



Fire and Ice Sermon Series

<http://www.puritansermons.com/>

Thomas Goodwin: His Life, Times and Quest for Assurance

Guy Davies

Reprinted from the Congregational Studies Conference Papers 1994, pp.55-83. For information on the EFCC, contact: The Administrative Secretary, PO Box 34, Beverly, North Humberside, HU17 8YU, England. © Guy Davies 1994. Reprinted by permission.

<i>1. Introduction</i>	2
<i>II. The Life and Career of Thomas Goodwin</i>	4
1. Goodwin's Family Background, Birth and Education	4
2. Goodwin's Spiritual Pilgrimage	5
i. Conviction of sin	8
ii. Conversion and Assurance	9
3. Goodwin's Ministerial Career	12
i. Preacher at Cambridge	13
ii. A Pastor in Exile	14
iii. Goodwin in Commonwealth England	15
iv. Goodwin After the Restoration	19
<i>III. Goodwin on Assurance and the Church</i>	20
1. Assurance of Salvation	21
i. The Biblical Basis for Assurance	21
ii. Not all Christians have Assurance	22
iii. Assurance is desirable for all Christians	25
iv. Seeking Assurance	28
V. Conclusion	29
2. The Nature of the Church	31
<i>IV. Thomas Goodwin - A Man for Today</i>	32
i. A Man of the Word	32
ii. A Man of Peace.	32
iii. A Man who Knew Full Assurance of Salvation	33
iv. A Man of God	33

1. Introduction

There has been a considerable revival of interest in the Puritan Movement of the 16th & 17th centuries over the last fifty years or so. Academics have begun seriously to review Puritan life and thought. For example, Christopher Hill began publication of his writing on the 17th century era in 1940 and Geoffrey Nuttall published *his The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith and Experience* in 1946. The old cliché expressed in the following words by Kenneth Hare in his poem *The Puritan* has been found to be largely groundless:

The Puritan through life's sweet garden goes
To pluck the thorn and cast away the rose;
And hopes to please, by his peculiar whim,
The God who fashioned it and gave it him.¹

The Puritans were not killjoys or self-righteous hypocrites, but men of Scripture who thought deeply about God, lived thoroughly to God and depended wholly upon God in Jesus Christ for full and free salvation. Their written works attain a level of precise, profound and practical understanding of the Word of God that remains unparalleled in evangelical literature until this present day.

But renewed appreciation of the Puritan movement has not simply been the preserve of academics and theologues. Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones, as you will know, was both fascinated and heavily influenced by Puritanism.

While still feeling the call to the ministry in the mid-1920s, Lloyd-Jones, became interested in Richard Baxter's life and writings. The works of both Baxter and John Owen were among Dr Lloyd-Jones, wedding presents.

He was later to assert in a paper given at the Westminster (formerly Puritan) Conference in 1971, on *Puritanism and its Origins*:

My interest in this subject is not academic, and never has been. Puritanism can be a snare and a real danger. There are these voluminous tomes, and very easily one can play a most exciting intellectual game picking out subjects and having most interesting theoretical discussions. That has never been my approach to Puritanism.

¹ J.I. Packer, *Among God's Giants*, Eastbourne, Kingsway, 1991, p. 341.

The Doctor went on to say:

...a true and living interest in the Puritans and their works has gripped me, and I am free to confess that my whole ministry has been governed by this.²

Through his preaching and teaching ministry in Westminster Chapel and his chairmanship of the Puritan and Westminster Conferences, Lloyd-Jones, was able to transmit his enthusiasm for things Puritan to a new generation of pastors.

The Banner of Truth Trust, founded by Iain Murray, began to reprint Puritan works, beginning in 1958 with Thomas Watson's *Body of Divinity*. Subsequently the massive, sixteen volume *Works of John Owen*, and the *Works of Richard Sibbes*, *John Flavel*, and others have followed. We are all now probably aware of at least the names if not the writings of some of these Puritan divines. Also Grace Publications has been involved in simplifying and abridging Puritan classics such as Owen's *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* for us to read.

Dr J.I. Packer's long held interest in the Puritans was opened up to the public in 1991 when he published his *Among God's Giants*. This is a collection of articles and papers written by Packer on Puritanism over the years, including some references to Goodwin.

However, our Puritan, Thomas Goodwin has received considerably less attention than some of his contemporaries. The Banner has only published two of the twelve volumes of his *Works*, under the titles *Justifying Faith* and *The Work of the Holy Spirit in our Salvation*.

Apart from the three papers delivered at the Westminster Conference in 1980, articles in *Evangelical Times* and the *Evangelical Library Bulletin*, commemorating the tercentenary of Goodwin's death in 1680 and a small section in Peter Lewis' *The Genius of Puritanism*, very little up-to-date material that I know of has been published on our divine.

But this apparent modern-day lack of recognition of the importance of Thomas Goodwin is uncalled for and belies his true historical and theological significance. His influence as a figure in the history of Congregational Independency is profound. Goodwin's value as a theological writer is great too. In the eyes of his own peers, he was highly esteemed, and for those "in the know" today his *Works* have been read with much profit.

So Thomas Goodwin is no obscure figure from the past. We have much to learn from him today as Evangelical Congregationalists. Pastor Michael Plant

² D.M. Lloyd-Jones, *The Puritans*, Edinburgh, Banner of Truth, 1987, p. 237.

encouraged me to carry on with my research on Goodwin for this paper by quoting to me the following words of Alexander Whyte:

My feeling is that two or three of your best and ablest men mastering Goodwin might transform the Scottish pulpit, as it rallied Oxford around Goodwin's pulpit in his eightieth year. I wish I were young enough to preach nothing else. Indeed there is nothing else worth preaching.

I do not feel that I have mastered Goodwin. But if I can stimulate some of you to give yourselves to further study in this area, I will be more than happy.

My aim is a practical, not an academic one. I want to see living and breathing modern day Puritans in today's church. Men and women who are eminently Biblical in their whole approach to life, who know their God well, serve Him with Holy Spirit inspired fervent consistency, desire to see as pure a church as there can be in a sinful world, and who are hopelessly in love with Jesus Christ, who loved them and gave Himself for them.

What I propose to do first of all is give you a biographical sketch of Goodwin's life and spiritual progress. This, I feel is necessary because Goodwin, as I have said, is nowadays a little known figure. But also because an understanding of his life throws light on the views he held and taught. Secondly, I want to focus on Goodwin's views on assurance of salvation, and then, more briefly, on his influence on the formation of the Congregational doctrine of the church. I will then try to sum up and apply what we have learned to our own situation.

II. The Life and Career of Thomas Goodwin

1. Goodwin's Family Background, Birth and Education

Thomas Goodwin was born prematurely on October 5th 1600 in Rolesby, a small village near Yarmouth in Norfolk. He was the eldest son of Richard and Catherine Goodwin. His premature birth made him a somewhat frail child.

His parents were of a godly disposition and hoped that their son would one day become a minister of the gospel. They obtained the best locally available classical education for Thomas in grammar-learning.

Goodwin soon proved himself to be an able scholar and was sent to Christ's College, Cambridge on August 25th 1613, at the age of thirteen, one year ahead of the normal age of entrance.

Young Thomas now entered the world of learning at Cambridge which was still influenced by the preaching of the 16th century Puritan preacher William Perkins, who died ten years earlier.

At Cambridge Goodwin was able to listen to the preaching of two well-known Puritan pastors of the day, Richard Sibbes and John Preston. But in his early years, Puritanism did not seem too appealing. He was more influenced by the flamboyant preaching style of Arminian ministers such as Doctor, later, Bishop Senhouse. Senhouse's sermon style was full of literary allusions and quotations,

...adorned with flowers of wit and human learning, collected from the Fathers, Poets and Historians.³

Such "preaching", if indeed it may be so-called, won the applause of the scholarly literati of Cambridge.

Goodwin himself gained a reputation for diligent study in comparison with many of his elders and attracted much attention to himself at the University. He desired to be a popular preacher after the Senhouse mode and, he later confessed:

...[I] gave myself to such studies as should enable me to preach after the mode then of high applause in the University.⁴

In 1616 Thomas graduated with a B.A. at sixteen years of age. In 1619 he removed to Catherine Hall, graduating M.A. in 1620. He later became a lecturer there.

So, humanly speaking, Goodwin, a bright, intelligent, eloquent, academically successful young man was going somewhere. But God had something more in mind than academic glory and popular applause for Thomas Goodwin

2. *Goodwin's Spiritual Pilgrimage*

Thomas Goodwin's religious impressions began early. He recalls that:

I began to have slighter workings of the Spirit of God, from the time I was six years old; I could weep for my sins, whenever I did set myself to think on them, and had flashes of joy upon thoughts of the things of God. I was affected with good motions and affections of love to God and

³ James Reid, *Memoirs of the Westminster Divines*, Edinburgh, Banner of Truth, p. 320

⁴ *Ibid.*, p.322.

Christ, for their love revealed to man, and with grief for sin, as displeasing them.⁵

Although this statement seems to display spiritual sensitivity, even perhaps early godliness, in young Thomas, he later added this reflection to it:

This showed how far goodness of nature might go, as well in myself as others, to whom yet true sanctifying grace never comes.

Such “slighter working of the Spirit of God” did not amount to six year old Goodwin being a truly sanctified child of God.

The proof of this is seen in what happened to Goodwin while at University. He began to attend upon the preaching of Richard Sibbes, the Puritan preacher. He also read with relish Calvin’s Institutes. But one day, all his serious religions impressions were shattered. Goodwin was due to take communion at the University in the belief that,

...if I received that sacrament, I should be so confirmed, that I should never fall away.⁶

However, Goodwin’s University tutor had other ideas and refused him the sacrament before all the College because he was “little of stature” i.e. too young. Thomas was thoroughly humiliated. His religions exercises now stopped.

But after this disappointment I left off praying; for being discouraged I knew not how to go to God. I desisted from going to hear Dr Sibbes any more. I no more studied sound divinity...⁷

It is at this time in his life that Goodwin began to be attracted to the superficial and spiritually unhelpful ministrations of Dr Senhouse. He became Arminian in his thinking. After all, their teaching that you could come into and go out of a state of grace, on the surface of things seemed to fit Goodwin’s own experience. In his heart of hearts, however, Goodwin reflected:

That which I observed as touching the matter of my own religion, was, that those Godly fellows (Perkins’ disciples at Christ’s) and the younger

⁵ Ibid., p.321.

⁶ Ibid., p.322.

⁷ Ibid.

sort of their pupils that were godly, held constantly to their religions practices and principles without falling away or declining as I knew of.⁸

He once exclaimed:

They talk of their powerful preaching, and Mr Rogers of Dedham and such others, but I would gladly see the man that would trouble my conscience.⁹

Goodwin was to have his wish granted. “To Dedham you shall go”. Rogers was on form. Dr Rogers was renowned for his animated and awakening preaching style. The godly of those days would say to each other “Let us go to Dedham to fetch fire.”¹⁰

Goodwin recounted to John Howe his experience of seeing and hearing the fiery Rogers preach:

Mr Rogers was ...on the subject of the Scriptures. And in that sermon falls into expostulation with the people about their neglect of the Bible... He personates God to the people telling them. “Well, I have trusted you so long with my Bible: you have slighted it; it lies in such and such a house all covered with dust and cobwebs. You care not to look at it. Do you use my Bible so? Well you will have my Bible no longer”. And he takes up the Bible from his cushion and seemed as if he were going away with it and carrying it from them. but immediately [he] turns again and personates the people to God, falls down on his knees, cries and pleads most earnestly, “Lord, whatsoever thou dost to us take not thy Bible from us; kill our children, burn our houses, destroy our goods; only spare us thy Bible, only take not away thy Bible.” And then he personates God again to the people, “Say you so? Well I will try you a little longer; and here is my Bible for you, I will see how you use it, whether you will love it more, whether you will value it more, whether you will observe it more, whether you will practise it more and live more according to it”.’ This had a tremendous effect upon the congregation. Goodwin himself was deeply moved. he was ‘fain to hang a quarter of an hour upon the

⁸ Diversities of Gifts, Westminster Conference Papers, 1980, p. 9.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Peter Lewis, *The Genius of Puritanism*, Carey, p. 22.

neck of his horse weeping, before he had the power to mount, so strange an impression was there upon him...¹¹

i. Conviction of sin

But no lasting effect was had upon Goodwin by all this. The Lord really began to work upon him during a funeral sermon. The day was October 2nd 1620. Goodwin was out “to be merry” with some of his college friends, but they heard a bell toll at St Edmund’s church, signifying that there was to be a funeral service. Goodwin was reluctantly persuaded to attend the service by one of his colleagues. He later reminisced;

I was loth to go in, for I loved not preaching especially that kind of it that good men used, which I thought to be dull stuff...¹²

The preacher was one Dr Thomas Bainbridge. His text was Luke 19:41,42, Christ’s tears over unrepentant Jerusalem. Bainbridge pressed upon his congregation the dangers of deferring repentance. “*This thy Day*, not to-morrow, but today”¹³ The preacher then warned his audience that to leave off instant repentance could result in judicial hardening, everlasting blindness of heart and mind to saving gospel truth. Goodwin gives us something of the thrust of Bainbridge’s passionate plea for repentance *now!*

“The matter of the sermon was vehemently urged on the hearer, whoever he was who deferred his repentance, not to let slip the opportunity of that day, but immediately to turn to God, and defer no longer, being edged with that direful threatening, lest if he did not turn to God in *that day*, the day of grace and salvation, it might be eternally hid from his eyes.”

Goodwin commented:

I was so far affected, that I said to a companion of mine who came to church with me, and indeed had brought me to that sermon, “*That I hope to be the better for this sermon as long as I live* “. ¹⁴

¹¹ Ibid. p. 22f.

¹² James Reid, *Memoirs*, p. 323.

¹³ Ibid. p. 324.

¹⁴ Ibid.

Deep conviction of sin now set in. Goodwin refused the company of his friends and returned to Catherine Hall. “I thought myself...” he said, “...to be as one struck down by mighty power.” He continued:

The grosser sins of my conversation came in upon me, which I wondered at, as being unseasonable at first; as so the working began, but was still prosecuted more and more, higher and higher; and I, endeavouring not to entertain the least thought of my sins, was passively held under the remembrance of them, and affected, so as I was rather passive all the while in it than active, and my thoughts held under, while that work went on.¹⁵

Not only was Goodwin convicted of his own personal sinfulness and enabled to see “the exceeding sinfulness of [his] sin”, but he came to realise that he had a share in Adam’s original sin.

...I well debated with myself that one place Romans 5 vs. 12, “*By one man sin entered into the world, and death by him, and passed upon all men, in whom, or in that all has sinned*”... This caused me necessarily to conceive thus of it, that it was the guilt or demerit of that one man’s disobedience that corrupted my nature... I [said Goodwin] ...solemnly fell down on my knees before God, the Father of all the family in heaven, and did of my own accord, assume and take on me the guilt of that sin, as truly as any of my own actual sins.¹⁶

Not only was this so, but Goodwin was made aware of the wrath of God against his sin and of the awful nature of the hell that awaits sinners.

ii. Conversion and Assurance

So much for Goodwin’s conviction of sin. But what of his actual conversion experience? Goodwin’s conversion was not of the sudden “Damascus Road” variety. It was a long, drawn out struggle. Goodwin became aware of the beginnings of new spiritual life within himself...

as he [God] created the world and the matter of all things by a word, so he created and put new life into my soul, and so great an alteration was strange to me.¹⁷

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 325.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 326f.

¹⁷ *The Works of Thomas Goodwin, Volume II, Nichol's Series, p. lxi.*

The Lord brought home to Goodwin's tender conscience the conversion experiences of the apostle Paul and of one Mr Price, a Puritan minister, to encourage Goodwin that he too could experience forgiveness of sin. Reflecting on this fact in later years, Thomas Goodwin wrote:

God took me aside, and as it were privately said unto me, Do you now turn to me, and I will pardon all your sins though never so many, as I forgave and pardoned my servant Paul, and convert you unto me, as I did Mr Price, who was the most famous convert and example of religion in Cambridge.

The glory of God, not the praise of his contemporaries was now the chief end of Goodwin's life.

...the most eminent property of my conversion to God I have been speaking of, was this, that the glory of the great God was set up in my heart as the square and rule of each and every particular practice, both of faith and godliness.¹⁸

Goodwin still had some way to go, however, till he found his soul resting assuredly upon the Redeemer. He commented:

I was diverted from Christ for several years, to search only for the signs of grace in me. It was almost seven years before I was taken off to live by faith on Christ, and God's free love, which are alike the object of faith.¹⁹

Early on in his Christian experience Goodwin listened to a sermon by the Puritan Dr John Preston on Romans 12:2 "Be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind". One point particularly hit home to Goodwin's heart. Preston stated,

It is when upon the change of a man's utmost end, there is a change made upon the whole man, and all the powers of his soul.²⁰

This started Goodwin off on a course of intensive self-examination to see if his life lived up to Dr Preston's principle. By examining himself thus, Goodwin hoped to be able to discern the sanctifying activity of the Spirit upon his soul and

¹⁸ Ibid., p. lxvi.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. lxviii.

²⁰ Ibid., p. lxvii.

therefore to be able to find assurance that he was indeed a changed man. Goodwin's son wrote in his father's Memoir that:

His thoughts for so long a time were chiefly intent on the conviction which God had wrought in him, of the heinousness of sin, and of his own sinful and miserable state by nature; of the difference between the workings of the natural conscience, though enlightened, and the motions of a holy soul, changed and acted by the Spirit, in an effectual work of peculiar saving grace.²¹

Goodwin would share his spiritual anxieties with his friend Mr Price. This wise and godly pastor was quick to diagnose the cause of his younger friend's ills. He urged Goodwin to look away from himself and his endeavours to find assurance of acceptance with God on account of his sanctification. Here is an example of Mr Price's advice to Goodwin:

Say unto the Lord: Lord, thou knowest I hate my former sinful course; it grieveth me I have been so long such a stranger unto thee, my Father. Thou knowest now I desire to believe in Jesus Christ, I desire to repent of my sins, and it is the desire of my heart to do thy will in all things. Finding these things in your heart cast yourself upon the righteousness of Christ, and fear nothing; for God will be a most merciful God in Christ unto you. Strive but a little while, and thou shalt be crowned; even so, come, Lord Jesus come quickly. Amen.²²

Goodwin's great problem was that, although truly regenerate and sanctified, he made his changed life the ground of his assurance instead of resting upon the finished work of Christ alone for assurance of acceptance with God. Happily, Goodwin took Dr Price's advice. He reflected:

...I was pitched on this great principle, that if I found I were sanctified, as I plainly did, I then was certainly justified. But I did not think my sanctification to be my justification, but an evidence of it only... And thus I was kept from going to Christ actually; though I dealt with God and his mercy in Christ, as having done all that was on his part to be done, in redeeming and reconciling us, as so I dealt immediately with God, in his pure mercy and free grace. But as it fell strongly into my thoughts, that there was a necessity of Christ's righteousness to justify me, as well as of his grace which had sanctified me; and the course God

²¹ Ibid., p. lxviii.

²² Ibid., p. lxviii f.

took to convince me of it, and to set me a-work about it, was this. He used the very conviction which I had of original sin from Adam, and the two branches of it; the guilt of Adam's actual transgression imputed to me, and the corruption of my nature thence derived... I began to reflect that Jesus Christ was the head for salvation, as Adam had been for sin and condemnation: and that therefore as there were two branches of sin and condemnation derived to me from Adam, — the one an imputation of his fact to me, the other a violent and universal corruption of nature inherent in me;—just so it must be in Christ's salvation of me; and hence I must have an imputation of his righteousness for justification, as well as a holy nature derived from him for sanctification; which righteousness of Christ, for justification was perfect, though my sanctification was imperfect. The notion of this did mightily and experimentally enlighten me.²³

So Goodwin using the theological argument of Romans 5 and applying it to himself, now found assurance of acceptance with God on the grounds of Christ's obedience and blood. He never again made the mistake of resting upon his sanctification as the primary basis of Christian assurance.

Goodwin's death bears witness to this fact. On his death bed his assurance was full,

I am going to the three Persons, with whom I have had communion: they have taken me; I did not take them. I shall be changed in the twinkling of an eye, all my lusts and corruptions I shall be rid of, which I could not be here; those croaking toads will fall off in a moment... I could not have imagined I should ever have had such a measure of faith in this hour; no, I could never have imagined it. My bow abides in strength. Is Christ divided? No, I have the whole of his righteousness; I am found in him, not in my own righteousness, which is of the law, but in the righteousness which is of God, which is by faith of Jesus Christ, who loved me and gave himself for me. Christ cannot love me better than he doth; I think I cannot love Christ better than I do; I am swallowed up in God.²⁴

So, we have the spiritual pilgrimage of Dr Thomas Goodwin, now let us look at his ministerial career.

3. Goodwin's Ministerial Career

²³ Ibid., p. lxxf.

²⁴ Ibid., p. lxxivf.

i. Preacher at Cambridge

In 1625 Goodwin was licensed “a preacher of the University” [of Cambridge]. In doing so, he subscribed to the supreme ecclesiastical and civil authority of the king, the Book of Common Prayer and the Thirty Nine Articles of the Anglican church. Doing so was a condition of being licensed to preach.

In 1628, the great John Preston died, leaving vacant his post of Lecturer to Trinity Church. Goodwin was chosen as his successor. Goodwin’s ministry was owned of the Lord to the conversion of many souls, both University scholars “who crowded to hear him” and townsfolk. Some of his scholarly converts were later to become “eminent preachers of the gospel”.

Goodwin worked hard at his pastoral duties and preached Jesus Christ and him crucified from the heart to his hearers. “He preached experimentally, for he preached as he had felt, tasted and handled of the good word of life.”²⁵

However, despite all this, Goodwin proved none too popular with some. By now, Archbishop Laud was asserting his rigid authority over Cambridge. One of the most important of his agents was the Bishop of Ely, who took a dislike to Goodwin and his Puritanism.²⁶

The Bishop had opposed Goodwin all along and had tried to make him swear not to preach on “any controverted points of divinity”. However, Goodwin responded that almost all “points of divinity” had been “controverted” at one time or another, making such an oath impossible.²⁷

Eventually in 1632, Goodwin was made vicar of Trinity, but by 1634 he was forced to resign his charge, together with his fellowship at Catherine Hall, on grounds of conscience. He could no longer take the restrictions that the Bishop was placing upon evangelical preaching, and became increasingly unhappy about the terms of conformity to the Anglican church.²⁸

For a man with such early academic ambitions such a decision can only be accounted for by the fact that Goodwin’s life now had another, more sublime goal...

²⁵ Ibid., p. xxiii.

²⁶ See Hugh Trevor-Roper, *Catholics, Anglicans & Puritans*, Fontana, p.76ff for Land's control of the Universities.

²⁷ Works II, p. lxxi.

²⁸ Ibid., p. lxxi and see *Diversities of Gifts*, p. 12.

I cheerfully parted with all for Christ, and he hath made abundant compensation, not only in the comforts and joys of his love, which are beyond comparison above all other things but even in this world.²⁹

ii. A Pastor in Exile

In 1638, Goodwin married his first wife, Elizabeth Prescott, an intelligent, joyful, godly woman, who gave him his only daughter, Elizabeth. At the risk of fine or imprisonment, Goodwin carried on his ministry among Separatist congregations in London. All the while he was in correspondence with ministers of an Independent persuasion both in New England and Holland. It is possible [see note 28] that Goodwin had become convinced of Congregationalist principles by John Cotton prior to his departure to the “New World” in 1633. This would explain his leaving Cambridge in 1634.

A good number of Puritan ministers and lay folk, wearied with the tyranny of Charles I and his domineering prelate Laud, fled Britain for Holland. In 1639 Goodwin joined them. Laud even tried to impose uniformity of religion after the Anglican pattern on the British exiles, but the Protestant Dutch authorities upheld tolerance of religion for their foreign guests.

It was while in Holland, or in Amsterdam more particularly, where Goodwin first settled, that he came into close contact with four men with whom he was to side as “the Dissenting Brethren” of the Westminster Assembly. These four men were ministers of Independent convictions, namely Messrs Nye, Burroughs, Bridge and Simpson.

Goodwin eventually became pastor of a church of “about one hundred persons” at Arnhem in which Philip Nye had ministered. Goodwin’s peaceable nature and pastoral gifts were evidenced when he was used to heal divisions in the church at Rotterdam over the matter of lay-preachers.

Out of the oppressive atmosphere of Laudian England and also prior to the turbulent years of the Commonwealth era, Goodwin and his colleagues were able to reflect together on the true nature and form of the church. They were later to be thankful for this peaceful time of exile and believed that it helped them to come to an unprejudiced and objective view of the Scriptural doctrine of the church.

Their *Apologetical Narration* stated;

We had of all men the greatest reason to be true to our own consciences in what we should embrace, seeing it was for our consciences that we

²⁹ Ibid., p. lxxii.

were deprived at once of whatever was dear unto us. We had no new commonwealth to frame church government unto, whereof any one piece might stand in the other's way to cause the least variation from the primitive pattern. We had no state ends or political interests to comply with; no kingdoms of our age to subdue into our mould, which yet will be co-existent with the peace of any form of civil government on earth; no preferment of worldly respects to shape our opinions for. We had nothing else to do but simply and singly to consider how to worship God acceptably, and most according to his Word.³⁰

However, back home in England the Long Parliament had impeached Laud and invited Puritan exiles to return home. The Puritan revolution in which Goodwin was to play an influential part had begun.

iii. Goodwin in Commonwealth England

a) London Church and Westminster Assembly

In 1640 Goodwin returned home to England. He gathered an Independent church in London, in the parish of St Dunstan's-in-the-East. Here Goodwin remained for ten happy and spiritually prosperous years. It was while pastor of this church that Goodwin came to prominence within the ascending parliamentary party of the Civil War years. He was appointed to preach to the House of Commons "on the occasion of... [a] ...solemn fast" in April 1642. His sermon, later published was entitled *Zerubbabel's Encouragement to Finish the Temple* on the text Zechariah 4:6-9. In it he was to "urge and to encourage you [the M.P's] to church reformation..."³¹ Goodwin, politically speaking, like most Independents of his day, had thrown in his lot with the emerging Commonwealth order. This was not the last time Goodwin would preach to Parliament.

By 1643 Parliament was starting to push through its "church reformation". The famous Westminster Assembly was convened by an Ordinance of Parliament. The purpose of this gathering was "...for the settling of the government and liturgy of the Church of England; and for vindicating and clearing of the doctrine of the said Church from false aspersions and interpretations."³² Thomas Goodwin was invited by Parliament to attend and contribute to the Assembly.

A hundred and twenty one divines of Episcopal, Erastian, Presbyterian and Independent convictions were summoned to comprise the Assembly, plus 30

³⁰ Ibid., p. xxvi.

³¹ Ibid., p. xxviii.

³² *Diversities of Gifts*, p. 24.

laymen. The largest party was made up of Presbyterians, their number being augmented by the Scottish Commissioners.

Goodwin was a faithful member of the Assembly. Robert Halley commented; “Few of its members attended the Assembly so regularly as Goodwin, or took so much interest in its proceedings”.³³ Once again Thomas found himself in league with his Congregational friends from his days in exile in Holland. Along with Goodwin Philip Nye, Sidrach Simpson, Jeremiah Burroughs and William Bridge, henceforth known as the “Dissenting Brethren”, pressed upon the Assembly their Independent views.

Goodwin was thus only one of a minority within the Assembly, but it was a vocal minority, able, when allowed to make its voice heard. Goodwin, although an able and learned debater, became known as a man of peaceable spirit. Even those who differed from him theologically could not but recognise him as a man of grace. Robert Baillie, a Scottish Commissioner, scarcely sympathetic with Goodwin’s ideas on church order, could nevertheless enjoy true fellowship with him. Once Goodwin proved particularly disruptive to Presbyterian policy. He had, said Baillie “...assayed to turn all upside down, to reason against all directions. He troubled us so that after long debates we could conclude nothing”. Baillie could however testify that after such difficulties he “spent an afternoon with him [Goodwin] very sweetly.” Baillie could also comment that Goodwin and his brethren were “learned, discreet, and zealous men, well seen in cases of conscience”. Also “the Independents speak much and exceedingly well.” However, Goodwin was not perfect and once the Scottish Commissioner wrote of “hotter words than were expected from Goodwin”.³⁴

We will return briefly to Goodwin’s involvement in the Assembly under the heading of his idea of the *Nature of the Church*. But for now we note that he was one of the members of the Westminster Assembly chosen to present their *Directory of Public Worship* to Parliament in 1644. He was also ordered by the House of Lords in 1647 along with Jeremiah Whitaker, to oversee and examine papers to be printed for the Assembly. His notes, taken mostly in short-hand, fill fifteen volumes.

b) President of Magdalen College, Oxford

In 1649, Goodwin was appointed, by Oliver Cromwell’s suggestion, a lecturer at Oxford. In that year he also remarried, having been widowed some years earlier. His new wife was Mary Hammond, a seventeen year old, but far beyond her years in grace and wisdom. Then, in 1650, ten years after gathering his

³³ *Works* II, p. xxx.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. xxix.

church in St Dunstan's-in-the-East, Goodwin accepted the post of President of Magdalen College, Oxford. At that time John Owen, a fellow Congregational leader and theologian, was made Dean of Christ Church, Oxford.

For Goodwin this change of circumstances was not undertaken without much heart searching. Already, three years earlier, he almost embarked for the New World in response to an invitation from John Cotton. But at the last moment, while even having the best part of his library on board, he changed his mind. It was his love for his church that stopped him going in the end, says Halley; "the entreaty and persuasion of his beloved friends prevailed and induced him to remain as their pastor in London."³⁵

According again to Halley this was still his "principal difficulty" in accepting the new post at Oxford. What eventually caused Goodwin to take up the Presidency of Magdalen was the hope of using his new sphere of influence for spiritual good. Halley's Memoir tells us

After his [Goodwin's] return from Holland, he had for some years, well nigh every month, serious and hearty acknowledgements from several young men who had received "the light of their conversion" by his ministrations in the [Cambridge] University.³⁶

Goodwin's desire was to see such spiritual blessings increased under his Oxford presidency.

Goodwin was a worthy recipient of such preferment. He was, as noted earlier, a brilliant scholar in his youth. He also knew previous success as a tutor and lecturer in Cambridge. His store of biblical and theological learning acquired in Holland and London was widely recognised. He was seen to be the acknowledged leader of the five "Dissenting Brethren" and of the Independent cause along with John Owen. He was well read and manifested "a love of all literature". Such an appointment would have delighted the younger Goodwin, full as he then was of ambitious after academic distinction. But it was a higher ambition that animated the now godly Puritan pastor — the nurture of able and spiritual young scholars for the work of the ministry.

Goodwin and Owen began to share in the spiritual oversight of their students. Prior to their coming to Oxford, it had been customary for College Fellows to preach in turn at St Mary's Church, Oxford, on Sunday afternoons. Now, the two pastors took over that duty between them. Just imagine the effect on the students that the regular ministry of such men would have had. A new spiritual

³⁵ Ibid., p. xxxi.

³⁶ Ibid.

fervour was spread among the Oxford scholars. Philip Henry, father of the famous Matthew the Bible commentator, was at Oxford in those days when

Serious godliness was in reputation and beside the public opportunities they had, *there were* many of the scholars that used to meet together for prayer and Christian conference, to the great comforting of one another's hearts in the fear and love of God, and the preparing of them for the service of the Church in their generation.³⁷

Once a young Latin and Greek scholar, later to receive prominence in the world of letters, applied to Goodwin for examination prior to entering Magdalen College. The youth found, to his dismay, that the President was more interested in his spiritual condition than in his learning.

He was to give an account only of the state of his soul, whether he was of the number of the elect, what was the occasion of his conversion, upon what day of the month and hour of the day it happened, how it was carried on, and when completed. The whole examination was summed up with one short question, namely, Whether he was prepared for death?³⁸

The boy was apparently so “frightened out of his wits” by Goodwin’s close spiritual probing that he never felt able to “go through the terrors” of such an examination again.

While presiding over his College affairs, Goodwin again became involved in church life. He gathered a church along Congregational lines which met at his lodgings. Many important figures in the world of learning became members of the fellowship, including Thankful Owen, President of St. John’s; Stephen Charnock, Fellow of New College, and several other Masters and Fellows.

One incident that throws a sidelight on Goodwin’s catholicity of spirit bears mentioning. John Howe, the Presbyterian, was a student at Magdalen when Goodwin had begun to gather and pastor his church. He was asked why he did not attend the fellowship. He answered that he could not agree with some aspects of Church polity that the fellowship held to and practised. Apparently, on hearing this “Goodwin immediately embraced him, and readily agreed to admit him upon liberal and catholic grounds to the privileges of their society”.³⁹

³⁷ J.B. Williams, *The Lives of Philip and Matthew Henry*, Edinburgh, Banner of Truth, 1974, p. 19 cited in *Diversities of Gifts*, p. 14.

³⁸ *Works* II, p. xxxiii.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. xxxv.

Goodwin's worth to the Commonwealth Establishment was further recognised when he was appointed a Trier along with thirty eight other ministers, some Independent and some Presbyterian, under John Owen's chairmanship. The function of this body was to evaluate ministerial candidates particularly in the light of "Fifteen Fundamentals" of the faith drawn up by Owen. He was also made a visitor of the Universities and schools, with duties including the assessment of studies, the application of discipline, the suggestion of new measures and if necessary the removal of "scandalous offenders".

iv. Goodwin After the Restoration

So, as we have seen, Goodwin was "well in" with the Parliamentarians. Cromwell, as a man of personal toleration and compassion, and also as a true saint favoured Independents for their tolerant views and promoted their cause whenever possible. Indeed, as his New Model Army was comprised of many Independents, he owed his political existence to them.

But the new British Republic was not to be a long lived one. On September 3rd 1658, Cromwell died, possibly of septicaemia.⁴⁰ This was the last thing anyone expected to have happened. The man who had won so many great battles: Naseby, Dunbar, Worcester; the man who guaranteed freedom of worship and freedom from persecution for the Puritan movement, was now dead. Goodwin was one of Cromwell's chaplains at this time, and a prayer of Goodwin's for the dying Lord Protector manifests the sense of reliance on the man: "Lord, we ask not for his life, for that we are sure of, but that he may serve thee better than ever before".⁴¹

However it was the Lord's will that his servant should not serve Him here on earth any longer. Cromwell died. Some of his last words were possibly heard by Goodwin:

Faith in the covenant is my only support, yet if I believe not, He remains faithful... I think I am the poorest wretch that lives. But I love God or rather am loved of God... Herein is love not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent us propitiation [sic] for our sins. We love him because he first loved us.⁴²

⁴⁰ Antonia Fraser, *Cromwell Our Chief of Men*, Mandarin, p. 671.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* p. 675.

⁴² *Ibid.*

All now seemed lost. All hopes now seemed to founder as Oliver died. Goodwin is supposed to have taken the words of Jeremiah upon his lips “O Lord, thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived”.⁴³

No one was found to succeed Oliver Cromwell as Lord Protector on a long-term basis. In 1660 the Monarchy was restored and Charles II was made king. The same year saw Goodwin’s removal from his Oxford Presidency. He then returned to London, taking many members of his Oxford church with him. There he remained, giving himself to the work of the ministry and the study of theology and the Bible. In 1666 he lost a good part of his library in the Great Fire of London, which was a severe trial to him. That experience brought to the press his volume *Patience and its Perfect Work*.

Goodwin was to the end a man of the Bible; indeed he had been described as a “living and walking Bible”.⁴⁴ His son wrote of him in his Memoir: “...the Scriptures are an inexhaustible treasure of divine knowledge, so by an eager search into them, he discovered those truths which are not to be found in other authors. The love and free grace of God, the excellencies and glories of our Lord Jesus Christ, were truths ill which his mind soared with greatest delight. And it was not merely speculative pleasure, but these truths were the life and food of his soul; and his heart was affected with them, he wrote them with a spiritual warmth that is better felt than expressed.”⁴⁵

In 1680 Goodwin died, as we have seen in our portrait of his spiritual pilgrimage, full of faith. Disappointed he may have been in the outcome of the Puritan Revolution, but Goodwin died speaking of the greatness of Christ’s love for Him, his love for Christ and of his being “swallowed up in God”.

So here we end our sketch of Goodwin’s life. Next I want to go on to note some of his more prominent theological view-points.

III. Goodwin on Assurance and the Church

We now go on to discuss some of Thomas Goodwill’s thinking on doctrinal matters. Goodwin was, of course, well within the Puritan theological mainstream. His views were reflective of the influence on him of such men as

⁴³ *Works II*, p. xxxvii.

⁴⁴ *Diversities of Gifts*, p. 14.

⁴⁵ *Works II*, p. lxxiv.

Sibbes and Preston and his colleague John Owen. But in two areas Goodwin's thought seems to stand out. Firstly his ideas on assurance of salvation were particularly clear and perceptive. Secondly his influence on the evolution of the Congregational doctrine of the church are important for us as Evangelical Congregationalists today. Of course he had much to say on many issues but I want to focus on these two points in this paper.

1. Assurance of Salvation

The question "How do I know I am a Christian?" was one that was addressed much in Puritan pastoral teaching. People in Puritan congregations would have been well taught and doctrinally orthodox. But though they believed all the right things, how did they know that they themselves had what they would have called "a saving interest in Christ"? (We would say "How do I know that Jesus is my personal Saviour?"). But although the way we phrase things may change, the problem of assurance or the lack of it is still a very real one in the church today.

All the main Puritan authors deal with this theme at one time or another, but it seems that Goodwin developed and crystallised all that was best in Puritan thinking on this matter in a very remarkable way. At least that is how I feel.

Let us look, then, in brief at some elements of Goodwin's teaching on the vexed matter of assurance of salvation.

i. The Biblical Basis for Assurance

Goodwin's major extended expositions on assurance are found in his three sermons on Ephesians 1:13,14⁴⁶ and in his treatise entitled *A Child of Light Walking in Darkness*, which deals mainly with the lack of assurance, based on Isaiah 50:10,11.⁴⁷ He also has a wide-ranging consideration of the theme in Book II of *The Objects and Acts of Justifying Faith* which is really an exposition of assurance in 1 John.⁴⁸ Of course within these respective articles Goodwin deals with many texts of Scripture, especially the Psalms. But his one key verse may be said to be Ephesians 1:13, "In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word

⁴⁶ Thomas Goodwin, *Exposition of Ephesians*, 1-2 vs 10, Sovereign Grace Book Club, pp. 227-253.

⁴⁷ *Works III*, pp. 227-350.

⁴⁸ Thomas Goodwin, *Works VIII*, Edinburgh, Banner of Truth, pp. 338-420.

of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise”.

In his exposition of Ephesians 1:13, Goodwin proceeds to divide up the text as he understood it:

First, Here is a WORK OF THE HOLY GHOST DISTINCT FROM FAITH: “After you believed, you were sealed”*Secondly* THE ORDER OF THAT WORK: it is “after they had believed”*Thirdly*, THE VIRTUAL CAUSE, if I may so call it, in whom this sealing is wrought: it is *in Christ* “in whom after ye believed ye were sealed”. *In whom* referreth to sealing... *Fourthly*, Here is THE PERSON THAT IS THE SEALER; it is the Spirit, the Holy Ghost....

For Goodwin the sealing of the Spirit meant assurance of salvation. It is “not to make salvation *sure in itself*, but to make us sure of it...”⁴⁹ The term “seal” signifies this — when the Queen of England places her seal on a document it signifies the authenticity of the document. The seal so placed also keeps the contents of the letter secure. So with Christians, the Spirit reveals to us our spiritual authenticity and security.

Goodwin then goes on to develop his points in more detail. We have not got the time here and now to go into his teaching in detail on this text. But, suffice to say that the ideas that assurance is distinct from and is consequent to faith and that assurance is the work of the Spirit govern all his teaching on this matter. His insight that scaling is something that happens to us “in Christ” is particularly valuable.

I want now to develop a few recurring themes in Goodwin’s teaching on assurance that may prove helpful to us.

ii. Not all Christians have Assurance

This was something most Puritans subscribed to. The Savoy Declaration, Chapter 18, section 3, states: “...infallible assurance doth not so belong to the essence of faith, but that the true believer may wait long, and conflict with many difficulties before he be partaker of it...”

In all his expositions of the doctrine of assurance Goodwin was keen to emphasise this. We may gather that the problem of a lack of assurance was a common thing in Puritan Congregations. It was something the divine himself had to come to terms with as we have seen. Thomas Goodwin therefore gave much

⁴⁹ *Exposition of Ephesians*, p. 232.

thought to this matter. In doing so he developed a well thought-out, coherent and in some areas, original pastoral theology of assurance. I share with you a few important points:

a) Faith and assurance are distinct

In his treatment of assurance in *The Objects and Acts of Justifying Faith*, Goodwin sets out to prove that “the act of faith which justifies the sinner, is distinct from knowing he hath eternal life, and may therefore be without it, because it doth not necessarily contain prevailing assurance in it”.⁵⁰

He goes on to give Scriptural examples to prove that faith may be present without assurance, such as in the Sermon on the Mount where “Christ himself... pronounced a blessedness to the poor in spirit, to the meek, to those that mourn, to those that hunger and thirst after righteousness, all which estates want assurance”.⁵¹ Also the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican demonstrates that, in the case of the Publican, who “went to his house justified”, “he was so much cast down with shame, that he could not lift up his eyes to heaven, and yet he lifts up an eye of faith: ‘Lord be merciful unto me a sinner.’ He flies out of himself and has recourse to God’s mercy, which by all his carriage, and the opposition made, he had no assurance of.”⁵²

Goodwin also argued that before “any man can believe his sins forgiven, or look upon any privilege to be had by Christ as his own, he must first be united to Christ, and Christ must be made his, and receiving him as indefinitely offered [in the gospel] to be his (if he will take him), and then not before, can any man come to believe he hath the pardon of his sins, or that he shall have glory, and be saved”.⁵³

The “just shall live by faith” — that is by casting themselves upon Christ for salvation. Assurance that we are so justified comes later.

Assurance comes in as a reward of faith, as a light superadded to faith, that when a man trusted God upon his bare word, and a secret hint of a promise, and hereby hath set his seal that God is true, and bourned the stress of many overpowering doubts and temptations and yet cleaves to Christ, though not fully knowing in his sense [or heart] Christ is his, then

⁵⁰ *Works* VIII, p. 338.

⁵¹ *Ibid*

⁵² *Ibid.* p. 340.

⁵³ *Ibid.* p. 344.

God sets to his seal; therefore says Christ, Rev. ii. 17, ‘To him that overcomes will I give to eat of the hidden manna’.⁵⁴

b) Why some believers may lack assurance

Assurance of faith may be lacking in a believer for many reasons. In his *A Child of Light Walking in Darkness*, Goodwin deals exhaustively with the problem of hindrances to assurance. The text, Isaiah 50:10,11 reads: “Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness and hath no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God...”

According to Goodwin this is a picture of “a true believer at his worst... set forth ...unto our view; and withal the power of true faith, as it alone upholdeth him in the saddest hour of darkness that can befall him...”⁵⁵ The “darkness” of the text through which the Christian must walk is “The light of God’s countenance withdrawn; yea all light and appearance to him of his own graces withheld and overclouded; the face of heaven so overcast with darkness that neither sunlight nor starlight appeareth to him, so as he hath no light; yea, rather, finds his own soul beset and besieged round with all the powers of hell and darkness, and the terrors of the Almighty shot into his soul”.⁵⁶

Three causes of this darkness are then stated: “1. God’s Spirit... 2. A man’s own guilty and fearful heart... 3. Satan.”⁵⁷

The Spirit may induce a lack of assurance or cause a period of spiritual darkness by “Withdrawing his comfortable presence”. He may also reveal God’s anger against a believer for his sins. He may “shake over him the rod of eternal wrath, especially when he hath provoked Christ by presumptuous sins already, and to prevent his going forward in the way of his heart”.⁵⁸ Our own sinful hearts may cause us a time of spiritual darkness. Due to remaining sin, we may begin to doubt whether we are indeed God’s children. The devil also may bring us in to darkness. He may cause us to doubt. “Satan, he hath a special inclination, and a more peculiar malicious desire, to vex and molest the saints with this sort of temptations [sic], of doubts and of disquietness that God is not their God...”⁵⁹ He would undermine our faith, get us to doubt our possession of eternal life in Christ

⁵⁴ Ibid. p. 346.

⁵⁵ *Works III*, p. 235.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid. p. 243.

⁵⁸ Ibid. p. 245.

⁵⁹ Ibid. p. 256.

and thereby make God a liar. He tries to inculcate error and heresy to the destruction of faith. He piles on the guilt of our sins as the accuser of the brethren.

God may leave us in such a period of darkness for many reasons, according to Goodwin simply because He pleases, as in the case of Job; because God would make us useful to others who are to pass through the darkness, to keep us humble after times of “abundance or revelations and comforts” as in the case of Paul with his thorn. Darkness may also be allowed when we become presumptuous, or rely on God’s sanctifying work in us for assurance, or previous blessings instead of upon God Himself. What of unrepented sin, a “stubborn stiff spirit under outward afflictions”, not standing up for the truth, or sheer “unthankfulness, and too common an esteem had of assurance and [the] light of God’s countenance.”? All these things may cause God to allow His Spirit to convict us of our sins, leave us to ourselves and free Satan to trouble us — all in all to leave us in darkness.⁶⁰

So, it is possible, according to Goodwin, and he argues his case biblically, for us to be Christians, and lack assurance of salvation.

iii. Assurance is desirable for all Christians

Having said that faith and assurance are distinct and that Christians may lack assurance, Goodwin was concerned to demonstrate that full assurance of faith is available to all believers. He also shows us how we may attain assurance of salvation.

a) Assurance for all

In his *Objects and Acts of Justifying Faith*, Book II, Goodwin gives its an exposition of 1 John to demonstrate both the possibility and the nature of true assurance. Unlike Roman Catholics, who believe that assurance is unattainable in this life, or the mystics, who believe that only a select few can attain to it, Goodwin shows its that in the New Testament assurance of salvation is open to all believers.

He takes 1 John 5:13 “These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God, that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God”, as a summary of the teaching of the whole epistle. He points out the recurring idea in this epistle of the certain knowledge we have as believers of the things of God, e.g. 2:3 “Hereby we do

⁶⁰ Ibid. see pp. 288-299.

know that we know him”, or 3:19 “hereby we know that we are of the ruth and shall assure our hearts before him”. John said 1:4 “...write we unto you, that your joy may be full.” All these things are taken to indicate that John wants his readers to attain the assurance that they personally have eternal life.

The possibility of knowing such assurance is offered to all. As Goodwin observed

...the scope of St John is to assure all believers, so he says in general that he writes it to them what [sic] believe; not to apostles only...⁶¹

b) What assurance is

The nature of assurance is analysed for us in chapter v of Book II of *The Objects and Acts...* In this chapter we are given an exposition of 1 John 5:7,8. We must say at the outset that Goodwin’s understanding of these verses is suspect. Textual criticism has shown that 5:7 is not really part of the text of 1 John.⁶² His understanding of verse 8 is debatable too. The three witnesses — the “spirit, the water and the blood” are said to bear witness to Jesus Christ, verses 5 & 9. Goodwin sees this and says the “...witnesses have their evidence set to one and the same record, both that Christ is the fountain of life and that God hath given to a believer eternal life.”⁶³ So far so good. However, Goodwill sees the “blood” as “the whole world of justification”, the “water” as “sanctification” and the “Spirit” as the witness of the Spirit as to personal assurance. This is probably reading too much into the text. But despite the suspect exegesis, Goodwin goes on to develop what is, in general a sound, practical exposition of the theme of assurance.

c) The three witnesses

“Blood”. The first proof of our having eternal life is that we believe in Jesus Christ for free justification. This, bare faith in Christ for justification helps with assurance because “...as the work of faith in Christ’s blood, so the effect of his blood thus apprehended, impleaded, evidenceth it to him; for still when guilt ariseth he call oppose Christ’s blood to it, and bathes his soul in thoughts of faith about it, and so finds the guilt quelled, allayed, his conscience pacified, stilled, and quieted by it, when no duties nor nothing [sic] else will give him ease.”⁶⁴

⁶¹ *Works VIII*, p. 356.

⁶² See for example John Stott, *The Letters of John*, the Tyndale Commentary Series, Leicester, IVP, p. 182f for an up-to-date, conservative approach to these texts.

⁶³ *Works VIII*, p. 360.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* p. 364.

“Water”. We then see that “for whom Christ’s blood justifies, it doth also cleanse and sanctify, and washeth away the filth of sin”; thus it is expressed John 3:5, a man being regenerated, and “born of water and the Holy Ghost.”⁶⁵ This gives us assurance because “the believer finds thus closing with Christ changeth him, renews him, washeth him from the power of sin, puts a new spirit and principle into him, clean opposite to sin, so as he cannot sin; he finds a new spring of gracious dispositions in him, still bubbling naturally up, and cleansing and working out corruptions...”⁶⁶

“Spirit”. The third witness is taken to be “all immediate testimony of the Holy Ghost...” The witness of the “blood” may be overcome by guilt-feelings; that of the “water” by the power of sin.

There is therefore a third testimony, and that is of the Holy Ghost himself, which is immediate; that is, though it backs and confirms what the other two said, yet quotes them not, builds not his testimony on them, but raiseth the heart up to see its adoption and sonship, by an immediate discovery of God’s mind to it, and what love hath borne to it; which is not argued from what is wrought in itself, but God says unto a man’s soul (as David desires), “I am thy Salvation”, Psalm xxxv.3, and as Christ said upon earth to some few, “thy sins are forgiven thee”, so from heaven it is spoken by his Spirit (which yet dwells in the heart afore), that a man’s sins are forgiven, and he is owned by the whole Trinity to be God’s child.⁶⁷

Goodwin returns to Ephesians 1:13 in this connection and says, regarding the Ephesians, “But now when they by sheer faith had honoured God, by scaling to his word, then God comforts them by sealing them with his Spirit”.⁶⁸ He also alludes to Romans 8:16 “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.” The “witness of our spirits”— that we believe and are sanctified is backed up by the direct testimony of the Holy Spirit that we are God’s children. This is the highest form of assurance. “My brethren, it is the next thing to heaven.”⁶⁹

So, full assurance of faith is to know, by a direct impression of the Holy Spirit that we are God’s children and heirs of heaven. It is God’s gift to those who

⁶⁵ Ibid. p. 361.

⁶⁶ Ibid. p. 364.

⁶⁷ Ibid. p. 366.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ *Exposition of Ephesians*, p. 251.

already possess saving faith in Christ and are truly sanctified by the Spirit. What do we know of the blessing of full assurance in our own lives?

iv. Seeking Assurance

Now that we know what is available to us, it is our duty to seek assurance. Goodwin taught that, although a lack of assurance was a common enough experience among Christians, it was not a desirable one in any way. Because God desires that all believers should come to a full assurance of faith — not to seek this blessing is to reject one of God’s choicest gifts. Thomas Goodwin wrote “It is the duty of everyone that doth believe to grow up to assurance, and it is his sin not to make out for it...”⁷⁰

Practical directives are given to help us “grow up to assurance”:

...I do see it is my duty to grow up to assurance that I have eternal life, it is my great sin to do otherwise; I see that it will improve all graces in me, it will help me to confidence in prayer, it will perfect my love to God, it will make me serve Him without fear, it will make me more holy, besides all the comfort it will bring in to me; this therefore will I set up as my mark, I will never pray but I will seek this in a more eminent manner; I will never receive the Lord’s Supper but I will put in this, that the Lord will come in to bestow it on me; I will listen to all the witnesses I find whispering to my heart by the Spirit, or by the promises suggested to me, and that is... [the] ...assurance to be attained in this life...⁷¹

The “child of light walking in darkness” is to “trust in the name of the Lord”. Goodwin well knew from his own experience that searching for “graces” or evidences of sanctification as the ground for assurance could lead to introspection and despair. We are to cast ourselves upon Christ.

For would we have peace of conscience and the guilt of sin removed? He is the “Prince of Peace”, and is made “righteousness” unto us. Are we in depths of distress, terrors within, terrors without, out of which we see no redemption? He is the “mighty God;” “able to save to the utmost,” being made “redemption” to us. Want we grace and his image to be renewed and increased in us? He is “the everlasting Father;” a *father* to beget his likeness in us, and *everlasting* to maintain it ever, when it is begun once: he is made “sanctification” to us. Want we wisdom to guide us? He is

⁷⁰ *Works* VIII, p. 372.

⁷¹ *Ibid.* p. 373f.

the “Counsellor,” and is made wisdom to us. All we want he hath even as all he hath we want.⁷²

One great motive for seeking assurance is that it will quicken our spiritual progress. During his treatment of Ephesians 1:13, Goodwin stated:

Observe from hence this, that all assurance that is true assurance, and the true seal of the Holy Ghost, it makes a man holy. If ever anything makes him holy, this doth it. Is he a holy Spirit in working faith? Doth he purify your hearts by believing? He will purify your hearts much more when he sealeth you, when he works joy in believing, unspeakable and glorious.⁷³

Or again...

Much more then, when the Holy Ghost is poured out upon you, and when you are baptized with the Holy Ghost as a Comforter. Look, as when the sun cometh near to the earth, then it is spring: it was winter before: so when the Holy Ghost cometh in this manner upon the heart, it was winter before, but it will be spring now.⁷⁴

We are to wait upon God — to plead with him to give us assurance of salvation. Goodwin concludes his exposition of Ephesians 1: 13 with these words:

Let this therefore be made a motive to seek... [the seal of the Spirit] ...at God’s hands; urge him with this besides his promises, tell him it will make you holy. It is a great motive to seek it, and it is a motive to you to urge God to obtain it.⁷⁵

V. Conclusion

So, Goodwin held that all Christians both could and should know assurance of salvation. As we have seen, the highest degree of assurance is the direct witness or seal of the Holy Spirit. It is this that we are to seek after above all else. Our faith in the promises may be subject to doubts. Our “graces” may be clouded over by indwelling sin. But nothing can shake the immediate and infallible witness of the Spirit.

⁷² *Works III*, p. 328.

⁷³ *Exposition of Ephesians*, p. 250.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* p. 252.

A similar view to Goodwin's was held by many of his Puritan predecessors and contemporaries such as John Preston, Richard Sibbes, the early and later teaching of John Owen and John Flavel. George Whitefield, a reader of Goodwin's works also seemed to agree with him on this point, as did many other leaders of the 18th Century Revival Movement.

In our century the greatest exponent of Goodwin's views on assurance was Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones. In his expositions of Ephesians 1:13,14 and Romans 8:15,16 Goodwin's influence looms large. Some modern reformed scholars took issue with the Doctor over this. But in following Goodwin, Lloyd-Jones was in a solid tradition of conservative expositors. The Westminster Confession of Faith endorses Goodwin's view of the "scaling of the Spirit", as do such renowned expositors as Charles Hodge and George Smeaton to name no others. Among modern grammarians the consensus seems to be that Goodwin's contention that the action of the main (aorist) verb in the clause under discussion in Ephesians 1:13, "sealed" at least can be held to be consequent upon the action of the aorist participle "believed". Thus we were scaled with the Holy Spirit subsequent to our believing the word of truth. I cannot go into this too much now, but the basic Greek Grammars will prove my point.⁷⁶ It is more important to grasp the burden of Goodwin's teaching. Dr Lloyd-Jones argued in his exposition of Ephesians 1:13 that:

I am increasingly persuaded that it is our failure to understand this precise statement that accounts for so much lethargy and failure among us as Christian people at the present time. At least I will go so far as to assert that any Christian who is not experiencing the joy of salvation is in that state very largely because of a failure to realise the truth taught in this particular verse of Scripture, for in it we are brought face to face with the way in which we can enter into the fullness which we should be experiencing in Christ.⁷⁷

What we need in the present hour are strong, confident, rejoicing, Spirit-filled Christians. A return to Goodwin's scripturally based teaching on assurance of salvation will be a step in the right direction. Are we as modern day Congregation alists ready to take it?

⁷⁶ In my unpublished *The Sealing of the Spirit*, (a copy can be found in the library of the London Theological Seminary) p. 38, I, following a paper by the same title by G.S. Harrison, quote grammarians such as Gresham Machen and C.F.D. Moule to support my case e.g. Machen's comment; '...the aorist participle denotes action prior to the action denoted by the leading verb...' p. 116f *N. T. Greek for Beginners*.

⁷⁷ D.M. Lloyd-Jones, *God's Utimate Purpose*, Edinburgh, Banner of Truth, p. 244.

2. The Nature of the Church

I will not say much about Goodwin's idea of the nature of the church, but as I am addressing a conference of an Evangelical Fellowship of Congregational Churches I thought I'd better say something.

As we saw in the biographical section of the paper, Thomas Goodwin was one of the five "Dissenting Brethren" who stood up for Congregational principles at the Westminster Assembly. With the five so called "dissenters" he wrote the famous *Apologetical Narration*, a veritable tour-de-force for Congregational ideas. In 1644, Goodwin and Philip Nye published John Cotton's influential *Keys of the Kingdom*, an exposition of the Congregational Church polity of the New England Puritans. Then in 1658, Goodwin, together with Nye, John Owen and others were appointed by 120 Congregational Churches to work on what was to be *The Savoy Declaration of Faith*.

Goodwin's views on the church have been given more attention than his views on assurance.⁷⁸ Geoffrey Nuttall's *Visible Saints* includes some references to Goodwin's influence on Congregational ideas. But the fullest treatment of Goodwin's doctrine of the church that I know of is in the 1980 Westminster Conference Papers, entitled *Diversities of Gifts*. Graham Harrison in his paper entitled *Thomas Goodwin and Independency* gives us a full assessment of Goodwin's thought on this matter.

Although further study on this subject is to be invited, it is beyond the scope of this paper to deal in any depth with Goodwin's doctrine of the church. Suffice to say that Goodwin taught the generally held Congregational principles formally stated in the Savoy Declaration. Over and against the Anglicans and their national church, he wanted a church consisting of "visible saints" or Christians with credible evidence of conversion and a holy life. He wanted churches to be independent of the control of diocesan bishops and able to appoint their own elders and deacons. He wanted a disciplined church. Over against the Presbyterians, he asserted that the local church is autonomous and independent under Christ and able to govern its own affairs in accord with Scripture. Churches could meet together for fellowship, to discuss and advise one another, but no more.

⁷⁸ But see Michael A. Eaton, *Baptism With the Spirit*, Leicester, IVP, p. 80-92 for a good survey of Goodwin on the sealing of the Spirit in relation to the teaching of D.M. Lloyd-Jones.

Goodwin was willing to argue for all these things, yet he was a most tolerant and peaceable man who wanted to promote unity among true believers.

IV. Thomas Goodwin - A Man for Today

Now I want to sum up and apply some lessons from Goodwin's life and thought to us today. Goodwin serves as a good example to us in a number of ways. He was...

i. A Man of the Word

He was described as we have seen as a "living and walking Bible". The Bible was the main source book for all his thinking. He subjected the Biblical text to the most minute analysis so that he might apply the truths he learned through disciplined exegesis to his readers/hearers. His interpretations of Scripture are warm and practical, arising as they do from a man deeply experienced in the ways of God and thoroughly steeped in Scripture. As a preacher, in comparison with two of his eminent contemporaries it was said "Owen preached earnestly to the understanding, Baxter forcibly to the conscience, Goodwin tenderly to the heart."⁷⁹ He calls us to be people of the Word.

ii. A Man of Peace.

Although willing to suffer for a principle, Goodwin was a notably peaceable and catholic spirited man. He reflected:

"As for my part, this I say, and I say it with much integrity, I never yet took up party religion in the lump. For I have found by a long trial of such matters that there is some truth on all sides. I have found Gospel holiness where you would little think it to be, and so likewise truth. And I have learned this principle, which I hope I shall never lay down till I am swallowed up of immortality, and that is, to acknowledge every truth and every goodness wherever I find it."⁸⁰

We must keep our Congregational distinctives tenaciously, but we are to be kind and peaceable toward those evangelicals who differ from its on church distinctives.

⁷⁹ *Diversities of Gifts*, p. 15.

⁸⁰ James M. Gordon, *Evangelical Spirituality*, SPCK, p. 8,

iii. A Man who Knew Full Assurance of Salvation

Brian Freer sums up this point for us succinctly. Goodwin's

...own conversion experience led him to a balanced view of the relative values and positions of justification and sanctification in the matter of assurance. Christ and his justifying grace are the only grounds of assurance, sanctification having a subsidiary value only as the evidence of faith's genuineness.⁸¹

Full assurance comes when the Holy Spirit makes these things a reality to us.

iv. A Man of God

This is what Goodwin was above all else. He *knew* God in Christ and walked with Him very closely. He emphasised that assurance must lead to holiness and the need for the power of the Holy Spirit to transform us from barren to fruitful Christians. He died swallowed up in Christ. He calls us to greater holiness, more intimacy with our Saviour and to a full assurance of faith through the power of the Holy Spirit. Goodwin's vision of the Church was of a company of Spirit-filled visible saints. How do our churches measure up to this description?

Many have been influenced by Thomas Goodwin's life and writings, such as Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield, Alexander Whyte and D.L. Moody. But no one has brought his teaching and emphases alive to us today more than the man whom Dr Packer once called "a kind of puritan" - Dr Lloyd-Jones.

He pleaded for a vital, biblical Christianity. He worked for evangelical unity - for churches who were one in the truth to separate from a spiritually bankrupt ecumenical establishment, just as Goodwin felt led to separate from his contemporary Anglican church. But, also like Goodwin, he urged that those gospel churches should express unity in Christ despite differences on secondary issues. But beyond orthodoxy and unity - again like Goodwin - the Doctor saw that our one great need is that of the power of the Holy Spirit in the Church. He challenges us:

Do you believe in revival, my friend? Are you praying for revival? Are you trusting in the organizing power of the church? Or are you trusting in the power of God to pour out his Spirit on us again, to revive us, to baptize us anew and afresh with his most blessed Holy Spirit?⁸²

⁸¹ *Diversities of Gifts*, p. 19.

⁸² D.M. Lloyd-Jones, *Joy Unspeakable*, Eastbourne, Kingsway p. 280.

Dr Lloyd-Jones grasped the lessons to be learned from studying the lives and teaching of Puritans such as Thomas Goodwin. Goodwin, as I hope I have demonstrated, has much of enduring and practical value to teach us. Will our interest in the Puritans simply be academic and irrelevant or will we seek to apply their values to ourselves? Will we stir ourselves up to “sue” God for the blessings with which He so mightily blessed our godly Congregational forbears? I hope so.

[Tanski Publications (Eureka, CA) has recently reprinted the entire 12 volume set of the *Works of Thomas Goodwin*, ISBN 0-9651791-0-9. The reader is encouraged to order a set from Cumberland Valley Bible Bookstore at 1-800-656-0231 (US) or +1 717 249-0231 (outside US).]

Visit *Fire and Ice: Puritan and Reformed Sermons* at
<http://www.puritansermons.com/>