

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 Reformers Wall in Geneva; the figure on the right represents John Knox. See page 146.

The Young People's Magazine

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Ahab and His Conscience

Ahab was a king of Israel, living in Samaria, and a very wicked king he was. He paid no attention to God's commandments; he worshipped idols; he was worse than anyone who had reigned before him. If he was wicked, his wife Jezebel was worse. She was not even an Israelite; she belonged to Zidon, just to the north of Israel. The Zidonian people had even more sinful idolatrous practices than the Israelites, with their worship of the false god Baal. And Jezebel introduced the worship of Baal, with all its gross wickedness, to Ahab and to the rest of Israel.

This is a reminder that those who have had a Christian upbringing should be very careful about who they marry – and who they take as their close friends. If these friends do not go to church, if they do not read the Bible, if they do not keep the Sabbath, if they do not believe in God, if they commit serious sins, then they are likely to have a bad influence on you. Remember Jezebel, and the bad influence she had on Ahab.

Do not imagine that you are bound to have a stronger influence on your new-found friend than he or she will have on you. Yes, make use of every opportunity you have to influence other people for good; but allow that influence to take effect before your friendship with them becomes too close – and most certainly before you consider taking someone as your wife or husband. After you have married, it may be too late to keep yourself from being influenced away from churchgoing, Bible-reading, Sabbath-keeping and some respect for God and His commandments; it may then be too late to prevent you being influenced into a downward spiral of serious sins.

Such a spiral is obviously extremely dangerous. At every stage, the sinner's only hope is, by faith, to lay hold on Jesus Christ as the one Saviour whom God has appointed. The further you go down the spiral of sin and carelessness, the more difficult it becomes to get out of it. Unless you repent – and wisdom dictates that you should repent *now* – this spiral must end in a lost eternity.

One day Ahab decided that he would like to take over a vineyard near his palace in Samaria. He went to speak to Naboth, its owner, offering to buy it or else to exchange it for a better vineyard. Ahab was probably most surprised

to find Naboth saying, No, to what may have been a very attractive offer. But Naboth knew what the law of God said, while Ahab probably knew very little about it. Before God divided up the country for the Children of Israel, He told them that each family must hold on to the land that they were given; they must not sell it to anyone else. So Naboth was not prepared to sell his vineyard to Ahab. Naboth was not being awkward; he just wanted to do what was right. More than anything else, he wanted to obey God.

Ahab was not pleased. He went home, went to bed and sulked; he refused to eat. When Jezebel asked him what was wrong, he told her about Naboth refusing to sell his vineyard. At once she dreamed up a clever scheme to make Ahab owner of the vineyard and she quickly put it into effect. She arranged to have Naboth accused of blaspheming God and the King; a court sat, heard false witness and condemned innocent Naboth to death. This was quickly done and soon Ahab was making his way to Naboth's vineyard to take it over as his own.

Ahab did not kill Naboth; he probably thought that his hands were clean in the matter. But he must have realised that Jezebel was going to put some wicked scheme into action when she went away to fulfill her promise to give him Naboth's vineyard. He did nothing, but real guilt fell on him because he did nothing. He should have restrained her. And afterwards he should have refused to take anything to do with the dead man's vineyard.

It must have come as a shock for Ahab to see Elijah, when the prophet came to accuse him of killing Naboth and of taking possession of the vineyard. At once Ahab showed what was in his heart; he asked Elijah: "Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?" (1 Kings 21:20). This was how he thought of Elijah. Ahab felt guilty; his conscience was aroused, and he did not like it. But Elijah was only a messenger; it was God who had sent him to speak to Ahab. In fact we can say that his conscience was acting on behalf of God. The prophet was told to say, "*Thus saith the Lord*, Hast thou killed, and also taken possession?" So when Ahab thought of Elijah as his enemy, he was treating God as his real enemy.

Your conscience too acts on behalf of God. When it makes you feel guilty after you have done something wrong, you have to ask if it is acting for God. Your conscience *may* be wrong, but you have to ask yourself: What has God said? What does the Bible tell me? What is the testimony of the commandments about what I have done? And when your conscience and the Bible agree, you should listen. You should not struggle against them. If you do so, you are fighting against God.

Suppose you are in church listening to a sermon and something touches your conscience. Or you are reading the Bible and one of its statements

makes you feel guilty. It may be something that reminds you of the seriousness of some sin you have committed – perhaps some act of dishonesty, or some untrue statement. You may wonder how the preacher knew about your sin, and you may blame somebody for telling him. And you may be angry with both of them. Many other people have reacted like this when a minister preached about their sins. But they were wrong, and you are probably wrong too. What is actually happening is that God, in His providence, has led the preacher to think in the way that he does, and so he speaks as he does – without knowing anything about you in particular. So in fact, if you become angry with the preacher, it is really God that you are angry with, and surely that is tremendously serious.

It may be that the sin which touches your conscience, making you feel guilty, is that most serious of sins: the sin of unbelief – you are not trusting in Jesus Christ as the Saviour whom God has appointed for sinners like you. How wrong then to be angry against God when you are reminded of your rebellion against Him! Remember that, in your unbelief, you are rejecting His kindness in offering you salvation – and behind that kindness is the further kindness of Christ Jesus in coming into this sinful world to suffer and to die. Can God treat lightly the sin of despising “so great salvation” and so great a Saviour?

Elijah warned Ahab about God’s coming judgement on himself and his family. How did the king react? We are told that he tore his clothes – a sign of sadness. In his case, he was showing that he was sorry for his sins. And he changed his behaviour; he “went softly”. After his meeting with Elijah he was more careful not to break God’s commandments; he wanted God not to be angry with him. It seemed to be repentance, but it was not wholehearted. So it was not genuine repentance. He did not even begin to love the Lord with all his heart. That was shown clearly when he later complained that another of God’s prophets, Micaiah, never had anything good to say about him. Ahab did not understand the seriousness of his sin.

There are still people whose repentance is no better than Ahab’s. They feel guilty when their consciences begin to testify on behalf of God. So they give up their most outrageous sins, but only because they are afraid of being sent to hell. They do not begin to love God; they are not concerned about being angry with God or about any of their other heart sins; and they do not believe in Jesus Christ. Yet God demands wholehearted obedience. He tells us to confess our sins – not only the sins that other people can notice, but even our sinful thoughts. Yet we must attempt none of these things in our own strength; we must trust in Christ completely. He has provided a perfect salvation. And we are assured that no one will perish who trusts in Him.

John Knox: His Life and Greatness

5. Summing up

Rev D W B Somerset

The purpose of this talk at last year's Young People's Conference was to give an outline of the life of Knox (1514-1572). Last month's article focused on his last, difficult years, although the Reformation had triumphed in Scotland in 1560. This is the final article in the series.

9 **The man.** Knox the man is rather elusive, but we will give the best account of him that we can.

His appearance: There is one engraving of Knox which is regarded as genuine, but it gives disappointingly-little impression of what he looked like. There is also a detailed description which confirms the engraving, but otherwise turns out to be of limited value: "In bodily stature he was rather below the normal height. His limbs were straight and well-proportioned; his shoulders broad; his fingers somewhat long. His head was of medium size with black hair; his appearance swarthy yet not unpleasant. His countenance, which was grave and stern, though not harsh, bore a natural dignity and air of authority; in anger his very frown became imperious. Under a rather narrow forehead his eyebrows rose in a dense ridge; his cheeks were ruddy and somewhat full, so that it seemed as though his eyes receded into hollows. The eyes themselves were dark blue, keen and animated. His face was somewhat long, with a long nose, a full mouth and large lips, of which the upper one was slightly the thicker. His beard was black, flecked with grey, thick, and falling down a hand and a half long."

His character and abilities: In character, Knox was bold, determined, confident, inclined to be overly-rough with his opponents, but gentle towards his family and flock. He was an exceptionally-powerful preacher, and wherever he went (St Andrews, Berwick, Newcastle, Frankfurt, Geneva, Perth, St Giles) he was always the first choice. He was eloquent and ready in debate; he was an exceptionally-shrewd judge of character and of situations; and he was a natural leader. As a Christian, he was brave and a man of great faith, and was deeply biblical in his outlook. He had broad sympathies and a good understanding of the human heart and human life.

As an illustration, here is his confession of his sinfulness in a letter to his mother-in-law: "Albeit I never lack the presence and plain image of my own wretched infirmity, yet, seeing sin so manifestly abound in all estates, I am compelled to thunder out the threatenings of God against obstinate rebellers; in doing whereof (albeit as God knoweth I am no malicious or obstinate sinner) I sometimes am wounded, knowing myself criminal and guilty in

many, yea in all things (malicious obstinacy laid aside) that in other I reprehend. Judge not, mother, that I write these things debasing myself otherwise than I am. No! I am worse than my pen can express.

“In body ye think I am no adulterer – let so be; but the heart is infected with foul lusts, and will lust, albeit I lament ever so much. Externally I commit no adultery, but my wicked heart loveth the self, and cannot be refrained from vain imaginations – yea, not from such as were the fountain of all idolatry. I am no man killer with my hands, but I help not my needy brother so liberally as I may and ought. I steal not horse, money, nor clothes from my neighbour; but that small portion of worldly substance I bestow not so rightly as His holy law requireth. I bear no false witness against my neighbour or judgement or otherwise before men, but I speak not the truth of God so boldly as it becometh his true messenger to do. And thus, in conclusion, there is no vice repugning [contrary] to God’s holy will expressed in His law wherewith my heart is not infected.”

He was hated and abused in his life and ever since. It is a curious question why people have hated Knox as they have. It seems to be partly for his Christian qualities, partly for his success under God in establishing Reformed Christianity in Scotland, and partly for his *History of the Reformation*, in which he exposed the sins of the political and religious leaders of his day and, by implication, the sins of many who have read the book since then.

His achievements: Among Knox’s achievements should be mentioned the establishing of Protestant congregations in St Andrews, Berwick and Dieppe; the founding of English Puritanism, with the immense fruit that has followed from that; and the launching of the Reformed Church of Scotland (including the *Book of Common Order*, the *Scots Confession*, and the *First Book of Discipline*). He was the principal instrument that God used in the Scottish Reformation, standing head and shoulders above the rest. We should be thankful to the Most High for John Knox and for his legacy.

For Junior Readers

Epitaphs

Do you know what an epitaph is? It is a short piece of writing – perhaps a poem – about a dead person. It is usually written on their gravestone. If you take time to walk round an old cemetery or churchyard you might see some interesting epitaphs. Some may describe something about the person who is buried there; others might be more like a message to the passerby.

In Ebenezer churchyard, near Sydney, there is the grave of a young

woman who must have died suddenly and unexpectedly. On her gravestone are the words:

“All you who come my grave to see
Prepare yourselves to follow me,
Repent in time, make no delay,
For I in haste was called away.”

Is this not good advice for each of us? It may not be usual in our days to speak to children or young people about death and the grave. But it is something that each of us will have to face. The Bible tells us that “it is appointed unto men once to die” – that means every man, each one of us. The Bible also refers to the grave as “the house appointed for all living”, where we will all at last be placed. So, if death is an appointment we must keep and the grave is to be our appointed home, should we not prepare for these solemn events?

The other point made by the epitaph is that we should not delay making this preparation. We do not know when our appointment is to be. It may be, like this young woman's, much earlier than might be expected. So the Bible tells us: “Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth”, and, “Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation”. Time is so short and is passing so quickly; should you not think of these things now before it is too late?

Another epitaph repeats this same theme:

“My dear friends, as you pass by,
As you are now, so once was I;
As I am now, you soon must be.
Prepare yourselves to follow me.”

So the Bible again emphasises, “Be ye therefore ready also” (Luke 12:40).

J van Kralingen

Old Richard's Dark Night

It was an autumn evening, and Richard and his whole family had gathered for family worship. With special earnestness, Richard poured out his heart before God for his 12 children. He prayed that not one of them might miss the way to heaven. He asked that, in spite of all the temptations they might meet and all the troubles they would have to pass through, not one of them would stray into forbidden paths. Then he asked that, after the storms of life were over, they might all be gathered into the heavenly fold of the Good Shepherd, never to part again.

Ellen was the oldest of Richard's daughters. As her father prayed that

evening, she was very much moved. After the youngest children had gone to bed, she began to cry bitterly. When she was able to speak again, she told her father: "I shall soon be gathered to the fold you have been praying we might all one day reach". She expected to be the first to go. She had not wanted to tell her parents that she was not well; she did not want to worry them. "But", she now admitted, "I cannot longer hide the truth." In fact, Richard and his wife had, for several months, talked to each other about how poorly their daughter looked. Yet for Ellen to confirm their suspicions was a tremendous shock.

One Sabbath, Ellen sent a message to her Sabbath school teacher asking him and everyone in her class to visit her. Sad at heart, they all made their way together to Ellen's house. They all cried, except Ellen. After the teacher had prayed, they came to her, one by one, to say farewell. Ellen smiled and, in a whisper, told them: "I die in peace. Meet me in heaven."

Soon Ellen died. Then her mother followed her, and one after another of Richard's children, until only Alice remained. He was older now, and not able to do much work. So he and Alice moved to a small cottage, near the mill where she worked. He expected to end his days quietly there and be buried with his wife and children.

Until she was about 18, although Alice had regularly attended her Sabbath school and the church services, she felt that she was not converted. But while reading John 3, she was impressed by Jesus' words to Nicodemus: "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God". Yet she was a little encouraged by the words in the last verse of the chapter: "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life". She thought about Jesus dying on the cross for sinners, and about His words: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do".

For a moment she was afraid that she was lost, that God would not save her. But then she thought of the words: "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost", and they gave her hope. And after she prayed again, she was able to say of Jesus: "His blood was shed for me". Alice was now justified by faith and at peace with God.

Alice had always loved her father. But now their love was stronger, for it had become the love of God's children. One way Alice showed her love was by devotedly caring for him and looking after the cottage where they both lived. On a Sabbath morning she got up early and, whatever the weather, she and her father set off together for Sabbath school. He would be leaning on his walking stick and sometimes on Alice's arm. Richard taught a class of little boys; usually Alice took her place with her friends in the Bible class but sometimes she taught a class of little girls.

One winter evening, as Richard waited for Alice to return from work at the Blackpits Mill, he put some more coal on the fire, put cups and bread on the table and made a pot of tea. Meanwhile work had stopped at the mill and the men and women began to walk home. On a night as dark as this, one needed to be specially careful while walking between the mill pool and the brook. But Alice, hurrying to get home, missed her footing on the bank of the pool and fell into the water. The other workers came with torches and ropes in the hope of rescuing her, but it was too late. She had drowned.

Now the question was: "Who will tell her father?" Another member of the church undertook the difficult duty. He reached the door of Richard's cottage and stood there for some time unable to go any farther. At last he opened the door and walked in. Richard was sitting in his armchair with his back to the door and called out: "Alice, my child, you have been long in coming tonight". The man burst into tears. Richard stood up and, looking his friend in the face, exclaimed: "Tell me what is the matter. Whatever is the matter? Has something happened to my child? Do tell me!"

His friend asked him to sit down. He said, "Richard, pray for strength; the Lord help you. Your Alice is drowned."

Richard collapsed, and his friends carried him to bed. Everyone was asking, "Poor old Richard, what will he do now?"

After he regained consciousness, Richard confessed that he had never felt it so hard to be resigned to God's will. He felt his loneliness. He wanted to be able to say, "Thy will be done". So he prayed, "Lord, help me to say it, for no doubt Thy will is the best, though at present I cannot see it. Job lost more in one day than I have lost in a whole lifetime, yet he could say, 'The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord'. O my God, help me to be resigned."

What could Richard do, now that he had no one to look after him? But God is always faithful to His children. He provided for Richard. So the kind man who brought him the sad message, about Alice, now took him to stay in his own home.

The next Sabbath Richard set out as usual for church. Some friends tried to tell him that it would only upset him further. "No, no," Richard answered, "I have often had, like the Psalmist, hard things made plain in the sanctuary of my God." Then he quoted two verses from Psalm 73: "Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart. . . . My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever." And, referring to another verse from the same Psalm, he made plain his assurance of God's care: "God will guide me with His counsel, and afterwards receive me to glory". Then he told his friends: "No, no; let me go to the chapel, for

“one thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life”.

But Richard's troubles were not yet over. When the owner of Blackpits Mill died some months afterwards, work stopped and all those employed there had to look for a job somewhere else. Among those affected were the people with whom Richard now lived. Another family from the church took him in, but Richard could see that they could not afford to keep him; the two shillings and sixpence he received in poor relief was not enough to pay for his food.

The only other option was to go to the workhouse. A workhouse was not an attractive place to live in, and Richard would not be able to go to church anymore. He spent a difficult week worrying about the future. Then, on the Saturday evening, he spent a long time in prayer. “Have mercy upon me, O Lord,” he cried, “for I am in trouble. Hear, O Lord, and have mercy upon me. Lord, be Thou my helper.” At last he felt resigned to God's will; he said, “Lord, not my will, that Thine be done. I lay my body, soul and spirit entirely in Thy hands”.

The next day, John Ashworth (who originally wrote Richard's story) felt he ought to attend Richard's church, two miles away; he could not think why. Ashworth found several of his friends at the church upset; they told him that old Richard was going to the workhouse and was to bid them goodbye.

Ashworth found Richard alone, looking very troubled; he had just said what he thought was a final goodbye to the children in the Sabbath school. “I feel it hard work”, he told Ashworth, “to part with my old friends, the means of grace and the house of my God. O how precious to me has been the Sabbath school and this blessed sanctuary! But the bitterness is past. Yes, yes, the bitterness is past. I now feel much more resigned to my lot.” And he wished Ashworth God's blessing.

Ashworth offered to give Richard three shillings a week, money that he would be able to gather from his friends. “How would that do?” he asked.

Richard was more than grateful. Then he exclaimed: “Now I see! Now I see! If I had sooner left myself in the hands of God – sooner from my heart said, ‘Not my will, but Thine be done’ – deliverance would have come sooner. Not till last night could I say it, and my God sends deliverance the very day after! ‘Blessed is that man that maketh the Lord his trust.’ ‘O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt His name together.’”

Richard was so thankful to God for providing for him in this way. He spent much of the next week going round his friends talking about what he called his “deliverance”. He told one of them: “I wonder I was so unwilling to leave myself in the hands of God. I have long believed that the sparrow

cannot fall to the ground without Him noticing, but somehow I did not like the workhouse, and I was very wishful to keep near the [Sabbath] school and chapel. . . . Prayers in sorrow are prayers in earnest. I have had a wonderful deliverance . . . and I will try never to doubt God's care for me again."

One day, two years later, Ashworth paid his friend a visit. Richard told him: "I have been trying to think of the way God has brought me, and *now* I believe He has brought me the right way. Many dark clouds have cast their shadows across my path. Dark indeed have been some of the nights of my pilgrimage, yet faith in the promises enabled me to see my way; but the night my dear Alice was drowned was the darkest of all. That was a *dark night*. I have had many sorrows, but I have had millions of joys. Yes, Mr Ashworth, taking all together I have been a happy man. A few more hours and we shall be 14 in heaven. What a mercy, 14 in heaven! From my heart I do *now* believe that 'all things work together for good to them that love God'. One day with my Saviour in heaven will compensate for all my sufferings on earth."

It was a very great mercy that Richard and all his family found salvation in Christ. We too are sinners, and we desperately need to find that salvation for ourselves. Then, however difficult our way through life may be, all will be well at last. How earnest we should be to avoid all forbidden paths, to seek the way to heaven, and to reach the fold of the Good Shepherd!

“One More Exact Translation”

2. The Right Motive

Matthew Vogan

The first part of this Youth Conference paper gave some of the history behind the translation of the Authorised Version, which was published in 1611, exactly 400 years ago. The article then went on to show that it was “the right time” for producing the new translation.

Although the Geneva Bible was the most popular version available at the time, the Puritans wanted one accurate, uniform translation that would be read both in Church and at home. This was the lasting selfless legacy of the men that attended Hampton Court. It was the right and best motive for the work. Sadly, this motive has almost vanished from the Evangelical scene today. Modern translators and the marketers of modern versions seek to promote the idea that no one translation can be a single authoritative Bible that will fulfil everyone's needs. The more Bibles that people will buy, the greater will be the profits for the publishers.

The translators of the Today's New International Version (a revision of

the NIV which rewrites any language in the Bible perceived to have male overtones), have the following statement on their website: “Clearly, the TNIV is not the translation for everyone; no Bible translation is”. They go on to state that their focus is upon 18-34 year olds who, they say, welcome this kind of revision. The translators and marketers of modern versions are dividing the Church by promoting the idea that no single standard Bible can be adequate for the whole Church. Yet God gave only one Bible to His Church. Instead of dividing the generations and different groupings of the people of God, the Bible ought to unite them as a shared possession.

A recent article, in a secular newspaper was entitled: “How many versions of the Bible do we need?” It reveals the way in which Bible publishing has become the “cash cow” that every publishing company greedily milks (*Kansas City Star* 22/10/10). An expert on Bible translations, David Lyle Jeffrey, comments: “When we have so much diversity, we lose our common voice”. Another expert, Leland Ryken, adds that the effect of such “wide divergence among Bible translations” is that “readers have no way of knowing what the original text really says”. “It’s like being given . . . three contradictory directions for getting to a town.” In the process “the Bible loses its identity as the authoritative word of God and becomes something trivial”. Everyone chooses the Bible translation that suits their preferences and taste. This idea, however, undermines the very nature and purpose of the Scriptures.

In contrast to those peddling their own versions today, who must attract attention for their work in a crowded marketplace, the translators of the Authorised Version did not seek to be original and daring. They were merely revising the work of others in the light of their knowledge of the original Scriptures. The AV built upon and completed the labours of all the translators across the whole Reformation period. It contains 83% of the New Testament translated by William Tyndale, who was burned at the stake before his work of translation could be completed. Such translators, who were faced with the most extreme consequences, knew the value of the Word of God.

Tyndale said “I had no man to imitate, neither was helped with English of any that had interpreted the same or such like thing in the Scripture before-time”. This makes what he produced truly remarkable. The AV translators had the advantage of what had gone before; they diligently compared and revised the former translations, such as the Geneva Bible and the Great Bible. They write in the Preface: “We never thought from the beginning that we should need to make a new translation, nor yet to make of a bad one a good one . . . but to make a good one better, or out of many good ones, one principal good one, not justly to be excepted against”.

Gerald Hammond (formerly Professor of English Literature at the

University of Manchester) has studied closely the work of all these former translations and asserts that the AV can justly be described as “a Bible which took ninety years to make”. The translators spoke of it in the Epistle to the Reader as “one more exact translation of the Holy Scriptures into the English tongue”. This emphasises that these rich streams of translation work were now collected and merged into one single translation, the AV. It also underscores that the translators’ goal was to be more exact, to be as faithful and precise as possible in the task of translating God’s Word.

Young People and the Bible

Rev Donald MacLean

Taken, with editing, from *The Young People's Magazine* for 1951, when Mr MacLean was editor.

To the question, “Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?” the Holy Spirit gives the answer, “By taking heed thereto according to Thy Word” (Psalm 119:9). However young we may be, we need cleansing, for we are born in sin and shapen in iniquity (see Psalm 51:5). From the time we are born we go astray from God, who is the fountain of living waters, and we seek out ways of our own choosing. We are guilty, and we continually add to our guilt by our sins. We are unholy, and we grow more unholy as our consciences harden and sin becomes something familiar.

Unless God’s Word will arrest us and bring us to Christ, the fountain opened for sin and uncleanness, we will persevere on this broad way that leads to destruction. Nothing will be effective to cleanse our ways except God’s truth. Education is not sufficient, nor is the training we receive at home. Only the Word of God can effectively cleanse our ways, by the power of the Holy Spirit. Thus Christ said to His disciples: “Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you” (John 15:3).

Those of our readers who are leaving school, and are starting out in the world in a new way, specially need the Word of God to be a lamp to their feet and a light to their path. They are entering a sphere where events move with a speed unknown to other generations. Coupled with this, it is a fact that the trend is away from God and His truth. Once a person is caught in this powerful stream, he is swept away from all that was valued at home. He absorbs the spirit of the age and rapidly joins the “backbiters, haters of God, spiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents,” which is the result of refusing to retain the knowledge of God.

Whatever career you may choose, you are bound to meet with this spirit

of atheism. It is the spirit of the generation, having entered its bloodstream. "From the sole of the foot even unto the head, there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores" (Isaiah 1:6).

You will meet with this spirit in many lectures in universities and colleges. We place a high value on good education as an instrument for sharpening the understanding and preparing a person for occupying his place in society in a useful and intelligent way. But an education which breathes the spirit of atheism – which treats religion as of no importance and regards the Bible as an outworn manual of no value apart from its merits as literature – is a viper. If it is received into the bosom, it will insert a poison that will fill the mind with enmity against the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The same spirit is seen in the ungodly love of money which is so common in industry and business. The love of pleasure, the lack of conscience in work, the large amount of Sabbath labour, all show that people do not think about God, the judgement seat of Christ or an endless eternity. In the armed forces these sins often appear in a worse form.

As we have already said, there is only one way to escape the pollution that is in this present evil world. It is by taking heed to God's Word and hiding it in our hearts (Psalm 119:11).

We are to hide it, first of all, *in our memories*. This will mean reading it regularly in private and, if we are at home, we will diligently attend to it at family worship. Let nothing prevent us reading that Book where the mind of God is revealed. Let us seek not to read it merely as a duty, but let us try to understand what we read. We should also seek to have such a spirit when we are listening to sermons.

Again, we are to hide it *by prayer*. However diligently we may store the truth in our memory, we will not hide it in our heart unless we prayerfully seek to understand it. We must be firmly convinced that unless God teaches us, we will never gain a true understanding of the Word. Hence the need for the prayer: "Blessed art Thou, O Lord: teach me Thy statutes" (Psalm 119:12).

Again, we are to hide it *by seeking to receive it* when it impresses us. Only by the power of the Holy Spirit, will the Word so sink into our hearts as to influence us to turn from our sins to God. We should therefore seek to wait earnestly on the Lord, asking that the Spirit would impress His Word upon our hearts and hide it in such a way that the devil cannot take it away. When a word from the Holy Spirit is hidden in the heart, it brings in a sense of our need of deliverance from sin and from God's wrath. Such a heart cannot be satisfied without Christ. He comes into that heart, as His Spirit reveals Him through the Word; then "the voice of rejoicing and salvation is in the tabernacles of the righteous: the right hand of the Lord doeth valiantly"

(Psalm 118:15). The language of the soul whose sins are pardoned now is: "I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord" (Psalm 118:17).

In hiding the Word in our hearts we are to have this principle in view: "that I might not sin against Thee". See how Joseph was preserved in the time of temptation. God's Word was hidden in his heart; so when temptation came, God's Word came also. He asked, "How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (Genesis 39:9). May all our young friends seek grace to have the Bible as their authority. "Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe: and I will have respect unto Thy statutes continually" (Psalm 119:117).

The New Birth

4. Now or Never

J C Ryle

This is another part of a chapter from Ryle's *Knots Untied*. It has been edited. He has already explained the new birth as "that change of heart and nature which someone goes through when he becomes a true Christian". In the last article, printed in May, he began to emphasise the absolute need for the new birth.

We must be aware that most people are utterly unfit to enjoy heaven in their present state. I state it as a great fact. Is it not so?

Look at the masses of men and women gathered together in our cities and towns, and observe them well. They are all dying creatures, all beings whose souls will live for ever, all going to the judgement seat of Christ, all certain to live for ever in heaven or in hell. But where is the slightest evidence that most of them are in the least degree ready for heaven?

Look at the greater part of those who are called Christians, in every part of the land. Take any parish you please, in town or country. Take the one you know best. What are the tastes of most people who live there? What do they like best, when they have a choice? What do they enjoy most when they can have their own way? Observe the way they spend their Sabbaths. Note how little delight they seem to feel in the Bible and prayer. Note the low and earthly notions of pleasure and happiness which prevail everywhere, among young and old, among rich and poor. Mark these things well, and then think quietly over this question: What would these people do in heaven?

You and I, it may be said, know little about heaven. Our ideas of heaven may be very indistinct. But I suppose we are agreed in thinking that heaven is a very holy place, that God is there, and Christ is there, and saints and angels are there, that sin is not there in any shape, and that nothing is said, thought or done which God does not like. Then I think there can be no doubt most

people around us are as little fit for heaven as a bird for swimming beneath the sea, or a fish for living on dry land.

And what do they need in order to make them fit to enjoy heaven? They need to be born again. It is not a small outward change that they require. It is not merely restraining raging passions. This is not enough. Old age, the fear of man, and the lack of opportunity to indulge in these passions, may produce all this. The tiger is still a tiger, even when he is chained; and the serpent is still a serpent, even when he lies coiled up. The change needed is far greater and deeper. Everyone must have a new nature; everyone must be made a new creature; the fountain must be purified; the root must be set right; each one needs a new heart and a new will. The change required is not that of the snake when he casts his skin and yet remains a reptile: it is the change of the caterpillar when his crawling life stops, but from his body rises the butterfly, with a new nature.

The plain truth is: most professing Christians in the world have nothing whatever of Christianity except the name. The graces, the experience, the faith, the hopes, the life and the conflicts of Christianity, the hungering and thirsting after righteousness – all these are things of which they know nothing at all. They need to be converted and renewed in the spirit of their minds, as truly as those among the Gentiles to whom Paul preached; they need to be turned from idols – as really, if not as literally, as they did.

One main part of the message which should continually be delivered to the greater portion of every congregation on earth is this: “Ye must be born again”. I write this down deliberately. I know it will sound dreadful and uncharitable in many ears. But I ask anyone to take the New Testament in his hand and see what it calls Christianity. Let him then compare it with the ways of most professing Christians and, if he can, say that what I have written is false.

Let every one who reads this article remember this grand principle of scriptural religion: No salvation without regeneration, no spiritual life without a new birth, no heaven without a new heart. Let us not think for a moment that the subject of this paper is a mere matter of argument, an empty question for learned men to argue about – but not one that concerns us. It concerns us deeply; it touches our own eternal interests, it is something we must know for ourselves, feel for ourselves, and experience for ourselves, if we would ever be saved. No soul of any man, woman or child will ever enter heaven without being born again.

Let us not think for a moment that regeneration is a change which people may go through after they are dead. Such a notion is absurd. Now or never is the only time to be saved. *Now*, in this world of toil and labour and money-

getting and business, *now* we must be prepared for heaven, if we are ever to be prepared at all. *Now* is the only time to be justified; *now* is the only time to be sanctified; *now* is the only time to be “born again”. So sure as the Bible is true, the person who dies without these three things will only rise again at the last day to be lost for ever.

We may be saved and reach heaven without many things which people reckon of great importance: without riches, without learning, without books, without worldly comforts, without health, without house, without lands, without friends. But without regeneration we shall never be saved at all. Without our natural birth we should never have lived and moved and read these pages on earth; without a new birth we shall never live and move in heaven. I bless God that the saints in glory will be a multitude that no man can number. I comfort myself with the thought that, after all, there will be “much people” in heaven. But this I know, and am persuaded of from God’s Word, that not one single individual will reach heaven who has not been born again.

For Younger Readers

“White As Snow”

There was fresh snow on the ground, and a little girl went outside to play in it. When she came back in, she told her mother: “I couldn’t help praying when I was out at play”.

“What did you pray for?” her mother asked.

“I prayed the snow prayer that I learned once in Sabbath school.”

“The snow prayer? What do you mean?”

“Why,” the little girl explained, “I mean that snow prayer in the Bible. You know it: ‘Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow’.”

That was a very good prayer for the little girl to use. It would be a very good prayer for you to use too.

When someone was writing about the girl, he pointed to another verse in the Bible about snow. It is this: “Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow”.

How can that be? It is because Jesus has done everything that is necessary to take away sin.

You too should learn the prayer that the little girl learned in her Sabbath school. Then use it to ask God to take away all your sin, to make you whiter than snow.

Looking Around Us

The Authority of God's Commandments

Tough policies on tackling crime laid down in 2006 are still relevant today. So states a report from the Inspectorate of Prosecution in Scotland. No one should be too surprised that, after only five years, the Inspectorate could find no one, among those whom they consulted, who thought the previous policies should be changed. The policies were no doubt the work of some of the best legal brains in the country.

What should surprise people is that a book given to us by God Himself is ignored in tackling crime today. Courts, police and other agencies should go about their work conscious that they are enforcing God's commandments, such as: "Thou shalt not kill", "Thou shalt not steal", "Thou shalt not bear false witness". If they were to think in this way, they might find their work much easier than it is. And if schools, governments and other bodies insisted on the authority of these commandments – making clear that God's law has much more than human authority – they might be surprised. They might find their exhortations, even to young people, becoming much more effective than they are at present.

Yes, the Bible is a very old book. It was completed more than 1900 years ago. But its teachings are unchangeably relevant. Its directions as to how people should live, including young people, apply to this generation as much as they did to those who heard them thousands of years ago. Because the commandments are the product of God's wisdom, they never need to change. Basically, human beings do not change. Their knowledge may increase; their technology may improve dramatically; but they still need to be taught God's commandments as the only rule whereby they are to live.

Of course, the commandments will not change human nature; the work of the Holy Spirit is needed for that. And we should pray for that work to be done in our own hearts and throughout the world. But we should recognise that God's commands do have a real restraining effect when they are brought to the attention of a sinner – for everyone has a conscience. And this generation is suffering – in terms of knife crime and in many other ways – because most of those who are in a position to do so refuse to draw attention to the commandments and to the authority that lies behind them.

Being Called to Account

Most of us, no doubt, know something about the terrible wickedness of the German gas chambers where millions of people perished during World War 2. But Hitler was not the only leader involved in such cruelty, particularly

against the Jews. In 1941 Romania was ruled by a dictator, General Ion Antonescu. Promoting the idea of removing Jews from two districts in his country, he told other ministers in his government: "I beg you to have no mercy. . . . The same shall be done to the Ukrainian element. . . . It does not matter if we are treated as barbarians. . . . We never had a more proper moment. . . . If necessary, fire with machine guns. . . . I give you full liberty. I assume all the responsibilities."

Later, the General was told that, in areas of southern Russia where the Romanians were fighting alongside the Germans, two hundred Jews were being shot for every Romanian soldier killed, he remarked with approval: "Go on with this, because I am taking it on me, before the country and history". And he added: "Let American Jews call me to account".

In his unspeakable heartlessness, he was ignoring the fact that he had to give account, for this and all his other wrongdoing, to One who is altogether greater than any of his fellow creatures. He had to meet God. And God has already called him to account.

We may be thankful to have been preserved from committing such wickedness as General Antonescu was responsible for. But we will all have to give account, before the judgement seat of Christ, for what *we* have done in the body, whether it was good or bad (see 2 Corinthians 5:10). None of us can claim to be free from sin – even serious sin against God (remember how serious the sin of unbelief is). And only the blood of Jesus Christ can wash sin away. Let us seriously, and urgently, seek that forgiveness.

Good Wishes

These are lines which Robert Murray M'Cheyne wrote on a blank leaf in a book which he sent to a little boy in his congregation in Dundee.

Peace be to you, gentle boy!
Many years of health and joy!
Love your Bible more than play;
Grow in wisdom every day.
Like the lark on hovering wing,
Early rise and mount and sing;
Like the dove that found no rest
Till it flew to Noah's breast;
Rest not in this world of sin
Till the Saviour take you in.

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