

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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Prosperity: a Blessing?

Ed Miliband, the leader of Britain's Labour Party, has complained that the Government is putting in danger what he called the "British promise". He was thinking of the idea that each generation of children can look forward to better opportunities than their parents. So they can hope to earn more than the people of a previous generation. Mr Miliband illustrated the idea by referring to his own family history. His grandfather, Samuel, and father, Ralph, fled to the UK ahead of the Nazi armies advancing into Belgium during the Second World War. As Jews, the Milibands were in great danger if they did not flee and they presumably landed in Britain with only what they could carry. Yet Ralph Miliband became a university professor and his son Ed has risen to near the top of British politics. Mr Miliband is afraid that the present government's policies may prevent the next generation being more prosperous than this one and having better opportunities in life.

For some centuries now, most generations have been more prosperous than those that went before and there have been more opportunities for young people to succeed. But can we really *expect* this to go on for ever? I do not think so, no matter what kind of government is in power. In any case, it ignores the important question: Do we, as a nation, have God's blessing? And how can Britain, and other nations across the world, expect to become more prosperous when they pay so little attention to God and His commands? Indeed, has any generation ever been so determined to ignore religion, trying to live without a god of any kind?

Yet it should be obvious that a false religion is worse than useless. We should be concerned to follow the true religion and to worship the God who really exists. This is the God who has revealed Himself in the Bible. And it should also be obvious that unless we are sincere – unless our whole heart is involved – in worshipping this God and in obeying His commandments, something is far wrong with the way we practice our religion.

But it is unlikely that Mr Miliband pays any attention to these things. He is an atheist; he claims, "I don't believe in God". The more is the pity, because God does exist. If people refuse to believe in Him, then they are doing them-

selves harm. And if they are in positions of authority, they are probably doing harm to others. Members of Parliament who do not believe in God will make laws that do not reflect God's commandments, and that is likely to be harmful to individuals and to the nation as a whole. That has been the position in Britain for many years now; our laws are much further out of line with God's law than once they were. There used to be laws, for instance, which to some extent prevented Sabbath-breaking. That is no longer the case, and the country is the worse for that.

Yet we must remember that, on many such issues, decisions in Parliament may reflect the views of the majority of British people. How few of them care about the Sabbath! How few wish to use it as a day for worshipping God! How few see it as a special opportunity to seek God and His blessing, for themselves and for the nation!

Many of those who left England to settle in America in the early 1600s were godly people. When they landed on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean, they experienced great hardships before they were able to cultivate the land and gather in their crops after their first summer in their new colony. As the generations passed, the people enjoyed greater prosperity, but there was less true godliness among them. In 1679 some of the people were very disturbed; they felt that they no longer had God's blessing in the colony. They called a meeting which laid out in great detail, in 13 sections, the sins of the times. These sins included, Sabbath-breaking, hatred of other people, drunkenness, dishonesty, worldliness, selfishness, unbelief and a decline in family religion. Also people were neglecting to attend public worship and were resisting calls to reform their way of life.

More than 40 years later, in 1721, a godly old minister called Increase Mather expressed his sadness because there was still no improvement in the spiritual state of the people around him in New England. He was now 82 and, after 65 years as a preacher, he looked back with sadness on the godly people he once knew. He contrasted the state of things in the past with the worldliness that he could see about him in his old age. Most people did not care about their souls; what really mattered for them was that they would have plenty of the things of the world. Sad at heart, he quoted the words of Jeremiah: "O that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears". And no doubt he prayed earnestly that God would work powerfully in the souls of the people around him.

Our situation is even worse than that which faced Increase Mather, but the response of God's children today should be similar to his. With sadness in our hearts we should go before God and pray that He would so work in our generation that multitudes of sinners would hear the gospel, believe in the

Lord Jesus Christ and serve Him, rather than follow the world, sin, atheism and false religion.

Many people today are finding life more difficult. Some are out of work and finding it hard, if not impossible, to find a job. Others are finding the cost of living increase more quickly than their income. And it is specially difficult for people to cope with such problems when they have been encouraged to believe that, as surely as year follows year, their standard of living will certainly improve. But that is not realistic in a sinful world, especially when the nation does not enjoy God's blessing, and does not even care about it. Our situation most certainly calls for repentance.

But is increasing prosperity always a blessing? Not unless godliness goes along with it. It was no real blessing for the farmer Jesus described (in Luke 12:16-21) to have had such a wonderful harvest – so wonderful that he was making plans to extend his barns to store it all. He had no thought about his soul or about eternity. His thoughts were all about worldly things. He promised himself that life would go on for many more years. He could now take his ease, he told himself. He would “eat, drink, and be merry”.

It was not a wise way of looking at the future, and his thoughts were solemnly interrupted when God told him: “Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee”. There were no years stretching out ahead of him in which to enjoy the prosperity created by that wonderful harvest. He did not even have one day left to spend in the ease he was so foolishly promising himself. Solemnly, he had scarcely any time to prepare for eternity; he had almost no time to seek the Lord. What a fool he was! And how many are like him today!

Even if this farmer had lived on in his abundance, he might not have enjoyed it; money does not buy happiness. Prosperity is not a blessing unless we live to God's glory, unless we are turning from sin and looking to Jesus Christ for salvation. And prosperity is often a distraction, turning our attention from the needs of our souls to the things of the world, helping us to forget that, more than anything else, we must seek God's blessing for our souls.

We need many things in this world. If God supplies them, we should be very thankful. We should acknowledge Him as the giver of every good thing we have. In countries like Britain, we have great reason to be thankful that we do not face the grinding poverty and other hardships that many people had to endure in previous generations. But let us always remember Jesus' words: “Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matthew 6:33). He is telling us to seek, as more important than everything else, a place in the kingdom of God. He assures that, if we do so, all our real needs will be supplied. The “British promise” may prove to be an illusion, but God's promise will never fail.

John Knox: His Life and Greatness

1. Years of Preparation

Rev D W B Somerset

The articles in this series are based on a talk given at the Young People's Conference in 2010. The purpose of the talk was to give an outline of the life of Knox (1514-1572) and to focus on a few episodes of particular interest in his life. Knox's life falls naturally into various distinct periods, and in this article we look at the first three of these.

1. *The Early Years and George Wishart (1514-1546).* John Knox was born about 1514 at Giffordgate, Haddington, to the east of Edinburgh. He studied at St Andrews University and was ordained priest by the Bishop of Dunblane in 1536. In the early 1540s, he was acting as a notary public in Haddington. This involved drawing up legal documents and witnessing signatures. He also acted as a private tutor. King James V died in 1542, when his daughter Mary Queen of Scots was only six days old, and the Earl of Arran was appointed Regent. He temporarily supported the Reformed faith, allowing the reading of the Bible in English, and appointing two Reformed preachers as his chaplains. It was probably through the preaching of one of these, Thomas Guilleme, that Knox was converted, at the age of about 29.

About the same time, George Wishart returned to Scotland and when he came to the south of Scotland, Knox became one of his followers, carrying a sword for his defence. The night before Wishart was arrested he dismissed Knox, who wished to accompany him, with the words: "Return to your bairns, and God bless you. One is sufficient for one sacrifice." Wishart was arrested in December 1545 and burned in St Andrews by Cardinal Beaton on 1 May 1546.

2. *St Andrews (1546-1547).* On 29 May 1546, Norman Leslie and others broke into St Andrews castle, killed Cardinal Beaton, and took possession of the castle. Knox gives a fascinating account of this in his *History*. Knox joined the "Castelians", as they were called, in April of the following year, and after about six weeks he was called to the ministry by the small congregation in the castle. On an appointed day John Rough preached on the election of ministers and then turned to John Knox and told him, in the name of those who called him, "to take upon him the office of preaching if he wished to avoid God's displeasure. Whereat the said John, abashed, burst forth in most abundant tears, and withdrew himself to his chamber. His countenance and behaviour, from that day till the day that he was compelled to present himself to the public place of preaching, did sufficiently declare the grief and trouble of his heart."

His first public sermon was on Daniel 7, in which he identified Romanism with the Fourth Beast mentioned in that chapter, and he immediately sprang to fame as a powerful preacher. The comment of the people of St Andrews was that previous Reformers had “only sned [lopped off] the branches of Papistry; he struck boldly at the root to destroy the whole”. But his ministry was brief, for in July a fleet of French galleys blockaded the castle, and those inside were obliged to surrender to the French on 31 July 1547. Knox was captured and put to work as a galley slave.

3. The French Galleys 1547-1549. The life of a galley slave was very hard – with heavy physical work, extreme discomfort, exposure to the weather, little food, and frequent cruelty – and it damaged Knox’s health for the rest of his life. In his *History* he talks about “the torment he sustained” and “the sobs of his heart”. It was the Lord’s way of preparing him for the great work that lay ahead. It also meant that he was able to learn, or perfect, his French; probably most of his fellow galley-slaves were Huguenots – French Protestants. This ability was useful to him later on when he preached in France on many occasions.

The galley slaves spent the winter of 1547 in Nantes, on the River Loire. Here attempts were made to compel them to worship the Virgin Mary. Knox tells of a Scot (who is assumed to have been himself) who took the image of the Virgin Mary into his hands, supposedly to kiss it, and then checking that no one was looking, threw it into the river saying, “Let our Lady save herself; she is light enough; let her learn to swim”. After that the sailors did not trouble the Scots any more.

The next April, in 1548, they rowed up to Brest where they joined other galleys and collected a French army which they transported to Scotland. They spent June to September on the east coast around St Andrews. Knox was very sick at this stage, and at one point, when the galley was between Dundee and St Andrews, a friend asked him if he knew the land. He replied, “I know it well, for I see the steeple of the place where God first in public opened my mouth to His glory; and I am fully persuaded, how weak that ever I now appear, that I shall not depart this life till that my tongue shall glorify His godly name in the same place”.

In September 1548 they returned to France, to Rouen on the Seine, for the winter. Another Reformer from St Andrews castle, Henry Balnaves, was imprisoned in Rouen castle, and a work that he had written on justification by faith was smuggled to Knox and revised by him on the galley. At the same time he wrote a preface to it. Although not published till later, this preface, written in such difficult circumstances when he was about 34, is the earliest of Knox’s works. Soon after this, Knox was released, probably

through the intercession of the English king, Edward VI, and in February 1549 he went to England.

Moses: God's Faithful Servant

5. At Mount Sinai

Rev D A Ross

Last month's article looked at Moses leading Israel out of Egypt and across the Red Sea. It then considered some of the difficulties that followed. It also emphasised Moses' exceptional qualities of leadership

The next scene of major importance is God assembling the Children of Israel at Mount Sinai to declare His laws. As you will remember, God met Moses on the top of the mount and showed Moses the form of His worship. He gave Moses the Ten Commandments for mankind in all ages. He also gave Moses the ceremonial law, which set out how Israel must worship God at the tabernacle, by means of priests and sacrifices. There was also the civil law which took to do with the government of the nation. Hence the way of worship and of everyday living was entirely regulated by God. He said, "What thing soever I command you, observe to do it; thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it" (Deuteronomy 12:32).

Lesson 20. This ruled out anyone adding to what God revealed or taking anything away. While the New Testament form of worship has replaced that of the Old Testament, the same principle applies today. Christ Jesus directs His Church: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations . . . to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:20). We refer to this as the Regulative Principle – that is, God's worship is ordered by Himself, and therefore we are not to add to it or take anything from it. The Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland holds firmly to this God-given principle, as did the writers of *The Westminster Confession of Faith*. Once we move away from this rule, the worship of God very quickly becomes corrupted.

Let us return to the scene on Mount Sinai, where God declared the law to Moses for His people. The Israelites became impatient and decided to set up their own form of worship (Exodus 32:1). Sadly, some of those who feared the Lord were persuaded to become involved in making a golden calf (Exodus 32:21-24). The most notable of these was Aaron, who had been appointed to assist Moses in the enormous task of caring for the Children of Israel and leading them to the land of promise.

Moses, along with his servant Joshua, was returning from Mount Sinai

with the Ten Commandments written on two tables of stone. One of them was: "Thou shalt have no other gods before Me" (Exodus 20:3). When Moses came to the camp of Israel, he was dismayed at the unfaithfulness and wickedness of those who professed to be the people of God. In holy anger, Moses cast the two tables of stone upon the ground, breaking them, and at once called the people to account. Those who were on the Lord's side came away from others who were determined to continue worshipping their false god and the Lord God directed them to slay these idolaters (Exodus 32:27). About 3000 are mentioned who were slain; possibly they were the ring-leaders, who would have been well known in the camp.

Lesson 21. What a solemn and frightening warning for the remaining Israelites, at the expense of others! It reminds us that, in the end, all sin will receive its due reward of eternal punishment, unless those who committed it repent. "The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23).

Lesson 22. In Israel's backslidden state, the outstanding faithfulness of Moses to his Lord and Master points to his exceptional courage. Moses stood against the whole nation in faithfulness to the Most High, even when they failed to serve God and worship Him; they were in a rebellious mood and Aaron and the Levites were carried along on the tide of defiance of God. This is indeed a lesson for us: though the entire world would be against us for keeping to the Word of God, there is never any reason for doing what is wrong. We may add the sobering teaching of Revelation 2-3, where the New Testament Church is solemnly warned about the evil of departing from the order of worship ordained by Christ, the Head of the Church. Many denominations today seem to think they can worship God in any way they please, but they are wrong. May the Lord fix in our minds the biblical principle: we are not to add to or take away from God's way of worship. "The words of the Lord are pure words; as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times" (Psalm 12:6).

In this critical period, when the people forsook God to worship a golden calf, Moses' great love and care for the people shines brightly. He was determined to bring Israel back to the one living and true God and into His favour. He now interceded in prayer for them. Their great sin brought a solemn threat from God to disown the nation totally and raise up another nation from the family of Moses. But Moses pled earnestly for their pardon and obtained that in due course. He did this, not once, but many times, when the people sinned grievously against God.

Lesson 23. There is here a further lesson: to show compassion to those who offend us and, in particular, those who offend God. We should pray for them, asking God to forgive them, for the sake of Christ Jesus.

Daniel Rowlands

4. Expelled

Daniel Rowlands began his ministry in 1733 in Wales – as his brother's assistant in Llangeitho. After he was converted, crowds of people began flocking to hear him. Later he started preaching in other places and, later still, in the open air.

In Rowlands' time, Wales was in a terrible state spiritually. His friend Howell Harris felt his soul stirred up, "seeing both rich and poor going hand in hand to ruin". He was especially concerned about the ministers: "I saw that they were not in earnest and did not appear to have any sense of their own danger or experience of the love of Christ". They were quite careless in the way they delivered their sermons; so what they said seemed to have no effect on anyone. Harris wrote: "I had never seen one man awakened by their preaching in our part of the country". This was not surprising when these ministers had no sense of the sinfulness of sin or of the danger of rushing unsaved into a lost eternity.

In such a situation one would think that the church leaders would have valued an earnest man like Daniel Rowlands. But no, the bishops were as careless about people's souls as everyone else. Ministers like Rowlands were supposed not to preach anywhere except in the place to which they had been appointed, and most certainly they were only to preach in an official church building. Rowlands did not keep to these rules; he was more concerned about the multitudes of people throughout Wales who did not know the way of salvation.

Time and again, Rowlands was reported to his Bishop; people complained about him going to other places to preach; yet no one seemed to complain when other ministers preached carelessly or when their message was not the message of Scripture. Another complaint about Rowlands was that he did not make the sign of the cross when baptizing. The people liked their superstitions, but some of them were annoyed when a man, concerned for the eternal good of souls, shunned these unscriptural practices and was earnest in preaching the truth God has revealed in the Bible.

Rowlands had been preaching for 30 years when matters came to a head. During that time the local Bishop had warned him several times about what might happen if he went on preaching outside his own district. But in 1763 Rowlands was more active than ever in spreading the good news of salvation. For some years before then, there had been less evidence of the work of the Holy Spirit bringing sinners to faith and repentance. But now there was a great change and it was clear that the Spirit was awakening many sinners to a concern for their souls. Many more people were coming to hear Rowlands

at Llangeitho. At times like this Satan is often most stirred up to oppose those whom God is using to bring sinners out of his kingdom.

One Sabbath in 1763 two ministers entered the church where Rowlands was conducting a service and handed him a letter. One account of the story says that Rowlands was going into the pulpit, ready to preach, when he was given the letter; he read it quietly and told the congregation that he had been expelled from the Church of England. He obeyed at once and walked out into the open air, with almost all the congregation following him. The other account of the story has Rowlands in a different church and states that the two ministers waited until the service was over before they handed the letter to Rowlands. After he read the letter, Rowlands told them: "I shall never enter these walls any more. Since you wish it, they shall be left for the owls from now on."

Just a few Sabbaths later a man went into the first of these churches at the time for the service. He was surprised to see no one there except the parish clerk. He then looked up to the pulpit and noticed the minister; he was translating part of an English newspaper into Welsh for the benefit of the clerk. One assumes that this was one of the careless ministers who had no interest in the souls of their hearers, and that the parish clerk was just as careless about his own soul.

Rowlands now lost the small salary he had been paid as the assistant minister at Llangeitho. But his needs were few and no doubt some of those who appreciated his preaching would give him gifts of money. In any case, he had two little farms which would have helped to support him, his wife and his family.

Before long a new church was built for Rowlands at Llangeitho. Soon after this there was a revival of religion there and in many other parts of Wales. Llangeitho was just a village among the mountains but now large numbers of people, from up to 15 miles away, would gather there every Sabbath to hear Rowlands preaching. And on a communion Sabbath, at least 1000 people, sometimes 1500, would come to the Lord's table, with a total of up to 5000 people attending the service. On such a Sabbath, people would come from much further away, some of them walking huge distances. Some of them would come on the Saturday, when there would be two services, one taken by Rowlands and the second by some other minister, in preparation for the communion service the next day.

Those who had walked a great distance on such Saturdays would stop at a well two miles from Llangeitho. There they would eat some food that they had carried with them and take a drink of the pure water from the well. Before eating they would ask God for His blessing and, when they had finished,

they would give Him thanks. Afterwards they would pray and sing before setting out on the last leg of their journey to worship God.

They might again be singing as they came down the mountainside towards Llangeitho. Rowlands often went out for a walk in the morning, along the bank of the River Aeron, before the first Saturday service. When he would hear the singing coming from the hillside he would say to himself: "Here they come again, bringing heaven with them". And he often felt encouraged. Those who rode to Llangeitho would put their horses into the fields or tie them to the hedges, and there might be rows of hundreds of horses so tied. It must have been an impressive sight.

But the preaching was far more impressive. A man called Robert Jones used to travel 80 miles to Llangeitho. Naturally he often felt very tired after his long journey, but before Rowlands had been preaching for 10 minutes he forgot all about his tiredness. One day he heard Rowlands speak on the verse: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). The preacher described God's everlasting love and spoke of the infinite glory of the Son of God; he went on to describe the depths of Christ's sufferings and the infinite value of His sacrifice – until Jones was absolutely lost in a sense of wonder. He scarcely knew whether he was in the body or not, whether he was in heaven or on earth. And we can be sure that the Holy Spirit was powerfully applying the truth to many more of God's children that day, so that their hearts also were drawn out to worship Him.

For Younger Readers

A Good Lesson

A woman once said something like this: "When I was a little girl, I learned a good lesson. One frosty morning I was looking out of a window into my father's farmyard. Many cows, oxen and horses were standing there, waiting for something to drink. The morning was very cold; the animals stood meek and quiet till one of the cows wanted to move; she tried to turn round. In doing so, she hit against the next cow. Then that cow kicked the one next to her. In five minutes, all the animals were furiously kicking each other.

"My mother smiled and said, 'See what comes of kicking when you are hit. Just so I have seen one angry word make a whole family angry with each other.'

“Afterwards, if my brothers or myself were annoyed, she would say, ‘Take care, my children, remember how the fight in the straw yard began. Never give back a kick for a hit, and you will save yourself and others a lot of trouble.’”

The girl had a wise mother. And it was a good lesson the girl learned on the farm that frosty morning.

You too should try to remember this story about the farmyard. Try to remember the lesson: not to get angry with others and not to hit them. And ask God to keep you from being angry; ask Him to keep you from hitting others – your brother or your sister, your friend or anyone else. Yes, it was a very good lesson.

“A Little While”

The judge was passing the old woman’s stall, where she was selling apples. “Well, Molly,” he asked her, “don’t you get tired, sitting here on these cold, dismal days?”

“It’s only a little while”, Molly answered him.

“And the hot, dusty days?” the judge asked again.

“It’s only a little while, sir,” the patient woman answered again.

“And the rainy, drizzly days?” he asked.

“It’s only a little while”; it was the same answer again.

“And your sick, rheumatic days, Molly?”

“It’s only a little while, sir.”

“And what then, Molly?”

“I shall enter into the rest which remains for the people of God, and the troublesomeness of the way there doesn’t pester or fret me. It’s only a little while, sir.”

“All’s well that ends well, I dare say,” the judge said politely but probably without much understanding of the spiritual experience of this good woman. Yet he asked her: “But what makes you so sure, Molly?”

“How can I help being sure, sir,” she answered, “since Christ is the way, and I am in Him? He is mine, and I am His. Now I only feel along the way. I shall see Him as He is in a little while, sir.”

“Ah, Molly, you have more than the law ever taught me”, the judge confessed. Then he added, “Well, Molly, I must look into these things.”

As he walked off with the apple he had bought, Molly added, “There is only a little while, sir”.

She was absolutely right. We are told: "Seek ye the Lord while He may be found". We only have a little while to seek Christ and to find Him. Only thus will we be safe when death comes, and it can come so unexpectedly.

The New Birth

2. Keeping to the Bible

J C Ryle

This is another part of a chapter from Ryle's *Knots Untied*. It has been edited. In February's article he began to explain what *regeneration*, or *the new birth*, is. He described it as "that change of heart and nature which someone goes through when he becomes a true Christian". This article gives some further explanation.

This change of heart in a true Christian is so thorough, so complete, that nothing could be chosen more fitting to express it than "regeneration" or "the new birth". It is no outward, bodily change; it adds no new powers to someone's mind, but it certainly gives an entirely new bent to all his old ones. His will is so new, his tastes so new, his opinions so new, his views of sin, the world, the Bible and Christ so new, that he is to all intents and purposes a new man. The change seems to bring a new being into existence. It may well be called being "born again".

This change does not always happen at the same time of life. Some are born again when they are infants. They seem, like Jeremiah and John the Baptist, to be filled with the Holy Ghost from their mother's womb. A few are born again in old age. Most true Christians are probably born again after they grow up. Most people, it is to be feared, go down to the grave without having been born again at all.

This change of heart does not always begin in the same way. With some, like the Apostle Paul and the jailer at Philippi, it is a sudden, violent change, with much distress of mind. With others, like Lydia of Thyatira, it is more gentle and gradual; for them winter becomes spring almost without them knowing how.

This change can only be known by its effects. Its beginnings are hidden. We cannot see them. Our Lord Jesus Christ tells us this most plainly: "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh or whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit" (John 3:8). Do we wish to know if we are regenerate? To answer the question we must examine what we know of the effects of regeneration. Those effects are always the same. The ways by which true Christians are led, in passing through the great change, certainly vary. But the state of heart

and soul, into which they are brought at last, is always the same. Ask them what they think of sin, Christ, holiness, the world, the Bible and prayer, and you will find them all of one mind.

This change is one which no one can give to himself or to anyone else; it would be as reasonable to expect the dead to raise themselves, or to require an artist to give life to a marble statue. The sons of God are born “not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:13.) Sometimes the change is referred to God the Father: “The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ hath begotten us again unto a lively hope” (1 Peter 1:3). Sometimes it is referred to God the Son: “The Son quickeneth whom He will” (John 3:21). “If ye know that He is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of Him” (1 John 2:29). Sometimes it is referred to the Spirit, and He is in fact the great agent by whom it is always brought about: “That which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (John 3:6).

But man has no power to work the change. It is far, far beyond His reach. “The condition of man after the fall of Adam”, says the Tenth Article of the Church of England, “is such that he cannot turn and prepare himself, by his own natural strength and good works, to faith and calling upon God.” No minister on earth can convey grace to anyone in his congregation. He may preach as faithfully as Paul or Apollos, but God must give the increase. He may baptize with water in the name of the Trinity, but unless the Holy Ghost blesses the ordinance, there is no death unto sin and no new birth unto righteousness. Jesus alone, “the great Head of the Church, can baptize with the Holy Ghost. Blessed and happy are they who have the inward baptism, as well as the outward.

I believe this account of regeneration to be scriptural and correct. It is that change of heart which is the distinguishing mark of a true Christian; it always goes along with justifying faith in Christ, the certain result of living union with Him, and the root of inward sanctification. I ask you to ponder this before you go any further. It is most important that our views should be clear upon this point: what regeneration really is.

I know that many will not agree with how I have described regeneration. They will think the definition I have given is much too strong. Some claim that regeneration only means admission to church privileges, by being made a member of the Church – that it does not mean a change of heart. Some tell us that the regenerate have the power to repent and believe if they think fit, but they still need a further change to make them true Christians. Some say there is a difference between regeneration and being born again.

To all this I have one simple reply: I can find no such regeneration anywhere in the Bible. It is an idea which does not have the solemnity with which

our Lord introduced the subject to Nicodemus. When Jesus said, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God," surely He meant more than this: "Except a man be admitted to church privileges . . .". A man like Simon Magus might have such a regeneration and never be saved. The penitent thief was never admitted to church privileges, yet he saw the kingdom of God. Surely Jesus must have meant a change of heart. As to the idea that there is any distinction between being regenerate and being born again, it will not bear examination; the two expressions mean the same thing.

The confusion of ideas on this simple point, what regeneration really is, all arises from not keeping to the Word of God. This doctrine is one of vital importance. It is no matter of names and words that I am writing about. It is something that we must feel and know by experience, each for himself, if we are to be saved. Let us seek to know it. Do not let the din and smoke of controversy draw away our attention from our own hearts. Are our hearts changed? Alas, it is poor work to argue about regeneration if, after all, we know nothing about it within ourselves.

For Junior Readers

Floods

I am sure you heard on the news about the terrible floods in Queensland, Australia. The area affected is larger than France and Germany put together. Rivers burst their banks and overflowed into the surrounding countryside, into towns and cities. Pictures show towns with just the roofs of houses and tops of trees sticking out above the water and people in boats trying to escape with some of their possessions. How frightening! Yet we should remember, in the midst of it all, what the Psalmist said:

"But yet the Lord that is on high, is more of might by far

Than noise of many waters is, or great sea-billows are". (Psalm 93:4)

Perhaps you have also read the touching story of the mother and two boys: Jordan, aged 13, and Blake, 10. They were driving home when their car engine cut out in the rising flood water. Very quickly the car was being swept away, so they tried to clamber out on to the roof.

Seeing their distress a man tried to rescue them by tying a rope round himself and jumping in to the water. When he got to them, Jordan bravely told the man to rescue his little brother first. The man managed to rescue Blake and then tried to help Jordan and his mother.

Sadly, the rope broke and they were swept downstream and drowned in the torrent. How very sad! The story made headlines in many news

articles, such as: “Hero of Queensland floods”; “Boy sacrifices his life to save his brother”.

What does the story make you think of spiritually? We are all sinners being swept away to a lost eternity. We cannot save ourselves. We have no strength.

But what does the Bible tell us? “For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:6-8).

That is the gospel, the good news about salvation. It tells us that Christ came into this sinful world, and lived among sinners. He died for sinners, for His enemies. Is that not amazing good news for sinners like us? He gave His life so that sinners might be saved. Will you not then “receive and rest on” Jesus Christ “alone for salvation, as He is offered to us in the gospel”. There is no other way!

J van Kralingen

Almost a Christian

Rev Donald MacLean

This article is taken from the September 1951 *Young People's Magazine* and edited.

To be a true Christian is the greatest blessing which any of the fallen human race can have. It involves the greatest possible good, not only for time, but also for eternity, for we are destined to exist through endless ages either in a state of blessedness with Christ in glory, or in a condition of utter misery with the devil and his angels. If we personally are to exist in the first of these states, our souls must experience a saving change, and so be savingly united to Christ and pass from darkness to light, from the kingdom of Satan to that of God's dear Son.

Being a Christian thus involves much more than just having the name. It means more than being baptized or sitting at the Lord's Table. Thousands of people today have been baptised in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost who never received a spiritual baptism. Although they are, outwardly, members of the visible Church, they have no part in the inheritance of the people of God. The same is true of multitudes who sit at the Lord's Table and profess to be feeding on the death of Christ; they show clearly that they have chosen the world and its pleasures rather than suffer reproach for the cross of Christ. In this, as in other things, we would do well to pay attention to the truth, “Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice” (1 Samuel 15:22).

The Word of God makes an impression on many people, but its effects may

be temporary. Their conscience is affected; desires to be a Christian spring up; but these impressions do not result in saving conversion to God. Yet, while these effects last, there may also be an outward change in the person's conduct. We see an example of these effects in Felix (Acts 24). As the Apostle Paul reasoned with him of righteousness, temperance and judgement to come, the Roman governor trembled. The Word of God from the mouth of the Apostle thundered at the door of his conscience and, for a time, he trembled. This would appear to be a hopeful sign, for there is a promise to those who tremble at God's Word: "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit and trembleth at My Word" (Isaiah 66:2).

But the trembling of Felix never brought him to the feet of Christ. On the contrary, he was able to put these disturbing thoughts away from him. "Go thy way for this time," he told Paul, "when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee." The love of the world prevailed against the trembling of his conscience and Felix fell asleep in its arms until, as far as we know, he entered a lost eternity. There the doomed soul awakened to a sense of guilt and wrath and misery from which no sleep will ever provide relief.

King Agrippa was also affected by the Apostle's testimony (Acts 26). When he heard about Paul's conversion, he realised that this man, who was a prisoner in danger of death, possessed something about which he knew nothing although he sat on a throne. He felt a powerful desire to be a Christian. "Almost," he said to Paul, "thou persuadest me to be a Christian." But the Apostle would not be satisfied with *almost*. He said, "I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds".

To be almost persuaded is not enough. Those who are savingly changed are made a willing people in a day of Christ's power. The Holy Spirit brings them to know that they are sinners – condemned, without any way of escape as far as human power can see. He reveals to them Christ, in the Word of God, as the way, the truth and the life. In Him, they see there is sufficient to cleanse them from all their iniquity and to meet with all their needs for time, death, judgement and the great eternity. They are made able to receive Him by faith, and in that day they are altogether won over to Christ. They show this by setting the Lord always before them, by their love to His Word, His cause and His people. They also show this by their desire to serve Him in the world as He enables them.

May each of our readers seek to be, not *almost Christians*, but altogether Christians. Let them turn their eyes continually to the Lord, for it is written: "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief" (1 Timothy 1:15).

Looking Around Us

Live for Ever?

Is there any limit to the development of computers? Moore's law is often quoted on this question; it can be roughly expressed like this: computing power doubles about every two years. Moore's law describes what has happened for quite some time, but no one can tell how long it will remain true. Yet some people imagine that the increase in computing power will go on and on indefinitely.

Impressively, an IBM supercomputer nicknamed Watson took on two expert competitors in a sophisticated quiz recently, and won. But tremendous efforts had been made to fill the supercomputer's memory with huge amounts of information and to program it to analyse the questions appropriately and to trawl through all the information for the right answer in an instant. But the manager of the team who prepared Watson for the quiz was at pains to point out that the computer was only capable of carrying out tasks that it had been programmed for.

Clearly computers can do many wonderful things – especially supercomputers like Watson, which actually consists of 90 large computers working together. Indeed a recent article in *Time* magazine suggests: "Maybe we'll scan our consciousness into computers and live inside them as software, for ever, virtually". It rather ignores the fact that consciousness – which God has created – is very different from a computer program. And, just like consciousness, there will always be limits to what computers can do.

But *Time*'s remark leads on to the further suggestion – perhaps intended to be taken more seriously – that scientists will be able to reverse the ageing process in human beings. Researchers at Harvard Medical School have treated cells in a group of mice and claim to have been successful in making them younger. This seems just a step away from reversing the ageing process in human beings. If that proved possible, then, provided we did not meet with some dreadful accident, we would be immortal.

This leaves one important fact out of account: God has said something different: "It is appointed unto men once to die" (Hebrews 9:27). We are all sinners, and sinners must die. No matter what advances science may make, it cannot make man immortal. Everyone knows that there are *difficulties* in the way of making man immortal, yet some people assume that all these difficulties can be overcome so that it will be possible to reverse ageing permanently and keep human beings alive for ever.

But no. We must believe "God rather than men", however intelligent and however knowledgeable they may be. God knows the future; we do not.

The Lord Will Provide

This poem by John Newton reflects God's promise to believers and is based on God's dealings with Abraham, as recorded in Genesis 22.

Though troubles assail,
 and dangers affright,
Though friends should all fail,
 and foes all unite;
Yet one thing secures us,
 whatever betide,
The Scripture assures us:
 The Lord will provide.

The birds without barn
 or storehouse are fed;
From them let us learn
 to trust for our bread.
His saints what is fitting,
 shall ne'er be denied,
So long as 'tis written,
 The Lord will provide.

We may, like the ships,
 by tempests be tossed
On perilous deeps,
 but cannot be lost.
Though Satan enrages
 the wind and the tide,
The promise engages
 the Lord will provide.

His call we obey,
 like Abraham of old,
Not knowing our way;
 but faith makes us bold;
For though we are strangers,
 we have a good guide,
And trust in all dangers
 the Lord will provide.

When Satan appears
 to stop up our path
And fill us with fears,
 we triumph by faith.
He cannot take from us,
 though oft he has tried,
This heart-cheering promise:
 The Lord will provide.

He tells us we're weak,
 our hope is in vain,
The good that we seek
 we ne'er shall obtain;
But when such suggestions
 our spirits have plied,
This answers all questions:
 The Lord will provide.

No strength of our own,
 or goodness, we claim;
Yet since we have known
 the Saviour's great Name,
In this our strong tower
 for safety we hide:
The Lord is our power,
 the Lord will provide.

When life sinks apace,
 and death is in view,
This word of His grace
 shall comfort us through;
No fearing nor doubting
 with Christ on our side,
We hope to die shouting,
 The Lord will provide.

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