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THE LETTERS OF SAMUEL RUTHERFORD

(1600-1661)

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Rutherford's Life

Samuel Rutherford (1600-1661) was born near Nisbet, Scotland, where little is known of his early life. In 1627 he earned a M.A. from Edinburgh College, where he was appointed Professor of Humanity. He became pastor of the church in Anwoth in 1627—a rural parish, with the people scattered in farms over the hills. He had a true pastor's heart, and was ceaseless in his labors for his flock. We are told that men said of Rutherford, "He was always praying, always preaching, always visiting the sick, always catechising, always writing and studying." His first years in Anwoth, though, were touched with sadness. His wife was ill for thirteen months before she died in their new home. Two children also died during this period. Nevertheless God used this time of suffering to prepare Rutherford to be God's comforter of suffering people.

In 1636 Rutherford published a book defending the doctrines of grace (Calvinism) against Arminianism. This put him in conflict with the Church authorities, which were dominated by the English Episcopacy. He was called before the High Court, deprived of his ministerial office, and exiled to Aberdeen. This exile was a sore trial for the beloved pastor. He felt that being separated from his congregation was unbearable. However, because of his exile, we now have many of the letters he wrote to his flock, and so the evil of his banishment has been turned into a great blessing for the church worldwide.

In 1638 the struggles between Parliament and King in England, and Presbyterianism vs. Episcopacy in Scotland, culminated in momentous events for Rutherford. In the confusion of the times, he simply slipped out of Aberdeen and returned to his beloved Anwoth. But it was not for long. The Kirk (Church of Scotland) held a General Assembly that year, restoring full Presbyterianism to the land. In addition, they appointed Rutherford a Professor of Theology of St. Andrews, although he negotiated to be allowed to preach at least once a week.

The Westminster Assembly began their famous meetings in 1643, and Rutherford was one of the five Scottish commissioners invited to attend the proceedings. Although the Scots were not allowed to vote, they had an influence far exceeding their number. Rutherford is thought to have been a major influence on the Shorter Catechism. During this period in England, Rutherford wrote his best-known work, *Lex Rex*, or *The Law - the King*. This book argued for limited government, and limitations on the current idea of the Divine Right of Kings.

- 1600 Approximate date of birth in Nisbet Parish, Roxburghshire.
- 1617 Entered University of Edinburgh, graduated M.A., in 1621.
- 1623-1626 Regent of Humanity at Edinburgh University.
- 1626 Became seriously religious about this time.
- 1627 Appointed to Parish of Anwoth (Galloway), Scotland.
- 1630 Involved in law case before Court of High Commission, as he refused obedience to the Articles of Perth. Death of wife (flee Eupham Hamilton).
- 1636 Published Treatise against Arminianism
- 1636 Bishop of Galloway got Court of High Commission to forbid him to exercise his ministry. 'Exiled' to imprisonment in Aberdeen from August, 1636. (This inaugurates the letter-writing period of his life.)
- 1638 The Scottish nation, in revolt against the errors of the Church of England under William Laud, signed the National Covenant. Rutherford returned to Anwoth.
- 1638 The Glasgow Assembly appointed him Professor of Divinity at St Mary's College, St Andrews. He reluctantly accepted. Attended several Covenanting Assemblies. Married Jean M'Math.
- 1642 (Civil war broke out in England between King Charles I and the forces of Parliament under Oliver Cromwell.)
- 1643-1647 An active member of the Westminster Assembly of Divines (November, 1643-November, 1647). Resident in London.
- 1644 Published *Lex Rex* (a political treatise) and *Due Right of Presbyteries*.
- 1645-1647 Published *Trial and Triumph of Faith, Divine Right of Church Government*, and *Christ dying and Drawing Sinners to Himself*.
- 1648 Resumed duties at St Andrews. Became Principal of St Mary's College. Published several minor works.
- 1649 (Parliament was victorious in England to end for a time the persecution of dissenters and non-conformists emanating from the Church of England.)
- 1651 Appointed Rector of University of St Andrews. Published *De Divina Providentia*.
- 1650-1661 Active in Scottish national affairs.
- 1655 Published *The Covenant of Life Opened*.
- 1659 Published *Influences of the Life of Grace*.
- 1660 (After Restoration of Charles II). Deprived of all offices and summoned to appear before Parliament on a charge of treason. Too ill to make the journey.
- 1661 Death in March.
- 1664 First edition of *Letters* published.
- 1668 (His MS. *Examen Arminianismi* published in Holland.)
(His widow and daughter Agnes survived him: all the children of his first marriage and six of the second predeceased him.)

To Lady Kenmure¹

from Anwoth, 26 June 1630

God's inexplicable dealings with His people well-ordered

I perceive your case in this world savoureth of worship and communion with the Son of God in His sufferings. You cannot, you must not have a more pleasant or more easy condition here than He had, who 'through afflictions was made perfect' (Heb 2:10). We may indeed think: cannot God bring us to heaven with ease and prosperity? Who doubteth but He can? But His infinite wisdom thinketh and decreeth the contrary; and though we cannot see a reason for it, yet He hath a most just reason. We never with our eyes saw our own soul, yet we have a soul; we see many rivers, but we know not their first spring and original fountain, yet they have a beginning. Madam, when you are come to the other side of the water, and have set down your foot on the shore of glorious eternity, and look back again to the waters and to your wearisome journey, and shall see in that clear glass of endless glory nearer to the bottom of God's wisdom, you shall then be forced to say, 'If God had done otherwise with me than He hath done, I had never come to the enjoying of this crown of glory.' It is your part now to believe, and suffer, and hope, and wait on: for I protest in the presence of that all-discerning eye who knoweth what I write and what I think that I would not want² the sweet experience of the consolations of God for all the bitterness of affliction; nay, whether God come to His children with a rod or a crown, if He come Himself with it, it is well. Welcome, welcome Jesus, what way so ever thou come, if we can get a sight of thee. And sure I am, it is better to be sick, providing Christ come to the bed-side, and draw aside the curtains, and say 'Courage, I am thy salvation,' than to enjoy health, being lusty and strong, and never to be visited of God.

Lack of ordinances

Worthy and dear lady, in the strength of Christ, fight and overcome. You are now alone, but you may have, for the seeking, three always in your company: the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. I trust they are near you. You are now deprived of the comfort of a lively ministry; so were Israel in their captivity; yet hear God's promise to them: 'Therefore say, Thus saith the Lord God, although I have cast them far off among the heathen, and although I have scattered them among the countries, yet will I be to them as a little sanctuary in the countries where they shall come' (Eze 11:16). Behold a sanctuary! for a sanctuary, God Himself, in the place and room of the temple of Jerusalem: I trust in God, that carrying this temple about with you, you shall see Jehovah's beauty in His house.

To John Kennedy³

from Anwoth, 2 February 1632

Deliverance from shipwreck and death

I salute you with grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ. I heard with grief of your great danger of perishing by the sea, but of your merciful deliverance with joy. Sure I am, brother, Satan will leave no stone unrolled, as the proverb is, to roll you off your Rock, or at least to shake and unsettle you: for at the same time, the mouths of wicked men were opened in hard speeches against you by land, and the prince of the power of the air was angry with you by sea. See then how much you are obliged to that malicious murderer, who would beat you with two rods at one time. But, blessed be God, his [Satan's] arm is short: if the sea and winds would have obeyed him, you had never come to land. Thank your God, who saith, 'I have the keys of hell and of death' (Rev 1:18). 'I kill and make alive' (Deu 32:39). 'The Lord bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up' (1Sa 2:6). If Satan were jailer, and had the keys of death and of the grave, they should be stored with more prisoners. You were knocking at these black gates, and found the doors shut; and we do all welcome you back again.

Prepare for death

I trust you know it is not for nothing that you are sent to us again. The Lord knew you had forgotten something that was necessary for your journey; that your armour was not as yet thick enough against the stroke of death. Now, in the strength of Jesus, dispatch your business; that debt is not forgiven, but deferred; death hath not bidden you farewell, but hath only left you for a short season. End your journey ere the night come upon you; have all in readiness against the time that you must fall through that black and impetuous Jordan; and Jesus, Jesus, who knoweth both those depths and the rocks and all the coasts, be your Pilot. The last tide will not wait for you one moment; if you forget anything, when your sea is full, and your foot in that ship, there is no returning again to fetch it. What you do amiss in your life today, you may amend tomorrow; for as many suns as God maketh to arise upon you, you have as many new lives; but you can die but once; and if you mar that business, you cannot come back to mend that piece of work again; no man sinneth twice in dying ill; as we die but once, so we die but ill or well once. You see how the number of your months is written in God's book; and as one of the Lord's hirelings, you must work till the shadow of the evening come upon

¹ **Kenmure, Lady** – Jane Campbell, Viscountess of Kemnure: daughter of the 7th Earl of Argyle. In 1628 she married John Gordon of Lochinvar. His untimely death occurred in 1634. She married again in 1640, but a second widowhood shortly commenced. She lived into the 1670s with what appears to have been an exemplary Christian life.

² **want** – lack.

³ **Kennedy, John** – Bailie of Ayr; an eminent Christian, prominent in public affairs during the 1640s.

you, and you shall run out your glass even to the last grain of sand. Fulfill your course with joy; for we take nothing to the grave with us, but a good or evil conscience. And although the sky clears after this storm, yet clouds will engender another.

Use of trials

You contracted with Christ, I hope, when first you began to follow Him, that you would bear His cross. Fulfill your part of the contract with patience, and break not to Jesus Christ. Be honest, brother, in your bargaining with Him; for who knoweth better how to bring up children than our God? For (to lay aside His knowledge, which there is no searching out) He hath been practiced in bringing up His heirs these five thousand years, and His children are all well brought up, and many of them are honest men now at home, up in their own house in heaven, and are entered heirs to their Father's inheritance.

Now, the form of his bringing up was by chastisements, scourging, correcting, nurturing. See if He maketh exception of any of His children (Rev 3:19; Heb 12:7-8). No! His eldest Son and His Heir, Jesus, is not accepted (Heb 2:10). Suffer we must; ere we were born, God decreed it; and it is easier to complain of His decree than to change it. It is true, terrors of conscience cast us down; and yet without terrors of conscience we cannot be raised up again. Fears and doubtings shake us; and yet without fear and doubtings we should soon sleep, and lose our hold of Christ. Tribulation and temptations will almost loose us at the root; and yet without tribulations and temptations we can now no more grow than herbs or corn without rain. Sin and Satan and the world will say, and cry in our ear that we have a hard reckoning to make in judgment; and yet none of these three, except they lie, dare say in our face that our sin can change the tenor of the new covenant.

Forward then, dear brother, and lose not your grips. Hold fast the truth.

To Robert Cunningham⁴

*from Irvine, being on my journey to "Christ's Palace"
in Aberdeen, 4 August 1636*

Consolation to a brother in tribulation

Grace, mercy and peace be to you. Upon acquaintance in Christ, I thought good to take the opportunity of writing to you. Seeing it hath seemed good to the Lord of the harvest to take the hooks out of our hands for a time, and to lay upon us a more honourable service, even to suffer for His name, it were good to comfort one another in writing. I have had a desire to see you in the face; yet now being the prisoner of Christ, it is taken away. I am greatly comforted to hear of your soldier's stately spirit for your princely and royal Captain Jesus our Lord, and for the grace of God in the rest of our dear brethren with you.

His own deprivation of ministry

You have heard of my trouble, I suppose. It hath pleased our sweet Lord Jesus to let loose the malice of these interdicted lords in His house to deprive me of my ministry at Anwoth, and to confine me, eight score miles from thence, to Aberdeen; and also (which was not done to any before) to inhibit me to speak at all in Jesus' name within this kingdom, under the pain of rebellion. The cause that ripened their hatred was my book against the Arminians, whereof they accused me on those three days I appeared before them. But let our crowned King in Zion reign! By His grace the loss is theirs, the advantage is Christ's and truths.

Christ worth suffering for

Albeit this honest cross gained some ground on me, and my heaviness and my inward challenges of conscience for a time were sharp, yet now, for the encouragement of you all, I dare say it, and write it under my hand, 'Welcome, welcome, sweet, sweet cross of Christ.' I verily think the chains of my Lord Jesus are all overlaid with pure gold, and that His cross is perfumed, and that it smelleth of Christ, and that the victory shall be by the blood of the Lamb, and by the Word of His truth, and that Christ, lying on His back in his weak servants and oppressed truth, shall ride over His enemies' bellies, and shall 'strike through kings in the day of His wrath' (Psa 110:5). It is time we laugh when He laugheth; and seeing He is now pleased to sit with wrongs for a time, it becometh us to be silent until the Lord hath let the enemies enjoy their hungry, lean, and feckless⁵ paradise. Blessed are they who are content to take strokes with weeping Christ. Faith will trust the Lord, and is not hasty nor headstrong. Neither is faith so timorous as to flatter a temptation or to bud⁶ and bribe the cross. It is little up or little down⁷ that the Lamb and his followers can get no law-surety, nor truce with crosses; it must be so till we be up in our Father's house.

⁴ **Cunningham, Robert** – An eminent minister of the gospel at Holywood, N. Ireland. In 1636 he and others were driven out of Ireland by Prelatists. He settled St.Irvine (Ayrshire). He died in March, 1637, scarcely eight months after Rutherford wrote to him.

⁵ **feckless** - worthless

⁶ **bud** – to win over by means of a gift.

⁷ **little up or little down** – Of little significance.

My dear brother, let us help one another with our prayers. Our King shall mow down His enemies and shall come from Bozrah with His garments all dyed in blood. And for our consolation shall He appear, and call His wife Hephzibah⁸ and His land Beulah⁹ (Isa 62:4); for He will rejoice over us and marry us, and Scotland shall say, 'What have I to do any more with idols?' Only let us be faithful to Him that can ride through hell and death upon a windlestrae,¹⁰ and His horse never stumble. And let us make Him a bridge over a water, so that His high and holy name may be glorified in me. Strokes with the sweet Mediator's hand are very sweet. He was always sweet to my soul; but since I suffered for Him, His breath hath a sweeter smell than before. O that every hair of my head, and every member and every bone in my body, were a man to witness a fair confession for Him! I would think all too little for Him. When I look over beyond the line, and beyond death, to the laughing side of the world, I triumph and ride upon the high places of Jacob; howbeit otherwise I am a faint, dead-hearted, cowardly man, oft borne down, and hungry in waiting for the marriage supper of the Lamb. Nevertheless I think it the Lord's wise love that feeds us with hunger, and makes us fat with wants and desertsions.

To John Gordon¹¹

from Aberdeen 1637

Win Christ at all hazards

I beseech you, Sir, by the salvation of your precious soul and the mercies of God, to make good and sure work of your salvation, and try upon what ground-stone you have builded. Worthy and dear Sir, if you be upon sinking sand, a storm of death and a blast will lose Christ and you, and wash you close off the rock. O for the Lord's sake look narrowly to the work!

Read over your life, with the light of God's day-light and sun; for salvation is not casten down at every man's door. It is good to look to your compass, and all ye have need of, ere you take shipping; for no wind can blow you back again. Remember, when the race is ended, and the play either won or lost, and ye are in the utmost circle and border of time, and shall put your foot within the march¹² of eternity, and all your good things of this short night-dream shall seem to you like the ashes of a bleeze¹³ of thorns or straw, and your poor soul shall be crying, 'Lodging, lodging, for God's sake!', then shall your soul be more glad at one of your Lord's lovely and homely smiles than if you had the charters of three worlds for all eternity. Let pleasures and gain, will and desires of this world; be put over into God's hands, as arrested and fenced goods that ye cannot intromit¹⁴ with. Now, when ye are drinking the grounds¹⁵ of your cup, and ye are upon the utmost end of the last link of time, and old age like death's long shadow is casting a covering upon your days, it is no time to court this vain life, and to set love and heart upon it. It is near after-supper; seek rest and ease for your soul in God through Christ.

Believe me that I find it to be hard wrestling to play fair with Christ, and to keep good quarters with Him, and to love Him in integrity and life, and to keep a constant course of sound and solid daily communion with Christ. Temptations are daily breaking the thread of that course, and it is not easy to cast a knot again; and many knots make evil work. O how fair have many ships been plying before the wind that in an hour's space, have been lying in the sea-bottom! How many professors cast a golden lustre, as if they were pure gold, and yet are, under that skin and cover, but base and reprobate metal! And how many keep breath in their race many miles and yet come short of the prize and the garland! Dear Sir, my soul would mourn in secret for you, if I knew your case with God to be but false work. Love to have you anchored upon Christ maketh me fear your tottering and slips. False underwater, not seen in the ground of an enlightened conscience, is dangerous; so is often falling and sinning against light. Know this that those who never had sick nights or days in conscience for sin, cannot have but such a peace with God as will uncercoat¹⁶ and break the flesh again, and end in a sad war at death. O how fearfully are thousands beguiled with false hide, grown over old sins, as if the soul were cured and healed!

Dear Sir, I always saw nature mighty, lofty, heady, and strong in you; and that it was more for you to be mortified and dead to the world than for another common man. You will take a low ebb, and a deep cut, and a long lance, to go to the bottom of your wounds in saving humiliation, to make you a won prey for Christ. Be humbled; walk softly. Down, down, for God's sake, my dear and worthy brother, with your topsail. Stoop, stoop! it is a low entry to go in at heaven's gate. There is infinite justice in the party you have to deal with; it is his nature not to acquit the guilty and the sinner. The law of God will not want one farthing of the sin-

⁸ **Hephzibah** – "my delight is in her"

⁹ **Beulah** – "married"

¹⁰ **windlestrae** – a withered stalk of grass; metaphorically a mere trifle.

¹¹ **John Gordon of Cardoness (Elder)** – lived in Cardoness Castle in the parish of Anwoth. He was a descendant of Gordon of Lochinvar and prominent in local parochial affairs. Little is known of Cardoness the Younger except that he took part in the Civil War in England. We gather from the Letters that human nature was strong in both father and son.

¹² **march** – boundary, border.

¹³ **bleeze** – a sudden flaming up.

¹⁴ **intromit** – intermeddle with, handle.

¹⁵ **grounds** – dregs.

¹⁶ **uncercoat** – fester under the skin.

ner. God forgetteth not both the cautioner and the sinner; and every man must pay, either in His own person (O, Lord save you from this payment!) or in his cautioner,¹⁷ Christ.

Christ's beauty

It is violence to corrupt nature for a man to be holy, to lie down under Christ's feet, to quit will, pleasure, worldly love, earthly hope, and an itching of heart after this farded¹⁸ and over-gilded world, and to be content that Christ trample upon all. Come in, come in to Christ, and see what ye want, and find it in Him. He is the short cut (as we used to say) and the nearest way to an out-gate¹⁹ of all your burdens. I dare avouch that ye shall be dearly welcome to Him. My soul would be glad to take part of the joy ye should have in Him. I dare say that angels' pens, angels' tongues, nay, as many worlds of angels as there are drops of water in all the seas and fountains and rivers of the earth, cannot paint Him out to you. I think his sweetness, since I was a prisoner, hath swelled upon me to the greatness of two heavens. O for a soul as wide as the utmost circle of the highest heaven that containeth all, to contain His love!

And yet I could hold little of it. Oh world's wonder! Oh, if my soul might but lie within the smell of His love, suppose I could get no more but the smell of it! Oh, but it is long to that day when I shall have a free world of Christ's love! Oh what a sight to be up in heaven, in that fair orchard of the new paradise, and to see and smell and touch and kiss that fair field-flower, that ever-green Tree of Life! His bare shadow was enough for me. A sight of Him would be the earnest of heaven to me. *Fy, fy' upon us!* that we have love lying rusting beside us or, which is worse, wasting upon some loathsome objects, and that Christ should lie His lone.²⁰ *Woe, woe is me!* that sin hath made so many madmen, seeking the fool's paradise, fire under ice, and some good and desirable things, without and apart from Christ. Christ, Christ, nothing but Christ can cool our love's burning languor. O thirsty love! wilt thou set Christ, the well of life, to thy head, and drink thy fill? Drink and spare not; drink love and be drunken with Christ! Nay, alas! the distance betwixt us and Christ is a death. O, if we were clasped in other arms! We should never twin²¹ again, except heaven twinned and sundered us; and that cannot be.

A word to children

I desire your children to seek the Lord. Desire them from me, to be requested for Christ's sake to be blessed and happy, and to come and take Christ and all things with him. Let them beware of glassy and slippery youth, of foolish young notions, of worldly lusts, of deceivable gain, of wicked company, of cursing, lying, blaspheming, and foolish talking. Let them be filled with the Spirit, acquaint themselves with daily praying, and with the storehouse of wisdom and comfort, the good Word of God.

To Robert Blair²²

from Aberdeen, 7 February 1637

God's arrangements sometimes mysterious

It is no great wonder, my dear brother that you be in heaviness for a season, and that God's will (in crossing your design and desires to dwell amongst a people whose God is the Lord) should move you. I deny not but you have cause to inquire what His providence speaketh in this to you; but God's directing and commanding will, can by no good logic be concluded from events of providence. The Lord sent Paul on many errands for the spreading of His Gospel, where he found lions in his way. A promise was made to his people of the Holy Land, and yet many nations were in the way, fighting against and ready to kill them that had the promise, or to keep them from possessing that good land which the Lord their God had given them.

I know that you have most to do with submission of spirit; but I persuade myself that you have learned, in every condition wherein you are cast, therein to be content and to say, 'Good is the will of the Lord, let it be done.' I believe that the Lord tacketh His ship often to fetch the wind, and that He purposeth to bring mercy out of your sufferings and silence which (I know from mine own experience) is grievous to you. Seeing that He knoweth our willing mind to serve Him, our wages and stipend is running to the fore with our God, even as some sick soldiers get pay when they are bedfast and not able to go to the field with others. 'Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the Lord, and my God shall be my strength' (Isa 49:5). And we are to believe it shall be thus ere all the play be played. 'The violence done to me and to my flesh be upon Babylon' (and the great whore's lovers) 'shall the inhabitant of Zion say; and my blood be upon Chaldea, shall Jerusalem say' (Jer 51:35).

'And behold, I will make Jerusalem a cup of trembling to all the people round about, when they shall be in the siege both against Judah and against Jerusalem. And in that day will I make Jerusalem a burdensome stone for all people: they that burden

¹⁷ **cautioner** – surety, security.

¹⁸ **farded** – painted, coloured.

¹⁹ **outgate** – way of escape.

²⁰ **Is lie his lone** – should lie by himself, be neglected.

²¹ **twin** – separate.

²² **Blair, Robert** – Born at Irvine in 1593. He became Presbyterian minister at Bangor, N. Ireland in 1623. Anglican prelates opposed him and secured his dismissal in 1634. He embarked with other ministers for New England but storms compelled them to return. In 1638 he became minister at Ayr but soon moved to St. Andrews, where he and Rutherford became firm friends. He lived till 1666.

themselves with it shall be broken in pieces, though all the people of the earth be gathered together against it' (Zec 12:2-3). When they have eaten and swallowed us up, they shall be sick and vomit us out living men again; the devil's stomach cannot digest the Church of God. Suffering is the other half of our ministry, howbeit the hardest; for we would be content that our King Jesus should make an open proclamation, and cry down crosses, and cry up joy, gladness, ease, honour and peace. But it must not be so. Through many afflictions we must enter into the kingdom of God. Not only by them, but through them must we go, and wiles will not take us past the cross. It is folly to think to steal to heaven with a whole skin.

I sought a plea of my Lord and was tossed with challenges whether He loved me or not, and disputed over again all that He had done to me, because His word was a fire shut up in my bowels, and I was weary with forbearing, because I said I was cast out of the Lord's inheritance. But now I see that I was a fool. My Lord miskent²³ all and did bear with my foolish jealousies, and miskent that ever I wronged His love.

And now He has come again with mercy under His wings. I pass from my (O witless!) summons. He is God, I see, and I am man. Now it hath pleased Him to renew His love to my soul and to dawt²⁴ His poor prisoner. Therefore, dear brother, help me to praise and show the Lord's people with you what He hath done to my soul that they may pray and praise. And I charge you, in the name of Christ, not to omit it. For this cause I write to you, that my sufferings may glorify my royal King and edify His Church in Ireland. He knoweth how one of Christ's live coals hath burnt my soul with a desire to have my bonds to preach His glory, whose cross I now bear. God forgive you if you do it not. But I hope the Lord will move your heart to proclaim in my behalf the sweetness, excellency, and glory of my royal King. It is but our soft flesh that hath raised a slander on the Cross of Christ: I see now the white side of it; my Lord's chains are all over-gilded. O if Scotland and Ireland had part of my feast! And yet I get not my meat but with many strokes. There are none here to whom I can speak; I dwell in Kedar's tents. Refresh me with a letter from you. Few know what is betwixt Christ and me.

Dear brother, upon my salvation, this is His truth that we suffer for. Christ would not seal a blank charter to souls.

Courage, courage! joy, joy for evermore! O joy unspeakable and glorious! O for help to set my crowned King on high! O for love to him who is altogether lovely!—that love which many waters cannot quench, neither can the floods drown!

To Robert Gordon of Knockbreck²⁵

from Aberdeen, 9 February 1637

Things which affliction teaches

Temptations that I supposed to be stricken dead and laid upon their back rise again and revive upon me; yea, I see that, while I live, temptations will not die. The devil seemeth to brag and boast as much as if he had more court with Christ than I have and as if he had charmed and blasted my ministry that I shall do no more good in public. But his wind shaketh no corn²⁶. I will not believe that Christ would have made such a mint²⁷ to have me to Himself, and have taken so much pains upon me as He hath done, and then slip so easily from possession, and lose the glory of what He hath done. Nay, since I came to Aberdeen, I have been taken up to see the new land, the fair palace of the Lamb; and will Christ let me see heaven, to break my heart and never give it to me? I shall not think my Lord Jesus giveth a dumb earnest, or putteth His seals to blank paper, or intendeth to put me off with fair and false promises. I see that now which I never saw well before:

Faith Necessity

1. I see faith's necessity in a fair day is never known a right; but now I miss nothing so much as faith. Hunger in me runneth to fair and sweet promises; but when I come, I am like a hungry man that wanteth teeth, or a weak stomach having a sharp appetite that is filled with the very sight of meat, or like one stupefied with cold under the water that would fain come to land but cannot grip anything casten to Him. I can let Christ grip me, but I cannot grip Him. I love to be kissed and to sit on Christ's knee; but I cannot set my feet to the ground, for afflictions bring the cramp upon my faith. All that I can do is to hold out a lame faith to Christ like a beggar holding out a stump, instead of an arm or leg, and cry, 'Lord Jesus, work a miracle!' O what would I give to have hands and arms to grip strongly and fold handsomely about Christ's neck, and to have my claim made good with real possession! I think that my love to Christ hath feet in abundance, and runneth swiftly to be at Him, but it wanteth hands and fingers to apprehend Him. I think that I would give Christ every morning my blessing, to have as much faith as I have love and hunger; at least I miss faith more than love or hunger.

²³ **miskent** – overlooked.

²⁴ **dawt** – pet, show favour to.

²⁵ **Gordon, Robert (of Knockbreck)** – 'A single-hearted and painful Christian much employed at parliaments and public meetings after the year 1638. Knockbreck is in the parish of Borgne, which adjoins Anwoth and over looks Wigtown Bay.

²⁶ **shaketh no corn** – does no harm.

²⁷ **mint** – attempt.

Dead to the World

2. I see that mortification, and to be crucified to the world, is not so highly accounted of by us as it should be. O how heavenly a thing it is to be dead and dumb and deaf to this world's sweet music! I confess it hath pleased His Majesty to make me laugh at the children who are wooing this world for their match. I see men lying about the world, as nobles about a king's court, and I wonder what they are all doing there. As I am at this present I would scorn to court such a feckless²⁸ and petty princess, or buy this world's kindness with a bow of my knee. I scarce now either see or hear what it is that this world offereth me; I know that it is little which it can take from me and as little that it can give me. I recommend mortification to you above anything; for, alas! we but chase feathers flying in the air, and tire our own spirits for the froth and over-gilded clay of a dying life. One sight of what my Lord hath let me see within this short time is worth a world of worlds.

Spiritual Joy

3. I thought courage, in the time of trouble for Christ's sake, a thing that I might take up at my foot. I thought that the very remembrance of the honesty of the cause would be enough. But I was a fool in so thinking. I have much ado now to win to one smile. But I see that joy groweth up in heaven, and it is above our short arm. Christ will be steward and dispenser himself, and none else but he. Therefore, now, I count much of one dram weight of spiritual joy. One smile of Christ's face is now to me as a kingdom; and yet He is no niggard to me of comforts. Truly I have no cause to say that I am pinched with penury or that the consolations of Christ are dried up; for He hath poured down rivers upon a dry wilderness the like of me, to my admiration; and in my very swoonings He holdeth up my head and stayeth me with flagons of wine, and comforteth me with apples. My house and bed are strewn with kisses of love. Praise, praise with me. O if you and I betwixt us could lift up Christ upon His throne, howbeit all Scotland should cast Him down to the ground!

To John Gordon, (Younger)²⁹

from Aberdeen [undated]

Reasons for being earnest about the soul

I exhort you in the bowels of Christ, set to work for your soul. And let these bear weight with you, and ponder them seriously.

1. Weeping and gnashing of teeth in utter darkness, of heaven's joy.
2. Think what you would give for an hour, when you shall lie like dead, cold, blackened day.
3. There is sand in your glass yet, and your sun is not gone down.
4. Consider what joy and peace are in Christ's service.
5. Think what advantage it will be to have angels, the world, life and death, crosses, yea, and devils, all for you, as the King's serjeants and servants, to do your business.
6. To have mercy on your seed and a blessing on your house.
7. To have true honour and a name on earth that casteth a sweet smell.
8. How ye will rejoice when Christ layeth down your head under His chin, and betwixt His breasts, and drieth your face, and welcometh you to glory and happiness.
9. Imagine what pain and torture is a guilty conscience; what slavery to carry the devil's dishonest loads.
10. Sin's joys are but night-dreams, thoughts, vapours, imaginations, and shadows.
11. What dignity it is to be a son of God.
12. Dominion and mastery over temptations, over the world and sin.
13. That your enemies should be the tail and you the head.

For your children now at rest (I speak to you and your wife, and cause her to read this):

1. I am a witness for Barbara's glory in heaven.
2. For the rest, I write it under my hand, there are days coming on Scotland when barren wombs and dry breasts and childless parents shall be pronounced blessed. They are, then, in the lee of the harbour ere the storm come on.
3. They are not lost to you that are laid up in Christ's treasury in heaven.
4. At the resurrection you shall meet with them; thither they are sent before but not sent away.
5. Your Lord loveth you, who is homely to take and give, borrow and lend.
6. Let not children be your idols, for God will be jealous and take away the idol, because He is greedy of your love wholly.

²⁸ feckless – worthless

²⁹ John Gordon, (Younger) – Little is known of Cardoness the Younger except that he took part in the Civil War in England. We gather from the Letters that human nature was strong in both father and son.

To William Livingstone³⁰
from Aberdeen, 13 March 1637

Counsel to a youth

I rejoice to hear that Christ hath run away with your young love, and that you are, so early in the morning, matched with such a Lord; for a young man is often a dressed lodging for the devil to dwell in. Be humble and thankful for grace, and judge it not so much by weight, as by its truth. Christ will not cast water on your smoking coal; He never yet put out a dim candle that was lighted at the Sun of Righteousness.

I recommend to you prayer and watching over the sins of your youth; for I know that missive³¹ letters go between the devil and young blood. Satan hath a friend at court in the heart of youth; and there pride, luxury, lust, revenge, and forgetfulness of God are hired as his agents. Happy is your soul if Christ man the house, and take the keys Himself, and command all (as it suiteth Him full well to rule all wherever He is). Keep and entertain Christ well; cherish His grace; blow upon your own coal, and let Him tutor you.

Now, for myself, know that I am fully agreed with my Lord. Christ hath put the Father and me in each other's arms. Many a sweet bargain He made before, and He hath made this among the rest. I reign, as king, over my crosses; I will not flatter a temptation, nor give the devil a good word; I defy hell's iron gates. God hath passed over my quarrelling against him at my entry here, and now He feedeth and feasteth with me. Praise, praise with me, and let us exalt His name together.

To the Laird of Carleton³²
from Aberdeen, 14 March 1637

I have one above who forgetteth me not; nay, He groweth in His kindness. It hath pleased His holy Majesty to take me from the pulpit, and teach me many things in my exile and prison that were mysteries to me before; as,

Increasing sense of Christ's love

1. I see His bottomless and boundless love and kindness, and my jealousies and ravings, which, at my first entry into this furnace, were so foolish and bold as to say to Christ, who is Truth itself, in His face, 'Thou liest.' I had well-nigh lost my grips; I wondered if it was Christ or not; for the mist and smoke of my perturbed heart made me mistake my Master, Jesus. My faith was dim, and hope frozen and cold; and my love, which caused jealousies, had some warmth, and heat, and smoke, but no flame at all. Yet I was looking for some good of Christ's old claim to me, though I had forfeited all my rights. But the tempter was too much upon my counsels, and was still blowing the coal. Alas! I knew not well before what good skill my Intercessor and Advocate, Christ, bath in pleading, and in pardoning me such follies. Now He is returned to my soul 'with healing in His wings'; and I am nothing behind with Christ now, for He hath overpaid me, by His presence, the pain I was put to by on-waiting, and any little loss I sustained by my witnessing against the wrongs done to Him.

I think it was a pain to my Lord to hide Himself any longer. In a manner, He was challenging His own unkindness, and repented Him of His glooms. And now, what want I on earth that Christ can give to a poor prisoner? O how sweet and lovely is He now! Alas! that I can get none to help me to lift up my Lord Jesus upon His throne, above all the earth!

Resignation

2. I am now brought to some measure of submission, and I resolve to wait till I see what my Lord Jesus will do with me. I dare not now nickname, or speak one word against, the all-seeing and over-watching Providence of my Lord. I see Providence runneth not on broken wheels; but I, like a fool, carved a Providence for mine own ease, to die in my nest, and to sleep still, till my hair greys, and to lie on the sunny side of the mountain, in my ministry at Anwoth. But now I have nothing to say against a borrowed fireside, and another man's house, nor Kedar's tents, where I live, being removed far from my acquaintance, my lovers and my friends. I see God hath the world on His wheels, and casteth it as a potter doth a vessel on the wheel. I dare not say that there is any inordinate or irregular motion in Providence. The Lord hath done it. I will not go to law with Christ, for I should gain nothing of that.

Deadness to earth

3. I have learned some greater mortification, and not to mourn after or seek to suck the world's dry breasts. Nay, my Lord hath filled me with such dainties that I am like a full banqueter, who is not for common cheer. What have I to do to fall down upon my knees, and worship mankind's great idol, the world? I have a better God than any clay-god. Nay, at present, as I am now disposed, I care not much to give this world a discharge of my life—rent of it, for bread and water. I know it is not my home, nor my Father's

³⁰ Livingstone, William – Probably an Anwoth parishioner.

³¹ missive – a written message.

³² Carleton, Laird of (John Fuflarton) – Carleton was in the parish of Borgue, not far from Anwoth.

house; it is but His foot stool, His muir-ground³³. Let bastards take it; I hope never to think myself in its common for honour or riches. Nay now I say to laughter, 'Thou art madness.'

Temptations

4. I find it most true that the greatest temptation out of hell is to live without temptations. If my waters would stand, they would rot, Faith is the better for the free air and the sharp winter-storm in its face. Grace withereth without adversity. The devil is but God's master-fencer, to teach us to handle our weapons.

Infirmities

5. I never knew how weak I was till now, when He hideth himself, and when I have Him to seek seven times a day. I am a dry and withered branch, and a piece of a dead carcass, dry bones, and not able to step over a straw. The thoughts of my old sins are as the summons of death to me; and of late my brother's case hath stricken me to the heart. When my wounds are closing, a little ruffle causeth them to bleed afresh. So thin-skinned is my soul that I think it is like a tender man's skin that may touch nothing; you see how short I should shoot of the prize if His grace were not sufficient for me.

To John Fleming, Bailie of Leith³⁴

from Aberdeen, 15 March 1637

Directions for Christian conduct

I wish I could satisfy your desires, in drawing up and framing for you a Christian Directory. But the learned have done it before me, more judiciously than I can; especially Messrs. Rogers,³⁵ Greenham,³⁶ and Perkins.³⁷ Notwithstanding, I will show you what I would have been at myself although I came always short of my purpose.

1. That hours of the day, less or more time, for the Word and prayer, be given to God, not sparing the twelfth hour or mid-day, although it should then be a shorter time.
2. In the midst of worldly employments there should be some thoughts of sin, judgment, death, and eternity, with a word or two (at least) of ejaculatory prayer to God.
3. To beware of wandering of heart in private prayers.
4. Not to grudge, although you come from prayer without sense of joy. Down casting, sense of guiltiness and hunger are often best for us.
5. That the Lord's Day, from morning to night, be spent always either in private or public worship.
6. That words be observed, wandering and idle thoughts be avoided, sudden anger and desire of revenge, even of such as persecute the truth, beguarded against; for we often mix our zeal with our own wild-fire.
7. That known, discovered and revealed sins that are against the conscience, be avoided, as most dangerous preparatives to hardness of heart.
8. That in dealing with men, faith and truth in covenants and trafficking be regarded; that we deal with all men in sincerity; that conscience be made of idle and lying words; and that our carriage be such as that they who see it may speak honourably of our sweet Master and profession.

I have been much challenged,

1. For not referring all to God, as the last end: that I do not eat, drink, sleep, journey, speak and think for God.
2. That I have not benefited by good company; and that I left not some word of conviction, even upon natural and wicked men, as by reproving swearing in them; or because of being a silent witness to their loose carriage; and because I intended not in all companies to do good.
3. That the woes and calamities of the kirk, and particular professors, have not moved me.
4. That in reading the life of David, Paul, and the like, when it humbled me, I, coming so far short of their holiness, laboured not to imitate them, afar off at least, according to the measure of God's grace.
5. That unrepented sins of youth were not looked to and lamented for.
6. That sudden stirrings of pride, lust, revenge, love of honours, were not resisted and mourned for.
7. That my charity was cold.

³³ **muir-ground** – waste, heath-land.

³⁴ **Fleming, John: Bailie of Leith** – He was a timber merchant who befriended Rutherford in days of need and supplied him with necessities.

³⁵ **Daniel Rogers** (1573-1652) – of Haversham (Bucks) and Wethersfield (Essex) he suffered under the Laudian persecution of the Puritans.

³⁶ **Richard Greenham** (1535-94?) – of Cambridgeshire and London as early Puritan.

³⁷ **William Perkins** (1558-1602) of Cambridge – eminent among the Elizabethan Puritans.

8. That the experience I had of God's hearing me, in this and the other particular, being gathered, yet in a new trouble I had always (once at least) my faith to seek, as if I were to begin at A, B, C, again.
9. That I have not more boldly contradicted the enemies speaking against the truth, either in public church-meetings, or at tables, or ordinary conference.
10. That in great troubles, I have received false reports of Christ's love, and misbelieved Him in His chastening; whereas the event hath said that all was in mercy.
11. Nothing more moveth me, and burdeneth my soul, than that I could never, in my prosperity, so wrestle in prayer with God, nor be so dead to the world, so hungry and sick of love for Christ, so heavenly-minded, as when ten stone-weight of a heavy cross was upon me.
12. That the cross extorted vows of new obedience, which ease hath blown away, as chaff before the wind.
13. That practice was so short and narrow, and light so long and broad.
14. That death hath not been often meditated upon.
15. That I have not been careful of gaining others to Christ.
16. That my grace and gifts bring forth little or no thankfulness.

There are some things also, whereby I have been helped. As,

1. I have benefited by riding alone a long journey, in giving that time to prayer.
2. By abstinence, and giving days to God.
3. By praying for others; for, by making an errand to God for them, I have gotten something for myself.
4. I have been really confirmed, in many particulars, that God heareth prayers; and therefore I used to pray for anything, of how little importance so ever.
5. He enabled me to make no question that this way, which is mocked and nick-named, is the only way to heaven.

Sir, these and many more occurrences in my life, should be looked unto:

1. Thoughts of atheism should be watched over, as, 'If there be a God in heaven,' which will trouble and assault the best at some times.
2. Growth in grace should be cared for above all things; and falling from our first love mourned for.
3. Conscience made of praying for the enemies, who are blinded. I am still ashamed with Christ's kindness to such a sinner as I am. He hath left a fire in my heart that hell cannot cast water on, to quench or extinguish it.

To John Stuart³⁸
from Aberdeen, 1637

Commercial misfortunes

Grace, mercy and peace be unto you. I long to hear from you, being now removed from my flock, and the prisoner of Christ at Aberdeen. I would not have you to think it strange that your journey to New England hath gotten such a dash. It indeed hath made my heart heavy; yet I know it is no dumb Providence, but a speaking one, whereby our Lord speaketh His mind to you, though for the present ye do not well understand what He saith. However it be He who sitteth upon the floods hath shown you His marvelous loving kindness in the great depths. I know that your loss is great, and your hope is gone far against you. But I entreat you, Sir, expound aright our Lord's laying all hindrances in the way. I persuade myself that your heart aimeth at the footsteps of the flock, to feed beside the shepherds' tents, and to dwell beside Him whom your soul loveth; and that it is your desire to remain in the wilderness where the Woman is kept from the Dragon (Rev 12:14). And this being your desire, remember that a poor prisoner of Christ said it to you that the miscarried journey is with child to you of mercy and consolation, and shall bring forth a fair birth on which the Lord will attend. Wait on: 'He that believeth maketh not haste' (Isa 28:16).

I hope that you have been asking what the Lord meaneth, and what further may be His will, in reference to your return. My dear brother, let God make of you what He will, He will end all with consolation, and will make glory out of your sufferings; and would you wish better work? This water was in your way to heaven and written in your Lord's book: ye behoved to cross it, and therefore, kiss His wise and unerring Providence. Let not the censures of men, who see but the outside of things, and scarce well that, abate your courage and rejoicing in the Lord. Howbeit your faith seeth but the dark side of Providence, yet it hath a better side, and God will let you see it.

³⁸ **Stuart, John** – Provost of Ayr. 'A godly and zealous Christian of long standing and from his earliest years.' He used his worldly goods to relieve the oppressed. He was among those who endeavored unsuccessfully to immigrate to New England.

Learn to believe Christ better than His strokes; Himself and His promises better than His glooms. Dashes and disappointments are not canonical Scripture. Fighting for the Promised Land seemed to cry to God's promise, 'Thou liest.' If our Lord ride upon a straw, His horse shall neither stumble nor fall. 'For we know that all things work together for good to them that love God' [Rom 8.28]. Ergo, shipwreck, losses, etc. work together for the good of them that love God. Hence I infer that losses, disappointments, ill-tongues, loss of friends, houses or country, are God's workmen, set on work to work out good to you, out of everything that be-falleth you. Let not the Lord's dealing seem harsh, rough, or unfatherly because it is unpleasant. When the Lord's blessed will bloweth across your desires, it is best, in humility, to strike sail to Him, and to be willing to be led any way our Lord pleaseth. It is a point of denial of yourself, to be as if you had not a will, but had made a free disposition of it to God, and had sold it over to Him. And to make use of His will for your own is both true holiness, and your ease and peace. You know not what the Lord is working out of this, but you shall know it hereafter.

And what I write to you I write to your wife. I compassionate her case but entreat her not to fear nor faint. This journey is a part of her wilderness to heaven and the Promised Land, and there are fewer miles behind. It is nearer the dawning of the day to her than when she went out of Scotland. I should be glad to hear that you and she have comfort and courage in the Lord.

Blessedness of trials

Now for myself: I was three days before the High Commission, and accused of treason preached against our King. (A minister being witness went well-nigh to swear it.) God hath saved me from their malice.

Firstly, they have deprived me of my ministry; Secondly, Silenced me, that I exercise no part of the ministerial function within this kingdom, under the pain of rebellion; Thirdly, Confined my person within the town of Aberdeen, where I find the ministers working for my confinement in Caithness or Orkney, far from them, because some people here (willing to be edified) resort to me.

At my first entry I had heavy challenges within me, and a court fenced (but I hope not in Christ's name), wherein it was asserted that my Lord would have no more of my services and was tired of me. And like a fool, I summoned Christ also for unkindness. My soul fainted and I refused comfort, and said, 'What ailed Christ at me? for I desired to be faithful in his house.' Thus, in my rovings and mistakings, my Lord Jesus bestowed mercy on me, who am less than the least of all saints. I lay upon the dust, and bought a plea from Satan against Christ, and he was content to sell it. But at length Christ did show Himself friends with me, and in mercy pardoned and passed my part of it, and only complained that a court should be holden in His bounds without His allowance. Now I pass from my compearance;³⁹ and as if Christ had done the fault, He hath made the mends and returned to my soul. So that now his poor prisoner feedeth on the feasts of love.

My adversaries know not what a courtier I am now with my Royal King for whose crown I now suffer. It is but our soft and lazy flesh that bath raised an ill report of the cross of Christ. O sweet, sweet is His yoke! Christ's chains are of pure gold; sufferings for Him are perfumed. I would not give my weeping for the laughing of all the fourteen prelates; I would not exchange my sadness with the world's joy. O lovely, lovely Jesus, how sweet must thy kisses be when thy cross smelleth so sweetly! Oh, if all the three kingdoms had part of my love-feast and of the comfort of a dawted⁴⁰ prisoner!

Dear brother, I charge you to praise for me, and to seek help of our acquaintance there to help me to praise. Why should I smother Christ's honesty to me? My heart is taken up with this that my silence and sufferings may preach. I beseech you in the bowels of Christ to help me to praise. Remember my love to your wife, to Mr. Blair and Mr. Livingstone and Mr. Cunningham. Let me hear from you, for I am anxious what to do. If I saw a call for New England I would follow it. Grace be with you.

To John Clark⁴¹

from Aberdeen [undated]

Hold fast Christ without wavering, and contend for the faith, because Christ is not easily gotten nor kept. The lazy professor hath put heaven as it were at the very next door and thinketh to fly up to heaven in his bed, and in a night-dream.

But truly that is not so easy a thing as most men believe. Christ Himself did sweat ere He won this city; howbeit He was the freeborn heir. It is Christianity to be sincere, unfeigned honest, and upright-hearted before God; and to live and serve God, supposing there was not one man nor woman in all the world dwelling beside you, to eye you. Any little grace that you have, see that it be sound and true.

Marks of a Christian

You may put a difference betwixt you and reprobates, if you have these marks:

1. If ye prize Christ and his truth so as you will sell all and buy him, and suffer for it.
2. If the love of Christ keepeth you back from sinning, more than the law, or fear of hell.

³⁹ **compearance** – appearance in court.

⁴⁰ **dawted** – show favour to

⁴¹ **Clark, John** – probably a parishioner of Anwoth.

3. If you be humble and deny your own will, wit, credit, ease, honour, the world, and the vanity and glory of it.
4. Your profession must not be barren and void of good works.
5. You must in all things aim at God's honour. You must eat, drink, sleep, buy, sell, sit, stand, speak, pray, read, and hear the Word, with a heart-purpose that God may be honoured.
6. You must show yourself an enemy to sin, and reprove the works of darkness, such as drunkenness, swearing, and lying, albeit the company should hate you for so doing.
7. Keep in mind the truth of God that you heard me teach, and have nothing to do with the corruptions and new guises entering into the house of God.
8. Make conscience of your calling, in covenants, in buying and selling.
9. Acquaint yourself with daily praying; commit all your ways and actions to God by prayer, supplication, and thanksgiving. And count not much of being mocked, for Christ Jesus was mocked before you. Persuade yourself that this is the way of peace and comfort which I now suffer for. I dare go to death and into eternity with it, though men may possibly see another way. Remember me in your prayers, and the state of this oppressed church. Grace be with you.

To John Stuart⁴²

from Aberdeen, 1637

Self-submission

O that my will were silent, and as 'a child weaned from the breasts!' (Psa 131:2). But, alas! who hath a heart that will give Christ the last word in the contest, and will hear, and not speak again? O! contests and querulous replies, as 'I do well to be angry, even unto death' (Jon 4:9), smell of the stink of strong corruption. O, blessed soul that could sacrifice his will, and go to heaven, having lost his will and made resignation of it to Christ! I would seek no more but that Christ were absolute king over my will, and that my will were a sufferer in all crosses, without meeting Christ with such a word, 'Why is it thus?' I wish still that my love had but leave to stand beside beautiful Jesus, and to get the mercy of looking to Him, and burning for Him, suppose that possession of Him were suspended till my Lord fold together the leaves and two sides of the little shepherds' tents of clay.

Stability of salvation

He who said, 'Christ in you the hope of glory' (Col 1:27), (for our hope and the foundation and pillars of it is Christ-God) knew that sinners are anchor-fast and made stable in God; so that if God does not change, which is impossible, then my hope shall not fluctuate. O sweet stability of well-founded salvation! Who could win heaven, if this were not so? and who could be saved, if God were not God, and if He were not such a God as He is? O, God be thanked that our salvation is coasted and landed and shored upon Christ, who is Master of winds and storms! And what sea-winds can blow the coast or the land out of its place? Bulwarks are often cast down, but coasts are not removed; but suppose that were or might be, yet God cannot reel nor remove.

O that we should go from this strong and unmoveable Lord, and that we should loosen ourselves, if it were in our power, from Him! Alas, our green and young love hath not taken with Christ, being unacquainted with Him. He is such a wide and broad, deep and high, and surpassing sweetness, that our love is too little for Him; but O that our love, little as it is, could unite with his great and huge sweetness and transcendent Excellency! O thrice blessed, and eternally blessed are they who are out of themselves, that they may be in love united to Him!

To Earlston, (Younger)⁴³

from Aberdeen, 1637

Sufferings

Grace, mercy and peace be to you. I long to hear from you. I remain still a prisoner of hope, and do think it service to the Lord to wait on still with submission, till the Lord's morning sky break, and His summer day dawn. For I am persuaded, it is a piece of the chief errand of our life that God sent us for some years down to this earth, among devils and men, the fire-brands of the devil, and temptations, that we might suffer for a time here amongst our enemies; otherwise He might have made heaven to wait on us, at our coming out of the womb, and have carried us home to our country, without letting us set down our feet in this knotty and thorny life; but seeing a piece of suffering is carved to every one of us, less or more, as Infinite Wisdom hath thought good, our part

⁴² **Stuart, John** – see pg. 21.

⁴³ **Earlston, the Elder and Yonnger** (Alexander Gordon) – Descendants of the house of Gordon of Lochinvar, which was influenced by the teachings of John Wycliffe. The house of Earlston was located near Carsphairn in the inland parts of Kirkcudbright. Alexander Gordon was a staunch Presbyterian who appeared before the Court of High Commission in defence of his principles (1635). He was fined heavily. He later represented Galloway in the Scottish Parliament. His eldest son, who inherited the family estate in 1655, was killed in 1679 while assisting the Covenanting cause.

is to harden and habituate our soft and thin-skinned nature to endure fire and water, devils, lions, men, losses, wo⁴⁴ hearts as those that are looked upon by God, angels, men, and devils.

O what folly is it to sit down and weep upon a decree of God that is both dumb and deaf at our tears, and must stand still as unmovable as God who made it! For who can come behind our Lord, to alter or improve what He hath decreed and done? It were better to make windows in our prison, and to look out to God and our country, heaven, and to cry like fettered men who long for the king's free air, 'Lord, let thy kingdom come, O let the Bridegroom come! And, O day, O fair day, O everlasting summer day, dawn and shine out, break out from under the black sky, and shine!'

Hope of final deliverance

I am persuaded that if every day a little stone in the prison walls were broken, and thereby assurance given to the chained prisoner, lying under twenty stone of irons upon arms and legs, that at length his chain should wear in two pieces, and a hole should be made at length, as wide as he might come safely out to his long-desired liberty, he would in patience wait on, till time should hole the prison-wall and break his chains. The Lord's hopeful prisoners, under their trials, are in that case: years and months will take out, now one little stone, then another, of this house of clay, and at length time shall work out the breadth of a fair door, and send out the imprisoned soul to the free air in heaven; and time shall file off, by little and little, our iron-bolts which are now on legs and arms, and out-date and wear our troubles thread-bare, and then wear them to nothing: for what I suffered yesterday, I know, shall never come again to trouble me.

O that we could breathe out new hope, and new submission, every day, into Christ's lap! For certainly, a weight of glory well weighed, yea, increasing to a far more exceeding and eternal weight, shall recompense both weight and length of light and short-dated crosses. Our waters are but ebb, and come neither to our chin, nor to the stopping of our breath. I may see (if I would borrow eyes from Christ) dry land and that near; why then should we not laugh at adversity, and scorn our short-born and soon-dying temptations!

The believer in safekeeping

I rejoice in the hope of the glory to be revealed; for it is no uncertain glory we look for. Our hope is not hung upon such an untwisted thread as, 'I imagine so,' or 'It is likely'; but the cable, the strong tow of our fastened anchor, is the oath and promise of Him who is eternal verity. Our salvation is fastened with God's own hand, and with Christ's own strength, to the strong stoup⁴⁵ of God's unchangeable nature, 'I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed' (Mal 3:6). We may play, and dance, and leap upon our worthy and immoveable Rock; the ground is sure and good, and will abide the assaults of hell and the world.

O if our faith could ride it out, against the high and proud winds and waves, when our sea seemeth all to be on fire! O how oft do I let my grips go! I am put to swimming and half sinking. I find that the devil hath the advantage of the ground in this battle, for he fighteth on known ground, in our corrupt nature. Alas! that is a friend near of kin and blood to himself, and will not fail to fall foul upon us. And hence it is that He, who saveth to the uttermost, and leadeth many sons to glory, is still righting my salvation.

Dependence on Christ for perseverance

Twenty times a-day I ravel⁴⁶ my heaven, and then I must come with my ill-ravelled work to Christ, to cumber Him (as it were) to right it; and to seek again the right end of the thread, and to fold up again my eternal glory with His own hand, and to give a right cast of His holy and gracious hand to my marred and spoiled salvation. Certainly, it is a cumbersome thing to keep a foolish child from falls and broken brows, and weeping for this and that toy, and rash running and sickness, and bairns⁴⁷ diseases; ere he get through them all, he costeth no little care and fishery⁴⁸ to his keepers. And so is a believer a cumbersome piece of work and an ill-ravelled hesp⁴⁹ (as we used to say) to Christ. But God be thanked; for many spoiled salvations, and many ill-ravelled hesps hath Christ mended, since first He entered tutor to lost mankind. O what could we bairns do without Him! how soon should we mar all! But the less our weight be upon our own feeble legs, and the more on Christ, the strong Rock, the better for us. It is good for us that ever Christ took the cumber of us; it is our heaven to lay many weights and burdens upon Christ, and to make him all we have, root and top, beginning and ending of our salvation. Lord, hold us here.

⁴⁴ **wo** – Sorrowful.

⁴⁵ **stoup** – post, prop.

⁴⁶ **ravel** – twist the threads disorderly.

⁴⁷ **bairn** – child.

⁴⁸ **fishery** – trouble about a multitude of small things.

⁴⁹ **hesp** – hank of yam.

To William Gordon [of Kenmure]⁵⁰

from Aberdeen, 1637

Testimony to Christ worth

Grace, mercy and peace be to you. I have been long answering your letter, which came in good time to me. It is my aim and hearty desire that my furnace, which is of the Lord's kindling, may sparkle fire upon standers-by, to the warming of their hearts with God's love. The very dust that falleth from Christ's feet, His old ragged clothes, His knotty and black cross, are sweeter to me than kings' golden crowns, and their time-eaten pleasures. I should be a liar and false witness, if I would not give my Lord Jesus a fair testimonial with my whole soul. My word, I know, will not heighten Him; He needeth not such props under His feet to raise His glory high. But O that I could raise Him the height of heaven, and the breadth and length of ten heavens, in the estimation of all His young lovers! for we have all shapen Christ but too narrow and too short, and formed conceptions of His love, in our conceit, very unworthy of it. O that men were taken and caught with His beauty and fairness! they would give over playing with idols, in which there is not half room for the love of one soul to expatiate itself. And man's love is but heart-hungered in gnawing upon bare bones, and sucking at dry breasts.

It is well wared⁵¹ they want who will not come to Him who hath a world of love and goodness and bounty for all. We seek to thaw our frozen hearts at the cold smoke of the short-timed creature, and our souls gather neither heat nor life nor light; for these cannot give to us what they have not in themselves. O that we could thrust in through these thorns, and this throng of bastard lovers, and be ravished and sick of love for Christ! We should find some footing and some room, and sweet ease for our tottering and witless souls in our Lord. I wish it were in my power, after this day, to cry down all love but the love of Christ, and to cry down all gods but Christ, all saviours but Christ, all well beloveds but Christ, and all soul-suitors and love-beggars but Christ.

Marks of grace in conviction of sin and spiritual conflict

You complain that you want a mark of the sound work of grace and love in your soul. For answer, consider for your satisfaction (till God send more) 1 John 3:14. And as for your complaint of deadness and doubtings, Christ will, I hope, take your deadness and you together. They are bodies full of holes, running boils, and broken bones which need mending, that Christ the Physician taketh up; whole vessels are not for the Mediator's art. Publicans, sinners, whores, harlots, are ready market-wares for Christ. The only thing that will bring sinners within a cast of Christ's drawing arm is that which you write of—some feeling of death and sin. That bringeth forth complaints; and therefore, out of sense complain more, and be more acquaint[ed] with all the cramps, stitches, and soul-swoonings that trouble you. The more pain, and the more night-watching, and the more fevers, the better. A soul bleeding to death till Christ were sent for and cried for in all haste, to come and stem the blood, and close up the hole in the wound with His own hand and balm, were a very good disease, when many are dying of a whole heart. We have all too little of hell-pain and terrors that way. Nay, God send me such a hell as Christ hath promised to make a heaven of!

Alas! I am not come that far on the way, as to say in sad earnest, 'Lord Jesus, great and sovereign Physician, here is a pained patient for thee.' But the thing that we mistake is the want of victory. We hold that to be the mark of one that hath no grace. Nay, say I, the want of fighting were a mark of no grace; but I shall not say the want of victory is such a mark. If my fire and the devil's water make crackling like thunder in the air, I am the less feared; for where there is fire, it is Christ's part, which I lay and bind upon Him, to keep in the coal, and to pray the Father that my faith fail not, if I in the meantime be wrestling and doing and fighting and mourning. For prayer putteth not Paul's devil (the thorn in the flesh, and the messenger of Satan) to the door at first; but our Lord will have them to try every one, and let Paul fend for himself, by God's help, God keeping the stakes and moderating the play. And you do well not to doubt, if the ground-stone be sure, but to try if it be so; for there is great odds between doubting that we have grace, and trying if we have grace. The former may be sin, but the latter is good.

We are but loose in trying our free-holding of Christ, and making sure work of Christ. Holy fear is a searching of the camp that there be no enemy within our bosom to betray us, and a seeing that all be fast and sure. For I see many leaky vessels fair before the wind, and professors who take their conversion upon trust, and they go on securely, and see not the under-water, till a storm sink them. Each man had need twice a day, and oftener, to be riped,⁵² and searched with candles.

To John Henderson [of Rusco]⁵³

from Aberdeen [undated]

Practical hints

I earnestly desire your salvation. Know the Lord and seek Christ. You have a soul that cannot die. Seek for a lodging to your poor soul, for that house of clay will fall. Heaven or nothing! either Christ or nothing! Use prayer in your house and set your

⁵⁰ **Gordon, William** (of Kenmure) – Nothing is known of this person.

⁵¹ **warded** – deserved.

⁵² **riped** – examined thoroughly, ripped up.

⁵³ **Henderson, John** (of Rusco) – A parishioner who fanned the 'hoine-steading' of Rusco (Anwoth).

thoughts often upon death and judgment. It is dangerous to be loose in the matter of your salvation. Few are saved; men go to heaven in ones and twos, and the whole world lieth in sin. Love your enemies and stand by the truth which I have taught you in all things. Fear not men, but let God be your fear. Your time will not be long; make the seeking of Christ your daily task. Ye may, when ye are in the fields, speak to God. Seek a broken heart for sin, for without that there is no meeting with Christ. I speak this to your wife as well as to yourself. I desire your sister, in her fears and doubtings, to fasten her grips on Christ's love. I forbid her to doubt, for Christ loveth her and bath her name written in his book. Her salvation is fast coming. Christ her Lord is not slow in coming, nor slack in His promise.

To Alexander Colville [of Blair]⁵⁴

from Aberdeen, 23 June 1637

Regrets for being silenced in ministry

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you. I would desire to know how my lord took my letter I sent him, and how he is. I desire nothing but that he be fast and honest to my royal Master and King. I am well every way, all praise to Him, in whose books I must stand forever as His debtor. Only my silence paineth me. I had one joy out of heaven, next to Christ my Lord, and that was to preach Him to this faithless generation; and they have taken that from me. It was to me as the poor man's one eye, and they have put out that eye. I know that the violence done to me and his poor bereft bride is come up before the Lord; and, suppose I see not the other side of my cross, or what my Lord will bring out of it; yet I believe the vision shall not tarry, and that Christ is on His journey for my deliverance. He goeth not slowly, but passeth over ten mountains at one stride.

Longings for Christ

In the meantime, I am pained with His love, because I want real possession. When Christ cometh, He stayeth not long. But certainly the blowing of His breath upon a poor soul is heaven upon earth; and when the wind turneth into the north, and He goeth away, I die, till the wind change into the west, and he visit his prisoner. But He holdeth me not often at His door. I am richly repaid for suffering for Him. O if all Scotland were as I am, except my bonds! O what pain I have, because I cannot get Him praised by my sufferings! O that heaven within and without, and the earth, were paper, and all the rivers, fountains, and seas were ink, and I able to write all the paper within and without, full of His praises, and love, and excellency, to be read by man and angel! Nay, this is little; I owe my heaven to Christ, and do desire, although I should never enter in at the gates of the New Jerusalem, to send my love and my praises over the wall to Christ. Alas, that time and days lie betwixt Him and me, and adjourn our meeting! It is my part to cry, 'O when the night will be past and the day dawn that we shall see one another!'

To James Hamilton⁵⁵

from Aberdeen, 7 July 1637

Christ's over-burdened debtor

As for anything I do in my bonds, when now and then a word falleth from me, alas! it is very little. I am exceedingly grieved that any should conceive anything to be in such a broken and empty reed. Let no man impute it to me that the free and unbought wind (for I gave nothing for it) bloweth upon an empty reed. I am His over-burdened debtor. I cry, 'Down with me; down, down with all the excellency of the world; and up, up with Christ!' Long, long may that fair One, that holy One, be on high! My curse be upon them that love Him not. O how glad would I be if his glory would grow out and spring up out of my bonds and sufferings! Certainly, since I became His prisoner, He hath won the yolk and heart of my soul. Christ is even become a new Christ to me, and His love greener than it was. And now I strive no more with Him; His love shall carry it away. I lay down myself under His love. I desire to sing and to cry and to proclaim myself, even under the water, in His common,⁵⁶ and eternally indebted to His kindness. I will not offer to quit commons with Him (as we used to say), for that will not be. All, all for evermore to be Christ's! What further trials are before me I know not, but I know that Christ will have a saved soul of me, over on the other side of the water, on the yonder side of crosses, and beyond men's wrongs.

⁵⁴ **Colville, Alexander** – A Presbyterian Elder of Blair in the parish of Carnock, Fifeshire. He held high legal office and befriended Rutherford when he appeared before the Court of High Commission in 1630. He was a prominent member of the Scottish Presbyterian church for a lengthy period.

⁵⁵ **Hamilton, James** – Minister of the Gospel in Co. Down, N. Ireland. Under persecution he left for New England, but storms forced him to return. He became minister at Dumfries and later at Edinburgh; he was a man 'bold for truth.'

⁵⁶ **common** – indebted to, under obligation to.

To the Parishioners of Anwoth⁵⁷

from Aberdeen, 13 July 1637

Words to the backslider

I have heard, and my soul is grieved for it, that since my departure from you, many among you are turned back from the good old way, to the dog's vomit again. Let me speak to these men. It was not without God's special direction that the first sentence that ever my mouth uttered to you was that: 'And Jesus said, For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind' (Joh 9:3-9). Is it possible that my first meeting and yours may be when we shall both stand before the dreadful Judge of the world; and in the name and authority of the Son of God, my great King and Master, I write, by these presents, summonses to those men. I arrest their souls and bodies to the day of our compearance.⁵⁸ Their eternal damnation standeth subscribed and sealed in heaven by the handwriting of the great Judge of quick and dead; and I am ready to stand up as a preaching witness against such to their face on that day, and to say 'Amen' to their condemnation, except they repent. The vengeance of the Gospel is heavier than the vengeance of the Law. The Mediator's malediction and vengeance is twice vengeance, and that vengeance is the due portion of such men. And there I leave them as bond men, aye and until they repent and amend.

Ye were witnesses how the Lord's Day was spent while I was among you. O sacrilegious robber of God's day, what wilt thou answer the Almighty when He seeketh so many Sabbaths back again from thee? What will the curser, swearer, and blasphemer do when his tongue shall be roasted in that broad and burning lake of fire and brimstone? And what will the drunkard do when tongue, lungs, liver, bones, and all shall boil and shall fry in a torturing fire? He shall be far from his barrels of strong drink then; and there is not a cold well of water for him in hell. What shall be the case of the wretch, the covetous man, the oppressor, the deceiver, the earth-worm, who can never get his wombful of clay (Psa 17:14), when, in the day of Christ, gold and silver must lie burnt in ashes, and he must compear and answer his Judge, and quit his clayey and noughty⁵⁹ heaven!

Woe, woe, forevermore, be to the time-turning atheist, who hath one god and one religion for summer, and another god and another religion for winter, and the day of fanning, when Christ fanneth all that is in His barn-floor; who hath a conscience for every fair and market, and the soul of him runneth upon these oiled wheels: time, custom, the world, and command of men. Oh, if the careless atheist, and sleeping man, who edgeth by all with, 'God forgive our pastors if they lead us wrong, we must do as they command,' and layeth down his head upon time's bosom, and giveth his conscience to a deputy, and sleepeth so, till the smoke of hell-fire fly up in his throat, and cause him to start out of his doleful bed! O if such a man would awake! Many woes are for the over-gilded and gold-plastered hypocrite. A heavy doom is for the liar and white-tongued flatterer; and the flying book of God's fearful vengeance, twenty cubits long and ten cubits broad, that goeth out from the face of God, shall enter into the house, and in upon the soul of him that stealeth and sweareth falsely by God's name (Zec 5:2-3).

I denounce⁵⁹ eternal burning, hotter than Sodom's flames, upon the men that boil in filthy lusts of fornication, adultery, incest, and the like wickedness. No room, no, not a foot-breadth, for such vile dogs within the clean Jerusalem. Many of you put off all with this, 'God forgive us, we know no better.' I renew my old answer: the Judge is coming in flaming fire, with all his mighty angels to render vengeance to all those who know not God, and believe not (2Th 1:8). I have often told you that security will slay you. All men say they have faith: as many men and women now, as many saints in heaven. And all believe (say you), so that every foul dog is clean enough, and good enough, for the clean and new Jerusalem above. Every man hath conversion and the new birth; but it is not leal⁶¹ come. They had never a sick night for sin; conversion came to them in a night-dream. In a word, hell will be empty at the Day of Judgment, and heaven pang⁶² full! Alas! it is neither easy nor ordinary to believe and to be saved. Many must stand, in the end, at heaven's gates (Luk 13:25). When they go to take out their faith, they take out a fair nothing, or (as ye used to speak) a blaflume.⁶³ O lamentable disappointment! I pray you, I charge you in the name of Christ; make fast work of Christ and salvation.

Intense admiration for Christ

I wonder that men can bide off⁶⁴ Christ. I would esteem myself blessed if I could make an open proclamation, and gather all the world that are living upon the earth, Jew and Gentile, and all that shall be born till the blowing of the last trumpet, to flock round about Christ, and to stand looking, wondering, admiring, and adoring his beauty and sweetness. For His fire is hotter than any other fire, His love sweeter than common love, His beauty surpasseth all other beauty. When I am heavy and sad, one of His love-looks would do me meikle⁶⁵ worlds' good. O if you would fall in love with Him, how blessed were I! How glad would my soul be to help you to love Him! But amongst us all, we could not love Him enough. He is the Son of the Father's love, and God's delight. The Fa-

⁵⁷ **Anwoth parishioners** – Rutherford was their minister from 1627 until 1638.

⁵⁸ **compearance** – appearance in court

⁵⁹ **noughty** – worthless.

⁵⁹ **denounce** – to proclaim or pronounce, usually cursed, outlawed, or something bad.

⁶¹ **leal** – honest, genuine.

⁶² **pang** – cramped.

⁶³ **blaflume** – a sham, an air-bubble.

⁶⁴ **bide off** – abide (stay) away from.

⁶⁵ **meikle** – great, much.

ther's love lieth all upon Him. O if all mankind would fetch all their love and lay it upon Him! Invite Him, and take Him home to your houses in the exercise of prayer morning and evening, as I often desired you; especially now, let Him not want⁶⁶ lodging in your houses, nor lie in the fields when He is shut out of pulpits and kirks. If you will be content to take heaven by violence and the wind on your face for Christ and His cross, I am here one who hath some trial of Christ's cross, and I can say, that Christ was ever kind to me, but He over-cometh Himself (if I may speak so) in kindness while I suffer for Him. I give you my word for it, Christ's cross is not as evil as they call it; it is sweet, light, and comfortable. I would not want the visitations of love, and my Lord's delightful smiles and love-embracements under my sufferings for Him, for a mountain of gold, or for all the honours, court, and grandeur of velvet kirkmen. Christ hath the yolk and heart of my love. 'I am my Beloved's and my Well-beloved is mine.'

O that you were hand-fasted to Christ! O my dearly-beloved in the Lord, I would I could change my voice, and had a tongue tuned by the hands of my Lord, and had the art of speaking of Christ, that I might point out to you the worth and highness and greatness and excellency of that fairest and renowned Bridegroom! I beseech you by the mercies of the Lord, by the sighs, tears, and heart's-blood of our Lord Jesus, by the salvation of your poor and precious souls, set up the mountain that you and I may meet before the Lamb's throne amongst the congregation of the first-born. The Lord grant that that may be the trysting-place! that you and I may put up our hands together, and pluck and eat the apples off the tree of life, and that we may feast together and drink together of that pure river of the water of life that cometh out from the throne of God and of the Lamb!

O how little is your hand-breadth and span-length of days here! Your inch of time is less than when you and I parted. Eternity, eternity is coming, posting on with wings; then shall every man's blacks and whites be brought to light. O how low will your thoughts be of this fair-skinned but heart-rotten apple, the vain, vain, feckless world, when the worms shall make them houses in your eye-holes, and shall eat off the flesh from the balls of your cheeks, and shall make that body a number of dry bones! Think not that the common gate⁶⁷ of serving God, as neighbours and others do, will bring you to heaven. Few, few are saved. The devil's court is thick and many. He hath the greatest number of mankind for his vassals. I know this world is a forest of thorns in your way to heaven; but you must go through it. Acquaint yourselves with the Lord; hold fast Christ; hear His voice only. Bless His name; sanctify and keep holy His day; keep the new commandment, 'Love one another'; let the Holy Spirit dwell in your bodies; and be clean and holy.

Love not the world; lie not; love and follow truth. Learn to know God. Keep in mind what I taught you, for God will seek an account of it when I am far from you. Abstain from all evil and all appearance of evil. Follow good carefully, and seek peace and follow after it. Honour your king and pray for Him.

A loud call to all

I told you often while I was with you, and now I write it again: heavy, sad and sore is that stroke of the Lord's wrath that is coming upon Scotland. Woe, woe, woe to this harlot land! for they shall take the cup of God's wrath from His hands, and drink and spue and fall and not rise again. In, in, in with speed to your stronghold, you prisoners of hope, and hide you there till the anger of the Lord pass! Follow not the pastors of this land, for the sun is gone down upon them. As the Lord liveth, they lead you from Christ, and from the good old way. Yet the Lord will keep the holy city, and make this withered Kirk to bud again like a rose and a field blessed of the Lord.

To Hugh M'Kail⁶⁸

from Aberdeen, 5 September 1637

The Law

Ye know that men may take their sweet fill of the sour Law, in grace's ground, and betwixt the Mediator's breasts. And this is the sinner's safest way, for there is a bed for wearied sinners to rest them in, in the New Covenant, though no bed of Christ's making to sleep in. The Law shall never be my doomster,⁶⁹ by Christ's grace. If I get no more good of it (I shall find a sore enough doom in the Gospel to humble and to cast me down), it is, I grant, a good rough friend to follow a traitor to the bar, and to back him till he come to Christ. We may blame ourselves, who cause the Law to crave well-paid debt, to scare us away from Jesus, and dispute about a righteousness of our own, a world in the moon, a chimera,⁷⁰ and a night-dream that pride is father and mother to. There cannot be a more humble soul than a believer; it is no pride for a drowning man to catch hold of a rock.

The security of believers

I rejoice that the wheels of this confused world are rolled and cogged and driven according as our Lord willeth. Out of whatever airth⁷¹ the wind blow, it will blow us on our Lord. No wind can blow our sails overboard, because Christ's skill and the honour of

⁶⁶ want – lack

⁶⁷ gate – way, manner.

⁶⁸ M'Kail, Hugh – Minister of Irvine, Ayrshire.

⁶⁹ doomster – pronouncer of sentence.

⁷⁰ chimera – dream, illusion, or fancy.

⁷¹ airth – direction, quarter of the heavens.

His wisdom are empawnd⁷² and laid down at the stake for the sea-passengers that He shall put them safe off His hand on the shore, in His Father's known bounds, our native home ground. My dear brother, scaur⁷³ not at the cross of Christ. It is not seen yet what Christ will do for you when it cometh to the worst. He will keep His grace till you be at a strait, and then bring forth the decreed birth for your salvation (Zep 2:2). You are an arrow of His own making. Let Him shoot you against a wall of brass, your point shall keep whole.

To James Lindsay⁷⁴

from Aberdeen, 7 September 1637

Prayers of reprobates

Sanctification and mortification of our lusts are the hardest part of Christianity. It is in a manner as natural to us to leap when we see the New Jerusalem as to laugh when we are tickled. Joy is not under command, or at our nod, when Christ kisseth. But O! how many of us would have Christ divided into two halves that we might take the half of Him only! We take His office, Jesus and salvation, but 'Lord' is a cumbersome word; and to obey, and work out our own salvation, and to perfect holiness, is the cumbersome and stormy northside of Christ; and that we eschew and shift.

For your question, the access that reprobates have to Christ (which is none at all: for to the Father in Christ neither can they nor will they come, because Christ died not for them; and yet, by law, God and justice overtaketh them): I say, first, there are with you more worthy and learned than I am—Messrs. Dickson, Blair, and Hamilton—who can more fully satisfy you. But I shall speak in brief what I think of it in these assertions:

First assertion: All God's justice toward man and angels floweth from an act of the absolute, sovereign free-will of God, who is our Former and Potter, and we are but clay; for if he had forbidden to eat of the rest of the trees of the garden of Eden, and commanded Adam to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil that command no doubt had been as just as this, 'Eat of all the trees, but not at all of the tree of knowledge of good and evil.' The reason is, because His will is before his justice, by order of nature; and what is His will is his justice; and He willeth not things without Himself because they are just. God cannot, God needeth not hunt sanctity, holiness, or righteousness from things without Himself, and so not from the actions of men or angels; because His will is essentially holy and just, and the prime rule of holiness and justice, as the fire is naturally light, and inclineth upwards, and the earth heavy, and inclineth downward.

Second assertion: That God saith to reprobates, 'Believe in Christ (who hath not died for your salvation) and ye shall be saved,' is just and right because His eternal and essentially just will hath so enacted and decreed. Suppose natural reason speaks against it, this is the deep and special mystery of the gospel. God hath obliged, hard and fast, all the reprobates of the visible church to believe this promise, 'He that believeth shall be saved'; and yet, in God's decree and secret intention, there is no salvation at all decreed and intended to reprobates. And yet the obligation of God, being from his sovereign free-will, is most just, as is said in the first assertion.

Third assertion: The righteous Lord hath right over the reprobates and all reasonable creatures that violate His commandments. This is easy.

Fourth assertion: The faith that God seeketh of reprobates is, that they rely upon Christ, as despairing of their own righteousness, leaning wholly and withal humbly, as weary and laden, upon Christ, as on the resting-stone laid in Zion. But He seeketh not that, without being weary of their sin, they rely on Christ as mankind's Saviour; for to rely on Christ, and not to be weary of sin, is presumption, not faith. Faith is ever neighbour to a broken and contrite spirit; and it is impossible that faith can be where there is not a cast-down and contrite heart, in some measure, for sin. Now it is certain that God commandeth no man to presume.

Fifth assertion: Reprobates are not formally guilty of contempt of God, and misbelief, because they apply not Christ and the promises of the gospel to themselves in particular; for so they should be guilty because they believe not a lie, which God never obliged them to believe.

Sixth assertion: Justice hath a right to punish reprobates, because from pride of heart, confiding in their own righteousness, they rely not upon Christ as a Saviour of all them that come to Him. This God may justly oblige them unto, because in Adam they had perfect ability to do; and men are guilty because they love their own inability, and rest upon themselves, and refuse to deny their own righteousness, and to take themselves to Christ in whom there is righteousness for wearied sinners.

Seventh assertion: It is one thing to rely, lean, and rest upon Christ, in humility and weariness of spirit, denying our own righteousness, believing Him to be the only righteousness of wearied sinners; and it is another thing to believe that Christ died for me, John, Thomas, Anna, upon an intention and decree to save us by name. For

1. The former goeth first, the latter is always after in due order.
2. The first is faith, the second is a fruit of faith; and

⁷² **empawnd** – laid down as pledge.

⁷³ **scaur** – take fright.

⁷⁴ **Lindsay, James** – Unknown.

3. The first obligeth reprobates and all men in the visible kirk, the latter obligeth only the weary and laden, and so only the elect and effectually called of God.

Eighth assertion: It is a vain conclusion, 'I know not whether Christ died for me, John, Thomas, Anna, by name; and therefore I dare not rely on Him.' The reason is, because it is not faith to believe God's intention and decree of election at the first, ere you be wearied. Look first to your own intention and soul, and if you find sin a burden, and can and do rest under that burden upon Christ; if this be once, now come and believe in particular, or rather apply by sense and feeling (for in my judgment it is a fruit of belief, not belief) the goodwill, intention, and gracious purpose of God concerning your salvation. Hence, because there is malice in reprobates, and contempt of Christ, guilty they are, and justice hath law against them: and (which is the mystery) they cannot come up to Christ, because He died not for them; but their sin is that they love their inability to come to Christ; and he who loveth his chains deserveth chains.

To James Bautie⁷⁵
from Aberdeen, 1637

Spiritual difficulties resolved

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you. I received your letter, and render you thanks for the same; but I have not time to answer all the heads of it, as the bearer can inform you.

1. You do well to take yourself at the right stot,⁷⁶ when you wrong Christ by doubting and misbelief; for this is to nick-name Christ, and term Him a liar, which, being spoken to our Prince would be hanging or beheading. But Christ hangeth not always for treason. It is good that he may registrate⁷⁷ a believer's bond a hundred times, and more than seven times a day have law against us, and yet He spareth us, as a man doth his son that serveth him. No tender-hearted mother, who may have law to kill her sucking-child, would put in execution that law.

2. For your failings, even when you have a set tryst with Christ, and when you have a fair, seen advantage, by keeping your appointment with Him, and salvation cometh to the very passing of the seals, I would say two things.

(a) Concluded and sealed salvation may go through and be ended, suppose you write your name to the covenant with ink that can hardly be read. Neither think I any man's salvation ever passed the seals, but there was an odd trick or slip, less or more, upon the fool's part, who is enfeoffed⁷⁸ in heaven. In the most grave and serious work of our salvation, I think Christ had ever good cause to laugh at our silliness and to put on us His merits, that we might bear weight.

(b) It is a sweet law of the new covenant, and a privilege of the new burgh that citizens pay according to their means; for the new covenant saith not, 'So much obedience by ounce-weights, and no less, under the pain of damnation.' Christ taketh as poor men may give. Where there is a mean portion, he is content with the less, if there be sincerity. Broken sums and little weak obedience will be pardoned, and hold their footing with Him. Know you not that our kindly Lord retaineth His good old heart yet? 'He breaketh not a bruised reed, nor quencheth the smoking flax'; if the wind but blow, He holdeth His hands about it till it rise to a flame. The law cometh on with three O-yeses⁷⁹—'with all the heart, with all the soul, and with all the whole strength'; and where would poor folks, like you and me, furnish all these sums? It feareth me, nay, it is most certain, that if the payment were to come out of our purse, when we should put our hand into our bag, we should bring out the wind, or worse. But the new covenant seeth not heap-mete,⁸⁰ nor stented⁸¹ obedience, as the condition of it, because forgiveness hath always place.

Hence I draw this conclusion: that to think matters betwixt Christ and us go back for want of heaped measure, is a piece of old Adam's pride, who would either be at legal payment or nothing. We would still have God in our common, and buy His kindness with our merits. For beggarly pride is devil's honesty, and blusseth to be in Christ's common,⁸² and scarce giveth God a gramercy,⁸³ and a lifted cap (except it be the Pharisee's 'God I thank thee'), or a bowed knee to Christ. It will only give a 'Good-day' for a 'Good-day' again; and if he dissemble⁸⁴ His kindness, as it were, and seem to misken⁸⁵ it, it in earnest spurneth with the heels, and snuffeth in the wind, and careth not much for Christ's kindness. 'If He will not be friends, let Him go,' saith pride. Beware of this thief, when Christ offereth Himself.

⁷⁵ **Bautie, James** – Seems to have been preparing for the Presbyterian ministry when Rutherford wrote to him. After ordination he ministered In Co. Down, N. Ireland. On refusal to take the oath of fidelity to the Commonwealth in 1650, he was banished from the kingdom. His later history is unknown.

⁷⁶ **stot** – the rebound of a ball (that is, recall your thoughts before tthey have gone too far).

⁷⁷ **registrate** – register, keep on record.

⁷⁸ **enfeoffed** – invested with a right to heaven.

⁷⁹ **O-yeses** – proclamations intimating a demand; a way of stating the law's absolute requirements.

⁸⁰ **heap-mete** – full (heaped) measure.

⁸¹ **stented** – fixed at a certain rate.

⁸² **common** – to be indebted to Christ.

⁸³ **gramercy** – thank-you.

⁸⁴ **dissemble** – relates to Christ's kindness not being immediately and directly apparent.

⁸⁵ **misken** – to overlook, to treat as if unknown.

3. No marvel then of whisperings, whether you be in the covenant or not? for pride maketh loose work of the covenant of grace, and will not let Christ be full bargain-maker. To speak to you particularly and shortly. (1) All the truly regenerated cannot determinately tell you the measure of their dejections; because Christ beginneth young with many, and stealeth into their heart ere they are aware, and becometh homely with them, with little din or noise. I grant that many are blinded in rejoicing in a good-cheap⁸⁶ conversion that never cost them a sick night; Christ's physic wrought in a dream upon them. But for that, I would say, if other marks be found that Christ is indeed come in, never make plea with him, because he will not answer, 'Lord Jesus, how camest thou in? whether in at door or window?' Make Him welcome since He is come. 'The wind bloweth where it listeth.' All the world's wit cannot perfectly render a reason why the winds should be a month in the east, six weeks possibly in the west, and the space only of an afternoon in the south or north. You will not find out all the steps of Christ's way with a soul, do what you can; for sometimes he will come in stepping softly, like one walking beside a sleeping person, and slip to the door, and let none know He was there. (2) You object that the truly regenerate should love God for Himself: and you fear that you love Him more for His benefits, as incitements and motives to love Him, than for Himself. I answer: to love God for Himself as the last end, and also for His benefits, as incitements and motives to love Him, may stand well together; as a son loveth his mother, because she is his mother, howbeit she be poor; and he loveth her for an apple also. I hope that you will not say that benefits are the only reason and bottom of your love; it seemeth there is a better foundation for it. Always, if a hole be in it, sew it up shortly'.⁸⁷ (3) You feel not such mourning in Christ's absence as you would. I answer: That the regenerate mourns at all times, and all in a like measure, for his absence, I deny. There are different degrees of mourning, less or more, as they have less or more love to Him, and less or more sense of His absence; but, some they must have. Sometimes they miss not the Lord, and then they cannot mourn; howbeit it is not long so; at least it is not always so. (4) You challenge yourself that some truths find more credit with you than others. You do well; for God is true in the least as well as in the greatest, and He must be so to you. You must not call Him true in one page of the leaf, and false in the other; for our Lord in all His writings never contradicted Himself yet. Although the best of the regenerate have slipped here, always labour you to hold your feet.

4. Comparing the state of one truly regenerate, whose heart is a temple of the Holy Ghost, and yours, which is full of uncleanness and corruption, you stand dumb and discouraged, and dare not sometimes call Christ heartedly your own. I answer (a) The best regenerate have their defilements, that will clog behind them all their days; and wash as they will, there will be filth in their bosom. But let not this put you from the well. (b) Albeit there be some ounce-weights of carnality, and some squint-look or eye in our neck to an idol, yet love in its own measure may be sound. For glory must purify and perfect our love; it will never till then be absolutely pure. Yet if the idol reign, and have the yolk of the heart, and the keys of the house, and Christ only be made an underling to run errands, all is not right; therefore examine well. (c) There is a twofold discouragement; one of unbelief, to conclude (and make doubt of the conclusion) for a mote in your eye, and a by-look⁸⁸ to an idol; this is ill. There is another discouragement of sorrow for sin, when you find a by-look to an idol; this is good, and a matter of thanksgiving; therefore examine here also.

5. The assurance of Jesus' love, you say, would be the most comfortable news that ever you heard. Answer: That may stop twenty holes, and loose many objections; that love hath telling⁸⁹ in it, I trow. O that you knew and felt it, as I have done! I wish you a share of my feast; sweet, sweet hath it been to me. If my Lord had not given me this love, I should have fallen through the causeway of Aberdeen ere now. But for you, hang on, your feast is not far off; you shall be filled ere you go. There is as much in our Lord's pantry as will satisfy all His bairns, and as much wine in His cellar as will quench all their thirst. Hunger on, for there is meat in hunger for Christ; go never from Him, but go to Him (who yet is pleased with the importunity of hungry souls) with a dish-full of hungry desires, till He fill you. And if He delays, yet come not away, albeit you should fall a-swoon at His feet.

6. You crave my mind, whether sound comfort may be found in prayer, when conviction of a known idol is present. I answer, an idol, as an idol, cannot stand with sound comfort; for that comfort that is gotten at Dagon's feet is a cheat or blafume. Yet sound comfort, and conviction of an eye to an idol, may as well dwell together as tears and joy. But let this do you no ill; I speak it for your encouragement that you may make the best of your joys you can, albeit you find them mixed with motes. Soul conviction, if alone, without remorse and grief, is not enough; therefore lend it a tear, if you are able to obtain it.

7. You question, when you obtain more fervency sometimes with your neighbour in prayer than when you are alone, whether hypocrisy be in it, or not? I answer, if this be always, no question a spice of hypocrisy is in it, which should be taken heed to. But possibly desertion may be in private, and presence in public, and then the case is clear. A fit of applause may occasion by accident a rubbing of a cold heart, and so heat and life may come; but it is not the proper cause of that heat. Hence God of His free grace will ride His errands upon our corruption. But corruption is but a mere occasion and accident, as the playing on a pipe removed anger from the prophet, and made him fitter to prophesy (2Ki 3:15).

8. You complain of Christ short visits that He will not bear you company one night; but when you lie down warm at night, you rise cold at morning. Answer: I cannot blame you, nor any other who knoweth that sweet Guest, for bemoaning His withdrawals, and being most desirous of His abode and company; for He would captivate and engage the affection of any creature that saw His face. Since He looked on me, and gave me a sight of His fair love, He gained my heart wholly, and got away with it. Well, well may

⁸⁶ **good-cheap** – gratuitous.

⁸⁷ **shortly** – without delay.

⁸⁸ **by-look** – side-look: unbelief produces a side-look to sin without concern; recognition of a side-look to an idol, producing true sorrow for sin, is good.

⁸⁹ **telling** – something to mark down.

He brook⁹⁰ it! He shall keep it long ere I fetch it from Him. But I will tell you what you should do; treat Him well, give Him the chair and the board-head, and make Him welcome to the mean portion you have. A good supper and kind entertainment maketh the guest love the inn the better. Yet sometimes Christ hath an errand elsewhere, for mere trial;⁹¹ and then, though you give Him king's cheer, He will away; as is clear in desertions for mere trial and not for sin.

9. You seek the difference betwixt the motions of the Spirit, in their least measure, and the natural joys of your own heart. Answer: If you sorrow for anything that may offend the Lord, it will speak the singleness of your love to Him.

10. You ask the reason why sense overcometh faith. Answer: Because sense is more natural, and near of kin to our own selfish and soft nature. You ask if faith in that case be sound? Answer: If it be chased away, it is neither sound nor unsound, because it is not faith. But it might be, and was faith, before sense did blow out the act of believing.

11. You ask what to do, when promises are borne in upon you, and sense of impenitency for sins of youth hindereth application. Answer: If it be living sense, it may stand with application; and in this case, put to your hand and eat your meat in God's name. If false, so that the sins of youth are not repented of, then, as faith and impenitency cannot stand together, so neither that sense and application can consist.

To Thomas Corbet⁹²

from Aberdeen, 1637

Godly counsels

Build not your nest here. This world is a hard, ill-made bed; no rest is in it for your soul. Awake, awake, and make haste to seek that Pearl, Christ that this world seeth not. Your night and your Master Christ will be upon you within a clap; your hand-breadth of time will not bide you. Take Christ, howbeit a storm follow Him. Howbeit this day be not yours and Christ's, the morrow will be yours and His. I would not exchange the joy of my bonds and imprisonment for Christ with all the joy of this dirty and foul-skinned world. I am filled with Christ's love.

I desire your wife to do what I write to you. Let her remember how dear Christ will be to her, when her breath turneth cold, and the eye-strings shall break. O how joyful should my soul be, to know that I had brought on a marriage betwixt Christ and that people, few or many. If it be not so, I shall be woe to be a witness against them. Use prayer: love not the world: be humble, and esteem little of yourself. Love your enemies and pray for them. Make conscience of speaking truth, when none knoweth but God. I never eat but I pray for you all. Pray for me. You and I shall see one another up in our Father's house. I rejoice to hear that your eye is upon Christ. Follow on, hang on, and quit Him not. The Lord Jesus be with your spirit.

To William Glendinning⁹³

from Aberdeen, 1637

Sweetness of trial

I know that our Lord Jesus hath honoured you to bear His chains, which is the golden end of His cross, and so hath waled⁹⁴ out a chosen and honourable cross for you. I wish you much joy and comfort of it; for I have nothing to say of Christ's cross but much good. I hope that my ill word shall never meet either Christ or His sweet and easy cross. I know that He seeketh of us an outcast⁹⁵ with this house of clay, this mother prison, this earth that we love full well. And verily, when Christ snuffeth my candle and causeth my light to shine upward, it is one of my greatest wonders that dirt and clay hath so much court with a soul not made of clay; and that our soul goeth out of kind so far as to make an idol of this earth, such a deformed harlot, as that it should wrong Christ of our love.

Swiftness of trial

How fast, how fast doth our ship sail! and how fair a wind hath time, to blow us off these coasts and this land of dying and perishing things! Alas! our ship saileth one way, and fleeth many miles in one hour, to hasten us upon eternity, and our love and hearts are sailing close backover⁹⁶ and swimming towards ease, lawless pleasure, vain honour, perishing riches; and to build a fool's nest know not where, and to lay our eggs within the sea-mark, and fasten our bits of broken anchors upon the worst ground in the

⁹⁰ **brook** – enjoy, possess.

⁹¹ **trial** – that is, so that faith may be tried.

⁹² **Corbet, Thomas** – A parishioner of Anwoth.

⁹³ **Glendinning, William** – Son of Robert Glendinning, minister of Kirkcudbright. He became Provost of Kirkcudbright. Persecuted by the Bishop of Galloway, he became a zealous Covenanter. During the 1640s he was prominent in the Scottish Presbyterian cause.

⁹⁴ **waled** – chosen.

⁹⁵ **outcast** – quarrel, contention.

⁹⁶ **backover** – backward.

world, this fleeting and perishing life! And in the meanwhile, time and tide carry us upon another life, and there is daily less and less oil in our lamps, and less and less sand in our watchglass.⁹⁷ O what a wise course was it for us to look away from the false beauty of our borrowed prison, and to mind and eye and lust for our country! Lord, Lord, take us home!

Prevalence of sin

And for myself: I think if a poor, weak, dying sheep seek for an old dyke and the lee-side of an hill in a storm, I have cause to long for a covert from this storm, in heaven. I know none will take my room over my head there. But certainly sleepy bodies would be at rest and a well-made bed, and an old crazed bark at a shore, and a wearied traveller at home, and a breathless horse at the rink's⁹⁸ end. I see nothing in this life but sin and the sour fruits of sin. And, O, what a burden is sin! And what a slavery and miserable bondage is it, to be at the nod, and yeas and nays, of such a lord-master as a body of sin! Truly, when I think of it, it is a wonder that Christ maketh not fire and ashes of such a dry branch as I am. I would often lie down under Christ's feet and bid Him trample upon me, when I consider my guiltiness. But seeing He hath sworn that sin shall not loose His unchangeable covenant, I keep house-room amongst the rest of the ill-learned bairns, and must cumber the Lord of the house with the rest, till my Lord take the fetters off legs and arms, and destroy this body of sin, and make a hole or breach in this cage of earth, that the bird may fly out and the imprisoned soul be at liberty. In the meantime, the least intimation of Christ's love is sweet, and the hope of marriage with the Bridegroom holdeth me in some joyful on-waiting, that, when Christ's summer-birds shall sing upon the branches of the Tree of Life, I shall be tuned by God Himself to help them to sing the home-coming of our Well-beloved and His bride to their house together. When I think of this, I think winters and summers, and years and days, and time, do me a pleasure that they shorten this untwisted and weak thread of my life, and that they put sin and miseries by-hand,⁹⁹ and that they shall carry me to my Bridegroom in a clap.¹⁰⁰

To John Gordon¹⁰¹

from Aberdeen, 1637

I earnestly desire to know the case of your soul and to understand that you have made sure work of heaven and salvation.

Heaven hard to be won

1. Remember that salvation is one of Christ's dainties which He giveth but to a few.
2. That it is violent sweating and striving that taketh heaven.
3. That it cost Christ's blood to purchase that house to sinners, and to set mankind down as the King's free tenants and freeholders.
4. That many make a start toward heaven who fall on their back and win not up to the top of the mount, it plucketh heart and legs from them, and they sit down and give it over, because the devil setteth a sweet-smelled flower to their nose (this fair busked¹⁰² world) wherewith they are bewitched, and so forget or refuse to go forward.

Many come short of attaining

5. Remember that many go far on and reform many things, and can find tears, as Esau did; and suffer hunger for truth, as Judas did; and wish and desire the end of the righteous, as Balaam did; and profess fair, and fight for the Lord, as Saul did; and desire the saints of God to pray for them, as Pharaoh and Simon Magus did; and prophesy and speak of Christ, as Caiaphas did; and walk softly and mourn for fear of judgments, as Ahab did; and put away gross sins and idolatry, as Jehu did; and hear the Word of God gladly, and reform their life in many things according to the Word, as Herod did; and say to Christ, 'Master, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest,' as the man who offered to be Christ's servant did (Mat 8:19). And many may taste of the virtues of the life to come, and be partaker of the wonderful gifts of the Holy Ghost, and taste of the good Word of God, as did the apostates who sin against the Holy Ghost (Heb 6). And yet all these are but like gold in clink and colour, and watered brass, and base metal. These are written that we should try ourselves, and not rest till we be a step nearer Christ than sunburnt and withering professors can come.

Idol sins to be renounced

6. Consider that it is impossible that your idol-sins and you can go to heaven together; and that they who will not part with these can, indeed, love Christ at the bottom, but only in word and show, which will not do the business.

⁹⁷ **watchglass** – hourglass.

⁹⁸ **rink** – race-course.

⁹⁹ **by-hand** – aside.

¹⁰⁰ **clap** – that is, on a sudden (as when thunder is heard).

¹⁰¹ **Gordon, John** (of Rusco) – The Laird of Rusco Castle, two miles from Anwoth.

¹⁰² **busked** – adorned.

7. Remember how swiftly God's post time flieth away, and that your forenoon is already spent, your afternoon will come, and then your evening, and at last night, when you cannot see to work. Let your heart be set upon finishing of your journey, and summing and laying your accounts with your Lord, O how blessed shall you be to have a joyful welcome of your Lord at night! How blessed are they who, in time, take sure course with their souls! Bless His great name for what you possess in goods and children, ease and worldly contentment, that He hath given you; and seek to be like Christ in humility and lowliness of mind. And be not great and entire with the world. Make it not your god, nor your lover that you trust unto, for it will deceive you.

Likeness to Christ

I recommend Christ and His love to you, in all things. Let Him have the flower of your heart and your love. Set a low price upon all things but Christ, and cry down in your thoughts clay and dirt that will not comfort you when you get summons to remove and appear before your Judge to answer for all the deeds done in the body. The Lord give you wisdom in all things. I beseech you, sanctify God in your speaking, for holy and reverend is his name; and be temperate and sober. Companionry with the bad is a sin that holdeth many out of heaven.

To William Guthrie¹⁰³

from St Andrews [undated]

Depression under dark trials

I did not dream of such shortness of breath, and fainting in the way toward our country. I thought that I had no more to do than die in my nest, and bow down my sinful head, and let him put on the crown, and so end. I have suffered much; but this is the thickest darkness, and the straitest step of the way I have yet trodden. I see more suffering yet behind, and, I fear, from the keepers of the vine. Let me obtain of you, that you would press upon the Lord's people that they would stand far off from these merchants of souls who have come in amongst you. If the way revealed in the Word be that way, we then know that these soul-cowpers¹⁰⁴ and traffickers show not the way of salvation.

Alas, alas! poor I am utterly lost, my share of heaven is gone, and my hope is poor; I am perished, and I am cut off from the Lord, if hitherto out of the way! But I dare not judge kind Christ; for, if it may be but permitted (with reverence to His greatness and highness be it spoken), I will, before witnesses, produce His own hand that He said, 'This is the way, walk thou in it.' And He cannot except against His own seal. I profess that I am almost broken and a little sleepy, and would fain put off this body. But this is my infirmity, who would be under the shadow and covert of that good land, once¹⁰⁵ to be without the reach and blast of that terrible one. But I am a fool; there is none that can overbid, or take my lodging over my head, since Christ hath taken it for me.

Dangers of compliance

Dear brother, help me, and get me the help of their prayers who are with you, in whom is my delight. You are much suspected of intended compliance; I mean, not of you only, but of all the people of God with you. It is but a poor thing, the fulfilling of my joy; but let me obtest all the serious seekers of His face, His secret sealed ones, by the strongest consolations of the Spirit, by the gentleness of Jesus Christ, that Plant of Renown, by your last accounts and appearing before God, when the white throne shall be set up, be not deceived with their fair words. Though my spirit be astonished at the cunning distinctions which are found out in the matters of the Covenant, that help may be had against these men. Yet my heart trembleth to entertain the least thought of joining with those deceivers.

To James Durham¹⁰⁶

from St Andrews, 15 June 1658

[Written some few days before Durham's death]

Man's ways not God's ways

I would ere now have written to you, had I not known that your health, weaker and weaker, could scarce permit you to hear or read. I need not speak much. The Way you know, and have preached to others the skill of the Guide, and the glory of the home beyond death. And when He saith, 'Come and see,' it will be your gain to obey and go out and meet the Bridegroom.

¹⁰³ **Gutisrie, William** (1620-65) – Son of the Laird of Pitforthly, Forfarshire, and cousin to James Guthrie. He owed his conversion to the ministry of Rutherford at St. Andrews. In 1644 he became minister of Fenwick, Nr. Kilmarnock. He is chiefly remembered as the author of *The Christian's Great Interest*, first published in 1658.

¹⁰⁴ **soul-cowper** – jobbers in souls.

¹⁰⁵ **once** – once for all, completely.

¹⁰⁶ **Durham, James** (1622-58) – Minister of Black friars Church, Glasgow, from 1647. He died in 1658 at the age of 35, only ten days after Rutherford's letter was written to him. He is famed for his writings, which include expositions of Job, the Song of Solomon, and the Book of Revelation.

What accession is made to the higher house of His kingdom should not be our loss, though it be real loss to the Church of God. But we count one way and the Lord counteth another way. He is infallible, and the only wise God, and needeth none of us. Had He needed the staying in the body of Moses and the prophets, He could have taken another way. Who dare bid you cast your thoughts back on wife or children when He hath said, 'Leave them to me, and come up hither'? Or who can persuade you to die or live, as if that were arbitrary to us, and not His alone who hath determined the number of your months? If so it seem good to Him, follow your Forerunner and Guide. It is an unknown land to you, who were never there before, but the land is good and the company before the throne desirable, and He who sitteth on the throne is alone a sufficient heaven.

To James Guthrie, Robert Traill¹⁰⁷

*and other brethren imprisoned in the Castle of Edinburgh
from St Andrews, 1660*

I am, as to the point of light, at the utmost of persuasion in that kind that it is the cause of Christ which you now suffer for, and not men's interest. If it be for men, let us leave it; but if we plead for God, our own personal safety and man's deliverance will not be peace.

On suffering for Christ

There is a salvation called 'the salvation of God,' which is cleanly, pure, spiritual, unmixed, near to the holy Word of God. It is that which we would seek, even the favour of God that He beareth to His people; not simple gladness, but the gladness and goodness of the Lord's chosen. And sure, though I be the weakest of his witnesses, and unworthy to be among the meanest of them, and am afraid that the cause be hurt (though it cannot be lost) by my unbelieving faintness, I would not desire a deliverance separated from the deliverance of the Lord's cause and people. It is enough to me to sing when Zion singeth; and to triumph when Christ triumpheth. I should judge it an unhappy joy to rejoice when Zion sigheth. 'Not one hoof' will be your peace (Exo 10:26). If Christ doth own me, let me be in the grave in a bloody winding-sheet, and go from the scaffold in four quarters, to grave or no grave. I am His debtor, to seal with sufferings this precious truth. But O! when it cometh to the push, I dare say nothing, considering my weakness, wickedness and faintness. But fear not you. You are not, you shall not be alone, and the Father is with you. It was not an unseasonable, but a seasonable and necessary duty you were about. Fear Him who is Sovereign. Christ is Captain of the castle, and Lord of the keys. The cooling well-spring, and refreshment from the promises, are more than the frownings of the furnace.

God's presence ever with His people

I see snares and temptations in capitulating, composing, ceding, minching¹⁰⁸ with distinctions of circumstances, formalities, compliments and extenuations in the cause of Christ. 'A long spoon: the broth is hell-hot.' Hold a distance from carnal compositions, and much nearness to the Fountain, to the favour and refreshing light from the Father of lights speaking in His oracles. This is sound health and salvation. Angels, men, Zion's elders, eye us; but what of all these? Christ is by us, and looketh on us, and writeth up all. Let us pray more, and look less to men.

To James Guthrie¹⁰⁹

from St. Andrews, 15 February 1661

Steadfastness under persecution

We are very oft comforted with the word of promise; though we stumble not a little at the work of holy providence, some earthly men flourishing as a green herb, and the people of God counted as sheep for the slaughter, and killed all the day long. And yet both word of promise, and work of Providence, are from Him whose ways are equal, straight, holy, and spotless.

As for me, when I think of God's dispensations, He might justly have brought to the market-cross, and to the light, my unseen and secret abominations, which would have been no small reproach to the holy name and precious truths of Christ. But in mercy He hath covered these, and shapen and carved out more honourable causes of suffering, of which we are unworthy.

¹⁰⁷ **Traill, Robert** (1603-78) – A zealous Covenanter, minister of Greyfriars, Edinburgh, from 1648. When Charles II came to the throne in 1660, he joined James Guthrie and others in reminding the king of his obligation to keep the Covenant. For this he was driven into exile in Holland. His son (also Robert) became a Presbyterian minister in Kent and produced a number of evangelical treatises.

¹⁰⁸ **minching** – cutting into small pieces.

¹⁰⁹ **Guthrie, James** (1612?-61) – The son of the Laird of Outline, Forfarshire. It was under the influence of Rutherford that Guthrie, hitherto an Episcopalian, became a Presbyterian and Covenanter. He became minister at Stirling in 1649. Prominent in all national affairs in the 1640s and 1650s, he incurred the hatred of the Royalist Party and in the late summer of 1660 he was imprisoned in Edinburgh Castle. He was charged with 'high treason' and was hanged at the cross of the City on June 1, 1661. His head was thereafter cut off and fixed on the Nether Bow. His steadfastness inspired the Covenanting Party to resist the Episcopals.

And now, dear brother, much dependeth upon the way and manner of suffering; especially, that His precious truths be owned, with all heavenly boldness; and a reason of our hope given in meekness and fear: and the royal crown, and absolute supremacy of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Prince of the kings of the earth, avouched as becometh. For certain it is that Christ will reign, the Father's King in Mount Zion; and His sworn covenant will not be buried. It is not denied that our practical breach of covenant first, and then our legal breach thereof by enacting the same mischief and framing it into a law, may heavily provoke our sweetest Lord. Yet there are a few names in the land that have not defiled their garments, and a holy seed on whom the Lord will have mercy, like the four or five olive-berries upon the top of the shaken olive-tree (Isa 17:6), and their eye shall be toward the Lord their Maker.

The blessedness of martyrdom

Think it not strange that men devise against you; whether it be to exile, the earth is the Lord's; or perpetual imprisonment, the Lord is your light and liberty; or a violent and public death, for the kingdom of heaven consisteth in a fair company of glorified martyrs and witnesses, of whom Jesus Christ is the chief witness, who for that cause was born, and came into the world. Happy are you, if you give testimony to the world of your preferring Jesus Christ to all powers. And the Lord will make the innocency and Christian loyalty of His defamed and despised witnesses in this land to shine to after-generations, and will take the Man-Child up to God and to His throne, and prepare a hiding-place in the wilderness for the mother, and cause the earth to help the woman.

Be not terrified; fret not. Forgive your enemies: bless and curse not. For though both you and I should be silent, sad and heavy is the judgment and indignation of the Lord that is abiding the unfaithful watchmen of the Church of Scotland. The souls under the altar are crying for justice, and there is an answer returned already: the Lord's salvation will not tarry. Cast the burden of wife and children on the Lord Christ; He careth for you and them. Your blood is precious in His sight. The everlasting consolations of the Lord bear you up and give you hope: for your salvation (if not deliverance) is concluded.

Mr. Robert Campbell

*[Undated: Rutherford died on 20 March 1661,
shortly after this letter was written]*

Steadfastness in protest against Prelacy and Popery

You know that this is a time in which all men almost seek their own things and not the things of Jesus Christ. You are alone, as a beacon on the top of a mountain. But faint not; Christ is a numerous multitude Himself, yea, millions. Though all the nations were convened against Him round about, yet doubt not but He will, at last, arise for the cry of the poor and needy.

For me, I am now near to eternity; and for ten thousand worlds I dare not venture to pass from the protestation against the corruptions of the time, nor go along with the shameless apostasy of the many silent and dumb watchmen of Scotland. But I think it my last duty to enter a protestation in heaven before the righteous Judge, against the practical and legal breach of the Covenant, and all oaths imposed on the consciences of the Lord's people, and all popish, superstitious, and idolatrous mandates of men. Know that the overthrow of the sworn Reformation, the introducing of Popery and the mystery of iniquity, is now set on foot in the three kingdoms; and whosoever would keep their garments clean are under that command, 'Touch not, taste not, handle not.'

The Lord calleth you, dear brother, to be still 'steadfast, unmoveable, and abounding in the work of the Lord.' Our royal kingly Master is upon His journey, and will come, and will not tarry. And blessed is the servant who shall be found watching when He cometh. Fear not men, for the Lord is your light and salvation. It is true; it is somewhat sad and comfortless that ye are alone. But so it was with our precious Master; nor are you alone, for the Father is with you. It is possible that I shall not be an eyewitness to it in the flesh, but I believe He cometh quickly who will remove our darkness, and shine gloriously in the Isle of Britain, as a crowned King, either in a formally sworn covenant, or in His own glorious way; which I leave to the determination of his infinite wisdom and goodness. And this is the hope and confidence of a dying man who is longing and fainting for the salvation of God.

Beware of the ensnaring bonds and obligations, by any hand-writ or other wise, to give unlimited obedience to any authority, but only in the Lord. For all innocent self-defence (which is according to the Covenant, the Word of God, and the laudable example of the Reformed Churches) is now intended to be utterly subverted and condemned. And what is taken from Christ, as the flower of his prerogative-royal, is now put upon the head of a mortal power; which must be that great idol of indignation that provoketh the eyes of His glory.

Dear brother, let us mind the rich promises that are made to those that overcome, knowing that those that endure to the end shall be saved.

