Lord Protector, Triers were appointed to examine all candidates for the ministry of the church, and to determine if they were suitable and equipped not merely academically, but by “experience of the work of grace in the heart”. Men of all persuasions, Baptists, Independents, Presbyterians were all considered providing they passed the examination of the Triers. The principle of Puritanism, which then held sway, was “reverence for the

strict letter of the Scripture, as God's direct message to each individual man, and as forming our sole, final and absolute authority in religion".

Although they were not understood,
Yet from their spirit and their blood
Did flow a fair and fertile flood
Of thought and deeds both great and good.
Thomas Jordan, 1645.

The Puritans have been greatly misunderstood, yet sometimes they overdid it and brought censure unnecessarily upon themselves. Richard Baxter, it is said, preached for two hours before Charles II, which was not calculated to commend him or his cause to his Sovereign.

Perhaps a short digression here upon the nature of Puritanism would be helpful in understanding Alleine better. Puritanism might be described as an effort to rid the church of elements foreign to true faith and order, and in this sense it has wide reference. But as something specifically English it was the product of Henry VIII's imperfect Reformation. Bishop Hooper of Gloucester was, in a sense, a Puritan as he refused to wear episcopal habit, and was imprisoned in the Fleet for his non-compliance. He insisted on preaching in a weaver's coat.

James I championed the principle that unbroken episcopal succession, and hereditary royal succession were the inviolable bases of Church and State. The two systems informed and supported each other: 'No bishop, no king' was the famous formula which embodied the theory. Charles I accepted this and acted upon it. His entire belief in episcopacy is the key to much of his conduct. The Puritans realized that they were summoned to the defence of civil and religious freedom.

Puritanism aimed at the furtherance of true religion and godliness of life. Part of this appeared in the repeated schemes for the propagation of the Gospel in England and Wales, and also in the Commission of

Triers to ensure fit persons to preach the Gospel. Baxter acknowledged that they did a great deal of good. Puritanism was concerned for theological learning as well as piety. Nothing could be wider of the mark than to assert that “the ordained clergy were superseded by carpenters and cobblers who were conscious only of an outpouring of the Spirit”. John Owen, the great Puritan scholar and theologian, was appointed Vice-Chancellor of Oxford University. The Puritans were an “erudite and cultured party”. They were not as narrow as some think. Independents, Baptists, and even some Episcopalians were approved by the Triers.

FREE GRACE

What was the permanent and abiding influence of Puritanism on the Church and Nation? And what were the great principles for which it stood, and which need to be maintained today? They are these: that God’s free grace, mediated by the believer’s faith in Jesus Christ, is the essential root of human salvation; that God’s will revealed in his written Word, and interpreted by his Holy Spirit, is the supreme law for human conduct both in the sphere of the church and the world; that, therefore, the conscience must be free from merely human dictation and, above all, from the enslaving rule of the priest.

In an age like ours such a witness and such principles need to be revived, upheld, and affirmed. Ours is an age of declension and decay in morals, religion and civic life. They are all in desperate need of spiritual power to reverse these trends and restore spiritual health and vigour. The present state of weak and spent religion in the churches is not adequate to the task. What is needed are the principles and personal religion that fired the Puritans and such men as Alleine. I do not say we have to ape them in everything they did. But their intense awareness of God and of Christ, of grace and salvation, and of the truth of God’s holy Word must be the force for change, and reformation, and revival in our time.

MINISTRY AND TEACHING

So much, then, about Alleine's life and ministry. I want now to come to the subject of his preaching and teaching, and much of this is found in his little book, *An Alarm to the Unconverted*, which was first published in 1671. It met immediately with a warm response and a wide circulation. As the title indicates, it is composed of addresses to the unconverted.

First he speaks of *the impossibility of making Christians of natural men*. "Shall I", he asks, "make the blind to see? I can only draw a bow at a venture and leave to providence the result." He was greatly in earnest and conscious of the onerous nature of the task, and what hung upon it. "I know", he said, "if I succeed not with you, you are lost ... no conversion, no salvation!" This is plain speaking.

WHAT IS CONVERSION?

He deals with *mistakes and misunderstandings about conversion*. "It is not putting on the badge of Christ in Baptism. How many make the mistake here in dreaming that effectual grace is necessarily tied to the external administration of baptism ... so that every baptised person is regenerated, not sacramentally but really and properly And, indeed, were conversion and baptism the same, then men would do well to carry but a certificate of their baptism when they died, and upon sight of this there could be no doubt of their admission to heaven." (Sören Kierkegaard, 'the gloomy Dane', conjured up a similar picture of men and women, on the Day of Judgment, running around hunting for their baptism certificates.)

If this were so, says Alleine, what are we to make of the Lord's saying: "Strait [or narrow] is the gate that leads to life and few there be that find it."? Rather it should be said: "few there be that miss it."

Another thing about conversion, says Alleine, is that it does not lie in our own moral righteousness. Our righteousness does not exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees, and therefore cannot bring us into the kingdom of heaven. “I do not”, he says, “condemn morality, but I warn you not to trust in it.” Conversion is not merely the curbing of corruption by education. People mistake education for grace. *What then is conversion?*

*The nature of true conversion lies in a thorough change of both heart and life. The Author of conversion is the Holy Spirit of God. It is a work above man’s power to do. It is a new creation. You can no more do it than you can give birth to yourself. It is an *internal* work of God’s free grace. “Of his own will begat he us with the Word” (James 1:18).*

The *external* cause is the merit and intercession of Jesus. He prays for his elect. The *instrumental* means of conversion is the ministry of the Gospel. The world does not understand what it does when it persecutes and despises ministers of the gospel. The real instrument of conversion is the gospel, because the Word of God is the incorruptible seed that lives and abides for ever. The *final* cause, or the end and purpose of conversion, is man’s salvation and the glory of God.

Who then are the subjects of conversion? Elect sinners. “Whom God predestinates he also calls.” None is called but the sheep, those whom the Father has given to the Son from all eternity. People argue about election, but they begin at the wrong end, says Alleine: “Prove your conversion and then never doubt your election.” In other words, Alleine is saying, election is not a theoretical or speculative matter: it is essentially practical. How desperately do rebels argue! “If I am elected I shall be saved do what I will. If not, I shall be damned do what I can.” But that is fatalism not election! What does the Bible say? “Repent and be converted.” Do not stand disputing, but repent and believe. “They”, said Alleine, “who do not feed on the plain Word of God shall be choked on the bones.”

A NEW CREATION

Conversion is a thorough work of God. It extends to *the whole man*. He is a new creation in Christ Jesus. This extends to *his mind*: he comes to see everything differently. Sin is now a serious business. He trembles at its enormity, deformity, and filthiness, whereas before he treated it lightly. *His will*: he has a new purpose in life. He seeks God's glory that Christ may be magnified. He would rather have Christ than anything in the world. *His affections*: these all run in a new channel. He desires grace not gold. He had rather be gracious than great. (See how all this runs counter to the materialism of the world and the age in which we live.) Again, *he sorrows over his sins*: whereas once he felt no pang of conscience. His life takes on a new direction and purpose.

When a man is converted he has a new direction in life. He turns from sin, Satan, and the world, and his own righteousness. He once enjoyed sin, now he loathes it. He turns from the world, whereas before he was overcome by the world. "Converting grace puts God on the throne, Christ in the heart, and the world underfoot." Before conversion we are full of pride for our own righteousness, but conversion makes us count all loss, and we take Christ as our only righteousness.

In conversion we turn to God the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. *First, God the Father*: Would you be certain of your conversion? Then attend carefully to the following. *Have you taken God for your happiness?* If you could have anything, what would make you happy? Would money? fame? pleasures? Then you are not converted. But if God can make you happy you must be. Converting grace cures the fatal misery of the Fall, by turning the heart from idols to the living God. *Second, God the Son*: He is the only way to God the Father. The believer ventures all upon Christ. He is made unto him "wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption": Christ is all in all. The convert turns to the laws, ordinances and ways of Christ. He desires to know the whole mind of Christ, not out of fear,

but out of love. Here the hypocrite is discovered, for he desires holiness only as a bridge to heaven, not in and for itself. (This is very searching preaching, indeed.)

THE NECESSITY OF CONVERSION

Conversion, Alleine affirms, is not a high attainment of some Christians, but all who would be saved must undergo the change. *Without conversion your being is vain.* God made you for Himself. You are fearfully and wonderfully made; yet to no purpose if you were not made for God. But unless you are purged from your sins you cannot serve God – you have no skill for it, no strength for it, no mind for it. It is impossible that man in his natural, unregenerate state can do anything pleasing to God. “For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries” etc. *Without conversion the whole visible creation is in vain.* Man is the crown of creation; God made the whole creation for man. If man is false then the tribute of the creation to God fails. Hence “the whole creation groaneth and travaileth” under the burden of men’s sins, who pervert it to their own ends.

Without conversion, all religious observances are in vain. They cannot please God. “Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me,” says the Lord through his prophet (Isaiah 1:13). All praying, fasting, and good works are to no purpose. “Without faith it is impossible to please God.”

Without true conversion all your hopes are in vain. 1. *You can know no peace.* Sin naturally breeds disorders in the soul: care, passion, covetousness, malice, envy, sloth. How can the soul be at ease, at peace? “There is no peace to the wicked.” 2. *The hope of salvation hereafter is in vain.* The unsaved only have hope in this life, and are of all men most miserable. Without repentance all that Christ has done and suffered will be to you in vain. Without regeneration (which is the same thing as repentance) we have no saving interest in Christ and the benefits of his redemption.

To save men in their sins would offer violence to all the attributes of God. To his justice: if men should sow to the flesh yet reap everlasting life, where is the glory of Divine justice? To his holiness: if men continued in sin God's holiness would be defaced. The world would conclude that God was altogether such a one as themselves. To his truth, his veracity: God repeatedly declares that there is no peace to the wicked; that only those who confess and forsake sin shall find mercy. Where then would be God's truth if he should bring men to salvation without conversion? To his wisdom: for God to act like this would be "to throw pearls before swine", to give the choicest mercies to those who do not value them.

THE GLORY OF GOD

Salvation is to God's glory as well as to man's happiness. It would be dishonouring to God for him to bestow his choicest riches on those who live in their sins. What would an unsanctified man do in heaven? He would be as out of place as an animal in a symposium of learned men. "What communion has light with darkness?"

It would be an offence to the immutability of God: God declares that none but the pure in heart shall see God. "If [therefore] Christ should bring any to heaven unconverted, either He must get them in without His Father's knowledge (and then where were God's omniscience?), or against His Father's will (and then where were God's omnipotence?), or He must change His Father's will (and then where were God's immutability?)."

To save men in their sins would be against the word of Christ himself, for he said, "Except ye be converted, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven"; and again, "Ye must be born again". Should he save men in their sins he would be neither Lord nor Jesus. He is called Jesus because "he shall save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21).

“Awake,” says Alleine, “truly it is not more certain that you are now out of hell than that you shall speedily be in it, except ye repent and be converted ... I think I see the Lord Jesus laying his merciful hands of holy violence upon you: I think he acts like the angels to Lot ... ‘Escape for thy life!’”

“I have delivered my soul,” says Alleine, “but will none of you rise and follow me? Have I been charming the deaf adder? Do not fall into hell with your eyes open ... Am I speaking”, he says, “to rocks or to men? Show that you are men, let reason prevail.” This is strong pleading with people to turn to the Lord. There is great urgency in his words to act *now!*

THE CONDITION OF THE UNCONVERTED

Alleine then goes on to describe the marks of the unconverted. The unconverted must be undeceived for they think themselves secure and safe. Why is this? They have a confident persuasion that their hearts are good while all the time they are unsound. Like those in Laodicea described in the Book of Revelation (3:17), who said, “I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing”; or as the Book of Proverbs states: “There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet is not washed from their filthiness” (Proverbs 30:12).

For example, Paul before his conversion, when he was Saul, thought himself perfect according to the law: “touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless” (Philippians 3:6). There are open sinners, and there are secret sinners. “By this time,” says Alleine, “I hear you crying, ‘Who then shall be saved?’ The answer is ‘None, except by sound conversion.’”

Now in this matter of conversion the tendency is to look at the character change of the individual, and to regard that as the ground of assurance of being saved. Is that right? No, it is not. Our ground of

assurance lies not in anything in ourselves, but in Christ, and in Christ alone. Not in any inner change in ourselves which, of course, must accompany salvation, but in Christ alone, and his perfect righteousness, which is counted or imputed to those who believe in Him. For Christ “is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption” (1 Corinthians 1:30).

We come now to Alleine’s account of the miseries of the unconverted. The great difficulty of describing to the sinner his condition lies in the fact that he is blind and deaf, spiritually speaking. He is destitute of any spiritual sense and motion. He is, as the apostle Paul says, “past feeling” (Ephesians 4:19). So that, though the mountainous weight of sins rests upon him, he goes up and down as if nothing troubled him. God alone is able to make such live. But before I come to that, says Alleine, I must describe *that state of misery* to the sinner, for that is what it is, even if he does not realize it and feel it.

ALIENATION FROM GOD

1st The infinite God is against you. You are without God. You have nowhere to flee for help. What will you do when all fails you, and you have none to go to for help? God will say, “I never knew you”. But not only are you without God, but God is He who is against you. If only God were neutral, but he is not. “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Hebrews 10:31).

If God is against you, who shall be for you? Who shall deliver you out of his hands? Shall money? Shall people with power and influence? This should go like a dagger into your heart, that God is against you. It means all his attributes are against you. *His justice:* Satan would persuade you that God is an indulgent Father, who will overlook your sins. But God is exact, and his justice is more terrible to the sinner than the judge to the robber, or the gibbet to the murderer. *His holiness* is such that he cannot delight in the sinner out of Christ,

who does not believe in Christ. And God cannot simply lay aside his holiness. *The power of God is against you.* You are unable to contend with God your Maker. *His anger is against you.* Better to have all the world in arms against you than God: “Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker!” (Isaiah 45:9) *The wisdom of God is set for your ruin.* All his counsels contrive together for your destruction. *The truth of God is sworn against you.* Unless God is false to his Word you must die. God cannot deny himself. As the immutable faithfulness of God to his promise gives hope to believers, so it gives to unbelievers cause for consternation and confusion.

ALIENATION FROM CREATION

2ndly The whole creation is against you. Paul says in Romans 8, “The whole creation groans and travails” under the burden of man’s sin and disobedience. If God were to open the mouths of his dumb creatures they would, as Balaam’s ass did, testify against the wickedness of men. The land would groan, the air, the houses. It is man’s sin which has brought a curse upon nature. [The ‘green movement’ today has picked up something of this, but does not properly understand the problem. Man’s sense of guilt, with regard to the spoliation of nature, arises from the fundamental fact that he is a sinner – a rebel against God. Modern man knows that there is something wrong, but his secularism prevents him from understanding the real nature of the problem.]

“It should be a terror to the unconverted soul,” says Alleine, “that he is a burden upon creation.” When a man is converted God makes a covenant of peace for him with nature, of which we read in Job and Hosea: “And in that day will I make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field, and with the fowls of heaven, and with the creeping things of the ground” (Hosea 2:18). And, again, in Job we read, “At destruction and famine thou shalt laugh: neither shalt thou be afraid of the beasts of the earth. For thou shalt be in league with the stones of the

field: and the beasts of the field shall be at peace with thee” (Job 5:22-23).

UNDER THE SWAY OF THE DEVIL

3rdly Satan has full power over you. Satan is “the ruler of the darkness of this world”, i.e. over ignorant sinners. Men do not intend to serve Satan, but when they indulge their appetites, and further their selfish ends they are obeying him. He leads them captive at will.

4thly Your guilt is like a mountain upon you. While you are unconverted your guilt lies on you, and your sins will not die with you, as a prisoner’s debts will. (Here Alleine launches into a description of eternal punishment, which people are generally unacquainted with today. Few, if any, preachers deal now with this matter in the way he did then.) “[God]”, says Alleine, “shall make your conscience the tunnel by which he will be pouring his burning wrath into your soul forever.” Your raging lusts miserably enslave you. You are toiling to bring together the faggots and fuel for your own burning. Immortality shall be your misery. “O sinner, stop and wonder that you are standing on the very brink of destruction. Divine wrath is a fierce, everlasting, unquenchable fire, and this must be your portion unless you consider your ways, and speedily turn to the Lord by a sound conversion.”

THE LAW AND THE GOSPEL CONDEMN

5thly The Law of God discharges all its threats and curses at you. It demands satisfaction to the utmost.

6thly The Gospel denounces a much more severe condemnation than the Law. “He that believeth not shall be damned.” “Except ye repent ye shall all perish.” Is this true? Better open your eyes now. Sin has deprived you of your reason to look after yourself. You are a rational soul, and yet so brutified as to forget that you are immortal and to think

yourself to be “as the beasts that perish”. Could ever a word written four hundred years ago be more relevant and meaningful to our present age and generation? Undoubtedly Darwinism, that great deceiver and enemy of truth, has done much to condition men and women to think of themselves as mere animals and to brutify them.

But Alleine goes on: “O man, who has bewitched you that in the matters of this present life you shall be wise enough to forecast your business, foresee your danger, and prevent your ruin, but in the matters of everlasting consequence shall be slight and careless, as if they little concerned you?” Indeed, is this not a most alarming paradox to contemplate?

The truth of the matter is, that until men are convicted of sin, they will not come to Christ. “Meditate”, says Alleine, “upon the aggravations of your sins, as they are the grand enemies of the God of your life, and of the life of your soul.” He describes the terrible enormities of sin and exclaims: “Oh the work that sin has done in the world! This is the enemy that brought in death, that robbed and enslaved man, that turned the world upside down ... that thirsted for the blood of the Son of God ... This is the deadly poison, so powerful of operation that one drop of it, shed on the root of mankind has corrupted, spoiled, poisoned, and ruined the whole race.”

THE ROOT OF ALL SINS

The sin of the heart is the root of all other sins, and the heart is never soundly broken until it is thoroughly convinced of its original and deep-rooted depravity. “You must part with your sins or with your soul”: “Spare one sin and God will not spare you.” There is a great deal here about what *we* must do, and some might have the impression that we can have no claim upon Christ until we have thoroughly reformed our lives – then we may claim Christ as Saviour. But that is not what Alleine is saying. On the contrary, what he is saying is, “You are a lost

man if you trust in anything or anyone other than the Lord Jesus Christ. While men trust in themselves they try to establish their own righteousness. But that will never do. God the Son must be taken for your righteousness.” “I despair of ever being pardoned by my own duties and graces, and lean only on thy all-sufficient sacrifice and intercessions for pardon, life, and acceptance before God,” declares Alleine.

CONVERSION

In a sound conversion there is an unreserved yielding to the Saviour Jesus Christ:

All your powers and faculties and whole interest [are] to be his. The understanding [or mind] lays aside its corrupt reasonings. The judgment says, ‘Lord, thou art worthy of all acceptation’. The will resigns itself, no longer wavering: The memory gives itself up to Christ – ‘out with the trash’; the conscience comes in, ‘Lord, I will ever side with thee.’ The affections also submit; fear bows the knee; grief likewise declares, ‘I will mourn when thou art offended.’ Anger also comes in for Christ. Hatred will side with Christ: ‘I will be mortal enemy to the enemies of Christ.’ Thus will all your powers yield to Christ.

You must take all or none of the commandments of God. They are spiritual and reach to the thoughts and intents of the heart. Do not rest in general commands, but in the particular commands of Christ. Search your heart. Set aside time to be spent in secret before the Lord. Alleine gives an example of soul searching prayer, and suggests that such words be used as the following, which is a small excerpt from a much longer prayer:

O Blessed Jesus, I come to thee hungry and thirsty, poor and wretched, miserable, blind, and a most loathsome, polluted wretch,

a guilty condemned malefactor, unworthy to wash the feet of the servants of my Lord, much more to be married to the King of Glory. But such is Thine unparalleled love, I do here with all my power accept Thee and do take Thee for my Head and Husband, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, for all times and conditions, love, honour and obey Thee before all others, and this to the death. I embrace thee and all thy offices. I renounce my own worthiness, and do here avow thee to be the Lord my Righteousness. I renounce my own wisdom, and do here take thee for my only Guide. I renounce my own will, and take thy will for my law.

The language is, of course, of another period, and the prayer is based upon the timeless language of the Marriage Service, but it is expressive of the depth of devotion that was felt by the Puritans, and of the nature of the solemn covenant as they conceived it to be between God and the believer.

A RESERVATION

However, there were some dangers in this covenantal notion as developed by the Puritans. They were indeed good men but were not right about everything. This covenant was intended to be written down and kept as a document, signed by the believer, and is much longer than the short extract I have given. The danger, as I see it, is that it can, unless carefully guarded against, give rise to a legalistic understanding of the relationship between Christ and the believer, namely, that the covenantal document is something binding and necessary to be fulfilled on the part of the believer, and necessary to salvation. Thus, this personal covenant can so easily take the place, centre-stage, and obscure the covenant that was made between God and Christ, in which Christ acted in the place of all those who are chosen by God in Him. Christ himself has fulfilled the covenant, and there is nothing more required of the believer than to rest in that covenant and the finished, completed

work of Christ. Faith is a *recumbency*, a leaning upon, and resting in, Christ's finished work of redemption.

I mention this here as a corrective to the notion of a *personal, written covenant* between God and the believer developed by some Puritans. I believe that is why some later Puritan writing tends to manifest a legalistic trait. The Puritans were great men, and on the whole right about many things, but like all men they had their failings, and we are not to follow them blindly in all things.

Another thing that seems to have been misguided on their part is the assertion that in times of doubt and temptation the believer can have recourse to this document for assurance. But this cannot be right. In such times the believer must have recourse to the Saviour not to a document. Such a view again tends to be impersonal and legalistic. Our assurance must spring from our view of the Saviour, and of the perfect and finished work which he has done for our redemption. When the Lord bade Peter to walk to him on the water, and Peter began to sink, he looked to the Lord Jesus and called out to him to save him, and that must be the paradigm for the believer also to follow.

MOTIVATION TO CONVERSION

Now Alleine concludes with some motives to conversion. If one thing is absent today it is this: there is no motivation to conversion. We are preaching to dead men who neither hear, nor see, nor understand, nor feel anything at all of a spiritual nature to impel them to repent and be saved. But God can make the deaf to hear, the blind to see, the dead to live. Here, then, are some of the motives to conversion that Alleine sets out.

1. *The God who made you invites you.* Think of the boundless compassion and kindness of God in doing this. "Turn unto the Lord

your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil” (Joel 2:13). If there were no hope of mercy it might be understandable that men should not repent. But not when we consider the mercy and pity of God. “The Lord has laid aside his terror,” says Alleine, “and created a throne of grace ... He holds forth his golden sceptre; touch and live.”

2. *The doors of heaven are open to you; a kingdom of happiness, righteousness, and glory.* Here you will live and reign for ever. Will you not take God at his Word? Will you not let go of the world, and lay hold upon eternal life?

3. *God will give you indescribable privileges in this life.* Though the fullness of blessedness (happiness) is reserved until hereafter, yet God has much to give you here and now. He will deliver you from this present evil world. Prosperity shall not destroy you, and adversity will not separate you from Him. “He will sanctify to you your deepest distress.” He will be a Friend and Father to you. In a word, He will be your God. What can you expect that God do for you, and be to you? That He will be, and that He will do. “His door is open, his store is open, at all times to you.”

4. *The terms of mercy are brought as low as possible to you.* God has stooped so low to sinners as with honour he can. God does not impose anything unreasonable or impossible upon you as a condition of life. The first covenant required two things, both of which are impossible for sinners: (i) that we should fully satisfy the demands of justice for our sins; (ii) that we should keep the Law of God in its entirety. But because of our sins and our sinful natures both are impossible. But see God’s gracious provision for both. He accepts the Lord Jesus Christ as our substitute and as surety for both. For He “is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.”

5. *God offers all needed grace to enable you.* God says, “I have stretched out mine hand, and no man regarded” (Proverbs 1:24). Christ offers help to you. He reaches out his hand to you: “Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in” (Revelation 3:20). It does not matter if you are poor, blind and naked; God bids you come, and will provide all that you need to enrich you, open your eyes, and cover your nakedness. Though you yourselves can do nothing to save yourselves, God can do all that is necessary to save you, and has already done it through his Son Jesus Christ. Accept his offer, and let him do for you, and in you, what you cannot do for yourselves.

CONCLUSION

We come, then, to the end of Joseph Alleine’s life and work. We owe him and others like him much, for it was the faithful witness of the Puritans which was “the mainstay of Protestantism in England during the seventeenth century. They were its constant and fearless exponents, and the indomitable witness to its great principles, and these in particular: that God’s free grace mediated by the soul’s faith in Christ is the essential root of human salvation; that God’s will, revealed in His written Word, and interpreted by his Holy Spirit, is the supreme law for human conduct, both in the sphere of the church and the world; that therefore the conscience must be free from merely human dictation, and above all from the enslaving rule of the priest” (*Protestant Dictionary*, p. 562).

In the present state of declension in society and the moribund condition of the churches today, the recovery of such principles, and of the conviction that went with them in the experience of the Puritans, must be the only hope for the reformation of the Church in this country, and for the moral and spiritual recovery of the nation.