

The Young People's Magazine

**Issued by the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland
Reformed in Doctrine, Worship and Practice**

“Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them” Ecclesiastes 12:1



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Cover Picture: *The church in Reading where W Marsh preached. See page 51.*

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God's Great Power

Look up at the sky on a clear, cloudless night. You see countless stars sparkling above you. If you were to look through a telescope, you would be able to see far more. And if you were able to view the heavens through the Hubble telescope, as it hurtles through space, you would see still more of this part of God's wonderful creation. For, as we look at the sky, either with the naked eye or through a telescope, what we see is what God created. But there must be many more stars than can be seen through even the most powerful of telescopes. Who can count them?

Their Creator can. The Bible points us to the host of stars in the sky: "Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number: He calleth them all by names by the greatness of His might, for that He is strong in power; not one faileth" (Isaiah 40:26). As we lift up our eyes and look on the huge number of stars in the sky above us, we should remember that God made them. If He has names for them all and calls them by their names, it should be clear to us that He knows everything about them. And it should not surprise us that He can identify them all, because it was He who created everything.

During the French Revolution in 1789, an atheist who had gained some authority said to one of the peasants: "I am going to order your old church tower to be destroyed. I wish you to have nothing left to remind you of your old superstitions."

The peasant pointed to the sky as he answered, "You will need to leave us the stars, which are far older, and are seen from a far greater distance, than our church tower. If the church is destroyed, the sun, the moon and stars will never stop speaking to us about God." He was reflecting the teaching of Psalm 19: "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth His handiwork".

Whatever else the peasant knew or did not know, he recognised that there is a God and that this God created everything. One assumes that he would therefore have accepted that he was responsible to God and obliged to keep His commandments. And if the peasant had access to the teachings of the

Bible, he had a good basis for coming to know God personally – through Jesus Christ, the Saviour.

One other point we may learn from Isaiah 40:26 is the great power of God. It should be obvious that the One who created all things, including all the stars, is a Being of tremendous power. It is He who keeps the stars in their places – “not one faileth”. He keeps in existence everything He has made, including this world and each of us human beings who live on it. But there will come a time when He will use His power in a completely different way. He will bring it all to an end – except angels and human beings, whom He will preserve in existence for ever, either in heaven or in hell.

Time and again those who oppose God and His cause have spoken very strongly (and foolishly, even wickedly) against Him. During Hezekiah's time as King of Judah, a huge Assyrian army under Rabshakeh invaded the country and laid siege to Jerusalem, his capital city. This army commander did all he could to discourage the Jews from resisting him and his forces. He told them not to let Hezekiah deceive them by encouraging them to trust in the Lord. Rabshakeh pointed to all the heathen gods whose peoples the Assyrian army had conquered and implied that the true God was no more powerful than any of them. The Jews should surrender to him, this Assyrian general implied, and then they could all live a comfortable life.

How wrong he was! He did not distinguish between the true God and false gods. He did not realise that Hezekiah's God was the One who had created all things. He did not look up to the sky and consider the stars and the power of their Creator. But God sent Isaiah to reassure Hezekiah about the King of Assyria. “He shall not come into this city,” God said, “nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with shield, nor cast a bank against it” (2 Kings 19:32); he would never succeed in invading Jerusalem. And God did show His power: one night He sent an angel who killed 185 000 of the Assyrian troops. The Jews who trusted Hezekiah's God were absolutely right.

Today many people, some of them prominent in Britain and various other countries, speak very forcefully against God. They deny that He is the Creator; when they look up at the sky they tell themselves that the stars they see came into existence just by chance; they even try to convince themselves that God does not exist. But they should face up to the fact that God does exist and that His power remains unchanged since the creation. And it is a power which they must yet confront; if sinners go on rejecting God, they will be among the wicked who “shall be turned into hell” (Psalm 9:17).

But why should anyone continue on the way towards a lost eternity? God has used His power to provide a way of salvation. He has sent His own Son, Jesus Christ, to bear the guilt of rebellious sinners – a work that needed

divine power. And Jesus Christ is now at the right hand of God the Father in heaven – the place of power. From there He sends the Holy Spirit to work powerfully in the hearts of sinners; the Bible calls this work a new creation. And every act of creation needs enormous power.

When the Holy Spirit comes to work in a soul, He has to overcome two powerful forces. First, every unconverted heart exerts tremendous resistance to His work. There is strong opposition to holiness; no one wants to leave their sins. And when sinners are called to believe in Jesus, they do not want to believe; they resist the truth – this is the great power of unbelief.

Second, the devil has great power. He does not want to lose any of his followers and, as far as God permits him, he puts up tremendous resistance to the Holy Spirit. He tries to deflect sinners from thinking seriously about the claims of God, the seriousness of sin and its terrible consequences, and the grace of God in Christ. He tempts the sinner to disbelieve what God is saying through the Bible and the preaching he hears in church. He tempts sinners to assume that there will be plenty time to consider these things in the far-distant future. And he tempts sinners to go further into sin; he hopes they will become more and more resistant to the claims of God.

All these are powerful influences. But the Holy Spirit is far more powerful. He is able to subdue the sinner; He is able to change the sinner's heart and make him willing to trust in Christ – in a day of God's power (see Psalm 110:3). The Spirit does so when the sinner is in contact with the Scriptures; then He makes the sinner able, at least in a small degree, to understand the Bible's teaching about sin and salvation and to believe in Christ. Then, however powerful the temptations of Satan, the influences of the Holy Spirit prove to be much more powerful. However unwilling Satan is to let sinners go, he is completely unable to hold on to them when the Holy Spirit works effectively in their hearts.

That power is what we all need. Nothing less could have subdued the woman of Samaria, with her series of husbands and unmarried partners, and to bring her to turn to Christ in repentance and faith. Otherwise she would have gone on in her sins. And nothing less can subdue you, however conformed to God's commandments you may be outwardly.

So, when we look up at the sky on a cloudless night, let us remind ourselves that we are seeing the work of an all-powerful Creator. Let us remind ourselves too that we need a new creation in our souls. And let us ask Him, for the sake of the all-powerful Saviour, to send the Holy Spirit to work powerfully and savingly in our souls. But if we have already been blessed with His saving work in our hearts and lives, let us sincerely thank God from the bottom of our hearts for His great kindness to us.

David Cadwaladr

2. Who Is the True Prophet?

David Cadwaladr was brought up in a part of north-west Wales where no one preached the gospel. Yet he became afraid of sin, death and hell, and he lived, on the whole, a very serious life. Eventually he heard the gospel from a preacher called William Evans but it had no real effect on him; he remained unconverted.

David became ill with smallpox; he had to return home for three months while he recovered from the disease. During this time he read through the whole Bible, from Genesis to Revelation. When he recovered he found a new job in a place four miles from Bala.

Soon he was able to listen to William Evans again, as he preached on Galatians 3:22: "But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe". This time the preaching had a powerful effect on David, and he wondered how other people seemed so unconcerned about what they with hearing. Until now he had been afraid that God would not have mercy on people as sinful as he was. But as he listened to Evans, the gospel reached his heart; he now believed he could be saved although he was so sinful and guilty.

From then on he walked the four miles to Bala for public worship every Sabbath morning. Sometimes he had nothing to eat all day; other Sabbaths he would knock on the door of someone he thought would give him some food. He diligently went on praying to God, and he spent hours, long into the night, reading by candlelight. He read, not only the Bible, but every book he could find in the Welsh language.

But his reading was not always wise; for a start, it included some Roman Catholic books. Even more seriously for him, his thinking was disturbed by something he read about Mohammed and Islam. He began to ask himself: Who was greater: Christ or Mohammed? And which was the true religion: Christianity or Islam? He knew that both religions claimed to be from God, but it was obvious that only one of them could be true. He wanted to be absolutely sure that the teachings he believed were true; he knew that if, at some later stage in his life, he found out that he was wrong in his beliefs, it would be very difficult to change his mind then.

For six months he struggled with his problems. Sometimes he was impressed by how quickly Islam had spread and by the number of great nations which had submitted to it. At other times his mind inclined towards Christianity. He found it difficult to speak to anyone about his problems. But one day he asked a man: "What do we have that proves the truth of Christ's doctrine rather than that of Mohammed?" The answer was not at all helpful.

“Indeed, David,” the man told him, “you worry about things that shouldn’t concern you. You read too much.” Yet David’s problem was rather that some of his reading was not safe. There were many dangerous books going about then and there are many more today.

But he kept on praying; he asked God to keep him from trusting in a false prophet. Then he began to compare the life of Mohammed with that of Christ. As he did so, he took note of Mohammed’s sinfulness, while Christ’s life appeared all the brighter the more he looked into it. At last a verse from the Epistle to the Hebrews was strongly impressed on his mind. It was: “For such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens” (7:26).

There was no doubt in David’s mind any longer. Jesus Christ was indeed the one true prophet and Christianity was the one true religion. David felt ashamed that he had ever doubted claims of the One he now saw to be the glorious Lord Jesus Christ; he was also ashamed that he had ever compared this blessed Person with a sinner like Mohammed. He believed the teaching of Hebrews 7:26: because Christ is holy, He is a suitable Saviour for sinful human beings.

When he was 19, David wrote out a statement of how, by God’s grace, he wanted to live the rest of his life: “I, David Cadwaladr, do give myself this day to be the Lord’s possession for ever. I give my soul to Him to keep and to rule; my body as a sacrifice to Him, my heart to love Him, my tongue to praise Him, my time to serve Him, my members [of my body] as servants of righteousness for Him. In His Person I believe; in His blood I have washed; in His grace I strengthen myself; in His Word I will meditate; His glory I will behold; on His bosom I will lean; in His commandments I will walk; against sin I will war; under the cross I will suffer; for every man I will pray.

“Thus I intend to live for God and to trust only in His goodness for strength and grace to keep my vow. And lest I ever retract my words, God the Father, God the Son and the Spirit, the heavenly angels, the demons of hell and my own conscience shall be the witnesses of my covenant. ‘One shall say, I am the Lord’s; and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob’ (Isaiah 44:5). ‘Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses’ (1 Timothy 6:12). ‘I have sworn, and I will perform it, that I will keep Thy righteous judgments’ (Psalm 119:106).

“Keep me, O Lord, from every kind of presumption and error, and keep me ever close to Thee. May Thy blessing be upon me.”

And God did bless David Cadwaladr. God made him very useful as a preacher of the gospel for much of the rest of his life.

Martha and Mary

5. Concentrating on What Honours Christ

Rev H M Cartwright

The last article dealt with the reactions of Mary and Martha to the death of their brother Lazarus. "They needed an even-more-complete confidence than they had in the grace, wisdom and power of the Saviour."

Our third encounter with Mary and Martha is in the account given by Matthew (26:6-13), Mark (14:3-9) and John (12:1-9), the anointing of Jesus by Mary with very precious ointment, which took place in the house of Simon the leper. It impresses on us the benefit of concentrating our attention on what honours Christ.

On this occasion we see Martha again doing what she could do best – serving the supper. This time there is no criticism of her for being careful and troubled about many things – for her activity, as Moody Stuart puts it, has been "purified and exalted; it is service still, but without care and distraction; it is service, but with no more murmuring at Mary for leaving her the second time to sit at the feet of Jesus". The gentle rebuke she received on the first occasion has done her good, and her growing experience of the Lord has brought her to a better state of mind.

But in this account, attention is focused on Mary and what Mary did, though, of course, what Mary did was focused upon Christ. She is honoured for honouring Christ. Christ was very precious to Mary. She had learned of Him, and on this occasion she took the opportunity to demonstrate how much He meant to her by anointing His head and His feet with very costly ointment which she had kept for His burial. What she did was the fruit of her faith, which came by hearing. It was the fruit of her love, which flowed from her faith. It was the fruit of her devotion to Christ and desire for His honour. It was an evidence of the extent to which the forthcoming death of her Saviour occupied her thoughts. Like another Mary, she had laid up in her heart the things which she heard, and this moved her to do what she could to honour her Lord.

It was as well for her that she did not do what she did in order to receive the approval of men. Judas may have been the spokesman when he said, "Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence" – nearly a year's wages for a soldier – "and given to the poor?" (John 12:5). But this was also the general view taken by those present. "When his disciples saw it, they had indignation, saying, To what purpose is this waste? For this ointment might have been sold for much, and given to the poor" (Matthew 26:8,9). "And they murmured against her" (Mark 14:5). She was preoccupied with Christ

and concerned to honour Him, not to make an impression on the disciples. But she had her feelings too and no doubt that is one reason for the Lord coming to her defence and making known how highly He esteemed what she had done and that it would become known wherever the gospel spread.

The Lord was not dismissive of the poor and their needs. Indeed, the poor had a special place in His attention. This was one of the marks of the Messiah which He drew to the attention of John the Baptist and His disciples: “Go and show John again those things which ye do hear and see: the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and *the poor have the gospel preached to them*” (Matthew 11:4,5).

It is also a fact that those to whom Christ is more precious than anyone or anything else are constrained by His love to be to the fore in practical concern for those in need. They do not say to the naked, hungry brother or sister: “Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled”, and yet do not give them the things which are needful for the body (James 2:15,16). “Hereby perceive we the love of God, because He laid down His life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoso hath this world’s good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth. And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him” (1 John 3:16-19). It is as we drink at the fountain of the divine love, as Mary did, that we shall be moved to do what we can to manifest our love to others.

The Lord was addressing the error which was at the heart of the general complaining about Mary. If they had the concern about the poor which they professed they would have plenty opportunity to demonstrate it.

But where was their concern to honour their Lord, who was so soon to leave them by way of the cross? We are back again to this matter of priorities and motives. “Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him for ever” (*Shorter Catechism*, 1). “The *first* of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; the Lord our God is one Lord: and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. And the *second* is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” (Mark 12:29-31). This love for God in Christ – which is the graciously-produced response of the soul to the love of God in Christ and which flows into love for our fellow believers and fellow sinners – is so essential to any good work that Paul can say: “And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor . . . and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing” (1 Corinthians 13:3).

What Is Evangelical Religion?

4. The Work of the Holy Spirit

J C Ryle

This is the final edited extract from a chapter of the book, *Knots Untied*. The previous article was on the work of Christ

The fourth of the main features of Evangelical religion is the high place which it gives to the inward work of the Holy Spirit *in the heart of man*. Evangelical religion declares that the root of all vital Christianity in anyone is a work of grace in the heart. And unless he experiences that grace, his religion is a mere husk – a shell and a name and a form. It can neither comfort nor save. We maintain that the things which need most to be pressed on people's attention are those mighty works of the Holy Spirit: inward repentance, inward faith, inward hope, inward hatred of sin, and inward love to God's law. And we say that to tell men to take comfort in their Baptism or Church membership, when these all-important graces are unknown, is not merely a mistake but positive cruelty.

As an inward work of the Holy Ghost is necessary to a man's salvation, we also hold that it must be inwardly felt. We admit that feelings are often deceptive and that a man may feel much or weep much or rejoice much, and yet remain dead in trespasses and sins. But we maintain firmly that there can be no real conversion to God, no new creation in Christ, no new birth of the Spirit, where nothing is felt within. We hold that the witness of the Spirit, however much it may be abused, is a real thing. We believe it is a solemn duty to be no less concerned about the work of the Holy Ghost than we are about the work of Christ. And we insist that, where someone feels nothing in his heart, he really possesses nothing.

The fifth and last of the main features of Evangelical religion is the importance which it attaches to the outward work of the Holy Ghost – what can be seen – *in the life of man*. It declares that the true grace of God will always make itself known in the conduct, behaviour, tastes, ways, choices and habits of anyone who has it. It is not something hidden – what can be within a man and not show itself outwardly. The heavenly seed is “not corruptible, but incorruptible”. It is a seed which is distinctly said to remain in everyone that is born of God (1 Peter 1:23; 1 John 3:9). Where the Spirit is, He will always make His presence known.

We hold that, unless people really overcome the world, the flesh and the devil, it is wrong to tell them that they are children of God and members of Christ and heirs of the kingdom of heaven. We maintain that it is a

dangerous delusion to tell a man he is “born of God”, or regenerated, while he is living in carelessness or sin; it is likely to do infinite harm to his soul. We affirm confidently that “fruit” is the only certain evidence of a man’s spiritual condition; that if we would know whose he is and whom he serves, we must look first at his life. Where the grace of the Spirit is, there will always be more or less fruit of the Spirit. Grace that cannot be seen is no grace at all. In short, we believe that where there is nothing to be seen, there is no grace in the soul.

Swearing Tom

William Marsh was a young minister in England. In 1800 he had just become the assistant in a church in Reading. He preached only once before his church had to close for repairs. He went to stay with a friend who was the assistant in a church in Basingstoke. The minister of that church had been away for a long time, careless about his flock; so, in his absence, Marsh’s friend asked him to preach on the Sabbath. But before the end of the week, the minister returned home. When he heard about the arrangement for the Sabbath, he declared, “Young Marsh shall not preach in my church”. He did not like Marsh’s biblical religion.

When Marsh heard the minister’s decision, he was not angry; he was not upset; he just said quietly: “Then I am to be a listener instead of a preacher tomorrow. But I can pray as much as I wish.”

On the Sabbath morning, the minister of a small church on the edge of the town took unwell. He sent a message to Marsh asking him to take the service for him. Marsh was glad to do so and preached on John 1:29: “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world”. When the service was over, he offered to take a second in the afternoon. Between the services, the news went round the town about the young minister who was not allowed to take a service in the large church but was to preach again in the smaller church. Large numbers gathered – many of them probably out of curiosity – and the church was packed, and so was the graveyard outside. Among those standing in the middle passageway in the church was a man whom everybody knew as Swearing Tom. He was a leader in sin and in the use of bad language; he had not been in church for 17 years. He was obviously one of those who came out of curiosity.

Marsh’s text that afternoon was from Ezekiel 36:26: “A new spirit will I put within you”. Near the end of his sermon, the young minister quoted from the Gospel of Luke: “If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto

your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?" (11:13). Then Marsh added: "The offer is not to children but simply to those who ask. There is nothing therefore between the worst of men and this most blessed gift from heaven but to ask for it." And he went on: "If the most wicked man in this church will go home and pray that God, for Christ's sake, would give him His Holy Spirit to change his heart, God will hear and answer that man's prayer".

Swearing Tom was listening and he felt the force of these words. "I am the worst man here," he said to himself; "I will go home and pray." As he walked home, he had to pass a pub where he had long been a regular customer. His friends were calling him to join them in the pub, but he did not listen. When he reached home he threw himself on his knees and tried to pray as Marsh had said during the service.

Tom's prayers were heard in heaven; the Holy Spirit came to work in his heart, and he believed in Christ. His old nickname no longer fitted; he now became known as Praying Tom. And for the last 50 years of his life he made himself useful, giving up his free time to visit sick people in their homes and, no doubt, to pray with them.

Even when things seem to go wrong, it is good to follow Marsh's example and be patient. God acts wisely in everything He does. The minister who refused to let Marsh preach in his church clearly had no desire for the spiritual good of his flock; in his hatred of true, biblical religion he was doing the work of Satan. But God has His own ways of working; He can overrule all of Satan's schemes and all that people may do in rebellion against God and His Word. God will never let His purposes fail, although sometimes He makes use of the most unusual circumstances.

For Younger Readers

She Trusted Her Father

The ship was sailing all the way across the Atlantic Ocean, from Liverpool to New York. It was night; almost everybody was sound asleep.

Suddenly it became very windy. Huge waves came crashing against the side of the ship. Indeed she was almost thrown over on her side.

Soon everyone was awake. Among them was a girl who was just eight years old. "What is the matter?" she asked.

Someone told her about the sudden wind. Then she just had one question. She wanted to know where her father was.

But who was her father? He was the captain of the ship. He was in charge of it.

The girl was content. She believed that all was well, because her father was in control of the ship. She put her head on her pillow again and soon she was fast asleep.

See how the girl trusted her father. Those who trust in God take Him as their Heavenly Father. They know He is in control of everything. The girl's father could not control the winds. But God can.

No one who trusts in God needs to be afraid. No matter what happens, they will be safe. Even when difficult things happen, He will take care of them. And even when they die, all will be well because He will take them to heaven.

For Junior Readers

Who Will You Listen to?

Do you know the story of Joash, one of the kings of Judah? He was the boy-king who began to reign when he was only seven years old. For the first part of his reign, while he was under the good influence of Jehoiada the priest, he did what was right. Joash set about repairing the temple, which was a very good work. But Jehoiada, the good old priest, died and then we see Joash being pulled in another direction.

We see two different forces trying to influence Joash; they were both trying to get him to listen to them. On the one side were the princes of Judah. They gave him bad advice. They encouraged him to leave God's temple, where they ought to have worshipped God, and to set up idols again. Instead of opposing these wicked men and standing up for what was right, we read: "Then the king hearkened unto them". He listened to the bad men who gave him wrong advice and led him astray from God. How sad!

On the other side were the prophets of God, God's servants, who came with good advice. They told Joash he was doing wrong and tried to bring him back to God. Did he pay attention to them? Sadly not. We read that "they would not give ear". Joash and the princes of Judah would not listen to the God-fearing men who told them the truth.

So God sent judgements upon Joash: Jerusalem was attacked by enemies

and he himself was struck down with disease. His reign, which had started so well, came to a disappointing end. His own servants conspired against him and killed him; he was not even buried in the graves of the kings.

Does the story of Joash have something to say about your life? On the one hand, you have your parents, your minister and other Christians. They are speaking to you, explaining God's Word and His commandments to you. They care about your soul and give you good advice – advice which is for your spiritual good, not just for time but for eternity too. Do you listen to them? Do you take heed to their advice? Do you try to do what they tell you is right? I hope the words: "They would not give ear", do not apply to you.

Who else tries to make you listen? Who else tries to influence you? Perhaps school friends, other worldly people you meet – those who clearly do not put God first in their lives. Perhaps they try to tempt you away from your Christian upbringing, suggesting you do things that you know in your heart are wrong. Or perhaps it is more subtle than that, and you do not even realise that they have a bad influence on you. Do you "hearken unto them" as Joash did? I hope not. Do you give your ears, for example, to worldly music, which takes up your attention so that you have no time to think of better things? This is another bad influence which the devil is very happy to see young people absorbed with and which you would be better not to hearken to!

Should *you* not make sure that you listen, "hearken", "give ear" to what is for your good. Listen to God, who says, "Incline your ear, and come unto Me: hear, and your soul shall live".

J van Kralingen

Archaeology and Scripture

Most people in the world today, sadly, do not rely on Scripture to find out the truth; they rely on the ideas of modern science. This approach is totally different to the way we strive to bring up our children, in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. It can cause real difficulties to our children when science comes to conclusions which clash with Scripture. So what should be our response? The correct response is to remember that "through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear" (Hebrews 11:3). But this sounds like putting blind, irrational faith against rational scientific research. In reality though, science has to be measured against the all-important question: "What is truth?"

Archaeology is that branch of science which studies ancient peoples

through old bones, fossils, ancient writings and other objects. Archaeologists sift through the remains of ancient civilisations and then try to piece together their findings into a consistent picture of how the people of these societies lived. Some archaeologists tell us that there is no evidence to support the account of the fall of Jericho in the Book of Joshua. Although they have identified several layers of civilisation from 1500-1100 BC, no walls have been found which could come tumbling down. So, they claim, there was no defenced city to conquer, no battle and probably no general called Joshua. The question is: On what basis are these conclusions made?

Think of our own society being excavated at some point in the future. Up to a certain level, the archaeologist finds only china plates and cups. Then from a certain point they become plastic. If from other sources, the digger knows that plastic replaced china from 1950-65 then he can piece together other events from about this time. So with Jericho. If other information tells us that a certain level is dated at 1500-1100 BC, and no wall foundations are found at that level, then the modern researcher pieces together his findings in the light of that knowledge. The proof is in the pottery. The problem with this is that the very next spadeful of dirt, during the next excavation could overturn that conclusion.

There have been many examples of this problem. Troy is a well-known example. Over the last 150 years, as they have tried to reconstruct the ancient scene, almost every serious fresh dig has come to different conclusions from the last one. The only thing we can be certain about is that the next set of experts may come to a different conclusion from the last! Few doubt the care and rigour of the scientists concerned. But no one can actually go back in time and test theory against reality. So the terms *proof*, *truth*, and *knowledge* in this context should be used more cautiously, when present thinking may be revised with the next piece of compelling evidence.

By contrast, the Scriptures can never be broken. They speak of God's goodness to fallen man. God made the world and formed man from the dust of the ground; He knows the end from the beginning and has shaped the course of history according to His own will. He has told us a little of that history in Scripture for our instruction, and that poor sinners might glory in Him. The creation tells of His handiwork (Psalm 19), and where there is a little true light in the soul, that person will glory in God's works. But Satan was a liar from the beginning of the world and hates the worship of God. He suits his lies to the scientific age in which we live. His only aim is to overthrow the truth and how often he does so by using specialists in various branches of science to arrive at conclusions which go far beyond the evidence they have found. But let God be true and every man a liar. *G Main*

The Holy Scriptures

W S Plumer

Taken, with editing, from the book, *Short Sermons for the People*. Plumer was once a well-known minister in America. His text for this sermon was: "Whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope" (Romans 15:4).

Paul is here speaking of the things written in the Bible. He says God gave us that holy book to teach and comfort us, to make us firm and fill us with hope. Let us look a little at the Word of God and see how excellent it is.

1. The Bible tells us all we need to know about His nature and His will. It tells us He is holy, just, good, true, kind, strong and glorious. His will is made known to us in His law and His gospel, in all the Scriptures. We must not do what He forbids. We must do what He commands. And because He is a Spirit, we must worship Him in spirit and in truth. His greatest demand is that we give Him our heart. Without that nothing pleases Him.

2. This blessed book tells us how we sinners may be saved. It points out one way of life, and only one. It holds forth Jesus Christ as the only door to God; as the only sacrifice for sin; as "the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world"; as "the way, the truth, and the life". It says that no one comes to the Father except by Christ. On these points it leaves no doubt. There is no hope for sinners in any other way. He who tries to climb up to heaven in any other way will be treated as a thief and a robber (John 10:1). "Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ?" (1 John 2:22). All the prophets and apostles point to Christ. Do you wish to be saved? Look to Jesus. It is only by faith in Him that you can enter into rest. "Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and ye perish from the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him" (Psalm 2:12).

3. The Bible tells us how we may be made pure and holy, and it helps on that work. "Sanctify them through Thy truth; Thy word is truth" (John 17:17). It speaks of being born of the Spirit, and renewed by the Holy Ghost. He is the ointment that consecrates the soul to God. He is the well of water springing up into everlasting life within us. Love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance are all "the fruit of the Spirit" (Galatians 5:22,23). Apart from Him we have no really good desires or thoughts or plans. He takes of the things of Christ and shows them to us. He is the author of all saving graces and of all edifying gifts.

It was the Spirit of the Lord God that anointed the Lord Jesus "to preach good tidings unto the meek; to bind up the broken-hearted; to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound;

to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord; to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness” (Isaiah 62:1-3, see also Luke 4:16-21). Let no one forget that this blessed Holy Spirit may be found by prayer. Christ Himself says, “If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?” (Luke 11:13).

4. Some things are very remarkably borne out in many parts of the Bible; they bring out the *same glorious truths*. They often teach that men are by nature lost, dead in trespasses and sins; that salvation is wholly of God’s free mercy; that without holiness no man shall see the Lord; and that without faith it is impossible to please God. They say that no sinner ever turned to God with hearty sorrow for sin and was rejected. They teach the very opposite. Jesus Himself says, “Him that cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out” (John 6:37). They fully set before us the blessed truth that no one ever humbly trusted in God and was left to confusion. They declare that Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, never gives any of His sheep or lambs to the wolves.

The Bible makes it plain that no true servant of God was ever finally forsaken. No promise of God to believers has ever been broken. To this day each one is in full force. It is of great comfort to all who think properly that God loves weak Christians as truly as strong ones; and that the weak brother shall be held up, for God is able to make him stand, (Romans 14:4).

If mercy was offered only to the good, the wise and the strong, who could be saved? But the Bible gives every encouragement to the feeble and the sinful to hope in God through Jesus Christ. What more can they need? There may be war, famine and plague; the earth may reel and stagger like a drunken man; but God has given His oath, to all that have fled to Jesus, that His grace shall save them and that He will never leave them nor forsake them. No greater trials and cruelties can befall God’s people than those through which many saints have already been carried. The Church of God can never be in so low a state as she was when in all the earth there were only eight members, tossed on the waves of the flood; or when her great Head lay cold and dead in Joseph’s sepulchre.

When God’s Word bids us look into the future, it tells us wonderful things. It tells all the saints that their days of mourning shall soon end. It says that, having loved His own, Jesus will love them to the end. It says that “neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:38,39). The Bible also opens to us, as far as is necessary, visions

of future glory. It says that an exceeding and eternal weight of glory has been prepared for all the saints. It assures them that they shall be ever with the Lord. Beyond this world, there is a glorious life for them all.

5. Surely then the people of God may have *hope*. They can ask for nothing more to assure their faith. Whatever they may need, it is provided by the Lord and promised in His Word. There is no danger of trusting God too much. The fear is that they will not believe all that His Word allows them to believe.

They do not need brighter examples of piety and courage than the Bible gives them. Through faith God's people have "subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again; and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection; and others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (of whom the world was not worthy): they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth (Hebrews 11:33-38). Let God's people then hold fast our confidence which has great recompense of reward. Let them hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto them at the appearing of Jesus Christ.

But if God's Word is to give us hope and comfort, we must know it. If we would know it, we should hear it, read it, hide it in our hearts; we should not forget it or think of it lightly. Think about it, talk about it, study it, take a firm hold of all its truths. Seek earnestly to find out the meaning of all that God has said. Seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit. He can make the darkest things plain. He pours floods of light on its pages and teaches us the mind of God as no man or angel can do.

6. In all our ways we must have *patience*, (or *constancy*, as the word means). We must not flinch from duty, labour, study, peril or suffering. "The righteous shall hold on his way, and he that hath clean hands shall be stronger and stronger" (Job 17:9). May all our trials increase our patience. It is sad to see a professed child of God trembling like a leaf. Do not be a reed shaken with the wind. "He that wavereth is like a wave of the sea."

Thus we may have *comfort* from the Scriptures. Let the Word of God dwell in you richly in all wisdom. Then you will not be given over to folly and sorrow. God's Word will cure a thousand fears that you may now have. His Word will be such a support to you that you will seek no support from the dreams and fancies of men. Hold fast God's Word, and let all else go.

Looking Around Us

Is Religion Odd?

The Archbishop of Canterbury, the leader of the Church of England, is not usually the most forthright in defending Christianity. Perhaps he is more ready to defend religion in general than Christianity.

Recently the Archbishop has complained about the British Government treating religious faith as an “eccentricity” practised by “oddities”. Sadly, he is right – though one could wish to hear him emphasise the vital importance of following – not just any religion – but the one *true* religion. There is a God, and only one God, “the living and true God” (1 Thessalonians 1:9). And that one God has revealed Himself in the Bible. Everyone is under an obligation to follow this religion, government ministers included.

Archbishop Williams told a newspaper that ministers are wrong to think that religion is no longer relevant to society. But he should not encourage ministers to think favourably of *false* religion; it does great damage to both individuals and society. It is true religion that is relevant to individuals and society – because the God who made us is the One who has revealed to mankind the religion we should follow.

Thus it is based on facts, for God knows everything. He makes known, for instance, that: (1) there is a God, who is all-powerful, just and merciful; (2) this God created man perfect, but he rebelled against his Creator; (3) God continues to demand obedience to His law, although man is unable to keep the law and so deserves infinite punishment; (4) God has provided salvation through His Son, who came into the world to suffer and die. But people do not want to believe these facts – which is itself a sign of the corruption of the human heart.

God’s law is totally relevant to people like us, who otherwise could not know how we should live. Salvation from sin is equally relevant because otherwise we will be lost for ever. A godly life is relevant because it promotes the glory of our Creator. And so one could go on, for the whole Bible is relevant – the all-wise God made it suitable for our needs.

It is tragic when a government does nothing to promote true religion but rather makes it more and more difficult to practise it properly. Indeed people generally in most parts of the country today think those who practise true Christianity are more than a little odd. Yet we should not be ashamed of our religion. Yes, it may often be difficult if people make fun of us, or worse. But we should look to God for help. He *is* able to help us. And He will yet bring about a time when true religion will no longer seem odd, but lots of people everywhere will, from the heart, “serve the highest Lord”.

Youth Conference 2010

Arrangements

Venue: Scottish Youth Hostel, Glasgow.

Dates: Tuesday, April 6, to Thursday, April 8.

Chairman: Rev D A Ross

Lower Age Limit: 16 years old.

Applications: To Rev D A Ross, F P Manse, Laide, Ross-shire, IV22 2NB, *as soon as possible* (the closing date is March 27). See the February issue for an application form. The fee will be £40 for applicants in full-time employment and £20 for others. Cheques are payable to the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland.

Programme

Tuesday, April 6

2.30 pm **The Scottish Reformation of 1560**
450 years of blessing for Scotland
by Rev D W B Somerset

7.00 pm **John Knox**
His life and greatness
by Rev D W B Somerset

Wednesday, April 7

9.30 am **A Promise of Good Things to Come**
The system of sacrifices in the Bible
by Rev J R Tallach

1.30 pm **Church History in Glasgow**
A Tour conducted by Rev J B Jardine

7.30 pm **Prayer Meeting**
In St Jude's Free Presbyterian Church, Glasgow

Thursday, April 8

9.30 am **God's Faithful Servant**
Lessons from the life of Moses
by Rev D A Ross

Further information will be sent to each applicant about a week before the conference. If you have any queries, do not hesitate to phone Mr Ross (tel: 01445 731340). But please do *not* delay sending in your application.

Price 70p